

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 10 to 22, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 23 to 31, inclusive, answered orally.

Carbon Tax Collection

32. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to refund taxpayers paying the existing level of carbon tax on a progressive basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25533/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment in advance of the Budget on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions. Having said that, the Deputy will be aware that the Climate Action Plan 2019, published on Monday last, provided a commitment to assess a Carbon Tax trajectory of at least €80 per tonne by 2030, having regard to considerations on the social and economic impacts.

The carbon tax is currently set at €20 per tonne of CO₂ emitted. As such, carbon commodities with a heavier carbon content have a higher carbon tax charge. The carbon tax (VAT inclusive) for commonly used commodities is as follows:

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|----------|-----------------------------|
| Petrol | 5.64 cent per litre |
| Diesel | 6.56 cent per litre |
| Coal | €2.40 per 40 kilo bag |
| Peat | 52 cents per 12.5 Kilo bale |
| Kerosene | 5.76 cent per litre |

Carbon tax receipts in 2018 were €431 million. Carbon tax receipts are remitted to the Exchequer. Hypothecation is not a feature of the Irish tax system in general as it reduces the flexibility of the Government to prioritise and allocate funds as necessary at a particular time, constraining expenditure decisions and potentially distorting the allocation of resources, which can result in reduced value for money and sub-optimal outcomes.

Nevertheless, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action recommended that hypothecation of carbon tax revenues be considered and to this end my Department launched a public consultation on the options for use of revenues raised from increases in the carbon tax. The options include use of revenue to address fuel poverty as well as a so called “tax and dividend” scheme. The consultation is open until the 28 June 2019 and can be accessed on the Department’s website. The feedback from the consultation will help to inform future carbon tax

policy options.

As the Deputy will be aware, there are existing schemes in place which help those who may be in fuel poverty. These include the National Fuel Allowance and the provision of home insulation grants and free upgrades from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. Consideration of all options relating to carbon tax policy, including possible ring-fencing of revenue for specific purposes is ongoing and will be reviewed by the Tax Strategy Group in July.

NAMA Operations

33. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he plans to use the projected surplus from NAMA; when the agency will wind-up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25496/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of its Annual Report for 2018, NAMA recently revised its projected surplus to be returned to the State to €4 billion. The realisation of this surplus depends on the success of NAMA's ongoing deleveraging and completion of its Dublin Docklands SDZ and residential funding programmes.

Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA's debt has been redeemed in full, which is expected to be in 2020. Any NAMA surplus paid, while Exchequer positive, will not impact the general government balance, in line with Eurostat rules. It will be a decision for the Government as to how any surplus returned by NAMA will be utilised within the framework of the fiscal rules at that time. The intention has always been to use such receipts from the resolution of the financial sector crisis to pay down our national debt and reduce our debt servicing costs.

As the expected date for NAMA's redemption of its debt approaches, there is a possibility that a small number of loans may not be resolved by 2021 due to ongoing litigation that is largely outside NAMA's control. In addition, there is a possibility that NAMA may also be left with a small residual loan portfolio where best value for the State may not be achieved through sale or disposal before the end of 2021. Such assets are currently expected to represent less than 1% of NAMA's original portfolio.

Active consideration is underway regarding NAMA's end of life strategy and the maximisation of the return of any surplus to the State in respect of these remaining assets. These considerations will be examined in my forthcoming Section 227 Review into NAMA's achievement of its objectives which is due to be finalised shortly. I intend to use the publication of this review to make a decision as to how to best wind down NAMA in the context of the need to ensure that the State extracts maximum value from any residual assets remaining after 2020/2021.

Insurance Costs

34. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he is working with owners of childcare facilities to find solutions to the ongoing insurance crisis; the actions he will take to address the matter; and the timeline for changes on same. [22603/19]

35. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions his Department has had with representatives of the insurance industry to address the closure and threatened closure of indigenous companies due to the cost of insurance and in some cases the inability of companies to secure insurance cover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20509/19]

37. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he plans to tackle insurance costs for businesses which run various outdoor activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25357/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 34, 35 and 37 together.

I am very conscious of the difficulties being experienced as a result of the cost and availability of insurance to certain types of businesses. Whilst at both political and departmental level there has been considerable engagement with the different business stakeholders including for instance play centres, representatives, the owners of childcare facilities have not been in touch directly with my Department nor the Cost of Insurance of Insurance Working Group for a meeting to discuss insurance problems that they may be encountering.

Unfortunately, there is no single policy or legislative “silver bullet” to immediately stem or reverse these trends, either in the case of individual types of businesses such as childcare operators or businesses that run outdoor activities, or for businesses generally. This is because there are many constraints faced by the Government in trying to address this issue in particular the fact that for constitutional reasons, it cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied and for legal reasons it cannot direct insurance companies as to the price or the level of cover to be provided to consumers or businesses as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on the risks they are willing to accept.

I consider it therefore important that the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) continues to implement the 33 recommendations from the 2017 Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the 15 recommendations from the 2018 Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. This is necessary in order to ensure that the necessary reforms, in particular with regard to bringing the levels of damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions, through the development of new Personal Injury Judicial Guidelines following the enactment of the Judicial Council Bill. I am hopeful that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports’ recommendations will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and a more competitive insurance market.

Finally, I believe that the CIWG’s reforms are already having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, including those relevant to businesses.

Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears

36. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if the code of conduct on mortgage arrears of the Central Bank will be placed on a legislative basis in order that it can be admitted in court proceedings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25523/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have mentioned on many occasions, the Central Bank Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (the CCMA) is a statutory code issued under Section 117 of the Central Bank Act 1989. It clearly states in the CCMA that its provisions are legally binding on regulated entities, and the Central Bank has the power to administer sanctions on regulated entities for a contravention of the CCMA under Part IIIC of the Central Bank Act 1942.

In the judgment of the Supreme Court in May 2015 in *Irish Life and Permanent plc v Dunne*, the Court held that a breach of the moratorium provision in the CCMA would be fatal to a lender's legal entitlement to possession because allowing an application for possession where there was a breach of the moratorium provision of the CCMA would, in effect, be tantamount to a court acting in aid of the actions of a lender which were unlawful. However, with respect to the other provisions of the CCMA, the judge held that there was nothing in section 117 of the Central Bank Act 1989 or the CCMA itself suggesting that the courts are required to assess in detail the compliance or otherwise by a regulated entity.

In relation to matters that can be taken into account during court proceedings, the Department of Justice & Equality's **Land and Conveyancing Law Reform (Amendment) Bill 2019** addresses this issue. The Bill's key objective is to provide further protections for homeowners in mortgage arrears who are facing the risk of repossession proceedings in respect of their homes. It extends the scope of the Land and Conveyancing Act 2013 to cases where an insolvency solution to a borrower's mortgage arrears is not, for whatever reason, available.

The Bill is scheduled for Committee Stage this week.

The measures provided for in the Bill will prove to be an important addition to the suite of Government measures to protect those in mortgage arrears who are facing the prospect of court proceedings for repossessions of their homes. It is also important to acknowledge that the Bill received widespread support last month, when Second Stage was taken.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 34.

Mortgage Book Sales

38. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on State-owned banks selling non-performing loan books to vulture funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25320/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the reduction in the level of non-performing loans, or NPLs, across European banks is a major priority for the banking regulator, the SSM. The Irish banks have made huge progress in this regard since the height of the crisis. According to the Central Bank of Ireland, the average NPL ratio of the domestic Irish banks was 8.5 % in December 2018, falling from 13.8% a year earlier and from greater than 30% at peak in 2013. In volume terms, NPLs in the domestic Irish banks have now fallen by €67.3 billion, or 88%, from peak in 2013. A major contributor to this has been the almost 127,000 mortgage restructures that are currently in place.

Despite this progress, the NPL ratios at the Irish banks remain at an elevated level and are above the European average of under 4% and further work is required by the banks to address this.

It is important to reiterate that the protections in place for all borrowers before a sale remain unchanged. For example, Start Mortgages and Pepper, the firms who were involved in the Glas and Glenbeigh loan sales transacted by PTSB in 2018, are both regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. When dealing with borrowers, these firms are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears. Furthermore, assurances have been given that the terms of a restructure agreed before these sales took place will continue to be honoured.

In addition, in 2018 I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure

it remains as effective as possible. The result of this review was published last October and it is encouraging to note that the key findings included confirmation that for borrowers who engaged with the process, the CCMA is working effectively as it is intended in the context of the sale of loans by regulated lenders.

Finally, I wish to highlight that I cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks, which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally.

Brexit Data

39. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has carried out an assessment on the likely net contribution Ireland will have to pay to EU institutions each year after Brexit; if this will be a consideration in the framing of budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25233/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Given that the UK represents one of the largest net contributors to the EU budget, Brexit is likely to have a significant impact on the contributions of all Member States, including Ireland's. The exact impact will depend on the nature of the final agreement between the EU and the UK regarding its involvement with the EU budget post-Brexit.

Under the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and UK, the UK had agreed to continue to pay into the EU budget for the remaining years of the current MFF, as if it was still a member. This would result in no additional impact on Ireland's contributions or receipts up to the end of the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in December 2020.

However, if that Withdrawal Agreement is not concluded and there is a no-deal Brexit, the impacts on the EU budget will need to be clarified. Under this scenario the UK would need to clarify its intentions regarding whether it still intended to continue making payments towards the current MFF.

The European Commission has proposed a number of legislative proposals to prepare for the UK's withdrawal. The EU-level measures are summarised in the European Commission's fourth Brexit Preparedness Communication of 10 April 2019 and includes a measure for the 2019 EU budget, which establishes a legal basis for the UK to continue to both make payments into the EU budget and to access receipts from it for the year 2019. This framework seeks to minimise any unnecessary disruption for beneficiaries of EU spending programmes at the time of withdrawal.

If the UK decided not to continue with EU budget payments, then both the Commission and Member States would need to consider the most appropriate way forward. However, the gap would need to be mitigated by either increased contributions from other Member States, reductions in EU funding programmes, or a combination of both.

My Department monitors and analyses the potential impact of Brexit on our EU budget contributions on an ongoing basis. This analysis is based on the best information and data available at the time in question. As a result, for Budget 2020, my Department will be updating its forecasts in the run up to Budget day.

It should be noted, that the Commission's proposal for the next MFF 2021-2027 (published,

May 2018) is based on the UK no longer contributing to the EU budget, and as such, incorporates the impact of Brexit.

As you can appreciate, I don't want to engage in speculation, given the sensitivity around Brexit.

Insurance Industry

40. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider a State regulated insurance company in view of the recent report of profits in the insurance industry increasing by 1,300%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25588/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, I would like to put on record that I share the same concern as the Deputy in relation to the recent reporting of the large profits of insurers for 2017 at a time when many small businesses are struggling to get cover in the first place, or to get it at a reasonable price. I consider the current position unacceptable and I have made this very clear to Insurance Ireland when I met them recently. I believe they need to show a greater willingness to broaden their risk horizons and to begin to price their products in a way which recognises the general progress being made to address the cost of insurance problem.

It is important to acknowledge however that this is a difficult issue to resolve for any Government because of the constraints it faces in particular the fact that for constitutional reasons, it cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied and for legal reasons it cannot direct insurance companies as to the pricing level which they should apply in respect of businesses seeking insurance.

That said however through the work of the Cost of Insurance Working Group, significant progress has been made in beginning to transform the landscape within which insurers operate. This is reflected in the fact that with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak) and I am determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, including those relevant in this case.

In relation to your specific query about considering the establishment of a State regulated insurance company, it is important to be aware that any such company would be required to comply with the same prudential rules as private companies, thereby meaning that the cost of that insurance would still have to reflect the risk involved. My concern therefore with such a proposal is that it would simply compound the existing 'cherry picking' of risk within the market by insurers. This in turn could ultimately decrease competition in the market over the longer term, as some insurers may stop insuring particular risks completely if there is a view that a State company is willing to insure these risks instead, particularly those lines of business that are considered to be unprofitable.

In addition, there is no reason to believe that the State would be any better at managing this risk than private insurance companies, and as a result there potentially could be a large financial exposure to the State if significant losses were incurred.

In view of these issues, I am not convinced that State intervention of the type proposed would be a solution to the current problem regarding the cost or availability of insurance. Instead, I think that we need to continue to implement the recommendations of both reports of the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG).

Central Bank of Ireland Staff

41. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if the appointment of the incoming Governor of the Central Bank will be suspended until all investigations in New Zealand involving them are completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25524/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware the New Zealand State Services Commissioner is carrying out an investigation into the unauthorised access of New Zealand Budget material and the events surrounding it. I am not going to be drawn into speculating on a matter on which the New Zealand State Services Commissioner is currently compiling a report.

The State Services Commissioner, Peter Hughes, has stated that his office will not be making any comment on the matter until his investigation is concluded and all of the facts have been ascertained. The investigation aims to conclude by 27 June.

Consequently, it would not be appropriate for me or the Government to comment on the matter, particularly given we are not in possession of the facts. The Government and others must await the facts to emerge.

Mr. Makhlouf has agreed to the ongoing review as the best approach to establishing the facts of the matter.

He is continuing to work as usual in his role as CEO of the New Zealand Treasury.

I would caution against making claims about an individual who is not in a position to defend themselves.

The Government recommended the appointment of Mr. Makhlouf as Central Bank Governor to the President following a comprehensive, open, and international process.

Mr. Makhlouf was the recommendation of the independent interview panel. The process included a public call for expressions of interest, a comprehensive search using an independent executive search firm, a rigorous short-listing of applicants, psychometric testing of final interview candidates, and a final interview of five candidates.

The President signed the warrant appointing Mr. Makhlouf to the role of Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland on 14th May 2019.

Deputy Governor, Sharon Donnery, is acting Governor of the Central Bank from 1 June to 31 August.

My officials have been in contact with our Embassy in New Zealand to obtain updates on the matter.

However, given the definitive statement by the New Zealand State Services Commissioner that his office will not be making any comment on the matter until his investigation is concluded and all of the facts have been ascertained, it would not be appropriate to contact his office at this time.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

42. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that all affected cohorts of tracker scandal victims have been treated fairly; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [25534/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank's Tracker Examination is focused on ensuring that lenders provide fair outcomes for all groups of customers impacted by tracker related failings both from a contractual and transparency perspective.

The Examination is the largest, most complex and most significant supervisory review that the Bank has undertaken to date under its consumer protection mandate and requires all lenders, which offered tracker interest rate mortgages to their customers, to review all mortgage accounts, including accounts in arrears, to identify any tracker related failings both from a contractual and transparency perspective. The Central Bank does not make the decision on what is impacted or not, this is the responsibility of the lender. However, the Central Bank reviews and challenges the lender, where appropriate, on its conclusion.

Where affected customers have complained to their lender and remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, and do not accept the findings of the Appeals Panel, they also retain the option to bring a complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman or FSPO. The FSPO presents customers with a means of resolving their complaint in an independent, fair and transparent manner that takes account of their unique personal circumstances, through an informal dispute resolution process or formal investigation.

As noted in the Central Bank Tracker Mortgage Examination Redress and Compensation penultimate Update, which was published in February 2019, the Examination has now been completed at the majority of lenders. In the case of the remaining lenders, supervision work continues, as the Central Bank must ensure that the work carried out by lenders is sufficiently rigorous and thorough to have addressed satisfactorily any remaining issues affecting groups of customers and to ensure that all eligible groups of customers are included for redress and compensation.

In addition, the Central Bank Governor noted in his opening statement when he appeared before the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on 26 March this year that a total of €665 million has so far been provided to impacted customers. This figure includes €47 million for redress and compensation to impacted customers identified outside of the industry wide examination.

The Central Bank's priority at all times throughout the Examination has been to make sure that all affected groups of customers have been identified and remediated. The Government supports the work carried out by the Central Bank and I have been advised by the Bank that a final update on the Tracker Mortgage Examination will be published in the coming weeks.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

43. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the treatment of persons affected by a controversy relating to a bank (details supplied); the level of compensation offered; if he has a role in ensuring that customers receive fair treatment from financial institutions operating here in view of the fact he is a shareholder within the bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25437/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would remind the Deputy that as Minister for Finance there are strict rules around how I can intervene even in banks in which the State has a shareholding. The day to day operations of the banks are the sole responsibility of the boards and management teams and each bank must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are

legally binding documents that cannot be changed unilaterally. These frameworks, which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

However this Government has firmly supported the work of the Central Bank of Ireland to ensure that customers receive fair treatment from the financial institutions involved. As the Deputy will be aware, the industry wide Tracker Mortgage Examination review is the largest, complex and most significant supervisory review in the history of the Central Bank of Ireland in respect to its consumer protection mandate. It has revealed the unacceptable damage that misconduct can cause to consumers up to and including the loss of their homes and properties in some cases. To this end there has been €665 million of redress and compensation issued to customers at end February 2019.

To further support the work and power of the regulator, I am bringing forward the Central Bank (amendment) Bill which will introduce an advanced Senior Executive Accountability Regime (SEAR) which will, in tandem with new enhancements to the fitness and probity regime, help prevent something like the mortgage tracker issue happening again.

The Central Bank has intervened on prevailing rate issues in line with its regulatory engagement via the Examination. This intervention is aligned with the Central Bank's functions as part of the Examination to rigorously test and challenge, from a systemic perspective at the macro level, the position adopted by lenders to try and achieve the best result for all customers within a group.

The AIB prevailing rate customers have, directly as a result of the Central Bank's intervention, been admitted to the Examination and will receive a compensation payment as well as an offer of the current prevailing rate, as opposed to the prevailing rate at the time their fixed rate expired. By securing their admission to the Examination, the Central Bank has ensured that those customers have the opportunity to utilise to the full extent, the Examination's appeals processes. Should they be dissatisfied with any aspect of their redress and compensation offer and can pursue their case based on their own unique circumstances with the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

The Central Bank examined AIB's model to determine the then prevailing rate and concluded that based on the information then available, that it was reasonable. In relation to the contractual interpretation of the term "prevailing rate" the Central Bank formed the view at the time that at a macro level, it could not mount a legal challenge on behalf of all customers in the relevant group, that a rate other than the then prevailing rate should be offered.

Banking Sector Remuneration

44. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to lift the €500,000 pay cap for workers in the banking sector; the reports he has commissioned on the matter; his further plans to make such reports public; when such reports will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25317/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that Government policy on banking remuneration has remained unchanged since the financial crisis. Extensive restrictions are in place and these are not simply confined to a handful of senior bankers whose pay is restricted by the €500,000 pay cap (excluding a standard pension contribution). These affect c.23,000 workers across the three banks in which the State has a shareholding. The policy dictates that variable pay including bonuses and any other fringe benefits including the

likes of health insurance and childcare cannot be paid to any staff members from the most junior lowest paid staff to the most senior ranks.

A new regulatory framework has been put in place since the financial crisis across the EU, the economy has returned to near full employment, the remaining banks are profitable again – and in the case of AIB and BOI sustainably so. The State remains the largest shareholder in AIB, BOI and PTSB but following the successful IPO of AIB in June 2017 all three banks are also now on an equal footing with listings on the main market of the Irish and London stock exchanges.

The skill set required in the banking sector is evolving with the greatest demand for staff now in areas such as the digital economy, risk management, legal and compliance. These skills are in demand right across the economy and so the banks are competing for this talent against companies who have more flexible and attractive remuneration structures. Brexit has only made this problem more acute.

In the senior ranks of the banks the substantial disparity in pay levels versus other Irish listed companies or peer banks in Europe is stark and introduces an obvious retention risk particularly in AIB and Bank of Ireland. I also need to be advised if this retention risk and a lack of alignment between the interests of executives and shareholders, undermines the Government's objective of recovering the State's full investment in the banks.

As a result I undertook last year to carry out a review of Government bank remuneration policy to determine if it remains fit for purpose. My department held a full open EU public procurement to select a suitably qualified external consultant to assist it in completing this review. The specialist advisory division of International Firm Korn Ferry was subsequently appointed.

Engagement with a broad set of relevant stakeholders was an important part of the process. Stakeholders engaged with by Korn Ferry and my department included the major institutional investors in the banks, proxy advisory firms, the Financial Services Union (FSU), the chairs of the remuneration committee in each of the banks and representatives of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) in Frankfurt.

I felt it was also important to get the views of the Central Bank on this matter. I note the response from the Governor of the Central Bank in this regard which is available on the Central Bank's website. I have now received the report and once I have considered it, my intention is to publish it in due course.

Fiscal Policy

45. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Finance if funds held in the exceptional contingencies reserve fund, as currently designed under the National Surplus (Reserve Fund for Exceptional Contingencies) Bill 2018, could be withdrawn to invest in capital expenditure or fund welfare payments during an economic downturn, exceeding the Expenditure Benchmark under the fiscal rules. [25549/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to establish a Rainy Day Fund. Creation of the Fund forms part of Government's policy to stabilise the public finances and increase the State's resilience to external economic shocks.

The National Surplus (Reserve Fund for Exceptional Contingencies) Bill 2018 was published on 24 October 2018 and is now before the Seanad.

The actions of this Government and its predecessor including pro-active mitigation measures and preparation of better crisis management plans give me confidence that we are now better prepared to meet future crises. That said, with a strongly performing economy setting reserves aside now will further strengthen our position.

The RDF is intended as a reserve fund which may be drawn upon under certain circumstances, particularly severe economic downturns. Creation of the Fund forms part of the Government's policy to stabilise the public finances and increase the State's resilience to external economic shocks.

One criteria for drawdown of the Fund is that it can be used to remedy or mitigate the existence of "exceptional circumstances" in the State. Under the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012 "exceptional circumstances" are defined as either a period of severe economic downturn or a period during which an unusual event outside the control of the State has a major impact on the financial position of the general government.

It is also envisaged that the occurrence of a force majeure event could justify deployment of the Fund. This could include events such as: a natural disaster; public emergency; or other unforeseen one-off occurrences.

The RDF is intended therefore to be used as a defined-purpose instrument to address severe events as opposed to the normal fluctuations within the economic cycle.

This approach would align it with the current EU fiscal rules framework, whereby it could be accommodated as an "unusual event" under the existing Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) provisions.

In the event of a severe downturn, the Fund could be used to support capital investment. This would enable us to maintain the infrastructural development to support future economic recovery and growth.

It is proposed that withdrawals from the RDF will be transferred to the Exchequer so as to support the State's expenditure with positive supply side effects.

Fiscal Policy

46. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he will consider to support the economy in the event of a sharp recession caused by international risks, such as those referred to in the recent report of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. [25552/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The risks posed by an external shock to our economy have been consistently highlighted for some time by both myself and my Department. These risks are being managed by building-up our fiscal capacity through broadening our tax base, debt reduction, targeting improvement in the general government balance, and establishing the Rainy Day Fund.

The tax base has been broadened by a series of measures, most recently by extending the standard rate of VAT to the tourism sector. These policies will help improve the resilience of the public finances to shocks to various sectors of the economy.

Separately, our debt as a percentage of GDP has almost halved from a peak of around 120 per cent in 2012 and continues on a downward trajectory. However, our debt burden remains elevated when measured as a share of modified GNI. Accordingly, this Government has com-

mitted to further utilising resources realised from the resolution of the financial crisis towards reducing this burden.

A small Exchequer cash surplus was achieved last year, the first underlying surplus since 2006. A general government balance of 0.0 per cent of GDP was also achieved in 2018. A surplus of 0.2 per cent is targeted for this year, improving to 0.4 per cent in 2020 under current assumptions.

Furthermore, the Rainy Day Fund will be established this year with an initial capitalisation of €1.5 billion from the Irish Strategic Investment Fund. Some of the historically high levels of corporation tax will be set aside for this fund, with an annual contribution of €0.5 billion budgeted. From the perspective of the sustainability of the public finances, this means the risk of permanently increasing expenditure on the basis of transient receipts is reduced.

The potential impact of an external shock is being mitigated by focusing on competitiveness-oriented policies. Capital expenditure has been prioritised to address the bottlenecks to growth which emerged during the recovery, such as the need for more residential development and public infrastructure investment. Total capital expenditure is set to more than double from €4.2 to €8.6 billion between 2016 and 2021. Such sustained levels of investment will increase our capital stock, improve the long-term growth potential in the economy and help build resilience to external shocks.

The Summer Economic Statement, to be published later this month, will set out the Government's overall economic and budgetary strategy and establish the parameters for the forthcoming Budget, particularly in the context of the increase probability being assigned to a disorderly Brexit.

Licensed Moneylenders

47. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to tackle the high cost of moneylenders through legislative means; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25525/19]

70. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for a cap on moneylender interest rates; the reports he has commissioned on the matter; his further plans to make such reports public; when they will be made public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25322/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 70 together.

My Department recently launched a public consultation process seeking views on capping the cost of licensed moneylenders and other regulatory matters in relation to moneylending. The consultation paper is available at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/81d5a4-public-consultation-capping-the-cost-of-licensed-moneylenders-and-ot/>.

Deputies will be aware of the report by the Centre for Co-operative Studies, University College Cork entitled "Interest Rate Restrictions on Credit for Low-income Borrowers" which was launched late last year.

Subsequently, the Personal Micro Credit Task Force, which was established at the behest

of SFF, engaged an independent social researcher, Dr Stuart Stamp, to investigate unlicensed moneylending. My Department is financially supporting this research in conjunction with the SFF and the Citizens Information Board. The report is expected later this year.

The closing date for the public consultation being undertaken by my Department is 31 July 2019. I will review the responses received after that date and consider the best way to proceed. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage anyone who has an interest in this topic to look at the consultation paper and consider responding to some or all of the questions asked.

Insurance Costs

48. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance when the working group on the cost of insurance will complete its work. [25413/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am very conscious of the difficulties that the cost and availability of insurance are having on many businesses, charities, community groups, sporting clubs and other groups in this country and can understand the frustration that many people have with the existing position. Unfortunately, there is no single policy or legislative “silver bullet” to immediately stem or reverse premium price rises. This is because there are many constraints faced by the Government in trying to address this issue in particular the fact that for constitutional reasons, it cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied and for legal reasons it cannot direct insurance companies as to the pricing level which they should apply in respect of businesses seeking insurance.

Notwithstanding this, I wish to re-emphasise how important this issue is for the Government. Consequently, following the publication of its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in 2017, the Cost of Insurance Working Group undertook an examination of the employer liability and public liability insurance sectors. This second phase culminated in the publication in January 2018 of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. I believe there has been significant progress already in the implementation of the two reports, including the following:

- the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission, and its subsequent recommendations relating to addressing award levels for soft tissue injuries – this has provided the objective evidence we need to be able to address award levels;
- the establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance; the Central Bank is currently reviewing the possibility of expanding its scope to cover business insurance;
- reforms to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019;
- amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;
- the reform of the Insurance Compensation Fund to provide certainty to policyholders and insurers; and,
- various reforms of how fraud is reported to and dealt with by An Garda Síochána, including increased co-ordination with the insurance industry, as well as the launch recently of Operation Coatee, a co-ordinated operation to tackle insurance fraud.

The Deputy will be aware that both Reports contained Action Plans with timeframes for the implementation of Actions associated with the Recommendations. I would note that this timeframe expired at the end of 2018 with regard to the Motor Report and is due to expire at the end of 2019 with regard to the Employer and Public Liability Report. I would like to assure the Deputy that the Cost of Insurance Working Group will continue to focus on implementing the outstanding recommendations in both reports and it is hoped that this can be achieved by the end of this year.

In this regard, I consider that bringing the levels of damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions is undoubtedly the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs. Work is progressing as a matter of priority on the Judicial Council Bill, and it is due to complete Report and Final Stages in the Seanad this week, prior to being submitted to Dáil Éireann shortly thereafter. I would hope that we can collectively work together to ensure that the Judicial Council Bill is enacted by the summer.

Alongside this, the Law Reform Commission commenced its work to undertake a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries, as part of its Fifth Programme of Law Reform. As everybody in this House will be aware, this is a complex task and appropriate consideration has to be given to the constitutional implications of such an exercise.

In conclusion, I believe that the reforms implemented to date are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, including those relevant to businesses.

Insurance Costs

49. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to the request of a federation (details supplied) on the increasing costs of insurance which is having a negative impact on some businesses within the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25501/19]

102. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have received correspondence from an organisation (details supplied) regarding spiralling insurance costs; the actions he is taking to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25728/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 102 together.

I acknowledge the general problems faced by many small businesses, including hotels, in relation to the cost and availability of insurance as well as the frustrations that some may have with the pace of reform. Unfortunately, there is no single policy or legislative “silver bullet” to immediately stem or reverse premium price rises. This is because there are many constraints faced by the Government in trying to address this issue in particular the fact that for constitutional reasons, it cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied and for legal reasons it cannot direct insurance companies as to the pricing level which they should apply in respect of businesses seeking insurance.

I wish to re-emphasise how important this issue is for the Government. Consequently, following the publication of its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in 2017, the Cost of Insurance Working Group undertook an examination of the employer liability and public liability insurance sectors. This second phase culminated in the publication in January 2018 of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. As part of that process, both Minister of State D'Arcy and the Working Group met with a number of relevant representative bodies of businesses impacted, including the Irish Hotel Federation, to get a better appreciation of the issues they have experienced in their particular sectors. Indeed, there is a specific section in the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance on these issues.

While I understand that the Irish Hotels Federation may feel that there is a lack of progress being made, I believe there has been significant progress in the implementation of the two CIWG Reports. Examples include the following:

- the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission, and its subsequent recommendations relating to addressing award levels for soft tissue injuries – this has provided the objective evidence we need to be able to address award levels;

- the establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance; the Central Bank is currently reviewing the possibility of expanding its scope to cover business insurance;

- reforms to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019;

- amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;

- the reform of the Insurance Compensation Fund to provide certainty to policyholders and insurers; and,

- various reforms of how fraud is reported to and dealt with by An Garda Síochána, including increased co-ordination with the insurance industry, as well as the recent decision by the Garda Commissioner to develop a divisional focus on insurance fraud which will be guided by the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) which will also train Gardaí all over the country on investigating insurance fraud, and the recent success under Operation Coatee, which targets insurance-related criminality.

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, including those relevant to businesses.

Undoubtedly the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs particularly for small businesses is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions. In this regard, the Personal Injuries Commission has highlighted the significant differential between award levels in Ireland and other jurisdictions, and has made a number of recommendations to address this issue, in particular the establishment of a Judicial Council to compile guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury. Both I and Minister of State D'Arcy believe that this awards gap needs to be significantly closed and we are working with the Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr Charlie Flanagan TD, to ensure that this happens at the earliest opportunity. In this regard, work is progressing as a matter of

priority on the Judicial Council Bill, and it is due to complete Report and Final Stages in the Seanad this week, prior to being submitted to Dáil Éireann shortly thereafter. I would hope that members of both Houses of the Oireachtas can collectively work together to ensure that the Judicial Council Bill is enacted by the summer.

Finally, I would like to assure the Deputy that the Cost of Insurance Working Group will continue to focus on implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in parallel with implementing those from the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. I am hopeful that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports' recommendations will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and a more competitive insurance market.

Financial Services Sector

50. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his revised strategy for the development of international financial services here; the reason he is halving previously indicated levels of new job creation in the sector between 2020 and 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25230/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The employment target in Ireland for Finance is to reach 50,000 people in direct employment in the sector by 2025. That is a net increase of 5,000 above the target employment level set for the previous strategy, IFS2020. The targeted increase in employment set out in IFS2020 was 10,000.

The target of an increase of 5,000 people in employment in international financial services reflects two key factors.

First, Ireland is at a different position in the economic cycle and, with the country close to full employment, setting jobs targets is somewhat contradictory.

Second, and more importantly, the impacts of technology on the employment in the financial services sector are also potentially transformative and this will put existing employment figures under considerable pressure. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs reported that financial services is one of two sectors in the Irish economy which is not expected to employ more people in 2023 than in it did 2018.

While Ireland for Finance has an overall target for employment growth, it is also important that the strategy sets the aim of seeking to ensure that the posts located in Ireland will be high quality, well paid, and 'sticky' – that is, less likely to be outsourced or easily transferable. Higher value posts are also less likely to be affected by increased levels of automation in the sector.

A number of additional indicators of success have been selected to run concurrently with the jobs target. These include: trends in employment in international financial services; regional growth; new and specialised sub-sectors; high-level posts that will reflect a move up the value chain; the breadth of skills and sub-sectors; and the depth of specialised financial services available in Ireland.

Insurance Costs

51. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address the difficulties being faced by businesses nationally experiencing rising insurance costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25611/19]

54. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to support local businesses in County Wicklow with increasing insurance costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25356/19]

55. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance the actions he is taking to assist small businesses nationally which are struggling to renew their insurance policies and facing rising insurance costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25610/19]

60. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to reduce the cost of public liability insurance for community groups and community events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25568/19]

68. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address the rising cost of insurance for street performers and other artists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24329/19]

71. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address the rising cost of mart insurance premiums; if he has commissioned research or reports on the impact of high insurance costs on rural business and community development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22796/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51, 54, 55, 60, 68 and 71 together.

I acknowledge the general problems across the country as a whole faced by many small businesses (including marts), community and voluntary groups, as well as other sectors such as street performers in relation to the cost and availability of insurance. I also appreciate that there is some frustration about the perceived pace of reform. Unfortunately, there is no single policy or legislative “silver bullet” to immediately stem or reverse premium price rises. This is because there are many constraints faced by the Government in trying to address this issue in particular the fact that for constitutional reasons, it cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied and for legal reasons it cannot direct insurance companies as to the pricing level which they should apply in respect of businesses seeking insurance.

However, I wish to re-emphasise how important this issue is for the Government. Consequently, following the publication of its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in 2017, the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) undertook an examination of the employer liability and public liability insurance sectors. This second phase culminated in the publication in January 2018 of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. I believe there has been significant progress in the implementation of the two CIWG Reports. Examples include the following:

- the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission, and its subsequent recommendations relating to addressing award levels for soft tissue injuries – this has provided the objective evidence we need to be able to address award levels;

- the establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance; the Central Bank is currently reviewing the possibility of expanding its scope to cover business insurance;

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- amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;

- the reform of the Insurance Compensation Fund to provide certainty to policyholders and insurers; and,

- various reforms of how fraud is reported to and dealt with by An Garda Síochána, including increased co-ordination with the insurance industry, as well as the recent decision by the Garda Commissioner to develop a divisional focus on insurance fraud which will be guided by the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) which will also train Gardaí all over the country on investigating insurance fraud, and the recent success under Operation Coatee, which targets insurance-related criminality.

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from May 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24.5% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, including those relevant to businesses.

Undoubtedly the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs particularly for small businesses is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions. In this regard, the Personal Injuries Commission has highlighted the significant differential between award levels in Ireland and other jurisdictions, and has made a number of recommendations to address this issue, in particular the establishment of a Judicial Council to compile guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury. Both I and Minister of State D'Arcy believe that this awards gap needs to be significantly closed and we are working with the Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr Charlie Flanagan TD, to ensure that this happens at the earliest opportunity. In this regard, work is progressing as a matter of priority on the Judicial Council Bill, and it is due to complete Report and Final Stages in the Seanad this week, prior to being submitted to Dáil Éireann shortly thereafter. I would hope that members of both Houses of the Oireachtas can collectively work together to ensure that the Judicial Council Bill is enacted by the summer.

Finally, I would like to assure the Deputy that the Cost of Insurance Working Group will continue to focus on implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in parallel with implementing those from the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. I am hopeful that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports' recommendations will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and a more competitive insurance market.

Tax Code

52. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when the Revenue Commissioners will complete its review of flat rate expenses regimes in place; the way in which he will ensure that changes are politically proofed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25526/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that their review of the flat rate expenses regime is ongoing and that it is intended to have the review completed by the end of 2019. The Deputy will be aware from my previous replies on this matter that Revenue confirmed an implementation date of 1 January 2020 in respect of any changes that may be made to the flat rate regime, to ensure they do not impact on any specific group earlier than the rest. Revenue has advised that this position is unchanged.

The flat rate expenses regime is a concessionary practice operated by Revenue where both specific commonality of expenditure exists across an employment category and the statutory requirement for the tax deduction as set out in section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 is satisfied. To qualify for a deduction under that section, an expense must be “wholly, exclusively and necessarily” incurred in the performance of the duties of the employment and paid by the employee. The purpose of the flat rate expenses regime is to simplify tax administration for both taxpayers and Revenue by making it easier for large groups of employees working in the same sector to avail of their entitlement to tax relief in respect of allowable expenses incurred in the performance of their employment duties.

The Deputy will be aware from my previous replies to questions on this matter that I am aware of Revenue’s programme of work in this area. Furthermore, the Deputy will be aware that the administration of the tax code is exclusively a matter for Revenue who are independent in the performance of their functions. Any changes in practice to the flat rate expenses regime are therefore a matter for Revenue, but I understand that any withdrawal of the practice can only take place if Revenue are satisfied that there is no longer a legally valid basis to give the concession, after engagement with the relevant representative body acting on behalf of the various categories of workers.

As I have said on previous occasions, there has been no change to the general rule set out in legislation so all employees retain their statutory right to claim a deduction under section 114 TCA for any valid expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment, to the extent which the expenses are not reimbursed from any source. So while certain employees may no longer claim a deduction on a universal “flat rate” basis, they may still be able to still claim a deduction on a specific “vouched basis”.

Housing Policy

53. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to implement new regulations of vulture and cuckoo funds to ensure that those in search of affordable homes are not losing out to international speculators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25589/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The key to resolving current issues, including affordable housing, in the housing market is increasing supply. This is why the Government is committed to increasing the supply of all types of housing including social, affordable and private. Institutional investors represent one aspect of the housing market and have a role in increasing supply, particularly the supply of urban apartments.

The Deputy should be aware that a Department of Finance staff paper on institutional investment in the housing market, published in February 2019, found that property funds, real estate firms and REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts) account for a relatively small proportion of housing transactions. In 2017, the latest year for which official data is available, such firms purchased a net 1 per cent of transacted units. However, it is clear the number of transactions from such investors is increasing.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) identified greater apartment construction as a policy objective. Approximately 12 per cent of the national housing stock is in apartments, in comparison to many European countries where it is normal for 40-60 per cent of households to live in apartments. Given Ireland’s population growth, a movement towards smaller average household size and greater mobility in the labour market, apartments will need to become a more prevalent form of housing, particularly in urban areas. Many institutional investors spe-

cialise in providing such accommodation. However, as Rebuilding Ireland makes clear, professional landlord investment can only be one aspect of a multi-pronged response to addressing current issues in the market.

Introducing regulation of the investment activity of institutional investors to limit or exclude them from housing, if it is possible to do, would be likely to have the major unintended consequence of reducing supply.

Questions Nos. 54 and 55 answered with Question No. 51.

Tax Avoidance

56. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the plans of the OECD for a minimum effective corporate tax rate to cut down on tax avoidance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25318/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the current proposals flow from earlier discussions at both OECD and EU level to address taxation issues arising from the growing digitalisation of the economy. The OECD published a work plan on 31 May setting out the broad direction of travel for the period ahead. This work plan was endorsed by G20 Finance Ministers on 9 June and work will continue over the next 18 months with a view to reaching final agreement by end 2020.

It is important to note that the work plan remains on a “without prejudice” basis and that a lot of work remains to be done before we have a sustainable agreement.

I have been very clear that further change to the international tax framework is necessary to ensure that we reach a stable global consensus for how and where companies should be taxed. A certain, stable, and globally agreed international tax framework is vital to facilitate cross border trade and investment.

When I look at the proposals currently being discussed at OECD I believe that proposals examining the issue of where companies generate their value and whether new concepts of value creation need to be recognised, might provide a basis upon which a sustainable agreement could be found at the OECD.

However, proposals to introduce a minimum effective tax rate remains problematic, not least because of a lack of clarity as to what it is the proposal is trying to achieve.

Ireland is supportive of measures to limit companies’ capacity to engage in aggressive tax planning. Artificial profit-shifting for tax purposes poses a real challenge and must continue to be addressed. However, I do not support measures which have as their core objective the end of legitimate and fair tax competition.

The benefits of tax competition have long been recognised by the OECD and others, as long as this competition is fair.

I believe that fair tax competition is a legitimate tool for small peripheral countries to balance against size, geographical location or resource advantages other countries enjoy, and this is supported by a wealth of economic research.

Ireland is positively engaged in the discussions at OECD and remains open to solutions which respect our right to compete fairly and which respect the legitimacy of Ireland’s long-standing 12.5% corporate tax rate.

Tax Code

57. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on efforts to broaden the tax base; and his views on whether reliance on corporation tax is unsustainable. [25438/19]

72. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he plans to broaden the tax base in a progressive manner further to the criticism of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council of the over-reliance on corporate tax receipts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25550/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 72 together.

Ireland has been consistently successful over several decades in attracting leading multinationals to base here and given our high level of integration with the global economy, it is not altogether surprising that our corporation tax base has become concentrated, as it has been for a number of decades.

Nonetheless, I would acknowledge that there are risks associated with this increase in corporation tax receipts. A fiscal vulnerability exists in the form of an exposure of the public finances to fluctuations in corporation tax receipts, which last year were at their highest ever share of Exchequer revenues at 18.7 percent of overall tax receipts. By way of context VAT and Income Tax receipts accounted for approximately 64 percent of our overall tax receipts.

In recent years, I have taken steps to broaden our corporation tax base, including through the introduction of the 80 per cent cap on capital allowances for intangible assets in Budget 2018 and the introduction of a broader Exit Tax regime in Budget 2019. Measures have also been introduced in recent years which will ensure a continued broadening of the overall tax base. These include the introduction of the Universal Social Charge, the Local Property Tax and the sugar-sweetened drinks tax. Further measures that I have taken which will enhance the tax base include the increase in the VAT rate, for tourism related goods and services, from the 9 per cent rate to the 13.5 per cent rate in Budget 2019. For 2019 all of these measures are projected to raise revenues equivalent to approximately 1.5 percent of GDP or 5.7 percent of overall general government revenue.

Further steps which I have taken include an increase in the commercial (non-residential) Stamp Duty rate from 2 per cent to 6 per cent in Budget 2018 and an increase in the betting duty levy from 1 per cent to 2 percent in Budget 2019. I have also removed some tax reliefs, such as the Home Renovation Incentive and the Start your own Business Relief, and continued a roll-out of enhanced taxation compliance measures. However, I would note that further potential for base broadening exists, particularly in the environmental area where important policy priorities exist.

The ongoing systematic review of tax expenditures, taken in line with my Department’s Tax Expenditure Guidelines, will assist in this process, through identifying deadweight, resource misallocation and assessing if tax reliefs still meet their initial policy objectives. This will also provide a ‘health check’ as to whether they accord with the OECD tax hierarchy in terms of their impact upon economic growth.

My Department will shortly publish a paper to highlight some of these in-built vulnerabilities to our tax revenues and to quantify where possible, the impact of a shock to our corporation tax receipts. Potential solutions to this are presented in order to prompt a policy discussion around how best to mitigate against this emerging over-reliance. It is my intention to give con-

sideration to these, and possibly other, suggestions with a view to making recommendations to Government in the autumn.

Tax Code

58. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if further to the fiscal assessment report of June 2019 from the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, he is examining further measures to broaden the tax base; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25229/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that I and my Department continue to seek ways to broaden the tax base that do not run contrary to the growth focus of this Government.

Certain measures have already been introduced which will ensure a continued broadening of the overall tax base. These include the introduction of the Universal Social Charge, the Local Property Tax and the Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax. Further measures that I have taken which will enhance the tax base include the increase in the VAT rate, for tourism-related goods and services, from the 9 per cent rate to the 13.5 per cent rate in Budget 2019. For 2019 all of these measures are projected to raise revenues equivalent to approximately 1.5 per cent of GDP or 5.7 per cent of overall general Government revenue. I would also note that further potential for base broadening exists, particularly in the environmental area where important policy priorities exist.

Also in Budget 2019 the income tax package was primarily comprised of an increase of €750 in the point of entry to the higher rate of income tax, a reduction in the third rate of USC and an extension of the income range on which the second rate of USC will be charged. This continued the focus on reducing the tax burden on low to middle income earners, while maintaining a broad tax base.

The Deputy will be aware that in recent years I have taken steps to broaden and enhance the stability of our corporation tax base, including through the introduction of the 80 per cent cap on capital allowances for intangible assets in Budget 2018 and the introduction of a broader Exit Tax regime in Budget 2019. Given that Ireland has been consistently successful over several decades in attracting leading multi-nationals to base here and given our high level of integration with the global economy, it is not altogether surprising that our corporation tax base has become concentrated.

Nonetheless, I would acknowledge that a fiscal vulnerability exists in the form of a significant and growing exposure of the public finances to corporation tax receipts, which last year were at their highest ever share of Exchequer revenues at 18.7 per cent of overall tax receipts. My Department will shortly publish a paper to highlight some of these in-built vulnerabilities and to quantify where possible, the impact of such a shock. Potential solutions to this are presented in order to prompt a policy discussion around how best to mitigate against this emerging over-reliance. It is my intention to give consideration to these – and possibly other suggestions – with a view to making recommendations to Government in the autumn.

Exchequer Payments

59. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on Exchequer debt servicing costs for the first quarter of 2019; the way in which the refinancing of Exchequer debt since the beginning of 2018 is impacting on those costs in 2019 and 2020; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [17779/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the National Treasury Management Agency that Exchequer debt service costs in the first quarter of 2019 were just over €2 billion, a decline of 6.2% on the same period last year. They were also marginally below expectations.

Exchequer debt service costs peaked in 2014 and have been falling since. The NTMA expects them to fall further this year and next, as high coupon debt matures and is replaced with lower coupon debt.

A fixed rate Treasury bond with a coupon of 4.5% matured in October 2018 while new bond issuance in 2018 was completed at a weighted average yield of just below 1.1%.

Two benchmark bonds mature this year. The first, which matured yesterday on Tuesday, 18 June, had a coupon of 4.4%. The second, which will mature in October, has a coupon of 5.9%. The NTMA advises me that new bond issuance so far in 2019 was completed at a weighted average yield of just under 1.2%.

In the April Stability Programme Update, Exchequer debt servicing costs for 2019 were estimated at just above €5.3 billion. That is close to €0.2 billion lower than was estimated in Budget 2019. Similarly, the debt service estimate for 2020 was reduced by over €0.25 billion.

There are also two benchmark bond maturities in 2020, one in April and the second in October. These bonds have coupons of 4.5% and 5% respectively.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 51.

Brexit Preparations

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of preparations for a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25493/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Council in April 2019 agreed to an extension of the Article 50 process until 31 October 2019, following a request by Prime Minister May. The extension includes giving the UK flexibility to leave before that date should the Withdrawal Agreement be ratified. The European Council decision made clear that the Withdrawal Agreement, including the backstop, cannot be re-negotiated and that any unilateral commitments by the UK Government should be compatible with the letter and the spirit of the Withdrawal Agreement. We welcome these important assertions. The European Council also agreed that should the UK's position on the EU-UK future relationship evolve, the EU is prepared to reconsider the political declaration on the future relationship.

The Government remains focused on the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement as the best way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU and to fully protect the Good Friday Agreement. The decision of the European Council provides the UK with more time, until 31 October, to ensure an orderly withdrawal. However, the risk of a no deal Brexit remains. The preparations for all possible scenarios, that have been taking place since before the Brexit referendum, are therefore continuing. Brexit in all scenarios will have negative consequences and as a Government we are determined to be as ready as we can be.

The Government's Contingency Action Plan, published on 19 December 2018, sets out comprehensive, cross-Government preparations that have been taking place over the last three

years. This work continues at both a national and EU level. Last week, on 12th June, the Commission issued its fifth Contingency Communication which updates and reinforces the necessary no deal Brexit preparedness measures at EU level.

The Government has been taking key decisions to advance the implementation of our Brexit preparations. The Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act, was signed into law by the President on 17 March 2019. The Act complements legal measures at EU level and focuses on measures protecting our citizens and supporting the economy, enterprise and jobs, particularly in key economic sectors. The Act is primarily intended for a no deal scenario, and most of the Act will not be commenced should the Withdrawal agreement be ratified. The legislation which I proposed in the areas of Taxation and Financial Services is an important part of the whole of Government response to Brexit, as it will ensure continuity of access for business and citizens in relation to certain taxation reliefs and allowances, as well as enabling insurance undertakings to continue to fulfil contractual obligations to their Irish customers, in a no deal scenario.

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

As Minister for Finance, my objective is to protect the economic and financial interests of the State and to support the work of the Revenue Commissioners so as to minimise the Brexit disruption to trade, to the greatest extent possible. My Department is working within the whole-of-Government approach and is coordinating closely with its agencies who are developing and implementing plans and measures to protect our economy.

The Central Bank has statutory responsibility for financial stability and has been focused on Brexit since before the UK referendum. The Central Bank has been working closely with financial services firms to ensure that they have contingency plans in place for end March 2019, and they are now using the extended deadline to further prepare to cope with the possible effects of Brexit, with as little disruption for consumers as possible. In relation to funding the State, the NTMA's strategy continues to take account of the market dislocation risks posed by Brexit. The Exchequer's funding position is strong.

Within Revenue, there is a very significant program of work that has been ongoing in terms of ICT, staffing, and trader engagement. Additional physical capacity is in place at ports and airports to apply checks and controls, in a no deal scenario. This work will ensure that the Revenue Commissioners are prepared to facilitate the efficient movement of legitimate trade to the maximum extent possible in a no deal scenario.

I am satisfied that my Department and its relevant agencies are continuing to work to ensure that they are as prepared as possible to limit the inevitable disruption to consumers and trade, post Brexit.

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

62. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the tangible steps his Department has taken to provide flood insurance to those properties located in areas with demountable flood defences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17987/19]

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

However, the provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. Consequently neither the Government, nor the Central Bank can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance (Solvency II directive).

The core strategy for addressing areas at risk from flooding is the OPW Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (“CFRAM”) Programme which focusses on 300 Areas for Further Assessment identified as being at potentially significant risk of flooding. The proposed feasible measures are outlined in Flood Risk Management Plans which sets out current flood relief schemes, including 118 proposed schemes that can protect a further 11,500 properties.

The Government believes that its existing policy in relation to flooding, which is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach, is the best way forward. This commitment is underpinned by the OPW and Local Authorities capital investment programme, and complemented by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and Insurance Ireland which provides for the exchange of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes.

This arrangement has led to a greater availability of flood cover in previously higher risk areas. For instance, the Insurance Ireland survey in March 2019 of approximately 87% of the property insurance market in Ireland, indicates that of the completed defence schemes, 95% of policies in areas benefitting from permanent flood defences include flood cover, while 74% of policies in areas benefitting from demountable defences include flood cover. In addition, it should be noted that an Insurance Ireland/OPW working group shares relevant data on completed flood defence schemes and a sub-group has been established to explore the technical arrangements that may allow for the further sharing of data.

In relation to demountable defences my Department is continuing to examine how to increase the level of cover in areas with demountable defences. One of the outcomes of these discussions is that the insurance industry has now acknowledged that they accept that the demountable defences meet the desired ‘1:100 year’ standard. However, while demountable defences are effective when correctly deployed they are dependent on human intervention which increases the risk of failure. This is a difficult and complex issue to resolve but every effort being made to get a more responsive approach from the insurance industry on this matter.

Motor Insurance Claims

63. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the progress in developing legislation that would oblige insurance companies to inform motor insurance policyholders of claims made against them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25567/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department is currently working on developing legislative changes that would oblige insurance companies to inform policyhold-

ers of claims made against them. The objective of the proposal is to ensure that policyholders are informed as soon as possible after a claim against their policy is lodged and informed after a claim is settled. In addition, the proposal will seek to require insurers to engage with the policyholder to ensure that the policyholder's views can be taken into consideration.

This proposal originates from Recommendation 8 of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. A corresponding recommendation was then included in the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance (Rec 10) as this issue is generally far more pertinent to businesses and other liability insurance policyholders rather than individual motorists.

The Department engaged with Insurance Ireland to seek voluntary agreement of this proposal through a protocol. Unfortunately, no such agreement could be reached on a non-legislative basis.

As a result, it is proposed to include this legislative proposal within the Consumer Insurance Contracts Bill 2017, a Private Members' Bill introduced by Sinn Féin which is based on a 2015 Law Reform Commission Report. The Government provided support in principle for the objectives of this Bill at Second Stage and noted the intention of the Minister for Finance to submit substantive amendments should the Bill reach Committee Stage.

On 27 May 2019 Government approval was given to enable the drafting of committee stage amendments. As part of this approval process the Office of the Attorney General expressed the view that they wish to obtain specialist independent legal advice on this Bill to avoid any unforeseen consequences.

I understand that the Clerk of the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach has written to my Department to signal that the Committee has decided to consider the Bill at Committee Stage the week beginning 8th July. The Office of the Attorney General is currently working on the Government's Committee Stage amendments. However as this is a Private Members' Bill, the timing of the legislative steps are not within the control of the Government.

Tax Agreements

64. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent communiqué by G20 finance leaders on digital services taxes; his further views on plans for a new tax policy based on the amount of business a digital company does in a state and not the location it is headquartered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25319/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been very clear that further change to the international tax framework is necessary to ensure that we reach a stable global consensus for how and where companies should be taxed. A certain, stable, and globally agreed international tax framework is vital to facilitate cross border trade and investment.

In this regard I welcome the G20 Finance Ministers' commitment to achieving a consensus based solution to addressing the tax challenges arising from digitalisation, and their endorsement of the OECD BEPS Inclusive Framework as the correct forum for this work to be carried out.

When I look at the proposals currently being discussed at OECD I believe that proposals examining the issue of where companies generate their value, and whether new concepts of value creation need to be recognised, might provide a basis upon which a sustainable agreement could be found at the OECD.

It is my belief that any such solution should be grounded in the principle that corporate tax should be paid where value is created in accordance with the well established arm's length principle. However, there is scope for a possible broadening of the concept of value creation that recognises that some value may arise from scale, from brands or from access to markets.

Any change should be moderate and based, to the greatest extent possible, on existing transfer pricing rules which are deeply embedded in the international tax framework. The bulk of profits must remain taxable in exporting countries under the existing corporate tax framework. This can help to ensure that such countries are not disproportionately impacted. Any proposal which would disproportionately benefit large countries at the expense of smaller ones is not sustainable. Proposals which are focused on providing certainty into the medium term for governments and for business are much more likely to be acceptable to the international community.

Ireland will continue to engage positively in the discussions at OECD and remains open to solutions which respect our right to compete fairly and which respect the legitimacy of Ireland's longstanding 12.5% corporate tax rate.

Corporation Tax Regime

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the impact on Ireland's corporation tax base and level of receipts from the proposed changes to international taxation under the umbrella of the OECD BEPS process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25492/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 28 May, the OECD Inclusive Framework on BEPS agreed a programme of work aimed at developing a consensus solution to the tax challenges arising from the digitalisation of the economy. The work will be undertaken under the auspices of the OECD over the coming months, on a "without prejudice" basis. The work programme was published by the OECD on 31 May last and endorsed by G20 Finance Ministers at their meeting in early June.

The programme is structured under two broad pillars, known as Pillar One and Pillar Two. In very broad terms, Pillar One is examining where profits of multinationals are allocated and examining mechanisms for potentially amending existing approaches. Pillar Two is examining the concept of minimum effective taxation.

The work on both Pillars is at a very early stage and the OECD work programme provides a framework for detailed work to begin in the OECD's technical working parties. The discussions on both Pillars are not yet formulated as draft proposals which can be fully analysed by countries at this stage.

The proposals on the table under Pillar One are, as yet, quite diverse and there is no clarity on what might ultimately be agreed. While clearly a change in how profits are taxed in different jurisdictions would result in a shift in profits being allocated from one location to another, upward and downward adjustments in revenue won't become clear until technical work advances.

As regards Pillar Two, the work programme will detail some of the potential mechanics of how a minimum taxation proposal may operate but there is not sufficient detail at this stage to estimate the impact of any eventual proposal on corporation tax receipts.

In the circumstances, it is not possible to calculate the impact on corporation tax receipts of implementing the proposals as they are currently drafted. Officials in my Department and Revenue will be actively engaged in the work at OECD, including the estimation of the impact

of the options as they emerge in more detail.

The Deputy will be aware that on 23 May, I delivered a speech on this important topic at the Harvard Kennedy School and Irish Tax Institute Global Tax Policy Conference where I signalled that change is coming in the international tax rules as a result of the work now underway at the OECD to find a globally agreed solution to the challenges in relation to the taxation of an increasingly digitalised international economy.

In that speech, I outlined my belief that it might be possible to find a globally acceptable agreement within the broad Pillar One proposals that provides certainty. I also set out the principles that would need to be observed in order for the OECD process to result in an agreed outcome. Those principles include aligning taxing rights with value creation, respecting the long established international corporate tax framework as well as the primary taxing rights of exporting countries and not disproportionately benefitting large countries at the expense of smaller ones.

As I have outlined, a minimum effective tax proposal had not, until recently, been part of the discussions at the OECD on addressing the tax challenges of digitalisation and I remain to be convinced of the validity and appropriateness of this aspect of the work.

Nevertheless, Ireland is positively engaged in the discussions at the OECD and I remain open to solutions which respect our right to compete fairly and which respect the legitimacy of Ireland's longstanding 12.5% corporate tax rate. In all of these discussions my key priority will be to ensure that as this important work advances, Ireland's interests are central to the process of forming that globally agreed consensus.

Within those parameters, if the outcome of this work can, in these changing times, provide tax certainty for governments and for business, it will be very worthwhile.

Fiscal Policy

66. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that the State finances remain on course and that the economy continues to compete effectively with all other economies throughout Europe and outside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25572/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The public finances continue to perform well. In 2018, the General Government balance returned to a surplus for the first time in over a decade – a significant achievement. This followed a number of years of primary budget surpluses. Furthermore, the European Commission have stated that Ireland continues to be compliant with the fiscal rules. For this year and 2020, further surpluses of 0.2 and 0.4 per cent (of GDP) are anticipated.

However, while very substantial progress has been made in recent years, we cannot become complacent. The headline debt ratio continues to improve but it remains flattered by developments in nominal GDP. Partly for these reasons, my officials will shortly publish two related pieces of work on fiscal vulnerabilities and public debt. These reports confirm that more needs to be done to bring the debt burden down to lower levels.

It is imperative that we continue to implement prudent budgetary policy in 'good times' so that policy can deliver counter-cyclical support in the event of a downturn. Such policies are also warranted by the unusually elevated set of international risks facing the Irish economy at present, particularly relating to Brexit. The external environment has also weakened in recent

months with a less benign economic outlook.

Taking recent fiscal and macroeconomic data together, the overall performance of the economy remains robust, best encapsulated by exceptional labour market data. The unemployment rate is well below 5 per cent (down from 16 per cent in 2012) helped by strong and broad based employment gains, which are transforming income and living standards in Ireland. Significant progress has also been made in recent years in improving Ireland's competitiveness. The 2019 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook ranked Ireland as the 2nd most competitive country in the EU and the 7th most competitive in the world.

Illicit Trade in Fuel and Tobacco Products

67. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the additional measures that will be implemented to deal with cross-Border smuggling and illicit trade in products such as fuel and tobacco; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25502/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The threat that fuel fraud and the illicit tobacco trade pose to legitimate business, to consumers and the Exchequer is clear and I am assured by Revenue that combatting such criminality continues to be a priority for them.

Steps taken by Revenue to combat the illegal fuel trade include the introduction of stringent supply chain controls and reporting requirements, and a rigorous programme of enforcement action. In addition, Revenue and the UK Revenue and Customs undertook a joint initiative to introduce a new marker for use in marked fuels, which came into operation from April 2015. Revenue have also conducted random National Sampling Programmes in the years 2016 to 2019, to assess the extent of fuel laundering. The industry view is that the actions taken have been successful in curtailing fuel fraud and the results of Revenue's sampling programmes support this view.

Revenue acts against all aspects of the illegal tobacco trade, and uses a combination of risk analysis, profiling and intelligence, and risk-based screening of cargo, vehicles, baggage and postal packages to intercept illicit products. Action after importation includes checks at retail outlets, markets and private and commercial premises.

Revenue and An Garda Síochána collaborate closely in acting against fuel and tobacco crime, and also cooperate closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, in the framework of the North-South Joint Agency Task Force. This cooperation plays a key role in targeting the organised crime groups responsible for much of this criminality, who operate across jurisdictions. Recent successes include the detection of an illegal cigarette factory in Jenkinstown, Co. Louth, in March 2018, as well as the detection of a second cigarette factory in Knockbridge, Co. Louth, in March 2019.

I am satisfied that Revenue's work against fuel fraud and the illicit tobacco trade has achieved a considerable level of success. For my part, I will fully consider any additional proposals for legislative change that may be brought forward by Revenue which would enhance its capacity to deal effectively with fraud and criminality in these areas.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 51.

Tax Compliance

69. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that REITs and

IREFs are paying a fair share of tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25527/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Institutional investors represent one aspect of the property market and have an important role in increasing supply, particularly the supply of urban apartments.

Notwithstanding this fact, the Government monitors the actions of investors in the market and has taken action when abuses have been identified. The Deputy will be aware that action was taken in 2016 to address concerns about the use of section 110 and fund vehicles by foreign investors to take profits derived from Irish real estate without paying Irish tax.

This resulted in the introduction of the IREF (Irish Real Estate Fund) framework in 2016. IREFs are investment undertakings, excluding UCITS, where at least 25% of the value of that undertaking is made up of Irish real estate assets. Where the main purpose of the fund is to invest in Irish property, this also falls into the regime regardless of the level of property held. Where an IREF makes an actual distribution or on the redemption of units in the IREF, non-resident investors will be subject to a withholding tax of 20%. Certain investors such as pension funds, life assurance companies, charities and credit unions are exempt from the withholding tax as this is the norm for such bodies across the tax acts.

The Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) framework was introduced in 2013, to facilitate long-term, risk-diversified, collective investment in rental property. The rules relating to REITs in Ireland are found in Part 25A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. In order to be a REIT, a company must be listed on the main market of an EU stock exchange within three years of forming, and it must be widely held. Irish REITs are collective investment vehicles which invest in Irish property. As such, their income and gains from Irish property are not taxed within the REIT but are instead taxed in the hands of the investor when distributed. REITs must distribute at least 85% of their property profits to their shareholders each year. A REIT is subject to corporation tax on any income or gains arising from any other business (i.e. non-property business) that it carries on.

Dividend withholding tax at 20% must be applied to all distributions from REITs, other than distributions to certain limited classes of investors such as pension funds and charities as they are more generally exempt from tax.

I am satisfied with the tax regimes applicable to REITs and IREFs, however given the important implications which developments in the property market can have for the economy, my Department actively monitors developments in this sector on an ongoing basis. As part of the 2018 Finance Act process I committed to conduct a review of REITs, IREFs and section 110 companies as they invest in the Irish property market. Officials in my Department are currently preparing this report, which is to be presented to the Tax Strategy Group in July.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 47.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 51.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 57.

Fiscal Policy

73. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a key conclusion of the recent fiscal assessment report of June 2019 from the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council that the primary balance as a share of GNI has flat-lined since 2015 and that this suggests

that there are underlying structural problems and the underlying fiscal position of Ireland is disimproving; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25414/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have noted the assessment of the Stability Programme Update 2019 in the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council's Fiscal Assessment Report. In keeping with established practice, I will issue a formal response to the Report in due course.

The Council's assessment of the primary budget balance highlights concerns over the risks of reliance on elevated corporation tax receipts and unplanned increases in Government expenditure.

As I have stated on numerous occasions, the Government is acutely aware of the importance of not committing to unsustainable permanent expenditure increases financed by transient revenue increases. To that end, we have committed to putting aside some of the excess corporation tax receipts for the Rainy Day Fund, to build up our fiscal buffers for the uncertain economic times ahead.

Furthermore, my Department has prepared a Fiscal Vulnerabilities Scoping Paper, to be published shortly, which outlines a number of possible policy approaches to countering the risks of reliance on volatile tax revenues. These proposals, among others, will be considered by Government as we begin preparations for Budget 2020.

In terms of unplanned increases in expenditure, additional expenditure reporting requirements by Departments can be introduced when expenditure has exceeded departmental budgets in the previous year. After the significant budget overrun by the Department of Health last year, a new oversight board has been established to continuously monitor and report on departmental expenditure, in order to address potential issues as they arise.

My Department will publish the Summer Economic Statement 2019 next week. This will set out the parameters for economic growth, the risks facing the economy over the medium-term, and the Government's strategy for addressing these challenges. The Statement will guide Government in formulating budgetary policy based on the principles of steady and sustainable improvements in the public finances and living standards.

Corporation Tax Regime

74. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the country-by-country report of the European Commission recommending the State to address features of the tax system that may facilitate aggressive tax planning and to focus in particular on outbound payments and reference to the tech giants using Irish corporate tax structures here to repatriate EU wide revenues back to the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25323/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Commission Country Specific Recommendations for EU Member States form an integral part of the European Semester cycle of economic governance. The overall objective is to encourage the Member States to increase their growth potential by continuing to improve their economies and further strengthening their economic resilience.

In this regard I welcome the publication of the European Commission's Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland. While one of these recommendations calls on Ireland to continue to take action on addressing aggressive tax planning, it is notable that Commissioner Moscovici

has publicly acknowledged that we are on the right track and encouraged us to continue in this direction.

Ireland's actions in recent years have demonstrated our clear commitment to taking action to address aggressive tax planning. Ireland's Corporation Tax Roadmap, which was published last September, set out a clear range of actions which Ireland is taking on corporate tax reform. Significant actions have already been taken on foot on the Roadmap including the introduction of Controlled Foreign Company rules, amendments to Ireland's exit tax rules, and the prompt ratification of the BEPS Multilateral Instrument. Further actions will be taken in Finance Bill 2019 including the amendment of Ireland's transfer pricing rules and the introduction of anti-hybrid rules.

As a very open economy which serves as a key European base for a significant number of non-EU headquartered multinational companies, it is to be fully expected that Ireland would have a higher percentage of outbound royalty payments than other Member States. Concerns about outbound payments are justified in circumstances where the relevant profits should in fact be taxed in the EU or where the profits are ultimately being untaxed (either in the recipient or parent jurisdiction). It is my belief that neither of these concerns should arise in respect of outbound payments from Ireland.

The international consensus is that profits should be taxed where the 'DEMPE' functions occur. In this regard, Member States have the ability to tax the profits attributable to those functions within their jurisdiction under the international corporation tax framework.

Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the outbound payments made from Ireland are made by companies which are ultimately owned by companies resident and taxable in the United States. It is my understanding that reforms introduced by the US in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017 should make it impossible for any such royalties to avoid tax in the US even if they are not paid to the US directly and are not taxed in the recipient jurisdiction.

For these reasons I believe that the actions set out in the Roadmap are appropriate with regard to addressing aggressive tax planning but, as always, I will continue to keep the situation under review and shall act accordingly as circumstances demand.

Central Bank of Ireland Staff

75. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have been monitoring the developments in New Zealand regarding the outgoing Governor of the Central Bank there. [24049/19]

77. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the inquiry into the leak of the New Zealand Government budget recently. [24324/19]

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the appointment of the new Governor of the Central Bank; if he has been in contact with his counterpart in New Zealand; the timeline for the completion of the investigation there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25495/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75, 77 and 79 together.

The New Zealand State Services Commissioner is carrying out an investigation into the unauthorised access of New Zealand Budget material and the events surrounding it. I am not

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going to be drawn into speculating on a matter on which the New Zealand State Services Commissioner is currently compiling a report.

The State Services Commissioner, Peter Hughes, has stated that his office will not be making any comment on the matter until his investigation is concluded and all of the facts have been ascertained. The investigation aims to conclude by 27 June.

Consequently, it would not be appropriate for me or the Government to comment on the matter, particularly given we are not in possession of the facts. The Government and others must await the facts to emerge.

Mr. Makhlouf has agreed to the ongoing review as the best approach to establishing the facts of the matter.

He is continuing to work as usual in his role as CEO of the New Zealand Treasury.

I would caution against making claims about an individual who is not in a position to defend themselves.

The Government recommended the appointment of Mr. Makhlouf as Central Bank Governor to the President following a comprehensive, open, and international process.

Mr. Makhlouf was the recommendation of the independent interview panel. The process included a public call for expressions of interest, a comprehensive search using an independent executive search firm, a rigorous shortlisting of applicants, psychometric testing of final interview candidates, and a final interview of five candidates.

The President signed the warrant appointing Mr. Makhlouf to the role of Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland on 14th May 2019.

Deputy Governor, Sharon Donnery, is acting Governor of the Central Bank from 1 June to 31 August.

My officials have been in contact with our Embassy in New Zealand to obtain updates on the matter.

However, given the definitive statement by the New Zealand State Services Commissioner that his office will not be making any comment on the matter until his investigation is concluded and all of the facts have been ascertained, it would not be appropriate to contact his office at this time.

Carbon Tax Implementation

76. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance if he has commissioned a study on the effect of the current carbon taxes in reducing the use of fossil fuels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25234/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In advance of Budget 2019, my Department commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute to examine the environmental and economic impacts of increasing the Carbon Tax. This research examined how producers and consumers may react to increases in the Carbon Tax. The study estimated that increasing the Carbon Tax by €10 would lead to overall emissions reductions of 2.4% in the non-ETS sector. A more recent ESRI study estimated that CO₂ emissions could reduce by 10.2% following an increase in the carbon tax from €20 to €100 per tonne.

The Department of Finance is continuing to work with the ESRI to build an improved evidential base for assessing the environmental, economic and social impacts of putting in place a long term carbon tax trajectory.

This ongoing research will contribute to Carbon Tax policy options which will be examined by the Tax Strategy Group prior to Budget 2020.

Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 75.

Credit Union Regulation

78. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to keep the Central Bank industry funding levy at current levels for credit unions up to, including and post-2021 in view of the fact that credit unions continue to encounter financial difficulties particularly in relation to income generation and return on assets resultant from low interest rates, low loan to asset ratios and high cost income metrics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25321/19]

103. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if urgent consideration will be given to concerns on the proposed increase in the industry funding levy for credit unions (details supplied) in view of the fact this will impact most severely on smaller credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25806/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 103 together.

As the Deputy is aware, credit unions are regulated and supervised by the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank who is the independent regulator for credit unions. Within his independent regulatory discretion, the Registrar acts to support the prudential soundness of individual credit unions, to maintain sector stability, and to protect the savings of credit union members.

Since 2004 the amount of the Industry funding levy payable by each credit union has been capped at a rate of 0.01% of total assets.

Consultation Paper 95 'Joint Public Consultation Paper - Department of Finance and the Central Bank of Ireland - Funding the Cost of Financial Regulation' (CP95) was published in 2015 and set out proposals to move from partial industry funding of financial regulation towards full industry funding, noting the proposal set out in an earlier consultation conducted by the Central Bank (CP61 'Consultation on Impact Based Levies and Other Levy Related Matters') to move credit unions to fund 50% of the cost of regulating the credit union sector.

The Central Bank indicated, in its Funding Strategy and 2018 Guide to the Industry Funding Levy, that it intended to seek my approval to increase the proportion of financial regulation costs to be recovered from credit unions on a phased basis setting out an initial target of 50% to be reached by 2021.

In response to the Central Bank's request I recommended that credit union contributions should not increase beyond the 50% target until:

1. The levy trajectory has reached the planned 50% rate, at which time the impact on the viability of the sector will be better understood

2. A public consultation regarding increasing the levy rate for credit unions beyond 50% is

undertaken, which would include a regulatory impact assessment of such a change on the sector.

In contrast to this recovery rates in 2018 for all other industry categories ranged from 65% to 100% and the Central Bank intends to increase all to 100% funding over the next number of years.

The Deputy might also wish to note, that the Department of Finance, in collaboration with the Central Bank, is currently preparing a public consultation paper on potential changes to the Credit Institutions Resolution Fund Levy, which is expected to reduce materially from 2020. This consultation, which will be published on the Department of Finance website very shortly, will be open to all persons and I would strongly encourage all stakeholders to submit feedback.

It is also important to note that as Minister for Finance I have reduced the Stabilisation Scheme Levy materially and that since 2017 no further levies have been charged by the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo).

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 75.

Summer Economic Statement

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the summer economic statement will be published; the level of detail the statement will have in terms of fiscal and macroeconomic projections; the impact of different Brexit scenarios; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25494/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm for the Deputy that the Summer Economic Statement (SES) 2019 will shortly be published and presented before the Oireachtas. The SES will set out the broad parameters for macroeconomic growth and the fiscal outlook as well as the constraints facing the economy over the medium term.

The Government is currently targeting a headline surplus of 0.4 per cent of GDP next year. Since the publication of the Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2019 in April, risks to the economy have intensified, most obviously the increasing possibility of a disorderly Brexit in October. As such, the SES is being prepared on a two-track basis; one scenario assuming an orderly exit, and one assuming a disorderly exit.

The impact of the two scenarios on the public finances will be set out in the SES.

However, I would also point out that, leaving aside Brexit, the economy is on the verge of overheating. Budgetary policy must, therefore, be framed in the context of potential overheating on the one hand, and the possibility of a disorderly exit of the UK from the EU on the other hand.

Protected Disclosures Data

81. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015. [25666/19]

The Taoiseach: The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 provides a robust statutory framework which aims to provide protections to whistleblowers who raise concerns regarding potential wrongdoing in their workplace.

In line with the Act, my Department has a policy on Protected Disclosures which sets out the procedure by which an employee can make a disclosure, what will happen when a disclosure is made, and what my Department will do to protect a discloser.

To date, no disclosures have been received from employees or former employees of my Department.

Departmental Offices

82. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department, including public bodies, in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25921/19]

The Taoiseach: My Department does not rent, lease or hire any office space. The properties occupied by my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office are provided and managed by the Office of Public Works. The National Economic and Social Development Office pays a contribution to the OPW of €322,329 per annum for its office space, with €241,746 paid to date in 2019.

Defence Forces Recruitment

83. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 101 of 14 May 2019, the timeline of the review into the recommendations from the working group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25642/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have requested the information sought and will revert to the Deputy when the information is available.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

84. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 69, 70 and 71 of 29 May 2019, when a decision will be made on whether members of the Defence Forces will be participating in the 2019 CISM World Games in China; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25643/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Further to Parliamentary Questions, No's 69, 70 and 71, I can confirm that approval has now been given for the Defence Forces to participate in the 7th CISM World Games which will take place in Wuhan, China in October 2019.

Protected Disclosures Data

85. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25656/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There have been a total of 22 Protected Disclosures made between 2014 and 2018 with an additional 4 received to date in 2019. This figure relates to all Protected Disclosures which have made been made

both in the Department and the Defence Forces.

In accordance with the terms of section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 an annual report in relation to the total number of protected disclosures made in the preceding year is prepared and published on the departmental website:

<https://www.defence.ie/what-we-do/protected-disclosures>.

Reports are currently available for 2014 to 2017 with the 2018 report being finalised at present. The following table details the numbers received in the years 2014 to 2018. This number relates to the total number of disclosures made to the Defence Organisation and it is not broken down further into the location of the discloser in keeping with the confidentiality requirements specified in the 2014 Act.

| Year | Number of Disclosures |
|------|-----------------------|
| 2014 | 2 |
| 2015 | 3 |
| 2016 | 2 |
| 2017 | 11 |
| 2018 | 4 |

Defence Forces Recruitment

86. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the actions he plans to take to resolve the ongoing issues regarding retention and recruitment in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25716/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces' 2019 recruitment campaign continues and is targeting 800 new members. Additionally a range of alternative recruitment approaches are being developed, aimed at addressing vacancies in certain specialist areas.

There is also significant work being progressed, aimed at ensuring the Defence Forces remains an attractive career for those currently serving. There are ongoing promotion opportunities, opportunities to gain unique experiences and work is continuing to enhance work-life balance.

The independent Public Service Pay Commission has been tasked with examining recruitment and retention issues and I expect that the Minister for Finance and for Public Expenditure and Reform will bring its report to the Cabinet in the near future. The Government will consider any recommendations made therein.

Defence Forces Remuneration

87. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the ongoing issue of low pay for Permanent Defence Force personnel will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25717/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Similar to other sectors in the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced as one of the measures to assist in stabilising national finances during the financial crisis. The recovery in the economy has provided the fiscal resources to restore pay scales to all public servants in

an affordable and sustainable manner.

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

Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA, improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were implemented.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The increases due under the agreement to date have been paid to Permanent Defence Force personnel. Further increases in pay are scheduled in 2019 and 2020.

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

New entrants who joined the Defence Forces since 2011, may also benefit from the measures which will see interventions at points 4 and 8 of the pay scales for all such relevant new entrants to the public service.

In accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the Government has tasked the Public Service Pay Commission with conducting a more comprehensive examination of the specific recruitment and retention challenges in the Defence Sector. The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform will bring the report to Government shortly.

The Government will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arise from the report.

Departmental Offices

88. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25916/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The information is contained in the following table.

| Year | Rent paid for office space in the Permanent Representation to the Council of the EU, Brussels |
|--------------|---|
| 2015 | €84,846 |
| 2016 | €116,896 |
| 2017 | €121,490 |
| 2018 | €111,600 |
| 2019 to date | €27,207 |

Protected Disclosures Data

89. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25660/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Protected Disclosures Act was introduced in 2014. The making of a Protected Disclosure refers to a situation where a worker discloses information in relation to wrongdoing. This is sometimes referred to as ‘whistleblowing’.

No protected disclosures were received by my Department from 2014 to date.

Foreign Policy

90. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the position in Hong Kong; the EU position on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25722/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In recent weeks, demonstrations have been taking place in Hong Kong to protest against plans to amend local legislation to allow for extradition to the Chinese Mainland, Macau and Taiwan. On 15 June, the Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced the indefinite suspension of the Extradition Bill. While the demonstrations have continued following that announcement, they have been largely peaceful.

Ireland supports the statement issued by the Spokesperson for High Representative Mogherini following the disturbances which took place on 12 June, which reiterates the fundamental right of citizens to assembly and expression, as contained in Hong Kong’s Basic Law, while calling for restraint on both sides. The statement also noted that the EU has expressed its concerns regarding the Extradition Bill to the Hong Kong Government.

Our Consulate General in Hong Kong, and officials in my Department, will continue to monitor this situation closely.

Ebola Virus Outbreak

91. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made at EU and international level to prevent the spread of Ebola; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25723/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and now Uganda, is a matter of grave concern. To date, 2,014 people have been infected, of whom 1,411 have died. The fact that the epicentre of the outbreak is in a conflict zone makes this an extremely difficult crisis to resolve.

So far, Ireland has provided over €2.6 million to UN and NGO partners both for outbreak control programmes in DRC and for preparedness efforts in Uganda. These include support for community mobilisation, sanitation, health & hygiene promotion and health worker training.

Ireland is also engaging through the EU. To date, the EU has provided €21.5 million to the UN, the Red Cross, and to NGOs for access to health care, prevention and control of infections, epidemiological surveillance, safe burials, contact tracing, logistics, and coordination. This includes new funding of €3.5 million announced on 13 June to enable rapid detection and reaction

to Ebola cases in Uganda and South Sudan.

Officials from my Department are liaising with US State Department, given the leading US role in the international response.

Irish Embassies in Kampala and Dar es Salaam - which has responsibility for relations with DRC - are liaising closely with local partners and donors, as well as with Irish citizens in the affected regions. My Department, including the two Embassies, is working with partners in Ireland, including HSE and the Department of Health, implementing lessons learned from previous situations including the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

Foreign Policy

92. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the situation in Moldova; the position of the EU on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25724/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland and its partners in the EU are closely monitoring developments in the Republic of Moldova.

I issued a statement on 11 June to express Ireland's support for efforts to resolve the constitutional crisis by peaceful means and to call for calm and restraint.

I take note of the decisions taken by the democratically elected Parliament of Moldova, and welcome the formation of a new government.

The situation in Moldova is under continuing discussion at EU level and I echo the joint statement issued by HR/VP Mogherini and Commissioner Hahn underlining the readiness of the EU to work with the new government, on the basis of a commitment to reforms and to the core principles enshrined in our Association Agreement.

Israeli Settlements

93. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has formally sought the publication of a database (details supplied); if not, if he plans to seek publication of same; if not, the reason therefore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25742/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In March 2016, the UN Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 31/36, calling upon the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to produce a database of all business enterprises involved in activities relating to Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian Territory.

The EU and its Member States, including Ireland, are wholly opposed to Israeli settlements in Palestine, which are contrary to international law, and are damaging to the prospects of peace. However, we believe that action against settlements must be both lawful and well-considered, since actions which are not fully thought-through risk ultimately being unwound, thereby undermining the cause they aim to support.

In this case, the terms of the Resolution as adopted by the UN Human Rights Council were so broad that a list drawn up pursuant to it might well include businesses with only tenuous or inadvertent connections with settlements. Any ambiguity about could potentially lead to unfair

and counter-productive outcomes.

The EU members of the HRC therefore abstained in the vote on the Resolution. Despite these reservations, Ireland of course assured the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) that we would cooperate with any request for assistance in the task they had been assigned.

In March 2019, the High Commissioner for Human Rights reaffirmed her commitment to discharging the mandate given her under Resolution 31/36 and explained that she needed more time to fully respond to the Council's request as the mandate was novel and complex. Ireland notes the High Commissioner's commitment to discharge the mandate of the HRC resolution 31/36 in a legally, factually and methodological sound manner.

Ireland has always sought to protect the independence of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights. We have not supported any efforts to delay or prevent publication of this database. Nor do we believe it would be appropriate to attempt to influence the High Commissioner's decision on when she considers the database ready for publication.

The Government is committed to the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and in November 2017 published its National Plan on Business and Human Rights 2017-2020. Implementation of this plan is a priority for the Government over the coming years, with the objective of promoting responsible business practice at home and abroad.

Budget Submissions

94. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the economic division in his Department has assessed the recent pre-budget submission of an organisation (details supplied) on creating a fairer Ireland. [25599/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that the pre-budget submission from the organisation in question is being considered by the relevant officials in the context of Budget and Finance Bill preparations. However, as the Deputy will be aware, it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss the details of measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill.

Oireachtas Select Committee Recommendations

95. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance when his Department will respond to the recent report of the Oireachtas Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight on tax expenditures; his views on the key recommendations of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17777/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Committee on Budgetary Oversight's report on Tax Expenditures was received in my office on 9 April this year. This report examines the current process by which the Department of Finance reviews and evaluates tax expenditures, and sets out the oversight role that the Committee can have in monitoring and scrutinising this process in future. It sets out four conclusions and makes eight recommendations covering information to be made available; the approach to reviewing tax expenditure measures; as well as ex-ante and ex-post scrutiny of tax expenditure measures.

I welcome the work of the Committee and concur with the conclusions set out in the report.

The individual recommendations are currently being considered by my Department, and I hope to be in a position to write to the Committee, in the coming weeks.

VAT Rate Application

96. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the rate of VAT payable by sports and leisure clubs seeking to purchase and install emergency defibrillator devices at their facilities; and if there is provision for such clubs to claim VAT back. [25644/19]

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

I am advised by Revenue that generally, businesses that are registered for VAT, including businesses in the leisure sector, are entitled to reclaim the VAT borne on the input costs associated with their taxable business activities including the cost of purchasing and installing defibrillators. As sporting activities are exempt, sports clubs cannot normally reclaim the VAT they incur on their purchases.

The Deputy may be aware that the VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities was introduced in Budget 2018 to reduce the VAT burden on charities through the partial compensation of VAT they incur. However, one of the conditions for qualification under the scheme is registration as a charity under Section 207 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Bodies established for the promotion of athletic or amateur games or sports are normally granted tax exemption under Section 235 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, and this being the case may not be eligible to claim under the Charities Compensation Scheme.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme

97. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reintroduce the home renovation incentive scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25645/19]

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

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

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

Furthermore, in light of the current housing supply shortage, and the need to deliver 25,000 additional housing units per annum over the period 2017-2021, there is a risk that a reintroduction of the HRI could lead to increased competition for scarce resources within the construction sector, leading to upward pressure on construction costs and house prices. The potential for

displacement of labour from work on new builds to work on home renovations would create a high opportunity cost of labour associated with HRI which was not present at the inception of the scheme.

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

Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman Remit

98. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if credit servicing firms with a transitional authorisation status fall under the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman in the same way as a fully regulated entity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25649/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman may investigate complaints against “financial service providers”. This includes complaints against a regulated financial service provider within the meaning of section 2(1) of the Central Bank Act 1942.

Under the 1942 Act, “regulated financial service provider” includes “a financial service provider whose business is subject to regulation by the Bank under this Act or under a designated enactment or a designated statutory instrument”. Persons who are taken to be authorised pursuant to the transitional provisions provided for in Section 34FA(1) of the Central Bank Act 1997 are considered to be ‘regulated financial service providers’ for the purposes of financial services legislation. Therefore, I can confirm that the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman may investigate complaints against the transitionally authorised firms to which the Deputy refers.

Protected Disclosures Data

99. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25659/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance has put in place a policy with related procedures for the making of Protected Disclosures, which have been developed in line with the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014. The Department’s policy and related procedures supports my Department’s strong commitment to ensuring that the culture and working environment of the Department encourages, facilitates and supports any member of staff in ‘speaking-up’ on any issue that may impact adversely on the Department’s ability to properly and fully carry-out all its roles and responsibilities to the high performance standard required.

As provided for under Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, a report is required to be prepared and published on an annual basis setting out the number of disclosures made to the Department in the previous year, the actions taken in response to those disclosures and any other information as may be requested by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform under the Act.

I can advise the Deputy that since the introduction of the Act, two protected disclosures have been made to the Department. This is set out in the table below and also on the Department's website at the following link

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/32ddef-protected-disclosures>.

I can assure the Deputy that any appropriate issue raised by a member of staff relating to a matter connected to the conduct of the business of the Department will be dealt with professionally and appropriately.

| Year | Protected Disclosures Received |
|------|--------------------------------|
| 2014 | Nil |
| 2015 | Nil |
| 2016 | Nil |
| 2017 | 1 |
| 2018 | 1 |

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

100. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide statistical information (details supplied) in respect of each of the quarterly lists of defaulters issued by the Revenue Commissioners for list A in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25676/19]

101. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide statistical information (details supplied) in respect of each of the quarterly lists of defaulters issued by the Revenue Commissioners for list B in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25677/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 101 together.

Section 1086 Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997, requires Revenue to publish Lists of Tax Defaulters, within three months of the end of each quarter in which agreed settlements are reached with taxpayers, or where Penalty Determinations are made by the Courts. The List is published in two parts as follows

- **Part 1:** Persons, where the Court has determined a penalty relating to a settlement, or has imposed a fine, imprisonment or other penalty in respect of a tax or duty offence.

- **Part 2:** Persons, where Revenue has accepted a settlement offer instead of initiating court proceedings, or a settlement has been paid in full.

The following table sets out the 'Part 2' details requested by the Deputy for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 (to date). Prior to 2017, details of unpaid amounts were excluded from the List of Tax Defaulters.

| Period | Settlements Agreed | No. Unpaid | % No. Unpaid | Amounts Remaining Unpaid | % Value Unpaid |
|---------|--------------------|------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Q1 2017 | 86 | 29 | 33.7% | €3,865,936 | 26.8% |
| Q2 2017 | 58 | 19 | 32.8% | €5,574,183 | 50.3% |
| Q3 2017 | 81 | 27 | 33.3% | €10,470,992 | 60.0% |
| Q4 2017 | 64 | 26 | 40.6% | €4,309,244 | 42.2% |
| Q1 2018 | 61 | 20 | 32.8% | €4,226,805 | 44.7% |
| Q2 2018 | 66 | 17 | 25.8% | €2,614,579 | 29.4% |

19 June 2019

| Period | Settlements Agreed | No. Unpaid | % No. Unpaid | Amounts Remaining Unpaid | % Value Unpaid |
|---------|--------------------|------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Q3 2018 | 65 | 18 | 27.7% | €3,402,907 | 26.3% |
| Q4 2018 | 73 | 24 | 32.9% | €5,360,772 | 42.1% |
| Q1 2019 | 62 | 17 | 27.4% | €14,374,017 | 68.0% |

The following table sets out the ‘Part 1’ numbers of cases and values of fines imposed by the Courts in respect of revenue offences for the years 2015 to 2018 and to 31 March 2019, as published in the quarterly List of Tax Defaulters. Revenue has advised me that the collection of such fines is a matter for the Courts Service of Ireland.

| Period | No. of Cases in which Fine Imposed | Total Amount of Fines Imposed |
|------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Q1 2015 | 324 | €795,212.20 |
| Q2 2015 | 247 | €645,548.50 |
| Q3 2015 | 310 | €869,722.50 |
| Q4 2015 | 294 | €709,423.00 |
| 2015 Total | 1,175 | €3,019,906.20 |
| Q1 2016 | 215 | €592,498.00 |
| Q2 2016 | 273 | €733,637.50 |
| Q3 2016 | 164 | €471,317.50 |
| Q4 2016 | 245 | €612,705.50 |
| 2016 Total | 897 | €2,410,158.50 |
| Q1 2017 | 228 | €566,778.00 |
| Q2 2017 | 215 | €609,860.00 |
| Q3 2017 | 176 | €460,788.00 |
| Q4 2017 | 209 | €525,332.50 |
| 2017 Total | 828 | €2,162,758.50 |
| Q1 2018 | 162 | €411,340.00 |
| Q2 2018 | 178 | €445,587.50 |
| Q3 2018 | 139 | €380,703.00 |
| Q4 2018 | 170 | €429,090.00 |
| 2018 Total | 649 | €1,666,720.50 |
| Q1 2019 | 159 | € 517,742 |

Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 49.

Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 78.

Economic Competitiveness

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to make progress in meeting the various economic indicators with particular reference to the need for a competitive economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25835/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Overall our economy is in good shape and is expected to grow this year and next. Modified domestic demand, an underlying measure of growth in the economy, grew by 4.5 per cent for 2018 as a whole.

One of the best barometers of the health in the economy is the labour market. The strong growth in employment over the last number of years has continued into this year, with total employment increasing by 81,200 (+3.7 per cent) in the year to Q1 2019. As a result, there are now more people working in Ireland than ever before.

At the cornerstone of our recovery, has been the improvement in our competitiveness. Since 2008, the Central Bank’s real harmonised competitiveness indicator has improved by approxi-

mately 22 per cent. The improvement in our competitiveness reflects the hard-won productivity gains made over the last number of years, alongside wage and price moderation.

Importantly, the robust economic growth in recent years has not yet given rise to significant inflationary pressures. In the first four months of 2019, average annual inflation was just 1.1 per cent was recorded.

On wage developments, while average annual earnings grew by over 3 per cent in 2018, this came on the back of a near decade of low or negative growth in earnings. The rise in labour income is a welcome development, however it needs to be monitored closely, as a significant acceleration in wages could undermine Ireland's relative competitiveness to other European countries.

Over the medium term, the domestic economy is expected to act as the primary driver of growth. In this context, we must remain conscious of the potential upward pressure this will place on both prices and wages, that could give rise to a loss of competitiveness.

Economic Competitiveness

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has identified specific factors which might impede economic progress or reduce the competitiveness of the economy having particular regard to the extent to which the relative positions compare in each jurisdiction in the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25836/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Overall our economy is in good shape, modified domestic demand, an underlying measure of growth in the economy, increased by 4.5 per cent for 2018 as a whole. Although growth in our economy is expected to moderate over the coming years, it is still expected to compare very favourably to other EU countries. The 2019 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook recently ranked Ireland as the 2nd most competitive country in the EU and the 7th most competitive country in the world, both of which are relative improvements on the 2017 rankings.

As a barometer of how well our economy is performing, there is no story more positive than the one emanating from our labour market. The positive growth in employment seen over the last number of years has continued into 2019, as a result the unemployment rate has fallen from a peak of 16 per cent in early 2012 to 4.4 per cent in May 2019. This compares favourably to an average unemployment rate of 6.4 per cent for the EU as a whole.

Importantly, the robust economic growth in recent years has not yet given rise to significant inflationary pressures. For 2018 as a whole, average annual inflation of just 0.7 per cent was recorded, this compares favourably to the 1.7 per cent recorded across the EU.

Over the medium term, the domestic economy is expected to act as the primary driver of growth. The baseline projections assume that some moderate overheating pressures will emerge, particularly in the context of the expected increase in housing output. However these pressures could be more significant than expected with the potential to generate imbalances over the coming years and impact on our competitiveness.

As I outlined in the Stability Programme Update in April, our economy also faces a number of external risks which could undermine our competitiveness. These risks primarily relate to a more adverse-than-expected outcome from Brexit, a rise in protectionism and a disruption to world trade. There is also increasing evidence of a slowdown in global growth.

As many of the risks we are facing are external and thus beyond our control, the best way we can mitigate against them is through prudent budgetary policy, careful management of the public finances and by focusing on competitiveness-oriented policies, particularly those that increase productivity.

Brexit Preparations

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which taxation matters under discussion at EU level are likely to impact on economic progress in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25837/19]

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to monitor discussions on taxation at European level with particular reference to the need to ensure that Ireland does not find itself in a vulnerable position in the aftermath of Brexit in view of its geographical location in the European context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25839/19]

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will ensure that Ireland does not become marginalised by way of fiscal or taxation changes in the European context in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25840/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106, 108 and 109 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, currently taxation matters at EU level, in particular tax directives, require the unanimous agreement of all Member States before they can be adopted. Taxation is one of the areas which remains subject to the subsidiarity principle and therefore within the gift of national parliaments. This means that Member States maintain powers in the area of taxation unless EU legislation has been agreed in a specific area. The principle of subsidiarity is guaranteed by Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union.

This current system of deciding taxation matters at EU level has been the basis of decisions for tax proposals since the beginning of the European Union. Since 2015, Member States have unanimously agreed in excess of 20 different tax initiatives.

While there has been discussions at EU level about changing the current voting system from unanimity to QMV (qualified majority voting), a considerable number of Member States have expressed support for retaining the current voting rules in taxation.

Ireland believes that the current unanimity-based voting procedure is the most appropriate voting system in the area of taxation. Several Member States have made clear that their Governments do not support any proposed change to how tax decisions are made at European level.

As EU partners, the United Kingdom and Ireland have traditionally shared similar views on the broader tax issue of harmonisation and on proposals such as the proposed directive for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base. While Brexit will result in the loss of an important ally on these matters, Ireland will not be isolated as a number of other countries have similar views to us.

Brexit, in whatever form it takes, will have a significant impact on Ireland, and requires planning by Government, business and citizens, as well as at the EU level. Our planning at home and at the EU level for all possible outcomes will continue. The Department of Finance and other Government Departments and key Agencies have been preparing for Brexit for three

years now – and we continue to do so, through extensive contingency planning and stakeholder engagement. Last week (on 12 June) the Commission issued its fifth Contingency Communication which updates and reinforces the necessary no deal Brexit preparedness measures at EU level.

Whatever the outcome of Brexit, Ireland will remain in the EU with all the stability and certainty that membership brings, including access to the Single Market of over 500 million people.

Economic Growth

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which economic performance here compares with other countries within the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25838/19]

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he remains satisfied regarding the economic performance of Ireland when compared to other countries throughout and outside Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25847/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 112 together.

As published in the Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2019, my Department has forecast economic growth to moderate to a more sustainable rate of 3.9 per cent in 2019, and to continue at the broadly similar pace of 3.3 per cent for 2020. Although growth rates have moderated from 2018, they still compare very favourably to other EU, and significant non-EU, trading partners.

As a barometer of how well our economy is performing, there is no story more positive than the one emanating from our labour market, where we saw full time employment growth of almost 3 per cent in 2018. More people are working in Ireland than ever before and the unemployment rate, at 4.4 per cent, is significantly lower than that of other Euro Area countries.

Growth in the Irish economy is expected to come from both modified domestic demand, which is set to increase by 4.0 per cent in 2019, and an expansion in Irish exports – which are set to grow by 5.2 per cent this year. Modified domestic demand excludes the volatile components of investment spending – giving a more accurate picture of the health of domestic economic activity.

Ireland's economic data compare favourably to those of our main trading partners – with growth, unemployment, and inflation performing better than the Euro Area and EU averages - as the data in Table 1 below illustrate. The European Commission Spring 2019 forecasts, published in May, show that the pace of expansion in the Euro Area, the EU and the US is expected to ease. For the Euro Area, the Commission is forecasting growth of 1.2 per cent this year, strengthening slightly to 1.5 per cent in 2020. Growth in the US economy will slow but remain relatively strong at 2.4 per cent for 2019, easing further to 1.9 per cent in 2020. In common with Ireland, unemployment continues to fall in the EU and US, with the US labour market set to tighten further as it approaches full employment. In the UK, unemployment will remain stable as employment growth slows in the context of subdued GDP figures.

The comparatively low level of inflation in Ireland should help to maintain our competitiveness and protect real wage growth. The 2019 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook recently ranked Ireland as the second most competitive country in the EU and the seventh most competitive country in the world. This should help our economy to continue to perform well interna-

tionally – notwithstanding a number of key global risks.

Table 1

| | Real GDP | | | Inflation | | | Unemployment | | |
|------------------------------|----------|------|------|-----------|------|------|--------------|------|------|
| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Ireland (SPU 2019 forecasts) | 6.7 | 3.9 | 3.3 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 5.7 | 5.4 | 5.2 |
| UK | 1.4 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 2.5 | 2.0 | 2.1 | 4.0 | 4.1 | 4.2 |
| Euro Area | 1.9 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.8 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 8.2 | 7.7 | 7.3 |
| EU28 | 2.0 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.9 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 6.8 | 6.5 | 6.2 |
| US | 2.9 | 2.4 | 1.9 | 2.4 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 3.7 |

Source: European Commission Spring 2019 forecasts and Department of Finance SPU 2019 forecasts for Ireland

Questions Nos. 108 and 109 answered with Question No. 106.

Mortgage Interest Rates

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which mortgage interest rates here compare with those applicable in other jurisdictions throughout the European Union; when the rates charged are likely to converge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25842/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The latest data on Retail Interest Rates published by the Central Bank (which was released on 14 June 2019) show that the average interest rate in Ireland on all new mortgages agreed in April 2019 was 3.03%. This interest rate varied considerably across countries, with the average for the euro area being 1.70%. A link to the publication is below:

<https://centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/retail-interest-rates/interest-rate-statistics-april-2019.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

The European Central Bank (ECB) sets monetary policy and official interest rates for the Eurozone as a whole and also plays a key role in the prudential supervision of European banks and the maintenance of the stability of the overall banking system in the context of the Single Supervisory Mechanism. It is a matter for each credit institution to set its own lending and deposit rates having regard to cost and competitive considerations and also to make its own lending decisions.

As the Deputy is aware, a number of factors contribute to the differential between Irish mortgage rates and those in other countries including the relatively large historical loss experience in the Irish market during the financial crisis and the related legacy issues of non-performing loans. In Ireland there is a relatively high level of non-performing loans in the banking system. Banks are required to make adequate provisions for such loans.

Banks are also required to hold an adequate level of capital against mortgage lending. These capital requirements are calculated with reference to historical loss and default rates. The high levels of mortgage default experienced by Irish banks in the aftermath of the financial crisis mean that Irish banks are required to hold relatively more capital for new mortgage lending than

many of their European peers, in some cases substantially more capital.

In addition to their capital requirements banks are also required to build up additional capital to meet regulatory capital buffers such as the countercyclical capital buffer which is intended to ensure banks can withstand future adverse economic shocks.

The impact of these capital requirements is reflected in the interest rates charged for mortgages in Ireland.

Furthermore, the Irish banking system continues to hold a large amount of lower yielding tracker mortgages on their balance sheets and there is currently a high level of concentration in the market for new mortgage credit.

As I have mentioned before, the Central Bank has introduced a number of changes to the Consumer Protection Code that are designed to help consumers make savings on their mortgage repayments; for example, provision 6.5 (g) of the Code now requires lenders at least annually to, *inter alia*, notify their variable interest (other than tracker) mortgage customers whether they can move to a cheaper interest rate as a result of a change in their loan to value interest rate band and, if the customer is permitted to move, to invite the borrower to contact the lender to discuss the matter. If the consumer is not permitted to move to a lower loan to value band with a lower interest rate, the consumer is nevertheless to be notified that he/she may be able to avail of a lower loan to value interest rate band from another lender based on an up to-date valuation of the property. It should also be noted that the Central Bank macro prudential loan to value and loan to income residential mortgage lending restrictions do not apply to switcher mortgages. More generally, the Code also requires lenders at least annually to provide to variable rate (excluding tracker) mortgage holders:-

- a summary of other mortgage products offered by that lender which could provide savings for the consumer at that point in time,

- a statement that consumers should keep their mortgage arrangements under review as there may be other options that could provide savings for the borrower and

- a link to the relevant section of the Competition and Consumer Protection website relating to mortgage switching or changing mortgage type

(<https://www.ccpic.ie/consumers/financial-comparisons/mortgage-comparisons/>).

Housing Policy

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he can put in place to create an economic environment favourable to young persons seeking to acquire a home for the first time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25844/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance published updated macroeconomic forecasts with the Stability Programme Update (SPU) in April. GDP is projected to expand by 3.9 per cent overall in 2019 and by 3.3 per cent in 2020. Growth at these levels ensures that Ireland is one of the fastest growing countries in Europe.

Ireland's strong economic performance has manifested itself in the labour market. The level of employment increased by 81,200, or 3.7 per cent, on average in the year to Q1 2019. As a result, there are now more people working in Ireland than ever before at 2.3 million. Encouragingly, the vast majority of employment growth was in full time positions. Economic growth

has also allowed the Government to run a budget surplus in 2018, the first in over a decade.

The positive economic conditions have resulted in strong wage growth, which in turn has fed through to more people being able to purchase a home for the first time. For example, there were over 37 per cent more first time buyer purchases in Q1 2019 than there were in Q1 2016. Residential construction has increased during this time.

Notwithstanding these positive developments, the Government recognises that there are affordability constraints on first time buyers and has implemented a number of measures to assist, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the Affordable Purchase Scheme. The best approach to improving affordability in the long term is to increase supply. The Government has put in place a number of significant initiatives to achieve this including a record allocation for housing provision to the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government in 2019, as well as the establishment of the Land Development Agency, Home Building Finance Ireland and changes to the tax system in the form of the vacant site levy.

Question No. 112 answered with Question No. 107.

Economic Policy

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he has identified particular or specific threats to the stability of the economy pre or post-Brexit with particular reference to changing training conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25848/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The *Stability Programme Update 2019* published by my Department in April, sets out the principal economic risks facing the Irish economy, along with an assessment of their relative likelihood and economic impact (see following table). The balance of risk is firmly tilted to the downside, both in the short-term and over the medium-term.

The Irish economy is in an unusual position at present, facing possible domestic overheating and capacity constraints on the one hand, and a slowdown in key export markets on the other. In addition to this, the UK's forthcoming exit from the EU is causing uncertainty in terms of Ireland's future trading relationship.

In March 2019, the Department of Finance and the ESRI published a comprehensive assessment of the potential impact of Brexit. This report shows that compared to a no Brexit baseline, the level of GDP in Ireland would be around 2.6 per cent lower in a 'deal' scenario, and 5.0 per cent in a disorderly 'no deal' scenario, ten years after Brexit. The report also estimates that, after ten years, Irish exports would be reduced by 4.6 per cent in a 'deal' scenario, and 8.3 per cent in a 'disorderly no deal' scenario.

Other than Brexit, the main short-term risks relate to a sharper-than-assumed deterioration in the international environment and an escalation of trade protectionism.

Over the medium-term, the principal risks relate to potential overheating as the economy approaches full-employment, and changes in other jurisdictions that affect the competitiveness of Ireland's corporate tax regime.

The economy is in a good position to meet these challenges. Economic growth, which resumed early this decade, has been consistently among the highest in the EU for a number of years, notwithstanding reservations about the headline data.

The recovery is perhaps most clearly evident in the labour market. The unemployment rate has fallen to 4.4 per cent from the peak of 16 per cent in 2012. There are now more people at work in Ireland than ever before.

The headline budget deficit was eliminated last year for the first time in a decade. Mitigation measures have been prioritised by building up the resilience of the economy and the public finances, thus improving the capacity to deal with an adverse economic shock. Some €1.5 billion has been set aside in a Rainy Day Fund. Our companies are being supported to prepare for Brexit, to diversify their markets and supply chains, to develop new skills and to explore new opportunities.

The Government will continue to work to strengthen the resilience of the economy, to maximise opportunities and to prepare our economy for the challenges ahead, including through the Ireland Connected Trade and Investment Strategy, the 10-year National Development Plan and Future Jobs Ireland 2019.

Table: macro-economic risk assessment matrix

| Risk | Likelihood | Impact and Transmission Channel |
|------------------------------|------------|---|
| External | | |
| External demand shock | Medium | High – the global economy has slowed and it is possible that the temporary slowdown becomes more prolonged. |
| Geopolitical factors | Medium | High – increased geopolitical uncertainty has the potential to disrupt growth in key regions and generate headwinds for output and employment in Ireland. |
| Disruption to world trade | Medium | High – the Irish economy is deeply embedded in the international economy and has benefitted enormously from globalisation, so that any increase in protectionism could potentially have a detrimental impact on living standards. |
| “Hard-Brexit” | Medium | High – An outcome to the continuing EU-UK negotiations which resulted in a WTO-type arrangement between the EU and UK would have a particularly detrimental impact on Irish-UK trade. |
| Domestic | | |
| Concentrated production base | Low | High – Ireland’s production base is highly concentrated in a small number of high-tech sectors, with the result that output and employment are exposed to firm- and sector-specific shocks. |
| Loss of competitiveness | Medium | High – as a small and open economy, Ireland’s business model is very much geared towards export-led growth, which, in turn, is sensitive to the evolution of cost competitiveness. |
| Housing supply pressures | High | Medium – supply constraints in the housing sector can adversely impact on competitiveness by inter alia restricting the mobility of labour. |
| Overheating economy | Medium | Medium – With the labour market approaching full employment, stronger than assumed growth could lead to overheating pressures. While boosting growth over the short-term, overheating pressures could generate significant imbalances over the medium-term. |

Economic Policy

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which issues with the potential to overheat the economy have been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25850/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Our economy is in good shape, following several years of economic recovery driven by the export sector, the domestic economy is now increasingly playing an important role in helping to drive growth. Modified domestic demand, a measure of underlying economic activity in the domestic economy, increased by 4.5 per cent in 2018.

Despite the rapid rate of recovery, the main signs of overheating – for instance pay developments, credit growth, and inflation - do not yet suggest that significant overheating pressures have emerged.

The labour market arguably provides the best barometer of the health of the economy at present. The strong growth in employment over the last number of years has continued into this year, with total employment increasing by 81,200 (+3.7 per cent) in the year to Q1 2019. In parallel the unemployment rate has fallen from a peak of 16 per cent in early 2012 to 4.4 per cent in May 2019. This rate of unemployment and the recent signs of a pick-up in earnings are consistent with an economy that is running close to full employment. Although these positive developments in the labour market are welcomed, we need to monitor these developments closely as a significant acceleration in wages, would undermine Ireland's competitiveness.

For 2018 as a whole, Ireland's inflation averaged just 0.7 per cent, this compares to an average inflation rate of 1.9 per cent for the EU as a whole. The comparatively low level of inflation in Ireland should help to maintain our competitiveness and protect real wage growth. While price pressures have been seen in the housing market, these are more a function of structural imbalances between supply and demand, which we are actively seeking to alleviate, rather than evidence of over-heating.

As in any healthy economy, the pick-up in credit growth has taken hold, albeit at a modest pace. However, since the financial crisis, a number of additional safeguards have been put in place to prevent the unsustainable build-up of credit, most notably the introduction of the macro-prudential regulations by the Central Bank.

Over the medium term, with the domestic economy expected to drive growth, it is important that we remain cognisant of the potential upward pressure this will place on both prices and wages, which could give rise to a loss of competitiveness. Indeed, in order to prevent overheating pressures emerging we must focus on maintaining competitiveness-oriented policies, whilst avoiding pro-cyclical policy measures. To this end, the Government will continue to implement budgetary policies designed to ensure economic stability and fiscal sustainability. This prudent approach to our public finances will help to mitigate against any future downturn in economy activity.

Housing Policy

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consider a capital allocation towards the provision of local authority or affordable housing, thereby making a prudent investment as opposed to the current policy of subventions through HAP or rent support in lieu of local authority housing to the extent of €2,000 per month each month ad infinitum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25843/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following a review of Rebuilding Ireland at the end of 2017, there has been a renewed emphasis on increasing the number of social housing units through build programmes.

Reflecting this renewed emphasis, an overall housing capital budget of €1.4bn was provided in Budget 2019 representing a 24% increase over the 2018 allocation. This will help deliver 10,000 new social housing homes in 2019 through a range of build and acquisition programmes.

As Rebuilding Ireland progresses, each year will see the housing needs of more households met through direct build and less through the Housing Assistance Payment, with published targets for HAP decreasing from a peak of 17,000 additional units in 2018 to 10,000 in 2021.

Furthermore, under Rebuilding Ireland, the Government is already providing significant capital allocations, through the local authorities, for the delivery of affordable housing:

The Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) was established in 2017 to provide offsite infrastructural support for private housing developments a portion of which will be offered at affordable prices. The Fund was originally €200m, comprising an Exchequer allocation of €150 million matched by a €50 million contribution from participating local authorities, over the period 2017 - 2019.

The Serviced Sites Fund is designed to get affordable home-building started quickly on local authority sites in the areas with the greatest affordability challenge. A total amount of €310 million is available for the Serviced Site Fund (SSF) out to 2021, to fund key facilitating infrastructure, on public lands, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent. At a maximum grant of €50,000 per affordable home, at least 6,200 affordable homes are being targeted under the Fund. The awarding of this funding is contingent on the local authority ensuring the delivery of affordable homes to rent or to buy from the site(s) without delay. The affordable homes from the sites funded under the Fund will be either affordable purchase under the 2009 Act or cost rental.

Recognising that it is often those households renting in the main urban areas that face the greatest affordability challenge, the development of a viable cost rental sector is also a Government objective. A Cost Rental model is being developed by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Housing Agency, relevant local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies in the context of a number of pilot cost rental projects at Enniskerry Road in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and at St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore (Dublin City Council). These pilots may provide a useful template to develop further projects at scale across many local authorities.

Project Ireland 2040 Funding

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he expects the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 to be sufficiently funded and in line with projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25849/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Project Ireland 2040, which comprises the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 and the National Planning Framework (NPF), was launched by the Government on 16th February 2018. The NDP seeks to reform how public investment is planned and delivered. It sets out a strategic vision for Ireland's public capital infrastructure priorities over the next 10 years that is strictly aligned with the National Strategic Outcomes for Ireland's new spatial strategy contained in the NPF.

The plan signals a shift to a greater integration of regional investment plans, stronger co-ordination of sectorial strategies and more rigorous selection and appraisal of projects to secure value-for-money. A suite of key reforms has been introduced to support the efficient implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and its objectives including:

- The establishment of a Construction Sector Group to ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction sector;

- A Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board consisting of Departmental Secretaries General that meets regularly to ensure effective leadership of the implementation process;

- The establishment of an Investment Projects and Programmes Office in my Department to coordinate reporting on the plan and to drive reforms, including strengthened business case and project appraisal;

- The publication of a Capital Projects tracker to inform citizens about projects in their areas and to give a greater overview to the construction sector;

- A Capability Review of public sector bodies is being undertaken by my Department to ensure that the State's delivery practices are of the highest standard; and

- As part of the ongoing reform of Ireland's capital management systems, the Office of Government Procurement is conducting a review of construction procurement strategy and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is reviewing the Public Spending Code. The purpose of these reviews is to strengthen the existing guidance to better align with the realities of project delivery and with a particular focus on improved financial appraisal, cost estimation and management.

These reforms are designed to support public bodies as they work to achieve value for money and to maximise outcomes from investment in public capital infrastructure.

As the Deputy will be aware, projections for general government revenue and expenditure beyond 2023 have not yet been compiled. However, Project Ireland 2040 does set out the national spending envelope up to 2027, allocated to each National Strategic Outcome to ensure that Project Ireland 2040 objectives can be pursued in the light of the expected funding allocation.

Protected Disclosures Data

117. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25664/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has protected disclosures procedures in place that have been developed in line with the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 and agreed upon by the Management Board. Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act requires that annual reports be published in relation to disclosures received by the Department. This is done via the Gov.ie website. I can confirm that there were no protected disclosures received by the Department since the Act came into force in 2014.

Freedom of Information Requests

118. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to ensure public bodies have the appropriate resources, knowledge and experience to apply the Freedom of Information Acts following the recent increase in demand for such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25689/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Freedom of Information Act 2014 is a key pillar supporting the openness, transparency and accountability of the public sector. However, as the Deputy has noted, the move towards a more user-friendly system and the abolition of fees have seen a significant increase in the number of requests. There has been a 67% increase between 2014, the last year of operation for the operation for the previous legislation, and 2017. It is expected that the Information Commissioner's next annual report will show that the number of requests in 2018 exceeded the 33,979 received by civil and public sector organisations in 2017 as part of a consistent upward trend. This con-

tinuing increase in demand may be seen both as a measure of the legislation's success and a significant challenge for public bodies.

Against this backdrop, the Central Policy Unit for Freedom of Information at my Department has continued to work closely with stakeholders throughout the civil and public service with a view towards improving FOI practice. Our aim is to ensure that requesters' objectives are met by the most efficient possible means, while building capacity both in terms of technical knowledge, but also an appreciation of the broader significance of this legislation for the business of their organisations. In addition, the Central Policy Unit liaises closely with the Office of the Information Commissioner as well as members of the public, providing guidance and advice on making the most of the FOI system through its help-desk service.

The Central Policy Unit is currently at an advanced stage of the tender process for a revised FOI training framework. Over 9,000 participants have received training under the previous framework. This new initiative aims to build on that success in the initial implementation of the 2014 Act, providing public servants with the practical skills and expert technical knowledge necessary to ensure more effective and efficient operation of the FOI system into the future.

Departmental Offices

119. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25690/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has financed one lease during the specified period. This lease is with the Technical University Dublin for learning facilities to support the Civil Service Learning and Development programme. The cost details of this lease are set out in the following table. The leasing costs to the bodies under the aegis of my Department, outside of those leased by the Commissioners of Public Works, are also included. In line with Standing Order 42A, the Office of Public Works will provide their response directly to the Deputy.

| Organisation | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------------------------|
| Department of Public Expenditure and Reform | Nil | Nil | Nil | 10,800 | 135,926 (full year cost) |
| Bodies under the aegis: | | | | | |
| Office of the National Lottery Regulator | 80,962 | 88,324 | 88,234 | 88,324 | 40,973 (to date) |

Departmental Circulars

120. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the target date for issuing a circular to public sector employers in respect of the changes under the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019. [25696/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, Parental Leave is a statutory entitlement, and the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019 will increase the amount of unpaid parental leave for relevant parents.

I understand that the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan TD, expects to sign a commencement order no later than 19 July, 2019, to give effect to the revised parental leave arrangements. Once the legislation has been commenced the new provisions will apply to all employees in all sectors.

Once in place my Department will issue the relevant notification to inform civil servants. Other sectors are responsible for notifying their own staff about the changes.

Office of Public Works Properties

121. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a decision has been made on an application to remove an OPW burden on the lands of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25772/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Officials in my Department have informed me that correspondence from the legal representatives of the person referred to by the deputy has been received recently. This correspondence is being considered and a response will issue shortly.

Office of Public Works Properties

122. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a building (details supplied) will be retained in public ownership due to its historical significance; if the OPW has plans to purchase the building; if it can discuss this matter with the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25776/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works, on behalf of the State, manage a large and diverse property portfolio, which ranges from office accommodation to visitor centres, Garda stations, among others. The acquisition of property is subject to a range of factors including the suitability of a property to meet a particular requirement.

At present, the Commissioners of Public Works have no requirement in the Cavan area that could be met in these buildings. Therefore, there are no plans to acquire the property in question.

Parental Leave

123. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position on the transferability of parental leave from one parent to another under legislation and practice in circumstances in which the two parents are working for separate public sector bodies, for instance a local authority and a Department; and if such a transfer of leave can be permitted under such circumstances in view of the fact that both parents are ultimately paid through Exchequer funds and are full-time permanent personnel. [25811/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish public service comprises the Civil Service, the Defence sector, the Education sector, the Justice sector, the Health sector, Local Authorities and the Non-Commercial State Agencies.

Each sector is a separate and distinct employer. Each of the sectors is regulated by the relevant Minister in accordance with the relevant legislation. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform regulates the Civil Service determining the terms and conditions of civil servants through Section 17 of the Civil Service Regulation Acts 1956 – 2005.

Under the Parental Leave Acts, both parents have an equal separate entitlement to parental

leave. If both parents work for the same employer, and the employer agrees, 14 weeks of one parent's parental leave entitlement may be transferred to the other (Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Acts 2008, paragraph 72).

While civil servants are deemed to be employed by the same employer for the purposes of Parental Leave provisions, employees in local authorities have a different employer. Therefore, under legislation, parental leave cannot be transferred between parents employed in the Civil Service and a local authority.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

124. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason six special needs assistants working in a clinic (details supplied) will have their contracts terminated in summer 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25622/19]

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

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

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

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

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

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support because the requirements outlined in Circular 0030/2014 were not complied with. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA support to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2019/20, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

The closing date for receipt of appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday 27 September 2019.

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

Protected Disclosures Data

125. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25657/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In accordance with Section 22 of the Protected Disclosure Act 2014, my Department has published information on protected disclosures received during 2015, 2016 and 2017 on its website:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Annual-Report/>

In summary, in 2015, 3 protected disclosures were received from workers in the Education sector. In 2016, 2 protected disclosures were received from workers in the Education sector. In 2017, 10 protected disclosures were received from workers in the Education sector. In 2018, 4 protected disclosures were received from workers in the Education sector. To date in 2019 there have been 4 protected disclosures received from workers in the Education sector.

There were no protected disclosures received from Department staff since the legislation was introduced.

Schools Site Acquisitions

126. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 172 of 14 May 2019, if there has been further progress on the site acquisition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25691/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The position is that work is progressing and ongoing with the landowner in question and Kildare County Council in addressing technical considerations crucial to the delivery of the site and the commencement of the legal conveyancing process. Due to reasons of commercial sensitivity I am unable to elaborate further at this point.

Gaelscoil Issues

127. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 166 of 14 May 2019, the date on which the new Gaelcholáiste will officially open; the accommodation that has been sourced in a centre (details supplied) to enable the opening; the progress made on the provision of temporary accommodation at a school as future temporary accommodation for the Gaelcholáiste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25692/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In relation to the planned new Gaelcholáiste to which the Deputy refers, my Department has recently received correspondence from the school patron, Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, which sets out that for operational reasons the ETB has decided it is in the best interest of the school communities in the Maynooth and surrounding areas to defer the opening of this new school from September 2019 to September 2020.

The Gaelcholáiste will be located on the current Maynooth Post Primary School/Maynooth Community College grounds which will be coming available as these schools move to the

Maynooth Education Campus.

The ETB has indicated that a high number of expressions of interest for September 2020 have already been received and that enrolment will commence in Autumn 2019 for September 2020.

Schools Building Projects Status

128. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 279 of 21 May 2019, if there has been further progress in finalising the project brief; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25693/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included on the Department's school building programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan.

The accommodation brief for the project is being finalised at present and my Department will be in contact with the school authorities as soon as this process has been completed.

School Transport Appeals

129. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school transport appeals lodged in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25713/19]

130. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school transport appeals upheld in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25714/19]

131. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school transport appeals lodged to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25715/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 to 131, inclusive, together.

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 School Transport Appeals Board is independent of my Department. Under the terms of reference of the Board, the Board determines appeals against decisions made by, or on behalf of, the Department of Education and Skills regarding the provision of school transport services and/or grant-aid under the terms of the School Transport Schemes.

I can advise that in 2016 a total of 191 appeals were heard and none were allowed; in 2017 a total of 144 appeals were heard and none were allowed; in 2018 a total of 251 appeals were heard and 4 were allowed; to date in 2019 a total of 121 appeals were heard, and 3 were allowed.

A number of appeals were referred by the Board to my Department's School Transport Sec-

tion for clarification and/or further consideration arising from additional information which came to light during the appeals process.

Special Educational Needs Data

132. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary school children on the waiting list for a special classroom in Ashbourne, County Meath. [25729/19]

133. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary school children waiting on a place in a special room in County Meath. [25730/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment in schools or keeping waiting lists.

The 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.

As the Deputy's question relates to identified need in a particular area I have arranged for the question to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

School Accommodation

134. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the two prefabs, one of which is occupied by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25731/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that arrangements are in place to undertake refurbishment works during the summer months to a prefabricated unit that is not currently in use. The unit, comprising two rooms, will be ready for occupation for the commencement of the new school year and both schools will then have access to an additional classroom to meet their needs.

Education Funding

135. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of financial support provided to an organisation (details supplied) in each of the past five years; the

non-financial supports provided to it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25739/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Galway Autism Partnership has been awarded funding by Galway Roscommon Education Training Board for the provision of the Community Education Programme. The funding is provided by SOLAS, the further education authority.

Community Education refers to education and learning, generally outside the formal education sector, with the aims of enhancing learning, empowerment and contributing to civic society. It is firmly community-based, with local groups taking responsibility for, and playing a key role in, organising courses and deciding on programme-content. It enables disadvantaged adults to avail of community education at minimal or no cost. This is usually allocated through the provision of teaching hours, or small grants, to a range of community and voluntary groups for educational activities.

The Galway Autism Partnership received €1,300 funding in 2018 and have not received funding before that date.

Schools Building Projects Status

136. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposed redevelopment of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25740/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that, in April this year, approval was given to the school to which she refers to carry out refurbishment and other internal works under the Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2019. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority in that respect. It is now a matter for the Board of Management of the school to progress it.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

137. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs assistants employed in County Galway; the estimated net increase for the next academic year; the number of SNAs employed in the county in each of the years 2012 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form, for both primary and secondary school sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25741/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I announced on 27 May that 792 additional SNA posts will be allocated to schools for the beginning of the 2019/20 school year, with up to 130 additional posts expected to be allocated by December 2019.

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

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

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

needed.

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

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

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

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support because the requirements outlined in Circular 0030/2014 were not complied with. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA support to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2019/20, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

The closing date for receipt of appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday 27 September 2019.

The NCSE publish the allocations for individual schools for each school year and this information is available on their website, www.ncse.ie.

School Curriculum

138. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the determination of a child is kept back to repeat a year in primary school is made; the definition of exceptional circumstances as per a circular (details supplied); if the all round education of the child including emotional and social learning and not just academia is taken into account in making such a determination; if a parent requesting that their child is kept back for a year has the ultimate say in making that decision with the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25771/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The primary school curriculum is designed as an eight year course, including a two year infant cycle followed by six years in standards from first to sixth, with children progressing to the next grade at the end of each school year.

The Department is providing considerable support for pupils with learning difficulties in schools. Learning support teachers, resource teachers, special needs assistants, computer equipment and a wide range of resources under the various schemes for schools in areas designated as disadvantaged are among the forms of provision allocated to schools for these pupils.

Under the Department's policy, pupils should only repeat a year for educational reasons and under no circumstances should an additional grade level (middle infants or repeat sixth class) operate through the retention of all or a substantial number of pupils for a second year at a grade

level. The level of provision now available should enable pupils to make progress in keeping with their needs and abilities and to move consecutively through the different class levels in the school in keeping with their peers.

In accordance with the terms of the circular, a principal teacher should consult with the learning support teacher, class teacher and parents of a pupil and if all parties conclude that the pupil would benefit educationally by repeating a class, the pupil may be retained. However, a record outlining the educational basis for the decision to retain a pupil in a class for a second year should be kept for any pupil retained. In addition, there should be a clear programme outlined for such a pupil that records precisely what new approach will be used for her/him and what its expected benefit will be. These records should be retained within the school and should be brought to the attention of the Inspector. A pupil should not be retained for longer than one year in a primary school.

Circular 32/03 recognises that a student may be allowed to repeat a year provided there is an educational basis for it, and there is a clear programme for the pupil to follow. The primary school in consultation with the parents and student is best placed to make the decision in respect of whether the reason cited for the student is an ‘exceptional circumstance’.

Teacher Recruitment

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding young teachers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25854/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment.

After the redeployment processes have transacted, each school is permitted to fill any remaining vacancies through open recruitment. It is open to any suitably qualified teacher to apply for these advertised teaching positions as they arise.

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

The 2018/19 school year has seen an increase of over 6,000 teaching posts in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

Budget 2019 will see numbers employed in our schools reach the highest ever level. Over 1,300 additional posts in schools will be funded in the 2019/20 school year, including more than 370 teaching posts to cater for growth in student population and additional special classes.

Earlier this year I announced a new scheme to allow post-primary schools to share teachers in priority subjects. The scheme will start from the beginning of the 2019/20 school year and will be reviewed after the first year of operation. Its aim is to alleviate some of the challenges schools have faced in recruiting teachers, but it is also a solution for graduates who are looking for full-time employment and more options for work.

My Department’s Circular 0015/2019 sets out the details of the scheme.

Departmental Offices

140. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25917/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The information requested by the Deputy for my Department is presented in tabular form below. The Department has three leases in the period under review and details are provided in respect of two of these contracts. The Department is obliged under the terms of the other contract to keep the terms confidential. Details, where available, are presented for the years 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 to date.

The information requested concerning the cost of rental/leasing and hiring of office space in regard to my Department's aegis bodies is being collated and I will arrange to have the material forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

| Lessee | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Department of Education and Skills | €47,452 | €33,000 | €47,400 | €47,400 | €47,400 |

Residency Permits

141. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25650/19]

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 from the person concerned under the Special Scheme for Students 2005 to 2010 on 23 October 2018. The Deputy will appreciate that applications are dealt with in chronological order. I understand that the application is under active consideration and INIS will be in contact with the person concerned, in writing, as soon as possible.

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.

Protected Disclosures Data

142. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25663/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised that since the introduction of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 to 31 December 2018, the number of Protected Disclosures received in my Department classified as such, following assessment, is 52. Under the Act, a Protected Disclosure is defined as being a disclosure of relevant information relating to wrongdoing made by a worker in the manner specified in the Act.

This figure also includes Protected Disclosures directed to the Minister from workers in An

Garda Síochána and the Irish Prison Service.

I can also advise the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service, Legal Aid Board, National Disability Authority, the Courts Service, An Garda Síochána and the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission have their own Protected Disclosures Policies in place and report separately on disclosures received.

The Department produces Annual Reports on Protected Disclosures, the most recent of which, for 2017, is available at the following link: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Report_on_Protected_Disclosures_received_in_the_Department_of_Justice_and_Equality_\(Vote_24\)_in_2017](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Report_on_Protected_Disclosures_received_in_the_Department_of_Justice_and_Equality_(Vote_24)_in_2017).

State Pathology Service

143. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a building which is owned by the Office of the State Pathologist at 239 Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9, is vacant; and if there are plans to bring this building back into use. [25699/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department does not own or lease this property and is not aware of any plans for its use. The majority of properties occupied by my Department are owned or leased on its behalf by the Office of Public Works (OPW), including the premises occupied by the Office of the State Pathologist, adjacent to the address referred to by the Deputy.

Departmental Correspondence

144. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a response will issue to correspondence regarding a person (details supplied); if he is satisfied that he has received sufficient and correct information from the Garda report which would allow him answer the specific question posed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25727/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have sought further information in relation to the Deputy's query and I will contact him directly when the information is to hand.

Rape Crisis Network Funding

145. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of financial support provided to a centre (details supplied) in each of the past five years; the non-financial supports provided to it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25743/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is the primary statutory funder for sexual violence services, including rape crisis centres in the state.

In 2019, the Tusla national provision for frontline Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services is €25.3 million.

This allocation includes direct funding provision to the rape crisis centres and I am advised that Tusla is providing an allocation of €444,250 this year to the centre in question.

My Department has not provided direct funding to the centre in question for the last five years. Financial and other supports are, however, provided to the centre through funding provided by my Department to the Rape Crisis Network Ireland which is an umbrella organisation for such centres.

In this regard my Department through Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and the Victims of Crime Office is providing combined approved funding of €95,000 in 2019 to the Network for its work in this area.

These funds are utilised by the Network in providing a legal co-ordinator service which provides legal advice and training supports to rape crisis centre staff including to staff from the centre in question. The network also administers financial supports to rape crisis centres in their provision of court and Garda accompaniment services for victims of sexual crime. The Network co-ordinates the overall administration of both the accompaniment service itself and the essential associated training needs of staff and volunteers to carry out such services.

Given the nature of how these services are provided it is not feasible to provide a further breakdown of this funding allocation against each rape crisis centre being supported by the Network.

Garda Transport Data

146. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda cars attached to each district in the Galway Garda division in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25744/19]

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 can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

The Deputy may also wish to be aware that 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.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. 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 so as to ensure their optimum use.

The Garda authorities advise that the following table outlines the Galway Divisional Fleet by District from 2014 to 14 June 2019.

| 1 Jan - 14 June 2019 | Cars | Vans | Mbikes | 4x4 | *Others | Total |
|----------------------|------|------|--------|-----|---------|-------|
| BALLINASLOE DISTRICT | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| CLIFDEN DISTRICT | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |

Questions - Written Answers

| 1 Jan - 14 June 2019 | Cars | Vans | Mbikes | 4x4 | *Others | Total |
|----------------------|------|------|--------|-------|---------|-------|
| GALWAY DISTRICT | 27 | 13 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 51 |
| LOUGHREA DISTRICT | 9 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| SALTHILL DISTRICT | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| TUAM DISTRICT | 10 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 15 |
| GALWAY DIVISION | 65 | 23 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 102 |
| | | | | | | |
| 31 December 2018 | Cars | Vans | Mbikes | 4 x 4 | *Others | Total |
| BALLINASLOE DISTRICT | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| CLIFDEN DISTRICT | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| GALWAY DISTRICT | 27 | 12 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 50 |
| LOUGHREA DISTRICT | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| SALTHILL DISTRICT | 9 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 12 |
| TUAM DISTRICT | 10 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| GALWAY DIVISION | 66 | 22 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 102 |
| | | | | | | |
| 31 December 2017 | Cars | Vans | Mbikes | 4 x 4 | *Others | Total |
| BALLINASLOE DISTRICT | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| CLIFDEN DISTRICT | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| GALWAY DISTRICT | 26 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 39 |
| LOUGHREA DISTRICT | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| SALTHILL DISTRICT | 10 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 16 |
| TUAM DISTRICT | 10 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| GALWAY DIVISION | 67 | 16 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 93 |
| | | | | | | |
| 31 December 2016 | Cars | Vans | Mbikes | 4 x 4 | *Others | Total |
| BALLINASLOE DISTRICT | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| CLIFDEN DISTRICT | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| GALWAY DISTRICT | 27 | 11 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 46 |
| LOUGHREA DISTRICT | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| SALTHILL DISTRICT | 8 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 13 |
| TUAM DISTRICT | 9 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| GALWAY DIVISION | 64 | 20 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 97 |
| | | | | | | |
| 31 December 2015 | Cars | Vans | Mbikes | 4 x 4 | *Others | Total |
| BALLINASLOE DISTRICT | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| CLIFDEN DISTRICT | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| GALWAY DISTRICT | 29 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 42 |
| LOUGHREA DISTRICT | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 |
| SALTHILL DISTRICT | 9 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 11 |
| TUAM DISTRICT | 8 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| GALWAY DIVISION | 59 | 13 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 81 |
| | | | | | | |
| 31 December 2014 | Cars | Vans | Mbikes | 4 x 4 | *Others | Total |
| BALLINASLOE DISTRICT | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| CLIFDEN DISTRICT | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| GALWAY DISTRICT | 27 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 41 |
| LOUGHREA DISTRICT | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| SALTHILL DISTRICT | 10 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| TUAM DISTRICT | 7 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| GALWAY DIVISION | 56 | 13 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 80 |

*The category 'others' refers to MPV, SUV, Minibus or Prisoner Conveyance Vehicles

Garda Transport Data

147. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda cars older than five years in each Garda division in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25745/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including the allocation of Garda resources. As such, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Commissioner in the light of identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter.

I have requested the relevant information from the Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy directly when I receive it.

Garda Data

148. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí on maternity leave and sick leave for longer than six weeks in each Garda division in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25746/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including personnel matters.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the number of members of An Garda Síochána who were absent from duty due to illness for a period greater than six weeks was 282 as of 14 June 2019. I am further informed that the number of members of An Garda Síochána who were absent from duty due to maternity leave and unpaid maternity leave was 93 and 47 respectively as of 14 June 2019.

As the figures at Divisional level are of a magnitude which could potentially lead to the identification of individual Gardaí, I have not provided these figures.

Garda Deployment

149. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda juvenile liaison officers in each Garda district in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25748/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution under review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure optimum use is made of the resources.

I am advised by the Commissioner that Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) are specially trained to fulfil a key role in implementing the Garda Diversion Programme. Their role includes the administration of formal and informal cautions as well as appropriate supervision

of children who have been admitted to the Diversion Programme, as provided in Part 4 of the Children Act 2001.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in the format requested, as JLOs are assigned on a Garda Divisional basis. Accordingly, for the Deputy's information I have set out in the attached table, as supplied by the Commissioner, the figures by Division in each of the years 2008 to 30 April 2019, the latest date for which figures are currently available.

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-06-19_pq149-19-06-2019_en.xlsx] Juvenile Liaison Officers

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

150. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda youth diversion programmes in place in each county in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25749/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The attached table details the Garda Youth Diversion projects in each county for the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019.

At present, there are 106 GYDPs operating around the State, catering for approximately 4,000 young people every year. In general, the location of projects is linked to local needs and the levels of youth crime. The existing network of GYDPs has developed organically over three decades, and I am committed to ensuring that it continues to develop as resources become available so that every young person has access to these very valuable services, and that they are delivered to the highest standard possible.

The continued support and development of these services is of high importance to my Department. Recently the Action Research Project (ARP) was launched by my Department in partnership with the University of Limerick.

The ARP, supported by the Research Evidence into Policy Programmes and Practice project (REPPP) in the University of Limerick, involves 15 selected Garda Youth Diversion Projects. The intention is to move beyond the testimonial and anecdotal evidence we have that projects work well and provide a good service, to capture precisely what specific interventions work best, document this evidence, and roll out learning across all the projects over a period of years. The actions will include:

- examination of what makes for a successful relationship between a young participant and a Youth Justice Worker (success being understood as facilitation of real change in the young person's attitudes and life that would not otherwise happen);
- articulating the contribution that a GYDP makes in tackling crime in a community; and
- assessment of the contribution that 'up-stream' agencies and interventions can make to crime reduction and making appropriate recommendations.

Furthermore, I am chairing an expert Steering Group to guide the development of a new Youth Justice Strategy. One of the areas the group is examining is diversion from the Justice System. This will include looking at how we can enhance the Garda Youth Diversion Programme and the GYDPs which act to support it.

All of this work will help to further develop and enhance, over time and as resources allow, the approach to the location of new projects, with the objective of ensuring that the GYDP service is available in all areas of the State.

| GARDA DIVISION | PROJECT | GARDA DISTRICT | CBO | Year opened if after 2014 | Year Closed |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| | Compass | Kilkenny | Ossory Youth (YWI) | | |
| CARLOW/ KILKENNY | Hub | Carlow | Carlow Regional Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | Cavan 365 | Cavan | Foróige | | |
| CAVAN/ MONAGHAN | MNYP | Monaghan | Foróige | | |
| | Ennis Youth | Ennis | Clare Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| CLARE | Kilrush | Kilrush | Clare Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | BAP | Gurranabraher | Foróige | | |
| | Doughlas West | Togher | Foróige | | |
| | FAYRE | Mayfield/Gurranabraher | Foróige | | |
| | GAP | Mayfield | Foróige | | |
| | HERON | Togher | Foróige | | |
| | Knocknaheeney/ Hollyhill | Gurranabraher | Foróige | | |
| | MAY | Anglesea St | Foróige | | |
| CORK CITY | TACT | Togher | Foróige | | |
| | | | | | |
| | Feabhas | Cobh | Cloyne Diocesan Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | Mallow | Mallow | Cloyne Diocesan Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| CORK NORTH | Youghal | Midleton | Foróige | | |
| CORK WEST | Bandon | Bandon | Foróige | | |
| | | | | | |
| | Castle | Dún Laoghaire | Crosscare | | |
| | LAB | Dún Laoghaire | Crosscare | | |
| DMR EAST | SAY | Blackrock | Crosscare | | |
| | North Fingal (Balbriggan) | Balbrigan | Foróige | 2016 | |
| | BYB | Ballymun | Crosscare | | |
| | Donnycarney | Santry | Donnycarney Youth | 2016 | |
| | Jets | Coolock | Crosscare | | |
| | Keep | Coolock | Kilmore West Ltd. | | |
| | North Bay | Balbrigan | Extern Ireland | 2016 | |
| DMR NORTH | Woodale | Coolock | Sphere 17 | | |
| | Dime | Fitzgibbon St | Foróige | | 2016 |
| | HAY | Fitzgibbon St | Foróige | | |
| | Most | Fitzgibbon St | Bradóg Youth Service | | |
| | Nickol | Bridewell | Belvedere Youth Service | | |
| DMR NORTH CENTRAL | Swan | Store Street | Swan Youth Service | | |
| | APT | Tallaght | Foróige | | |
| | Boost | Tallaght | Foróige | | |

Questions - Written Answers

| GARDA DIVISION | PROJECT | GARDA DISTRICT | CBO | Year opened if after 2014 | Year Closed |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|-------------|
| | Bru | Crumlin | BRU Ltd | | |
| | Clay | Crumlin | CLAY Ltd | | |
| | Jay | Tallaght | Foróige | | |
| | Key 1 & 2 | Tallaght | Foróige | | |
| DMR SOUTH | Yew | Tallaght | Foróige | | |
| | Dán | Kevin St | Foróige | | |
| | KRIB | Kevin St | Foróige | 2016 | |
| DMR SOUTH CENTRAL | Liberties Club | Kevin St | SICCDA | | |
| | ABLE | Clondalkin | Foróige | | |
| | Cabra Step up | Blanchardstown/ Fitzgibbon St | Cabra for Youth | | |
| | Cody | Clondalkin | Cherry Orchard Equine Centre | | |
| | Effort | Blanchardstown | Crosscare | | |
| | Fan | Blanchardstown | Crosscare | | |
| | Graft | Lucan | Crosscare | | |
| | ORB | Blanchardstown | Foróige | | |
| | Swift | Clondalkin | Crosscare | | |
| | Ucan | Lucan | Crosscare | | |
| | Valley | Lucan | Crosscare | | |
| | WEB | Blanchardstown | Foróige | | |
| DMR WEST | BEAT | Blanchardstown | Foróige | 2019 | |
| | An Fál Carrach | Milford | Foróige | | |
| DONEGAL | Leaf | Letterkenny | Foróige | | |
| | Bán | Mill St | Foróige | | |
| | Junction | Ballinasloe | Youth Work Ireland Galway (YWI) | | |
| | Meas | Mill St | Foróige | | |
| GALWAY | Treo Nua | Tuam | Youth Work Ireland Galway (YWI) | | |
| KERRY | KDYS | Killarney | Kerry Diocesan YS (YWI) | | |
| | Athy | Kildare | Extern Ireland | | |
| | Bridge | Leixlip | Kildare Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | Curragh Newbridge | Kildare | Kildare Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| KILDARE | Naas | Naas | Extern Ireland | | |
| | Acorn | Tullamore | Midlands Regional Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | Block | Port Laoise | Foróige | | |
| | Fusion | Tullamore | Midlands Regional Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | Port | Port Laoise | Foróige | | |
| LAOIS/OFFALY | SUB | Birr | Foróige | | |
| | Ballynanty | Henry St | Limerick Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | CCYDG | Henry St | Moyross Youth Development Company | | |
| | Irishtown | Henry St | Limerick Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | King's Island | Henry St | Limerick Youth Service (YWI) | | |

| GARDA DIVISION | PROJECT | GARDA DISTRICT | CBO | Year opened if after 2014 | Year Closed |
|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------|
| | Rathkeale | Newcastlewest | Foróige | | |
| | Southside Youth Initiative | Henry St | Extern Ireland | | |
| LIMERICK | West Limerick | Newcastlewest | Foróige | | |
| | Boyne | Drogheda | Youth Work Ireland Louth (YWI) | | |
| | CABLE | Drogheda | Foróige | | |
| | High Voltage | Dundalk | Cox's Demesne | | |
| LOUTH | TEAM | Dundalk | Muirhevnamor Community YS | | |
| | CYAP | Castlebar | North Connaught Community YS (YWI) | | |
| MAYO | YAB | Ballinasloe | North Connaught Community YS (YWI) | | |
| | NYPD (+ NYPD Extension) | Navan (Ext Ashbourne) | Foróige | | |
| MEATH | SMART | Trim | Crann Support Group Ltd | | |
| | LEAP | Longford | Foróige | | |
| ROSCOMMON/ LONGFORD | RAD | Roscommon | Foróige | | |
| SLIGO/LEITRIM | YAPS | Sligo | North Connaught Community YS (YWI) | | |
| | CYD | Clonmel | Waterford & South Tipperary CYS (YWI) | | |
| | Edge | Clonmel | Waterford & South Tipperary CYS (YWI) | | |
| | Nenagh | Nenagh | Foróige | | |
| | Ray | Templemore | NTP | | |
| TIPPERARY | Tar | Tipperary | Tipperary Regional Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | Ball | Waterford | Waterford & South Tipperary CYS (YWI) | | |
| | Day | Dungarvan | Waterford & South Tipperary CYS (YWI) | | |
| | Pact | Waterford | Waterford & South Tipperary CYS (YWI) | | |
| | Sway | Waterford | Waterford & South Tipperary CYS (YWI) | | |
| WATERFORD | Tyre | Tramore | Waterford & South Tipperary CYS (YWI) | | |
| | ALF | Athlone | Midlands Regional Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| WESTMEATH | EYE | Mullingar | Midlands Regional Youth Service (YWI) | | |
| | SAFE | Wexford | FAB CDP | | |
| | Slaney | Enniscorthy | Ferns Diocesan Youth Service (YWI) | | |

| GARDA DIVISION | PROJECT | GARDA DISTRICT | CBO | Year opened if after 2014 | Year Closed |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| WEXFORD | Treóin | New Ross | Youth New Ross | | |
| | New Directions | Bray | Crosscare | | |
| WICKLOW | Way | Wicklow | Foróige | | |

Crime Data

151. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of youth crimes committed in each Garda district in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; the steps being taken to address the number of youth crimes being committed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25750/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The statistics sought by the Deputy are contained in the annual reports of the Committee set up under section 44 of the Children Act 2001 to monitor the effectiveness of the Garda Diversion Programme. These reports are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and available to members in the Library. They are also published online at <http://iyjs.ie/en/iyjs/pages/publications>. All youth crime cases are required to be sent to the Garda Diversion Office for consideration and the statistics for each year, broken down by Garda District, are set out in the annual report for that year. Figures for 2018 are not available yet, but will be available when the 2018 report is published later this year. The 2019 statistics and report will be available in the course of 2020.

The Deputy will appreciate that crime prevention and investigation, including in relation to the involvement of children in crime, are operational matters for An Garda Síochána in the first instance. My Department is committed to supporting them in this regard. That being said, I am committed to tackling youth crime and my department is taking a number of different steps to address the number of youth offences being committed.

An important initiative in that regard is the “Greentown” project, a research project led by the REPPP Project (Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice) at the School of Law in the University of Limerick (UL). The REPPP project is a strategic research partnership with UL which is supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and also by my own Department. Its specific focus is on examining the recruitment by criminal networks of children in Ireland and to make recommendations for interventions to disrupt this.

In the absence of international models of intervention that could be readily deployed, the original Greentown report (December 2016) recommended the design of a programme to include interventions with children and their families to help them withstand the influence of criminal networks. This new “Greentown Programme” has been designed with the input of leading international expertise on crime and criminal networks, together with Irish scientific, policy and practice expertise in child protection and welfare, drugs and community development.

I understand that it is intended to commence a trial of the Greentown Programme approach, on a pilot basis, during 2019.

More generally, I am currently developing a new Youth Justice Strategy with the assistance of an interdepartmental and interagency steering group. The new Strategy will address the full range of issues relevant to youth justice, including how best to tackle the serious issues raised in the Deputy’s Question.

A key issue here is how to ensure an integrated approach across all agencies, but in par-

ticular the relevant child welfare programmes, Garda Youth Diversion Projects and schools, to ensure a sustained and holistic response and that integrated services are provided to respond to the situation of children at risk, tailored to the individual child in the context of the specific family and the specific community and the issues they face. The new Youth Justice Strategy will be published in draft form for a further round of public consultation before the end of this year and will be finalised early in 2020.

My Department also provides funding through the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) to support the operation of 106 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs). These projects are community based multi-agency crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people who have become involved in crime/anti-social behaviour.

For 2019, IYJS has a renewed emphasis on preventative work by GYDPs, looking at the child in the context of the specific family and the specific community. This includes family support work and working with children aged 8 to 11. The Department also supports pilot projects, to help develop better approaches in areas such as engagement with hard-to-reach or more challenging children, as well as mentoring initiatives.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

152. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps which have been taken following the issues outlined in January 2019 in the Garda interim report of the Commissioner on youth crime cases from 2010 to 2017; the steps taken to address the shortcomings highlighted in the Garda youth diversion programme in the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25751/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner has given detailed information in relation to this matter when it was examined publicly by the Policing Authority and by the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality.

As I have previously confirmed, the publication of information in relation to the more detailed aspects of the Garda Review will be a matter for the Commissioner and the Policing Authority. My Department will continue to keep in close touch with the Commissioner and the Policing Authority as matters develop.

The Deputy will appreciate due to the sensitivity of some aspects of the report it may take time to implement the steps set out in the report.

The Garda Authorities have also advised that any decision relating to the commencement of disciplinary proceedings is a matter for the relevant Local Divisional Officer. I am informed that all relevant matters have been referred to the respective Divisional Officers to consider, in accordance with the Garda Síochána (Discipline) Regulations 2007.

In addition, the Policing Authority continues to follow up with an ongoing examination of these specific youth justice-related matters to monitor the effectiveness of the remedial actions which the Commissioner has set in train.

Legislative Reviews

153. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the review of the Defamation Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[25752/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As outlined in my responses to Parliamentary Questions number 234 of the 24th May and number 167 of the 29th of May, my Department is currently finalising the statutory review of the Defamation Act 2009. I expect a draft report with options for reform to be submitted to me in the coming weeks, with a view to my bringing proposals for legislative change to Government in the autumn.

The Review is already addressing all the issues raised in submissions made to it, including those that featured in a recent campaign by the print media. These include:

- whether changes should be made to the respective roles of the judge and the jury in High Court defamation cases, in particular in relation to the question of damages; and- whether any change should be made to the level or type of damages which may be awarded in defamation cases, or to the factors to be taken into account in making that determination.

It is important that the Defamation Act operates in practice to ensure that where damages are awarded for defamation, they are fair and proportionate. The objective set for the defamation review was to ensure that our defamation law strikes the right balance between protecting an individual's good name and privacy, and protecting the right to freedom of expression, taking account of the vital role in our democracy played by a free and independent press.

Legislative Process

154. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the progress of the Parole Bill 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25783/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, the Government agreed in April 2017 to progress the objective of establishing an independent Parole Board on a statutory footing by focusing on the Deputy's Private Member's Bill, and to bring forward appropriate amendments to the Bill at Report Stage.

As well as providing for the establishment of the new Parole Board, the Bill sets out the criteria to be considered in deciding on the release of prisoners and how the decision to release should be made.

Officials in my Department have been preparing detailed amendments in conjunction with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government, and in consultation with the Deputy. It is my intention to seek Government approval for these amendments very shortly, with a view to the Bill being brought to this House again for debate before the summer recess.

Inspector of Prisons Reports

155. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the publication of a report on covert surveillance in prisons. [25784/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, the Inspector of Prisons has furnished me with a copy of the report of her investigation, carried out under section 31 of the Prisons Act 2007, into allegations of improper surveillance and other wrongdoing in prisons.

I am considering the report in the light of advice from the Attorney General with a view to

publishing it in accordance with section 31 of the Prisons Act 2007.

Firearms Certificates

156. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures in place to monitor the modification of licensed firearms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25785/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I wish to advise the Deputy that there are stringent controls under Irish legislation on the issue of firearm certificates by An Garda Síochána and the conditions under which firearms can be held.

An Garda Síochána advise that each application for a firearms certificate is considered on its merits by the issuing officer in An Garda Síochána in accordance with the relevant legislation. I am also advised by An Garda Síochána that in order to record the modification of a firearm, such as a spare barrel, change of calibre, addition of a silencer etc. the firearm holder must make a formal application to the relevant issuing officer in An Garda Síochána. The Superintendent (or Chief Superintendent as the case may be) may then grant the modification. An Garda Síochána further advise that the PULSE system (i.e. An Garda Síochána’s IT system) will be updated to reflect any modification and a new firearm certificate will issue to the firearm holder.

All individuals authorised to possess, use or carry any firearm under certificate under the Firearms Acts 1925 to 2009 must at all times act in a responsible manner and fully comply with any conditions attached to the grant of such firearm certificate. It is incumbent on the holder of a firearm certificate to inform his or her local Superintendent (or Chief Superintendent, as the case may be) of any changes in the circumstances surrounding the grant of a firearm certificate or authorisation during the lifetime of the certificate or authorisation. Such changes include any modification of the firearm.

Crime Data

157. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position with regard to the publication of crime statistics previously provided through the CSO but which are no longer published due to concerns regarding the quality of the data; the actions he has taken to mitigate the information gap which exists in the absence of this information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25786/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As previously outlined to the Deputy, the CSO’s official crime figures remain “Under Reservation”, however, it is clear that progress is being made by An Garda Síochána and the CSO in improving the quality of the crime statistics.

In December 2018, the CSO published a third review of the quality of recorded crime statistics, based on data recorded on the PULSE database system for crimes reported to Gardaí in 2017. The review concluded, *inter-alia*, that clear improvements had been made in the manner in which criminal incidents were being recorded on the PULSE system.

While this is encouraging, it is also clear that there is more work to be done in this area and my Department, in conjunction with the Policing Authority, will continue to monitor the progress of An Garda Síochána in ensuring that the national crime statistics are returned to the higher standard required by the CSO.

I am advised that the latest CSO crime statistics, covering the first quarter of 2019, will be released early next week and I look forward to reviewing these statistics when they are available.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Applications

158. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 231 of 4 December 2018, 529 of 26 March 2019 and 546 of 8 May 2019, if the assessment of the caseload of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal which he requested is finalised; if so, the outcomes and actions arising from same; if not, the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25788/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed that the assessment of the caseload of the Tribunal will be submitted to me shortly and I will provide the Deputy with a further update at that point.

I can further inform the Deputy that the Law Reform Commission published its fifth Programme of Law Reform on 5 June 2019. A review of the Scheme of Compensation for Injuries Criminally Inflicted is one of the fifteen projects identified in the Programme, which I welcome as an opportunity to examine in detail this long established scheme.

Departmental Offices

159. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25919/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The majority of properties occupied by my Department are owned or leased on its behalf by the Office of Public Works (OPW).

I can confirm that the Department has not purchased or leased land during this period. Information in respect of buildings leased by my department is contained in the attached document.

I have requested that all agencies under the aegis of my Department respond directly to the Deputy.

| Name/Address | Term of lease | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 1/1/2019 – 30/6/2019 |
|--|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Department of Justice & Equality Montague Court (Part 2nd Floor) | 10 years 1/11/2006 to 31/10/16 and renewed for 8 years and 7 months from 1/11/16 to 31/5/2025 | €178,080 | €178,080 | €179,267 | €185,200 | €185,200 | €92,600 |
| Department of Justice & Equality Montague Court (Part 2nd floor and 3rd Floor) | 25 years to 31/5/2025 | €513,000 | €513,000 | €513,000 | €513,000 | €513,000 | €256,500 |

| Name/Address | Term of lease | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 1/1/2019 – 30/6/2019 |
|---|--|------|---------|---------|------|----------|----------------------|
| O'Higgins Commission of Investigation, Smithfield Business Centre, Dublin 7 | Rent of office space 6 Feb 2015 – 6 May 2016 | | €88,000 | €32,000 | | | |
| Irish Passenger Information Unit, Skybridge House, Dublin Airport | Rent of office space May 2018 – May 2020 | | | | | €169,552 | €127,164 |
| Inspector of Prisons Investigation, Regus, Harcourt Centre, Dublin 2 | Rent of office space 17/12/2018 – 16/12/2019 | | | | | €3313 | €41,084 |

Foreign Direct Investment

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she expects the island of Ireland in its entirety to remain an attractive location for foreign direct investment post-Brexit and into the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25841/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland continues to work closely with international clients, from a range of sectors, to mitigate the potential impact of Brexit and to capitalise on any opportunities for additional Brexit-related foreign direct investment (FDI) in the future. In doing so, the IDA has targeted both new-name investors and increased investment from companies already located here. This approach has contributed to record results in recent years and should lead to further investment and job creation in the years ahead.

The Agency has also restructured its global footprint in response to Brexit, with the UK now being treated as a distinct market. The IDA's staff are working hard as well to avail of new investment opportunities from non-traditional target markets. The Agency's efforts in this context have already yielded positive results, with over 70 Brexit-related investments and 5,000 associated jobs won to date.

Our efforts to win more FDI will be helped, post-Brexit, by our continued status as an attractive destination for overseas firms. Ireland's membership of the European Union ensures that companies considering an investment here will gain barrier-free access to the EU market. When taken together with other strengths - such as our pro-enterprise environment and our highly skilled dynamic workforce - I am confident that Ireland will continue to be an attractive destination for mobile overseas investment in the years ahead.

Protected Disclosures Data

161. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of whistleblower complaints in her Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25652/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The

Protected Disclosures Act 2014 became operational on 15th July 2014. Since that date, thirteen matters have been raised with my Department as protected disclosures.

The matters raised were dealt with in accordance with my Department's Protected Disclosures Policy, including referral to other Government Departments where appropriate.

Departmental Offices

162. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for her Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25913/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Accommodation for my Department, its Offices and the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority is provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) in buildings which are either State owned or leased by the OPW on our behalf. The rental costs are borne by the OPW and therefore the information being sought for these locations is a matter for the OPW. Typically, the Department and its Offices are in shared accommodation, either with other Government Departments, public bodies or the private sector.

The following table sets out the rental accommodation costs in relation to the other State Agencies under the remit of the Department. The information covers each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019 and covers various locations across the country.

| Agency | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 To date |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Competition & Consumer Protection Commission | n/a | n/a | €503,692 | €602,811 | €296,967 |
| Enterprise Ireland | €3,513,316 | €3,554,553 | €3,403,722 | €3,492,058 | €1,859,748 |
| Health & Safety Authority | €1,137,355 | €1,137,355 | €1,137,355 | €1,137,953 | €568,977 |
| IDA Ireland | €2,636,000 | €2,366,000 | €2,371,000 | €2,421,000 | €1,156,000 |
| National Standards Authority of Ireland | €891,951 | €891,951 | €891,951 | €864,803 | €405,657 |
| Personal Injuries Assessment Board | €188,544 | €198,544 | €198,544 | €188,544 | €94,277 |
| Science Foundation Ireland | €568,412 | €619,752 | €619,752 | €619,752 | €342,112 |

In 2015 and 2016 the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) occupied premises where the rental costs were borne by the OPW. The CCPC moved to new premises in April 2017 and commenced paying rent and charges related to it.

State Claims Agency

163. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if the State Claims Agency is providing indemnification to a clinic (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25719/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The State Claims Agency (SCA) has a statutory remit to manage personal injury claims, including claims in respect of clinical negligence, on behalf of Delegated State Authorities (DSA's) including the Health Service Executive.

I understand from the State Claims Agency that the clinic is covered under the indemnifica-

tion provided to the National Maternity Hospital.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Data

164. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 21 years of age who have access to the FreeStyle Libre device under the long-term illness scheme; the number of persons over 21 years of age who now have access to the FreeStyle Libre device under the long-term illness scheme in tabular form by CHO and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25633/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Data

165. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a cost-benefit analysis on the usage of the finger test strips for persons between five and 21 years of age with type 1 diabetes; if it has provided savings since the FreeStyle Libre reimbursement scheme was launched; if so, the details of the savings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25634/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy

Hospital Waiting Lists

166. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for atrial fibrillation ablation treatment across all hospitals conducting the procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25637/19]

167. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the long waiting times for atrial fibrillation ablation treatment in the Mater hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25638/19]

168. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the significant gaps that exist in patient access to ablation treatment for atrial fibrillation and other arrhythmias; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25639/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 166 to 168, inclusive, together.

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

With regards to the specific issues raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

HSE Properties

169. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 325 of 14 May 2019, when the HSE met with an organisation (details supplied); the timeline on the submission of requested documentation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25640/19]

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

Disability Support Services Funding

170. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 392 of 16 April 2019, the funding available for respite for children already used for 2019; and his plans to increase funding. [25641/19]

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

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

171. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take regarding the delays being experienced by a person (details supplied) due to HSE guidelines; and if the HSE will be requested to expedite the case. [25648/19]

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

Protected Disclosures Data

172. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25661/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act

2014 requires each public body to publish an annual report setting out the number of protected disclosures received in the preceding year and the action taken (if any).

Since the legislation was introduced in 2015 and covering the period 1 July 2014 to 31 December 2018, a total of 60 protected disclosures were submitted to my Department. All were made under Section 6 or Section 8 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. This means the disclosures were not from employees of my Department and instead related to a worker or workers employed in a public body under my Department's remit.

19 of the disclosures, when assessed, did not meet the criteria as set out under the Act.

Hospitals Data

173. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of eye and cataract procedures carried out at the cataract centre UL Hospital at Nenagh since November 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25668/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Budget 2019 announced that the Government had further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019. The joint Department of Health, HSE, and NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 was published on 11th March.

Under the Plan the HSE, in line with the National Service Plan, will deliver 1.155 million elective inpatient and day case discharges at a value of €1.4 billion in 2019. The Scheduled Care Access Plan includes:

- detailed plans from the NTPF to fund 25,000 IPDC treatments, 5,000 Gastro Intestinal Scopes and 40,000 outpatient first appointments.

- It is also projected that for ten identified high volume procedures, including cataracts, all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 6 months will be offered treatment in 2019.

These 10 procedures account for over a third of the active inpatient day case waiting list and represent 60% of NTPF planned activity in 2019.

At the end of July 2017, the number of people waiting for a cataract procedure was 10,024. Under the Inpatient Day Case Access Plan 2018, Cataracts were one of the specialties targeted by the NTPF and by end December 2018, the number of patients waiting had fallen to 6,440, a reduction of 36%. The number of patients waiting for a Cataract procedure at the end of May 2019 had further reduced to 5,655 with 481 patients waiting over 9 months. This represents a reduction of 3,890 or 89% when compared to July 2017, when there were 4,371 patients waiting over 9 months for a cataract operation.

Under the 2019 Scheduled Care Access Plan, all clinically suitable patients waiting longer than 6 months for a cataract procedure will be offered treatment funded by the NTPF.

In relation to the number of cataract procedures carried out at the Nenagh Cataract Centre since November 2018, I have asked the HSE to investigate the issue and respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

174. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied)

in County Clare will have surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25669/19]

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

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

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

Respite Care Services Provision

175. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the use of one of two properties (details supplied) for use as a respite care facility. [25671/19]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

176. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be given a date for a hip replacement operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25674/19]

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.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

177. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources will be provided to the HSE to eliminate the long delays for persons being reimbursed for costs incurred in having surgery under the cross-border directive; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that such delays are causing undue hardship to persons and families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25675/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is responsible for the operation of the Cross Border Directive and the management of staffing levels for the HSE Cross Border Directive (CBD) office is an operational matter for the HSE. I have, therefore, asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

It should be noted that the numbers of persons availing of the Directive has been increasing steadily for a number of years with a corresponding increase in the workload for the CBD office. I am aware that the HSE is currently considering a business case, and other interim steps, to address the issues which have arisen with regard to the processing of reimbursements.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

178. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the location in which a person (details supplied) can obtain a motorised wheelchair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25680/19]

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

Hospitals Capital Programme

179. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 146 of 10 April 2019, when the HSE capital plan for 2019 will be finalised and approved by him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25694/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is continuing to work with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Health Service Executive in a process to finalise as soon as possible a multi-annual Capital Plan for the HSE, which will include capital projects to be funded in 2019 and beyond, having regard to the available capital funding and the number of large national capital projects currently underway.

The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 and beyond having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway, the cashflow requirements attaching to each project and the relevant priority.

Projects that are currently in construction and are contractually committed will not be affected.

Once the HSE has finalised its Capital Plan for 2019, it will then be submitted to me for consideration.

Ambulance Service Provision

180. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are 102 ambulance stations nationally; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 94 of these stations operate on a 24/7 basis, 52 weeks a year, 365 days per year; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the other eight stations operate on a 24-hour basis, six-days a week and a 12-hour basis for the other day 52 weeks per year; his views on whether in the interests of public health all 102 ambulance stations should operate on a 24/7 basis, 52 weeks per year, 365 days per year; his plans to bring about the change in the operation of the other eight stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25695/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the queries raised by the Deputy relate to service issues, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Health Services Provision

181. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be considered for community living as matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25700/19]

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.

Drug Rehabilitation Clinics

182. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of drug detox beds provided directly by the HSE; the number provided by the voluntary sector; the number of persons waiting for same at the end of May 2019; the number waiting by categories (details supplied); the number admitted to such beds in 2018 and to date in 2019; and the average length of stay in 2018 and to date in 2019. [25701/19]

183. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of drug rehabilitation beds provided directly by the HSE; the number provided by the voluntary sector; the number of persons waiting for same at the end of May 2019; the number waiting by categories (details supplied); the number admitted to such beds in 2018 and to date in 2019; and the average length of stay in 2018 and to date in 2019 [25702/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 183 together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Children's Hospital

184. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 40 and 72 of 15 May 2019, the reason the new national children's hospital is obliged to provide private facilities for consultants who hold public and private contracts; his views on whether it is preferable in view of the Sláintecare report and a commitment to moving to a single tier health service, to ensure that the consultants working in the national children's hospital would also commit themselves to providing services on the basis of need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25703/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The vast majority of services in the new children's hospital will be public services. However, as part of the National Contract for Consultants negotiated in 2008, some consultants holding specific contracts are entitled to engage in private outpatient practice outside of their public commitment and this commitment must be conducted on site, that is, in the hospital they are contracted with. As a result, private outpatient clinics may be held on the public hospital campus but these clinics must be held outside contracted hours. The new children's hospital is obliged to provide such facilities for consultants holding such contracts. The proposal is for consultants to pay a fee for use of the rooms and other operational costs.

The Report of the Independent Review Group established to examine private activity in public hospitals has been received and is being examined in my Department. It is a comprehensive examination of private activity in public hospitals and contains a small number of recommendations. When the recommendations have been examined and considered in my Department and by other relevant Government Departments, it is intended to bring proposals to Government and to publish the Report thereafter.

Fuel Allowance Payments

185. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25704/19]

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

Home Help Service Provision

186. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when home help will be provided to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25708/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

187. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter regarding the provision of a drug for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25709/19]

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. The Act specifies the criteria to be applied in the making of reimbursement decisions which include the clinical and cost effectiveness of the product, the opportunity cost and the impact on resources that are available to the HSE.

As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines and therefore it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any individual case.

However, I can advise the Deputy that on 11 June 2019, the HSE Leadership Team approved access to the drug Nusinersen (Spinraza) for children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type I, II or III on an exceptional and individualised basis.

The recommendation is to approve access for children with genetically confirmed SMA Type I, II or III, in accordance with the controlled access criteria recommended by the Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee. The rare diseases committee recommendation was clearly targeted at the youngest and most severely affected SMA patients, and this group is the clear priority for the HSE. The actual patient assessment and approval process will be the means for determining access on an individual case by case basis.

Pharmacy Regulations

188. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the action he plans to take on the new rules of an organisation (details supplied) regarding pharmacy assistants and their roles, responsibilities and to limit their ability to cover pharmacists for temporary absence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25712/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Pharmacy Act 2007, my role in relation to the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland PSI (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules is limited to their consideration once submitted to me for my consent.

In this case, the Rules in question are currently subject to legal challenge. As a result, they are not currently under consideration.

I am not in a position to comment any further due to the legal challenge.

Hospital Appointments Status

189. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if surgery will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25738/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Vaccination Programme Data

190. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the targets set out for the uptake of HSE HPV vaccination programme for the years 2014 to 2019, in tabular form; the detail of the HPV immunisation uptake statistics provided by the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre for the school years 2014 to 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25755/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive collects and collates immunisation statistics, I have asked them to reply directly to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme Data

191. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if all children received their MMR booster vaccine in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25756/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive collects and collates immunisation statistics, I have asked them to reply directly to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme Data

192. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the targets set out for the uptake of the MMR vaccination programme for the years 2014 to 2019, in tabular form; the number of children that received their MMR vaccination for the years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25757/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive collects and collates immunisation statistics, I have asked them to reply directly to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme Data

193. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the targets set out for the uptake of each vaccination under the primary childhood immunisation schedule for the years 2014 to 2019, in tabular form; the actual number of children that did receive each vaccination under the schedule in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25758/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive collects and collates immunisation statistics, I have asked them to reply directly to the Deputy.

Dental Services Waiting Lists

194. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in CHO2 waiting for an appointment in categories and for periods (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25759/19]

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

HSE Waiting Lists

195. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in CHO2 waiting for an eye test in primary care; the number waiting for periods (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25760/19]

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

HSE Waiting Lists

196. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in CHO2 waiting for a hearing test in primary care; the number waiting for periods (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25761/19]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

197. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in CHO2 waiting for a speech and language assessment in primary care; the number waiting for periods (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25762/19]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

198. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for scoliosis surgery in CHO2; the length of time they are waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25763/19]

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 Waiting Lists

199. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been removed from the public waiting list having previously had unsuccessful surgery carried out by the same consultant; if patients are commonly removed from waiting lists without notification in this fashion; if such cases are an effort to shorten waiting lists; and the full circumstances in detail to date in relation to this particular case. [25770/19]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

200. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25774/19]

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.

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.

Health Promotion

201. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 345 of 5 February 2019, if the HSE has approved the draft HSE staff breastfeeding in

the workplace policy which was drawn up by the breastfeeding implementation group; if not, the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25787/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As the question relates to a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

202. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when approval of capital funding will issue for the development of children's disability services in County Waterford on land owned by the HSE at St. Otteran's Hospital, Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25791/19]

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

General Medical Services Scheme Data

203. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the pharmacies with a GMS contract in Dublin 5; the payments received under categories (details supplied) in each month from December 2018 to May 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25798/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Thalidomide Victims Compensation

204. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the support services available for persons who have been adversely affected by the use of a drug (details supplied); his plans to increase wrap around support for an association; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25808/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following an Irish Government Decision in January 1975, the Government granted an ex-gratia sum equivalent to 4 times the German lump-sum and an ex-gratia monthly allowance for life equal to the German monthly allowance, to each of the Irish children found to have thalidomide related injuries. There are currently 29 Irish people in receipt of ex-gratia monthly payments from my Department and all are now in their late 50s.

The German monthly payments are made by the Contergan Foundation, which is established under German legislation. From 01 August 2013, the Foundation substantially increased its monthly payments to thalidomide survivors, including Irish survivors. Both the German payments and the Irish ex-gratia payments made to the survivors are exempt from tax, including DIRT and are not reckonable as means for the purpose of Social Welfare payments. The rate of payment is related to the survivors' level of thalidomide related injury.

In addition to the initial lump sum and the monthly payments for life, the supports provided

to each Irish survivor include a medical card on an administrative basis regardless of means, provision of appliances, artificial limbs, equipment, housing adaptations, and access to a full range of primary care, hospital and personal social services. There is a designated senior manager in the Health Service Executive to act as a liaison with regard to the ongoing health and personal social service needs of Irish survivors.

The Contergan Foundation has confirmed that since 2013, it is accepting applications from individuals for compensation for thalidomide related injury. It is open to any Irish person to apply to the Foundation for assessment of their disability as being attributable to thalidomide. Any Irish person who establishes that their injury is attributable to thalidomide, will be offered appropriate supports by the Irish Government commensurate with those currently provided to Irish thalidomide survivors, outlined above.

Work is underway in the Department to bring forward Heads of a Bill to provide on a statutory basis for health and personal social services for the Irish survivors of thalidomide.

Health Services Provision

205. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the case of a child (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25809/19]

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

Neuro-Rehabilitation Policy

206. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of the nine implementation teams, one for each community health organisation, established to date in 2019, as part of the roll-out of the implementation plan for the national neuro-rehabilitation strategy; the funding allocated to support implementation in 2019; and the funding allocated in each CHO. [25810/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to publish a plan for advancing neuro-rehabilitation services in the community.

The Health Service Executive recently published its implementation framework in respect of the recommendations of the National Policy and Strategy for the provision of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland 2011-2015. This was the culmination of the work of the National Steering Group established in 2017, which included representation from stakeholder groups including the Neurological Alliance of Ireland.

The focus of the Neuro-Rehabilitation Strategy is on achieving best outcomes for people, by providing safe, high quality, person-centred care at the lowest appropriate level of complexity. This must be integrated across the care pathway and provided as close to home as possible or in specialist centres, where necessary.

The framework will guide the reconfiguration and development of neuro-rehabilitation structures and services at national and local level, through a 10-step Framework.

It proposes the formation of Managed Clinical Rehabilitation Networks (MCRNs), with the set-up of one demonstration MCRN suggested as the first step.

The ultimate goal of this approach is to put in place a national framework of acute, inpatient and specialist community services.

The Managed Clinical Rehabilitation Network (MCRN) model acknowledges that different service users need different input and different levels of expertise and specialisation at different stages in their rehabilitation journey.

The critical point of this model is that, although service users may need to access different services as they progress, the transition between services should be facilitated by appropriate communication and sharing of information between services so that they progress in a seamless continuum of care through the different stages:

- Acute hospital;
- Complex specialist rehabilitation services;
- Post-acute specialist inpatient rehabilitation services;
- Community based specialist rehabilitation services;
- Primary care; and
- Voluntary organisations.

This National Implementation Framework is evidence-based and informed by population needs. It addresses the continuum of care for those in need of neurological rehabilitation services. It describes the requirement for a whole system approach and provides the blueprint for how we should deliver care and services for those who suffer from neurological conditions who require individualised, goal focused rehabilitation

The implementation framework covers an initial period from 2019 into 2021. However, it is recognised that continued investment in and development of neuro-rehabilitation services will need to be prioritised beyond the three-year implementation period of this Implementation Framework.

As this a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

207. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his views on the work being done by cardiac specialists from some hospitals in Dublin and the midlands (details supplied) who carry out voluntary cath labs in St. James's Hospital for emergencies; if all hospitals are providing cardiologists for this service; the reason certain hospitals may not participate in this service by sending their cardiologists; the effect this may have on outcomes for patients with emergency heart problems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25814/19]

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.

HSE Properties

208. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the criteria and timelines associated with the tendering process the HSE is undertaking for professional advice in regard

to developing a programme for maintenance and recording of the Quaker burial ground on Cork Street, Dublin 8. [25815/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

209. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of an ophthalmology appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25816/19]

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

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

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

HSE Waiting Lists

210. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if there is an 11 month wait in County Clare for children under 12 years of age seeking access to the community ophthalmic physician and 26 months for adults who need cataract procedures in the public system as against three months for those that can afford private care as reported by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25820/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The number of patients waiting for a Cataract procedure at the end of April 2019 was 6,151, which represents a reduction of almost 50% when compared to July 2017, when the number of people waiting for a cataract procedure was 10,024.

It is also worth noting that at the end of April 2019, of the patients waiting for a cataract procedure, 582 of patients were waiting over 9 months. This represents a reduction of 3,789 or 87% when compared to July 2017, when there were 4,371 patients waiting over 9 months for a cataract operation.

Budget 2019 announced that the Government had further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019. The joint Department of Health, HSE, and NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 was published on the 11th March and is focused on ten identified high volume procedures, which includes cataracts.

The HSE has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy regarding waiting times for children seeking access to the community ophthalmic physician in Co Clare.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

211. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason a service is no longer being provided under the medical card scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25821/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

212. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national guidelines for post-mastectomy products (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25822/19]

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

Programme for Government Implementation

213. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on a programme for partnership Government commitment (details supplied); his views on the model of care; when it will be rolled out nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25852/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

214. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for surgery (details supplied) in the Saolta area; his plans to tackle such waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25853/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Budget 2019 announced that the Government had further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019. The joint Department of Health, HSE, and NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 was published on 11th March.

Under the Plan the HSE, in line with the National Service Plan, will deliver 1.155 million elective inpatient and day case discharges at a value of €1.4 billion in 2019. The Scheduled Care Access Plan includes:

- detailed plans from the NTPF to fund 25,000 IPDC treatments, 5,000 Gastro Intestinal Scopes and 40,000 outpatient first appointments.

- It is also projected that for ten identified high volume procedures, including cataracts, all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 6 months will be offered treatment in 2019.

These 10 procedures account for over a third of the active inpatient day case waiting list and represent 60% of NTPF planned activity in 2019.

At the end of July 2017, the number of people waiting for a cataract procedure was 10,024. Under the Inpatient Day Case Access Plan 2018, Cataracts were one of the specialties targeted by the NTPF and by end December 2018, the number of patients waiting had fallen to 6,440, a reduction of 36%. The number of patients waiting for a Cataract procedure at the end of May 2019 had further reduced to 5,655 with 481 patients waiting over 9 months. This represents a reduction of 3,890 or 89% when compared to July 2017, when there were 4,371 patients waiting over 9 months for a cataract operation.

Under the 2019 Scheduled Care Access Plan, all clinically suitable patients waiting longer than 6 months for a cataract procedure will be offered treatment funded by the NTPF.

In relation to the information requested by the Deputy, the following table provides a breakdown of the cataract surgery waiting times in the Saolta University Healthcare Group.

Cataract Procedures in the SAOLTA University Health Care Group by Hospital

| | 0-3 Months | 3-6 Months | 6-9 Months | 9-12 Months | 12-15 Months | 15-18 Months | 18+ Months | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Galway University Hospitals | 306 | 275 | 205 | 24 | 3 | | 3 | 816 |
| Sligo University Hospital | 205 | 154 | 75 | 20 | 19 | 6 | 16 | 495 |
| Letterkenny University Hospital | 10 | 13 | 6 | 4 | 3 | | 2 | 38 |
| Grand Total | 521 | 442 | 286 | 48 | 25 | 6 | 21 | 1349 |

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

215. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number on waiting lists for CAMHS by county; the number waiting by periods (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25855/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

216. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels for CAMHS teams by CHO; and the way in which this compares with the necessary full complement of staff as outlined by A Vision for Change. [25856/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Offices

217. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25918/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information sought is contained in the following table:

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | Total |
|---|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | € | € | € | € | € | € |
| Farrelly Commission of Investigation (old premises) | | | 99,630 | 95,345 | | 194,975 |
| Farrelly Commission of Investigation (new premises) | | | | 161,483 | 200,611 | 362,094 |
| Office of the Regulator of the National Lottery * | 98,500 | 98,500 | 98,500 | 98,500 | 49,250 | 443,250 |
| Total | 98,500 | 98,500 | 198,130 | 348,543 | 249,861 | 993,534 |

* The Department of Health is the lessee for offices in the Irish Life Centre, Dublin 1, which have been sub-let with effect from 02 February 2015 to the Office of the Regulator of the National Lottery. These costs are reimbursed in full by the Regulator.

Protected Disclosures Data

218. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25651/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As required under the relevant legislation, my Department has a Protected Disclosures Policy in place under which a staff member who wishes to make a protected disclosure may do so to any of the following confidential recipients:

- an independent confidential service engaged for this purpose;
- the Head of the Internal Audit Unit in the Department, or
- any member of the Department's Management Board.

Contact details for all of the above confidential recipients, as well as procedures for making a protected disclosure, are contained in the policy document which has been circulated to all staff and which is also available on the Department's intranet platform.

The numbers of Protected Disclosures received in the Department to date are:

2015 - Nil

2016 - Three

2017 - Two

2018 - One

2019 - Nil.

TAMS Administration

219. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that TAMS 3 will include grant aid for solar panels for farms. [25673/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Energy efficiency is a priority for the country, particularly in our efforts to decarbonise the economy in favour of renewable sources. Energy efficient investments will be among the items under consideration for inclusion as new investment measures under future Rural Development Programmes.

The current TAMS II Schemes provide grant aid for a number of investments specifically aimed at improving energy efficiency and developing a targeted and precise approach focusing on environmental dividends, efficiency and growth in the farming sector. Eligible energy efficiency investments include Plate coolers, Heat Transfer Units and Internal Ice Builders for the Dairy Sector.

The Pigs and Poultry Scheme and the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme provide grant aid for biomass boilers, electrical heat pads, energy efficient LED lighting, indirect heating systems, solar panels for water heating and electricity production, ventilation fans and control systems, insulation for doors, roofs and walls, air source heat pumps and heat recovery units.

LED Lighting uses a fraction of the electricity consumed by conventional lighting. The current specifications for the TAMS Scheme include LED for lighting in all new farm structures.

The Deputy will be aware that the availability of Solar Panels has recently been extended to all sectors which, together with the measures detailed above, will make a significant contribution to help ensure that the agriculture sector plays its part in Ireland’s transition to a low-carbon economy and society as outlined in the All-of-Government Plan to tackle Climate Disruption launched earlier this week.

Organic Farming

220. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of increase in organic production on an annual basis since 2010; the incentives that are available to encourage organic food production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25679/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The level of increase in organic production on an annual basis since 2010 is not readily available. Based on the following statistics, however, there is clear evidence of an increase in organic production.

In 2010, there was 52,370 hectares of land under organic production. There is currently 72,000 hectares approximately under organic production.

From a dairy perspective, there were 27 organic dairy herds in 2012 compared to 45 organic dairy herds in 2018. In 2012, there was 41,000 organic cattle approximately compared to 59,000 organic cattle approximately in 2016.

With regard to sheep production, organic sheep represented 1.3% of total sheep production in Ireland in 2012 compared to 1.9% of total sheep production in 2016. In 2016, there was 2,304 hectares under organic cereal and pulse production. This figure increased to 2,426 hectares in 2017.

It is important to note that the Organic Strategy Group recommended a renewed focus on developing sector specific statistics. As a consequence, a value chain analysis to be carried out by Teagasc is one of the sector specific actions within the new Organic Strategy launched in January, 2019.

The suite of supports currently available, which have contributed to the growth of the Organic Sector include the Organic Farming Scheme, the TAMS Organic Capital Investment Scheme and the Organic Processor Investment Grant Scheme.

GLAS Payments

221. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of payments owed in view of a successful appeal by a person (details supplied); if same will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25718/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Processing of the payment for this GLAS 3 application commenced immediately following the receipt of the appeal decision from the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Department officials are actively working to amend the GLAS contract in relation to a Low Input Permanent Pasture action which was declared as Traditional Hay Meadow on the GLAS application.

Once the required amendment is completed and the application clears the pre-payment validations, the GLAS payment will be issued.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

222. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeal cases taken by the Agriculture Appeals Office in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25721/19]

223. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeal cases taken to the Agriculture Appeals Office in which its initial ruling was subsequently challenged by his Department in each of the years 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25725/19]

224. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeal cases in which the Agriculture Appeals Office found in favour of the appellant in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25733/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 to 224, inclusive, together.

The appeals service of the Agriculture Appeals Office functions independently of my Department. The table below shows the number of appeals received by the Agriculture Appeals Office that were determined in favour of appellants in the years 2015-2018.

Allowed/Partially Allowed/Revised by Department after interaction with the Appeals Office

| | |
|------|---------------------------------|
| 2015 | 278 (41% of all appeals closed) |
| 2016 | 253 (41% of all appeals closed) |
| 2017 | 261 (37% of all appeals closed) |
| 2018 | 202 (39% of all appeals closed) |

In regard to the number of appeals received in the years 2015-2018, a total of 619 appeals were received in 2015 compared with 610 in 2014. There were 598 appeals received by the Office in 2016. A total of 638 appeals were received in 2017. In 2018, a total of 556 appeals were received, a decrease of 13% on 2017.

The Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001, provides for reviews of Appeals Officer decisions. In 2017, my Department challenged twelve rulings by the Appeals Officer while the corresponding figure for 2018 was seven.

Forestry Grants

225. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the continuous cover forestry schemes in operation; the number of participants in each such scheme; the total current and capital funding allocated to each such scheme in 2019; the grant and premium rates for each such scheme; and the criteria required to draw down a payment in each available scheme. [25789/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My colleague, Minister of State Doyle, launched the pilot Continuous Cover Forestry Scheme (CCF) earlier this year, to run until the end of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020. This is a scheme that I very much welcome and which has been very well received. My Department planned to accept applications for 30 projects over the two years and I am glad to inform the Deputy that this target has recently been reached well ahead of time.

The scheme comprises of CCF Transformation Management Plan that will run for a period of twelve years with three instalments of €750 occurring at intervals throughout the 12-year period. The first instalment will be at year one with the final payment issuing within twelve years from the date of completion of works relating to the first intervention. The middle payment can be paid at any stage during the intervening period as described within the Transformation Management Plan. Conifer, broadleaf and broadleaf mixed forests are eligible. Details in relation to the criteria which apply to the payment application process are fully outlined in the CCF Scheme document, which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/grantandpremiumschemes/2019/WISC-CFVer6120319.pdf

Funding for CCF is provided for in the total allocation for all forestry support schemes, which is €9.4m in 2019.

Woodland Improvement Scheme

226. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1137 of 8 May 2019, the reason there was such a large under-spend in each year of the woodland improvement scheme since it was established. [25790/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The funding for the Woodland Improvement Scheme is included in the total budget allocated to Forestry Support Schemes. This allocation includes funding for Forest Road Works, Reconstitution, NeighbourWood and Native Woodland Conservation Schemes.

Earlier this year, my colleague Minister of State Doyle launched a second Intervention under the Woodland Improvement Scheme. This updates the scheme to include two thinning interventions for all broadleaf and broadleaf mixed forests. Grant rates are €750 per hectare for the first intervention and €500 per hectare for the second. To date this year, we have received 67 WIS1 applications and 150 WIS2 applications.

It is worth noting that all forestry schemes are voluntary and demand-led and, therefore, spending is dependent on applications received, approved, contracts fulfilled and payments issued in any given year. As can be seen from the following table, spending on the Woodland Improvement Scheme has increased year-on-year since 2014, with the exception of 2018. The trend this year is encouraging with an 83% increase in the number of hectares thinned and tended this year compared to the same period last year, which is reflected in a similar increase in expenditure to date this year.

| Year | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 to date |
|-----------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| WIS Expenditure | €76,118 | €497,093 | €614,993 | €632,271 | €458,371 | €319,832 |

GLAS Payments

227. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an outstanding payment on the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25851/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015. Payments have been made for scheme years 2015, 2016, 2017 and for the 2018 advance payment. The 2018 balance payment is currently being processed and is expected to be paid shortly.

The applicant was successful in his appeal to BPS in relation to the reduction of the eligible area for a parcel with a GLAS action. GLAS payments continue to issue on a weekly basis,

Departmental Records

228. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a copy of the 2008 ledger used for receipt of REPS 4 applications into the Killarney offices of his Department to verify if there was a single or dual entries in respect of farmers in the county as referenced in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25857/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In relation to the REPS 4 participation of the persons named, the matter has been dealt with comprehensively and all REPS 4 payments due have issued in full to both persons named.

The position in relation to the ledger referred to is that it could not be located. The persons concerned were informed of this fact during the course of an oral hearing held by the Agricultural Appeals Office in 2014 concerning the matter.

19 June 2019

Departmental Offices

229. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25912/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following tables.

2015

| Office space | Rented/leased/hired | Cost |
|--|---------------------|----------|
| Mellows Campus Athenry | Leased | €100,000 |
| Appeals Office Kilminchy Court Portlaoise | Leased | €84,051 |
| Eircom Building Portlaoise | Leased | €118,000 |
| Sustainable Food Systems IrelandEast Point Business Park | Rented | €30,000 |

2016

| Office space | Rented/leased/hired | Cost |
|--|---------------------|----------|
| Mellows Campus Athenry | Leased | €100,000 |
| Rosslare Harbour | Leased | €4,500 |
| Appeals Office Kilminchy Court Portlaoise | Leased | €84,051 |
| Eircom Building Portlaoise | Leased | €88,500 |
| Sustainable Food Systems IrelandEast Point Business Park | Rented | €30,000 |

2017

| Office space | Rented/leased/hired | Cost |
|--|---------------------|----------|
| Mellows Campus Athenry | Leased | €100,000 |
| Rosslare Harbour | Leased | €6,000 |
| Appeals Office Kilminchy Court Portlaoise | Leased | €84,051 |
| Eircom Building Portlaoise | Leased | €118,000 |
| Sustainable Food Systems IrelandEast Point Business Park | Rented | €30,000 |

2018

| Office space | Rented/leased/hired | Cost |
|--|---------------------|----------|
| Mellows Campus Athenry | Leased | €100,000 |
| Rosslare Harbour | Leased | €6,000 |
| Appeals Office Kilminchy Court, Portlaoise | Leased | €84,051 |
| Eircom Building Portlaoise | Leased | €123,672 |
| Sustainable Food Systems IrelandEast Point Business Park | Rented | €30,000 |

2019

| Office space | Rented/leased/hired | Cost |
|--|---------------------|-----------|
| Mellows Campus Athenry | Leased | €25,000* |
| Rosslare Harbour | Leased | €3,000* |
| Appeals Office Kilminchy Court Portlaoise | Leased | €63,038* |
| Eircom Building Portlaoise | Leased | €105,517* |
| Sustainable Food Systems IrelandEast Point Business Park | Rented | €7,500* |

As regards the twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department, the information re-

quested is an operational matter for the State Bodies themselves and I have therefore referred the Deputy's question to the agencies and have requested that a response should issue within 10 days.

Broadband Service Provision

230. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of high-speed broadband at a location (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25623/19]

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 contract close, including finalisation of financial and legal documents. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly that.

The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed. 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.

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.

Protected Disclosures Data

231. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25654/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has received three Protected Disclosures since the legislation was introduced in 2015, one in each of the years 2017, 2018 and 2019. My Department has a Protected Disclosure Policy and Guidelines in place to support the implementation of the Protected Disclosure Act 2014.

National Broadband Plan Expenditure

232. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost of the roll-out of the national broadband plan in areas already covered by a commercial plan to cover 300,000 premises; when this roll-out was agreed; if this took place before or after the departure of a company (details supplied) from the bidding process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25779/19]

233. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the barriers in place to ensure issues regarding the roll-out of the national broadband plan do not break state aid rules (details supplied). [25780/19]

235. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale for the duplication of fibre as part of the national broadband plan in areas in which fibre infrastructure is already in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25782/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232, 233 and 235 together.

Under EU State Aid guidelines, it is a requirement that Member States thoroughly evaluate commercial plans so as to ensure that State Aid is confined to areas of well-defined market failure, where commercial investment is unlikely to occur in the near future. The deployment of the National Broadband Plan network is currently to provide access to high speed broadband to circa 540,000 premises across the State. The relevant premises are identified by Eircode and are represented as AMBER on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map. It is open to the Department within the NBP contract to increase or decrease the scope of the contract post-contract award where it is considered necessary to do so, for example to ensure on-going compliance with State Aid rules.

The National Broadband Plan procurement process was run on a technology neutral basis and sought to elicit the best technical solution from participating bidders to address the market failure identified and deliver on the minimum technical specifications set down in the tender documents. In line with State Aid Guidelines, the solution proposed by the successful Bidder was based on the maximum reuse of existing infrastructure to the greatest extent possible, which under the final tender provided involves deployment of new fibre cable over existing eir poles and through existing eir ducts, as well as some new build where no existing infrastructure exists.

The solution proposed at final tender was subject to a robust evaluation and was found to have met all the requirements set out since 2016.

The network design put forward at final tender met and in some areas exceeded the minimum technical specifications set down in the tender requirements, including the requirement to provide concrete commitments around how the network will be future proofed to meet end user demand over at least the next 25 years. It was a critical part of the assessment that any network design and technical solution put forward by any Bidder provided the necessary assurance and confidence that this could be achieved over the medium to long term. These commitments are also contractually binding on the Bidder.

Bituminous Fuel Ban

234. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to a legal threat of a failure to introduce a ban on smoky coal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25781/19]

237. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he received the correspondence which indicated future legal action in the event of the extension of a ban on smoky coal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25812/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 and 237 together.

The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or ‘the smoky coal ban’ as it is commonly known, was first introduced in Dublin in 1990, and subsequently extended to our major cities. Following a public consultation process, it was further extended in 2012, and now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide. The ban has proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels and has had the effect of significantly improving public health. Research indicates, for example, that the ban has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths in Dublin alone.

Through legal correspondence, received in May 2018, a number of coal firms indicated that they would challenge the decision to extend the ban nationwide.

I am working with the Attorney General to finalise a legally robust plan which will improve air quality by reducing particulate matter in the air. I am also committed to bringing forward Ireland’s first ever National Clean Air Strategy. The Strategy, which I intend to publish later this year, will provide the policy framework necessary to identify and promote integrated measures across Government that are required to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner air, while delivering on wider national objectives.

Question No. 235 answered with Question No. 232.

Exploration Licences

236. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 180 of 13 June 2019, the status of the licences; when they were applied for; the category of each; if the cost of the repayment of acreage rental fees identified in the same correspondence estimated at €1.5 million relates to all existing licences or specific licences; the category of the licences; if the figure of €1.5 million is for repayment in 2019; and if not, if it is for a defined period. [25793/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): The following table sets out the applications for petroleum authorisations involving the award of acreage currently under consideration by my Department. No decision has been taken in respect of these applications.

| Authorisation | Application | | |
|---------------------|--------------|------|------|
| | 2012 to 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
| Licensing Option | 2 | | |
| Exploration Licence | | 5 | 3 |
| Lease Undertaking | 1 | | 1 |

My letter to the Ceann Comhairle of 8 May 2019 referred to return of acreage fees for existing licences (petroleum authorisations) and estimated this to be in the region of €1 million to €2 million. This referred to existing petroleum authorisations involving the holding of acreage in particular Licensing Options, Exploration Licences (Standard and Frontier) and Lease Undertakings. Acreage rental fees are payable on the anniversary of award of a petroleum authorisa-

tion. Hence, the exact value of a return of fees, were it to take place, would vary depending on the timing of the repayment event.

Section 57 of the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960 requires the Minister to lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas every six months a report detailing all exploration activities including petroleum exploration authorisations granted during the period of the report. The last such report laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas was in respect of the six-month period ending 31 December 2018. In addition, a report on the status of all petroleum authorisations is published on a quarterly basis on my Department's website. The most recent such report was published on 31 March 2019.

Question No. 237 answered with Question No. 234.

Departmental Offices

238. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25914/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department leased two properties since 2015, details of which are contained in the following table.

| Address | Rent per annum | Duration of lease |
|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Athlone Rd. Roscommon | €25,000 ex VAT | 3 years from March 2017 |
| UCD , Belfield Dublin 4 | €50,400 ex VAT | 3 years from April 2017 |

The property in Roscommon is used by Geological Survey Ireland, while the space leased from UCD is used by the National Cyber Security Centre. All other properties occupied by the Department are managed by the OPW.

The information sought by the Deputy regarding the public bodies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each body. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Protected Disclosures Data

239. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25667/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Protected Disclosures Act 2014

The information for 2015 and 2016 is available on the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport Website at the following link.

<http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/protected-disclosures>

Details for 2017 are set out in the 2017 Annual Report in the link below.

<http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/corporate/english/annual-report-2017-english/annual-reportbrandedcoverfinalen.pdf>

In respect of 2018, a total of 8 allegations/disclosures invoking the Protected Disclosures Act were received.

- 2 of the allegations/disclosures received were not relevant to the Department.

- 1 case has been fully processed and is now closed.

- 1 case was not deemed to be a protected disclosure. This decision was appealed and the case is currently under internal review.

- The remaining 4 cases are in progress.

These Disclosures will be included in our Annual Report 2018, to be published shortly.

Statement:-

Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires a public body to prepare a report setting out the number of protected disclosures made to it in the preceding year. The Department's Head of Internal Audit is notified of allegations/disclosures received which invoke the Act and monitors them to ensure they are processed on a timely basis.

Departmental Funding

240. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of financial support provided to an organisation (details supplied) in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25734/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Funding for tourism from my Department, other than Greenways, is channelled through the tourism agencies, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland. Both agencies have informed my Department that they have not provided any financial support to the organisation in question.

Mountain Rescue Service

241. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of financial support provided to the Galway mountain rescue team in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25735/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department, through the Irish Coast Guard, administers an annual grant scheme to Mountain Rescue Ireland, the umbrella organisation for Mountain Rescue Teams on the island of Ireland. In 2018, an internal review of the administration of the mountain rescue grants was carried out. In recognition of the fact that patterns of activity have increased since the grant was originally apportioned, I have recently approved an increased allocation for 2019 within the Irish Coast Guard's overall allocation.

The following table sets out the grants over the past five years to Galway mountain team.

| Year | Amount € |
|------------------|------------|
| 2019 - allocated | €18,130.00 |
| 2018 | €7,407.00 |

| Year | Amount € |
|-------|------------|
| 2017 | €7,407.00 |
| 2016 | €7,407.00 |
| 2015 | €7,407.00 |
| Total | €47,758.00 |

Coast Guard Services

242. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of financial support provided to the Galway search and rescue unit in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25736/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There are two Coast Guard volunteer units in Galway - Costello Bay and Cleggan. My Department provides funding through the Coast Guard volunteer support programme for training, exercising and equipment for all Coast Guard Units on an on-going basis as needed. This funding is not disaggregated by unit. My Department also provides funding for the refurbishment and maintenance of the Coast Guard facilities. This programme is managed through the OPW. Costello Bay unit was a new build in 2011 at a cost of €700k approx. Cleggan Unit is being considered in context of a new build over the coming 3 years, subject to feasibility, planning and other requirements.

Sports Capital Programme Data

243. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applicants from County Galway to the sports capital programme in each of the past three years; the success ratio of applicants from the county versus the national average; the amount of funding sought from applicants from the county; the amount of funding awarded during this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25737/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Details of all applications and allocations under the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) are published on the Department's website at

<http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>

In the period referred to by the Deputy there were rounds of the SCP in 2017 and in 2018. In relation to the 2018 SCP, the application period closed on 19 October 2018. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. Thereafter, 619 "equipment only" applications were assessed and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced in May. Details of all of these allocations are also available on the Department's website. Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works but until this work is complete it is not possible to provide the success ratio of applicants from County Galway versus the national average. I expect that it will be September before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

For the 2017 round of the SCP, all valid local applications were awarded a grant including every valid local application from Galway. Full details of all applications and allocations for Galway are available on the Department's website. The precise methodology used to calculate

these grants is set out in the review of the 2017 SCP which is available at:

<http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-2017-review/review-2017-sports-capital-programme.pdf>

Sports Capital Programme Applications

244. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when successful applicants who applied for the latest tranche of sports capital funding will be notified regarding their applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25775/19]

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

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

619 “equipment only” applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced in May.

Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works.

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

Departmental Offices

245. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25922/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Office of Public Works (OPW), which comes under the remit of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, is responsible for the renting, leasing and hiring of office space for Government Departments, including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Accordingly details of the cost of any such rent, lease and hire is a matter for the OPW.

The renting, leasing and hiring of office space for public bodies under the aegis of my Department is a matter for those bodies and accordingly I have referred the Deputy’s question to them for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Child and Family Agency Data

246. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of referrals made to An Garda Síochána by Tusla in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, to cases of retrospective abuse by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25747/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have asked Tusla to reply directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Protected Disclosures Data

247. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of whistleblower complaints in her Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25653/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Since 2015 three protected disclosures have been received by my Department.

My Department is committed to fostering an appropriate environment for dealing with protected disclosures under the 2014 Act. In this regard, my Department has adopted the guidelines provided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in processing any protected disclosure received.

Children in Care

248. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to concerns raised by the inspectors from the Care Quality Commission in the United Kingdom regarding a secure mental health facility (details supplied) which cares for six Irish children; the cost of the facility for Irish children over the past ten years; her views on whether this service should and could be provided here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25681/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Special care, or secure care, provides a stabilising, therapeutic environment when a child's experiences and behaviours cannot be addressed in mainstream foster or residential care, and where the child poses a risk to their own safety. For a very small proportion of children, highly specialised care, such as that provided by the centre to which the Deputy refers, is required.

St Andrew's Healthcare is a secure mental health facility and placements are made in the best interests of the child. In making an order for the placement of a young person in a facility such as St Andrew's, the High Court requires a clinical recommendation by a HSE / Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service psychiatrist and will stipulate that arrangements are in place to ensure on-going clinical oversight by a psychiatrist from the relevant mental health service in Ireland.

I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has sought assurances in relation to the Irish children currently placed in this facility. To ensure their safety and well-being Tusla receive regular, detailed reports on the child. The children have regular visits from their allocated social worker, an up-to-date written care plan, access to their families and/or carers where this is in their best interests and aftercare planning with an allocated aftercare worker.

They also have a court-appointed Guardian Ad Litem to represent their wishes and interests in court proceedings. Tusla's ultimate goal is to see all children in such placements recover sufficiently to be safely discharged and return home to Ireland.

I understand that the Deputy would like to know whether it is possible to provide the same type of care in Ireland. When considering a specialised placement, Tusla must consider facilities where the expertise and services required are already in place, and where the complex skills necessary to practice effectively can be maintained through the treatment of sufficient numbers of patients. As noted by the Deputy, a total of six children from Ireland were in the facility at the time of the inspection, which represents approximately 0.01% of the total number of children in care in Ireland.

The Deputy also asks about costs. I have written to Tusla and asked them to reply directly to the Deputy on this aspect of the question.

Childcare Services Funding

249. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of an application (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25765/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Assisting childcare providers in extending their existing childcare services, or establishing new childcare services, have always been key areas of focus for my Department's capital programmes.

Each year the Department reviews the capital programmes as a whole and determines the priorities for Early Learning and Care and School Age Capital grants.

The capital strands have been made available to achieve the strategic priorities for 2019 as determined by the Department, having regard to the funding available, developed using analysis of the current state of the childcare sector, learnings from previous capital programmes and feedback and input from stakeholders, including childcare providers and Pobal.

I remain committed to assisting all childcare providers, both community and private, in providing world-class childcare and meeting demand for childcare places, and I anticipate that this year's Capital programme will build on last year's good work in the sector, as well as that of previous years.

This year saw a substantial oversubscription in applications for capital funding under Strand C, funding of school aged care providers. Unfortunately, due to budgetary constraints, it was not possible to fund every application despite their quality and the thought that went into many of them. As a result, many services, including the specific service mentioned by the Deputy, did not receive an offer of funding this year. All unsuccessful applicants have the opportunity to have their application reviewed by Pobal.

I would like to assure you that all applications for funding were appraised in a fair, thorough and impartial manner. In accordance with principles of fairness and equality, no favour was shown to any individual service or services, and all appraisal was undertaken on the basis of the content of their applications for funding alone.

Foster Care Data

250. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number

of persons acting as foster carers; the number of foster carers that have not been Garda vetted; the number still waiting for Garda vetting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25766/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The question relates to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct reply be provided to the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency Staff

251. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average waiting time for the allocation of social workers to deal with cases of retrospective abuse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25767/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The question relates to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct reply be provided to the Deputy.

Child Abuse

252. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number and names of publicly funded organisations or institutions that Tusla is investigating following the receipt of disclosures of abuse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25768/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla's remit is to assess and investigate reported incidents of child abuse. Where criminal matters are identified these are reported to the Gardaí for appropriate action.

The safety and welfare of children is everyone's responsibility and under the provisions of the Children First Act 2015, all suspected incidents of abuse must be reported. In all circumstances, where a concern regarding a volunteer or member of staff of an organisation is reported, the Tusla social work team should consider whether organisational or institutional abuse is a factor in the case.

I have asked Tusla to respond to the Deputy directly concerning publically funded organisations or institutions identified through referrals that have led to consideration or investigation of organisational abuse. I would note that, to ensure the confidentiality of any children involved, it may not be appropriate to provide the names of any such organisations.

Child and Family Agency Data

253. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of referrals made by Tusla to An Garda Síochána in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, regarding cases of retrospective abuse by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25769/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The question relates to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct reply be provided to the Deputy.

CLÁR Programme

254. **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; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25632/19]

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 school referred to by the Deputy.

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

Protected Disclosures Data

255. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25665/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19th July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland.

The Department aims to promote and implement the policy intentions of the Protected Disclosures Act by committing to protect workers who report concerns about risk and wrongdoing and to assure them that their concerns will be acted upon. Our bi-annual Staff Conferences and Staff Engagement Forums aim to share best practice in promoting an ethical and transparent workplace that encourages employees to raise genuine and reasonably held concerns about matters of public interest where knowledge of same comes to them through their employment.

I can confirm that there have been no whistleblower complaints made since the formation of the Department, to date.

Departmental Offices

256. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for his Department including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25920/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department was established in July 2017 and currently occupies office space at two locations - Trinity Point, Dublin 2, and Government Buildings, Ballina, Co. Mayo. The offices occupied in Ballina are in the ownership of the Office of Public Works (OPW), while the lease arrangements in relation to Trinity Point are managed on our behalf by the OPW. In both cases, no costs are directly incurred by my Department.

The following table sets out full details of accommodation costs paid in relation to my Department and the agencies under its remit.

19 June 2019

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 to date |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Department of Rural and Community Development | N/A | N/A | €0 | €0 | €0 |
| Irish Water Safety | €13,000 | €13,000 | €13,000 | €13,000 | €13,000 |
| Western Development Commission | €0 | €0 | €0 | €0 | €2,150 |
| Charities Regulator | €88,563 | €116,476 | €296,484 | €395,141 | €195,160 |
| Pobal | €1,287,955 | €1,613,847 | €1,799,529 | €2,075,048 | €653,605 |

Protected Disclosures Data

257. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of whistleblower complaints in her Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25658/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following from the enactment of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, the Department has put a policy and procedures in place to provide information to and assist workers who wish to make protected disclosures. The Policy and procedures are made available on www.welfare.ie.

All submissions made are assessed by a designated group of senior managers and investigations are then carried out where deemed necessary.

The Department has received thirty five submissions, a large proportion of which were from one individual, since the legislation was introduced in 2014. Twenty-nine cases have been fully dealt with by Jun 2019, of which no action was necessary in 25 cases.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is committed to fostering an appropriate environment for addressing concerns relating to potential wrongdoing in the workplace and to providing the necessary support for staff that raise genuine concerns.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

258. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive a decision on an invalidity appeal applied for one year ago; and the reason for the delay from the time of the original application to the appeals decision. [25670/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 29 January 2019, following the outcome of a review dated 4 January 2019 by a Deciding Officer of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 12 April 2019. The appeal was referred on 3 May 2019 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals

against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if additional time will be allocated to submit relevant documentation in respect of a rent supplement payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25678/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has been allocated a further 21 days to submit relevant documentation in respect of their Rent Supplement payment. A letter communicating this was posted to the person concerned on the 17th June 2019.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Parental Leave

260. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the target date for issuing information to private sector employers in respect of the changes under the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2019. [25697/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Deputy is advised that policy for Parental Leave is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality. My Department has responsibility for the associated benefit payment. As such the responsibility for engaging with employers for matters relating to parental leave is a matter for the Department of Justice and Equality.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

261. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on their social welfare appeal. [25726/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 27 March 2019. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 14 June 2019 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

262. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal on an application by a person (details supplied); when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25732/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 4 April 2019. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Homemakers Scheme

263. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if homemaker credits will be taken into account when calculating entitlement to a benefit for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25753/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the Homemaking Scheme is to make it easier for a homemaker who takes time out of the work force to qualify for a State Pension (Contributory). A full contribution year spent as a homemaker may be disregarded in the calculation of the yearly average for State Pension (Contributory). The Homemakers Scheme is only reckonable for State Pension (Contributory) purposes and does not entitle a person to any other benefits.

A claim for maternity benefit was received from the person concerned and was disallowed as the claimant does not satisfy the insurance conditions.

Maternity Benefit is paid to a person who takes maternity leave from work and has the required number of paid PRSI contributions/credits on their social insurance record. The three most recent complete calendar years are considered along with the current year. According to the record held in the Department, the person concerned does not have sufficient PRSI contributions/credits in these years to qualify for the benefit.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment

264. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a working family payment investigation for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal that is ongoing since December 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25754/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Working Family Payment (WFP) is an income-tested in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children. In order to qualify for WFP an applicant must provide such documents, certificates, information or evidence as required for the purpose of deciding their entitlement.

All household income is assessable for WFP and must be disclosed by an applicant. Income that is assessable for WFP include an applicant's and their spouse/partner's earnings from employment plus any other income such as income from self employment, income from rented property, farm income, etc.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 11 August 2018 and they were awarded WFP with effect from 26 July 2018 to 14 July 2019. However WFP was payable to 12 December 2018 only as they had ceased employment. A new WFP application was received from the person concerned on 18 February 2019 and was referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for further clarification

Their WFP application was disallowed on 13 May 2019 as they failed to provide such documents, certificates, information or evidence that were requested by a SWI while determining their entitlement to WFP.

The person concerned was notified of this decision and of their right of review and appeal on 13 May 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

265. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of files that the social welfare appeals office has sought from the invalidity section of her Department; the average delay in providing the files; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25792/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. The desire to process appeals quickly has to be balanced with the competing demand to ensure that decisions are consistent and of high quality and made in accordance with the legislative provisions and the general principles of fair procedures and natural justice.

A total of 1,548 Invalidity Pension (IP) appeals were registered and requests for appeal files were received by Invalidity Pension Section in the 12 months from June 2018 to end of May 2019.

As part of the appeal process all evidence submitted is reviewed by a different Deciding Officer to see if a revised decision is warranted. This can take some time in the case of IP applications, where additional medical evidence has been submitted in support of the appeal. In 2018, 322 cases were reviewed by a Deciding Officer in the appellant's favour, which meant that a full appeal was not required. Where the original decision is confirmed, a submission is prepared to explain the Deciding Officer's decisions and this submission is forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. This timeframe for this process can range from one week where no additional medical information is submitted with the appeal to up to a number of months for more complex cases where detailed additional medical information is received.

At all times every effort is made to complete reviews and ensure, where necessary, that appeals proceed as quickly as possible.

Anyone experiencing financial difficulties while awaiting a decision on a review or an appeal of any social welfare payment should contact their local Intreo Centre and enquire as to their entitlement to a payment under the Department's Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme.

The processing time of appeal outcomes is kept under continuous review and additional staff have been assigned to this work.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Grants

266. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the expanded grant scheme for septic tanks as announced under measure 8 - domestic wastewater treatment systems grant scheme, septic tanks, in February 2019 will come into effect; when local authorities will be provided with the details for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25624/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 8 February this year, I announced details of the measures being funded through my Department under the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. This included improved funding for on-site wastewater treatment systems (more commonly known as septic tanks).

The composition of the new multi-annual programme is based on recommendations from the Working Group that I established in April 2018 to conduct a review of investment needs and rural water services.

The new funding scheme for septic tanks will replace the grant which was brought into operation by the Domestic Waste Water Treatment System (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013. Under certain conditions, households can receive a grant to assist them in carrying out remediation, repair or upgrading works to, or replacement of, their individual domestic wastewater treatment system.

In developing the necessary regulatory and administrative changes to underpin the revised grants scheme, my Department has over recent months consulted and met with key stakeholders, including the County and City Management Association, the Local Authority Waters and Communities Office and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Work is at an advanced stage of development for the funding scheme. I expect that the process will be completed in the coming weeks when the necessary regulations dealing with the financial assistance arrangements and related administrative matters are put in place. This will enable a circular letter, terms and conditions, guidance and application form to issue to local authorities shortly thereafter.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

267. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there are regular assessments in his Department on the way in which decisions on issues could be delivered faster than currently; if actions are being taken to allow processes, procure-

ments and other decision-making matters more responsive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25635/19]

268. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authorities have made requests or suggestions to him regarding the way in which decision-making in his Department could be improved to allow a swifter response to providing social and affordable homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25636/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

My Department keeps the funding approval processes for housing projects under continuous review. While all publicly funded construction projects must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF), the objectives of which are to ensure cost certainty, value for money and financial accountability, my Department has streamlined the nine stages of review in the Framework, to just four for social housing construction projects.

My Department engages continuously with local authorities, including through the City and County Management Association (CCMA), on the various work processes associated with the delivery of housing projects, in line with Rebuilding Ireland commitments. A review carried out jointly between my Department and the CCMA identified more precise target timelines for developing new social housing construction projects, including an overall target of 59 weeks from an initial proposal being brought forward, to placing the construction contract and starting on site. This timeline compares favourably with private sector construction projects.

The bulk of this time is assigned to the completion of essential local authority work in project design, developing costings and specifications, undertaking planning through the Part 8 process and the procurement of contractors; the time allotted to my Department for funding approvals is a small portion of the overall time involved. In addition, projects are advanced in such a way as to allow other work to continue during the approval stages.

My Department's engagement with the CCMA and with individual local authorities has also seen improvements around single-stage project approvals for smaller scale projects and in relation to rapid build projects. Communications on construction proposals have also been enhanced through quarterly technical meetings, which are held between individual local authorities and my Department. Constructive input has been received from local authorities in identifying and implementing these process improvements and in working with my Department through the quarterly meetings, and in other fora, to review progress in respect of social housing projects and to clear any blockages as swiftly as possible.

These arrangements demonstrate the Government's commitment to the accelerated delivery of new housing. My Department has no interest in unnecessarily prolonging the time involved in these approvals, other than to ensure compliance with Government-wide rules for capital project oversight. We will continue to work with local authorities to ensure that projects are progressed efficiently, while also delivering high quality design and good value for money, in sustainable communities.

Protected Disclosures Data

269. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of whistleblower complaints in his Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25662/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires each public body to publish an annual report setting out the number of protected disclosures received in the preceding year and the action taken. The annual reports for my Department are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current?query=protected%20disclosure>.

Since the introduction of the Act, no protected disclosures have been received from workers of my Department.

To date, ten protected disclosures have been received from workers of other bodies in relation to which the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has legislative functions, as provided for under Section 8 of the Act.

Home Loan Scheme

270. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the financial position of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25672/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland home loan (RIHL) scheme was launched on 1 February of last year. When the scheme was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans would be approximately €200 million over three years. The RIHL has proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, with some €140 million drawn down to the end of May. The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted.

My officials have been engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform since October 2018 when higher lending and drawdown volumes were beginning to materialise.

I informed the Dáil on 29 January 2019 of the scheme's success and of the need for additional funding and indicated that my Department was in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance with regard to the allocation for 2019.

At all times, the scheme remained open and all local authorities were advised to continue to receive and process applications up to and including the issuing of loans.

My Department has consulted in detail with each Local Authority as to the anticipated demand in its area, and the likely level of approvals expected. This information has been submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with request for sanction for additional borrowing by the Housing Finance Agency. The HFA have an ongoing borrowing facility for when sanction is given so that they are in a position to proceed to borrow this second tranche of funding immediately.

The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan remains open to new applicants, and local authorities are to continue to receive, process and issue loans.

Home Loan Scheme

271. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment if funding is in place for county councils to finalise the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme after processing applications; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that county councils are still accepting new applications for the scheme in view of reports that funding has run out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25711/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland home loan (RIHL) scheme was launched on 1 February of last year. When the scheme was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans would be approximately €200 million over three years. The RIHL has proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, with some €140 million drawn down to the end of May. The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted.

My officials have been engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform since October 2018 when higher lending and drawdown volumes were beginning to materialise.

I informed the Dáil on 29 January 2019 of the scheme's success and of the need for additional funding and indicated that my Department was in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance with regard to the allocation for 2019.

At all times, the scheme remained open and all local authorities were advised to continue to receive and process applications up to and including the issuing of loans.

My Department has consulted in detail with each Local Authority as to the anticipated demand in its area, and the likely level of approvals expected. This information has been submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with request for sanction for additional borrowing by the Housing Finance Agency. The HFA have an ongoing borrowing facility for when sanction is given so that they are in a position to proceed to borrow this second tranche of funding immediately.

The first tranche of funding has not been exhausted, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan remains open to new applicants, and local authorities are to continue to receive, process and issue loans.

Constitutional Amendments

272. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the amendment of the Constitution (extending the franchise at presidential elections) Bill to extend the franchise at presidential elections is expected to be introduced; and the role his officials have in same. [25601/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): 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.

In order to inform public discourse on this significant policy change, an Options Paper was jointly 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 ex-

tending 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.

The Government agreed on 5 February 2019 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. More recently, at the meeting of the Government on 11 June 2019, the general scheme of a Constitution Amendment Bill was approved for drafting and for circulation to the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence, for pre-legislative consideration.

My Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are now working in close consultation with the Office of the Attorney General on the preparation of the necessary Constitution Amendment Bill. It is intended that the Bill will be published in good time to allow for the holding of a referendum in October/November 2019, subject to pre-legislative scrutiny and the passage of the Bill by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Housing Assistance Payment Expenditure

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the full extent of expenditure in each of the past five years to date in respect of HAP support or rent support in lieu of local authority housing; the extent to which such annual expenditure can be replaced as capital investment in respect of local authority or affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25845/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the replies to Questions Nos 48 and 1003 on 11 June 2019.

As the Deputy will be aware, Rent Supplement comes within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. As HAP is progressively replacing Rent Supplement for households with a long term housing need, the funding directed to Rent Supplement has decreased in recent years, as funding for HAP has increased. The table below has been supplied by the Department of Social Protection in relation to expenditure on Rent Supplement over the past five years.

| Year | Expenditure €000 |
|------|------------------|
| 2014 | 338,208 |
| 2015 | 311,059 |
| 2016 | 275,294 |
| 2017 | 230,566 |
| 2018 | 175,024 |

It is important to note that the ongoing supports for tenants in the private rented sector is not “in lieu” of local authority housing. At the outset of Rebuilding Ireland, a clear ambition was set out to provide social housing supports to over 137,000 households. This is being delivered through a number of vehicles, including continuing to support households in rented accommodation under HAP and RAS and also more than 50,000 homes under build, acquisition and leasing programmes.

Protected Disclosures Data

274. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of whistleblower complaints in her Department since the legislation was introduced in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25655/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Under Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act, public bodies are required to prepare a report not later than the 30th June each year setting out the number of protected disclosures made to it in the course of the immediately preceding year and certain other information relating to any such protected disclosures. Reports for the years 2015 - 2018 have been published on my Department's website and are available at

<https://www.chg.gov.ie/about/policy-on-disclosure-of-wrongdoing-in-the-workplace/>.

I am advised that two potential Protected Disclosures have been received by my Department since the introduction of the relevant legislation in 2014. Details of the first of these, the investigation of which concluded that there was no evidence of any wrongdoing having occurred, are included in the 2017 Report. Following assessment, the second matter, which was received earlier this year and again related to a body under the aegis of the Department, was deemed not to be a Protected Disclosure within the provisions of the Act.

European Capital of Culture

275. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding and supports which have been provided to Galway 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25764/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Galway 2020's ambition as European Capital of Culture is to deliver an artistic and cultural programme that will exceed expectations and leave a lasting legacy for Galway city and county.

The Government has committed €15 million towards the funding of Galway 2020, the bulk of which will be paid over 2019-2020. The terms and conditions for the provision of the funding are set out in a performance delivery agreement between my Department and Galway 2020. The agreement addresses the roles and responsibilities of the Department and Galway 2020 in the provision and expenditure of the grant, as well as the key deliverables and performance indicators attached to the drawdown of the grant, and the monitoring and reporting arrangements in place.

Galway City Council has committed €6 million (€2.2 m of which was expended at bid stage) and Galway County Council has committed €4 million to Galway 2020, the terms and conditions of which are also set out in individual service level agreements.

The public funders hold regular meetings with Galway 2020 to discuss all key aspects of the project and provide support, as required.

Having regard to additional funding and support, Galway 2020 commenced the roll-out of its sponsorship programme at the beginning of this year under the direction of the project's creative leadership, Artichoke. Since then, there has been sustained engagement with local, national and international businesses and it is my understanding that a number of potential partnerships are at an advanced stage of negotiation, with Galway 2020 expected to make announcements in the near future. The sponsorship programme will continue throughout 2019 and 2020.

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I am satisfied that Galway 2020 is progressing well and is developing an exciting and imaginative Capital of Culture programme. I look forward to a successful and impactful year that will serve to further highlight the vibrant and diverse cultural offering both in Galway and in Ireland as a whole.

HSE Properties

276. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a building (details supplied) can be retained in public ownership due to its historical significance; if she will discuss this matter with the HSE; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25777/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In the interests of the preservation, conservation, management and presentation of the built and archaeological heritage, my Department occasionally seeks to acquire certain heritage properties and monuments as resources and opportunities permit. From time to time such properties may come onto the open market, may be bequeathed to the State or may be offered to it free of cost. In addition, lands surrounding or in proximity to heritage properties or national monuments in State care (i.e. incorporating the setting of the structure) often reside in private ownership. In certain cases, improved protection of the property or monument, or access to same, would be possible if the State was to acquire such additional lands. In all cases the Department would need to examine the potential acquisition carefully, taking into account the conservation needs of the property and Value for Money principles.

My Department, in cooperation with the Office of Public Works, is, however, only in a position to acquire, maintain, conserve and present to the public a very limited number of properties and monuments such as that mentioned by the Deputy. While I am supportive of efforts to identify suitable future uses to safeguard historic buildings, crucial to their future is the identification of a viable use or uses with sufficient income to ensure their survival.

The national monuments in State care already number some one thousand sites at over 760 locations right across the country and these command considerable resource commitments in terms of both funding and personnel allocation. In addition, there are more than 45,000 protected structures spread across all 31 local authority areas in the country and in excess of 120,000 monuments listed in the Record of Monuments and Places that are not maintained by the State.

My Department does not comment on ongoing property sales processes, as it would be inappropriate to intervene publicly in individual cases.

Departmental Offices

277. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the cost of renting, leasing and hiring office space for her Department, including public bodies in each of the years 2015 to 2018, inclusive, and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [25915/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In general, matters relating to the acquisition and leasing of property for my Department are the responsibility of the Office of Public Works. However, I am advised that my Department has also leased a small number of properties over the period in question, the details of which are shown in the relevant tables below.

Questions - Written Answers

The equivalent information in relation to those bodies under the aegis of my Department is also shown in the following tables.

Properties Leased by the Department

2015

| Details of Property | Cost |
|--|---------|
| Kerry LIFE Project Office, Shanacashel Community Centre | € 4,995 |
| Burren Life Project ,Office, Carron Parish Community Hall, Co. Clare | € 9,812 |

2016

| Details of Property | Cost |
|--|---------|
| Kerry LIFE Project Office, Shanacashel Community Centre | € 4,995 |
| Burren Life Project, Office, Carron Parish Community Hall, Co. Clare | €14,161 |
| LIFE Project Office, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath | €10,325 |

2017

| Details of Property | Cost |
|--|---------|
| Kerry LIFE Project Office, Shanacashel Community Centre | € 4,995 |
| Burren Life Project, Office, Carron Parish Community Hall, Co. Clare | € 8,717 |
| LIFE Project Office, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath | €12,167 |
| An Coimisinéir Teanga, An Spidéal, Gaillimh | €48,228 |

2018

| Details of Property | Cost |
|--|---------|
| Kerry LIFE Project Office, Shanacashel Community Centre | € 4,995 |
| Burren Life Project ,Office, Carron Parish Community Hall, Co. Clare | € 8,717 |
| LIFE Project Office, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath | €12,167 |
| An Coimisinéir Teanga, An Spidéal, Gaillimh, | €48,019 |

2019 (to date)

| Details of Property | Cost |
|--|---------|
| Kerry LIFE Project Office, Shanacashel Community Centre | € 1,499 |
| Burren Life Project ,Office, Carron Parish Community Hall, Co. Clare | € 0 |
| LIFE Project Office, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath | €6,083 |
| An Coimisinéir Teanga, An Spidéal, Gaillimh, | €24,009 |

Properties leased by Bodies under the aegis of the Department

2015

| Organisation | Details of Property | Cost |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Arts Council | No 69 & 70 Merrion Square | €317,434 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Teach an Gheata Thiar - Béal Feirste | €46,287 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Ráth Chairn - Co. na Mí | €13,576 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Gaoth Dobhair - Dún na nGall | €22,616 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Sráid Fhreidric - Baile Átha Cliath | €83,982 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Corn Exchange Belfast | €12,398 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Raphoe, Co Donegal | €1,950 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 3 and 4 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 | €142,680 |
| Screen Ireland | Queensgate, 23 Dock Road, Galway | €93,910 |

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| Organisation | Details of Property | Cost |
|----------------|--|----------|
| Screen Ireland | Callaghan House, 13-16 Dame St, Dublin 2 (Screen Training Ireland) | €21,000 |
| Waterways | WI Regional Office, Ashtowngate, Dublin | €170,820 |
| Waterways | WI Regional Office, Carrick-on-Shannon | €43,000 |

2016

| Organisation | Details of Property | Cost |
|----------------------|--|----------|
| Arts Council | No 69 & 70 Merrion Square | €291,358 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Teach an Gheata Thiar - Béal Feirste | €41,001 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Ráth Chairn - Co. na Mí | €13,576 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Gaoth Dobhair - Dún na nGall | €22,620 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Sráid Fhreidric - Baile Átha Cliath | €63,208 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Corn Exchange Belfast | €10,983 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Raphoe, Co Donegal | €2,438 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Storage Lease - Duncrue Street, Belfast | €1,199 |
| Heritage Council | Offices for National Biodiversity Data Centre at Beechfield House, Waterford Institute of Technology West Campus, Carriganore, Co. Waterford (From 22.09.16 to 31.12.16) | €5,479 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 3 and 4 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 | €142,680 |
| Screen Ireland | Queensgate, 23 Dock Road, Galway | €55,787 |
| Screen Ireland | Screen Skills Ireland Callaghan House, 13-16 Dame St, Dublin 2 (Screen Training Ireland) | €21,000 |
| Údarás na Gaeltachta | Coiste Áiseanna na hÓige Teo, Daingean Uí Chúis, Contae Chiarraí | €9,483 |
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Ashtowngate, Dublin | €171,510 |
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Carrick-on-Shannon | €43,000 |

2017

| Organisation | Details of Property | Cost |
|----------------------|--|----------|
| Arts Council | No 69 & 70 Merrion Square | €303,271 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Teach an Gheata Thiar - Béal Feirste | €41,519 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Ráth Chairn - Co. na Mí | €13,576 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Gaoth Dobhair - Dún na nGall | €22,612 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Sráid Fhreidric - Baile Átha Cliath | €28,101 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | 63-66 Sráid Amiens - Baile Átha Cliath | €148,362 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Dún Seachlainn - Co. na Mí | €8,750 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Corn Exchange Belfast | €10,266 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Raphoe, Co Donegal | €3,900 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Storage Lease - Duncrue Street, Belfast | €2,217 |
| Heritage Council | Offices for National Biodiversity Data Centre at Beechfield House, Waterford Institute of Technology West Campus, Carriganore, Co. Waterford | €20,000 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 1,3,4,9, 14-16 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 (Note: Additional lease on Unit 1 included, also Unit 9 from 1st Sept 2017) | €157,732 |
| Screen Ireland | Queensgate, 23 Dock Road, Galway | €43,079 |
| Screen Ireland | Callaghan House, 13-16 Dame St (surrendered) (Screen Skills Ireland) | €8,750 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 10, 14-16 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 (From 1st April 2017) (Screen Skills Ireland) | €26,960 |
| Údarás na Gaeltachta | Coiste Áiseanna na hÓige Teo, Daingean Uí Chúis, Contae Chiarraí | €9,483 |
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Ashtowngate, Dublin | €177,794 |

Questions - Written Answers

| Organisation | Details of Property | Cost |
|-------------------|--|---------|
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Carrick-on-Shannon | €43,000 |

2018

| Organisation | Details of Property | Cost € |
|----------------------|--|----------|
| Arts Council | No 69 & 70 Merrion Square | €302,549 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | 63-66 Sráid Amiens - Baile Átha Cliath | €593,447 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Teach an Gheata Thiar - Béal Feirste | €42,952 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Ráth Chairn - Co. na Mí | €13,576 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Gaoth Dobhair - Dún na nGall | €22,612 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Dún Seachlainn - Co. na Mí | €35,000 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Corn Exchange Belfast | €10,173 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Raphoe, Co Donegal | €3,900 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Storage Lease - Duncrue Street, Belfast | €2,139 |
| Heritage Council | Offices for National Biodiversity Data Centre at Beechfield House, Waterford Institute of Technology West Campus, Carriganore, Co. Waterford | €20,000 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 1,3,4,9, 14-16 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 | €229,190 |
| Screen Ireland | Queensgate, 23 Dock Road, Galway | €46,996 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 10, 14 - 16 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 (Screen Skills Ireland) | €86,254 |
| Údarás na Gaeltachta | Coiste Áiseanna na hÓige Teo, Daingean Uí Chúis, Contae Chiarraí | €6,322 |
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Ashtowngate, Dublin | €153,514 |
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Carrick-on-Shannon | €43,000 |

2019 (to date)

| Organisation | Details of Property | Cost |
|---------------------|--|----------|
| Arts Council | No 69 & 70 Merrion Square | €151,636 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | 63-66 Sráid Amiens - Baile Átha Cliath | €296,723 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Teach an Gheata Thiar - Béal Feirste | €24,889 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Ráth Chairn - Co. na Mí | €6,788 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Gaoth Dobhair - Dún na nGall | €9,422 |
| Foras na Gaeilge | Dún Seachlainn - Co. na Mí | €17,500 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Corn Exchange Belfast | €5,000 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Raphoe, Co Donegal | €1,950 |
| Ulster Scots Agency | Storage Lease - Duncrue Street, Belfast | €1,051 |
| Heritage Council | Offices for National Biodiversity Data Centre at Beechfield House, Waterford Institute of Technology West Campus, Carriganore, Co. Waterford (to 30.06.2019) | €9,917 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 1,3,4,9, 14-16 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 | €87,456 |
| Screen Ireland | Queensgate, 23 Dock Road, Galway | €16,318 |
| Screen Ireland | Unit 10, 14 - 16 Lord Edward St, Dublin 2 (Screen Skills Ireland) | €21,563 |
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Ashtowngate, Dublin | €79,518 |
| Waterways Ireland | WI Regional Office, Carrick-on-Shannon | €21,500 |