

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 7, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 8 to 31, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 32 to 39, inclusive, answered orally.

Housing Assistance Payment Eligibility

40. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review the HAP limits in view of the difficulties those in need of housing are experiencing trying to find homes within the current limits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37387/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Increased rent limits for Rent Supplement and the Housing Assistance Payment were introduced in 2016. Taking account of the additional discretion available to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limit by up to 20%, and up to 50% in the Dublin region for those households either in, or at immediate risk of homelessness, the HAP scheme is operating effectively.

HAP is an immediately available support for those who qualify for social housing. To date in 2019, an average of 333 additional tenancies have been supported through the scheme each week, with over 50,000 households currently having their housing needs met under the scheme.

Increasing the current HAP rent limits could have inflationary effects, leading to a detrimental impact on the wider rental market, including for those households who are not receiving HAP support.

My Department closely monitors the level of discretion being used by local authorities, taking into account other sources of data, including Residential Tenancies Board rent data published on a quarterly basis. I am satisfied that the current maximum rent limits, together with the additional flexibility available to local authorities, are generally sufficient to support the effective operation of the HAP scheme. However, I will continue to keep the matter under review.

Questions Nos. 41 and 42 answered orally.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

43. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on Dublin social housing waiting lists who have been re-located outside of Dublin in each of the years 2009 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number located to each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36518/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There is no formal relocation programme for social housing applicants from Dublin but my Department is working on plans to provide increased mobility to social housing applicants generally. There is already some mobility provided for in the larger urban areas and for HAP recipients.

Consideration is being given to the possibility of extending that mobility by expanding the numbers of areas that social housing applicants can apply for. The basic premise is that households in receipt of, or qualified for, social housing support in one local authority area could potentially transfer to, or be allocated, social housing in another local authority area.

The four Dublin local authorities already co-operate in arrangements that enable social housing applicants to apply for housing in one or two of the other Dublin authorities simultaneously. Similar arrangements apply in the two Cork and two Galway local authorities.

In addition, persons on social housing waiting lists who elect to take the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) can source accommodation through HAP in any local authority area if their income is below the social housing income limit for the area concerned. As of June 2019, 4,455 HAP recipients had sourced their accommodation in a different local authority area to the authority of application and 483 of those were on the Dublin waiting lists but sourced accommodation outside of Dublin.

My Department is committed to the principle of increasing mobility for social housing applicants and I intend to bring proposals in this regard forward in due course.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

44. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will review and introduce appropriate regulations regarding the sale of affordable homes in view of the fact it has been reported that some affordable homes in a location (details supplied) will be selling for €420,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37677/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The selling price of discounted dwellings made available for purchase by a local authority under the affordable dwelling purchase arrangements is influenced by a number of factors, particularly the overall cost of each particular development, which can vary significantly from one site to another, the tenure mix involved in the local housing market. The appropriate way to take these factors into account is ultimately through a competitive procurement process rather than through price regulation.

A transparent and exhaustive process has been undertaken over many years by Dublin City Council to allow it to identify the most effective delivery model for O'Devaney Gardens, to ensure that this key site is developed in a tenure sustainable and financially viable way. This has included a detailed procurement process which has now reached the point where a preferred bidder has been selected and through which the City Council will be able to ensure that a high quality redevelopment of the site, with significant local community facilities, will be delivered.

In addition to the 56 social housing homes already under construction on the site, almost

770 further homes are to be provided, including nearly 200 further social housing homes as well as 165 homes at more affordable process, catering for those families who may not be eligible for social housing but may still need support in meeting their housing needs. The indications are that the homes to be made available under the affordable dwelling purchase arrangements will have a discount on the open market prices of 30-40%. The referenced figure of €420,000 is understood to relate to just 4 of the 165 discounted homes planned to be made available and I understand that Dublin City Council is re-examining how the price of those homes might be reduced below €400,000. The indicative prices for all the other affordable homes are considerably less than the referenced figure and, in most cases, significantly so; in fact, the majority of the homes have indicative prices below €310,000. A couple who are each on average earnings - approx. €40,000 - would be in a position to afford most of the indicative prices quoted for the O'Devaney Gardens development.

The significant discounts which will be provided on the affordable purchase homes will mean that homes will be available to very many individuals and families on more moderate incomes who would otherwise not be in a position to own their home in the area concerned.

Planning Issues

45. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to and his views on the concerns of residents and established communities in SDZ areas in which large scale developments are ongoing and constant; if he is satisfied that under SDZs residents are given ample opportunity to express their views on proposed developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37491/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Strategic Development Zones, or 'SDZs', are designated due to their economic or social importance to the State. Each SDZ is governed by a Planning Scheme, that must be prepared as part of a process that enables local residents and communities, as well as their local elected representatives at Council level, to input and shape how the SDZ is developed.

In this way, SDZs are designed to ensure both the delivery of specified development and infrastructure, and consistency and certainty in the future development of an area, for all stakeholders, whether developers or local residents.

The SDZ Planning Scheme adoption and amendment processes include a period of public consultation, before the local elected members of the relevant planning authority decide on the draft Scheme. The outcome of the draft Planning Scheme process may be appealed to An Bord Pleanála, by any interested party who made a submission on the draft scheme.

If an appeal is lodged to An Bord Pleanála, the Board may decide to hold an oral hearing, at which local residents and community representatives, as well as local councillors, have an opportunity to contribute further to the process.

An adopted SDZ planning scheme provides certainty and consistency for all stakeholders, including residents and established communities, in relation to development within the designated area. This is because planning applications for development within an SDZ may be approved only on the basis of compliance with the approved Planning Scheme.

In recent years, since the introduction of the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process for large scale residential development directly to An Bord Pleanála, there is the potential for some planning applications within an SDZ area to be made under the SHD process. This is a matter that is currently under review as part of an overall review of the SHD process in respect

of which I will be reporting to the Oireachtas in the coming weeks.

In light of experience to date, I am satisfied that residents are given ample opportunity to express their views on proposed developments through the SDZ Planning Scheme process.

Private Rented Accommodation Evictions

46. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will intervene in the latest eviction attempt of eight tenants at a location (details supplied) by the property owner in view of the fact this is the third attempt by the owners to mass evict these tenants over the past two years utilising different loopholes in the residential tenancies legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37391/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019, with one of its key functions being to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. Due to the quasi-judicial and independent role of the RTB, it would be inappropriate for me, as Minister, to intervene in specific disputes.

A number of measures have been introduced in recent years with the objective of improving security of tenure for tenants under the Residential Tenancies Acts. Section 34 of the 2004 Act provides that a landlord must state a reason for the termination in any notice served, in accordance with the allowable grounds for terminations. Through an amendment introduced in 2016, where a landlord proposes to sell 10 or more units within a single development at the same time, that sale is subject to the existing tenants remaining in situ, other than in exceptional circumstances. In addition, the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 provides that where a landlord terminates a tenancy because he/she intends to sell the property, he/she must enter into a contract for sale within 9 months of the termination date and, if not, must offer to re-let to a former tenant who provides their contact details.

The 2019 Act also provides that where a landlord terminates a tenancy because he/she needs vacant possession to substantially refurbish/renovate the property, that property must be offered back to the former tenant who provides their contact details, upon completion of the works. Also, such a termination notice must contain or be accompanied by a written certificate of a registered professional under the Building Control Act 2007, such as an architect or surveyor, stating that the proposed substantial refurbishment/renovation works would pose a health and safety risk necessitating vacating by the tenants and that such a risk would be likely to exist for at least 3 weeks.

The 2019 Act provides additional powers for the RTB to investigate and sanction landlords who engage in improper conduct, including non-compliance with the tenancy termination provisions. My Department will continue to keep the effectiveness and enforcement of the security of tenure provisions in the Acts under review.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

47. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a decision will be made on capital funding for the proposed North Quay development in Waterford city; if his attention has been drawn to the importance of commitment to the project and the necessity for commitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25231/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In 2016, the North Quays in Waterford was the subject of a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) order made by the Government, designating the area for mixed-use development, subject to preparation of an SDZ planning scheme, which has since been completed.

Waterford City and County Council submitted a bid for exchequer grant funding as part of the first call under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) in September 2018. On 26 November 2018, I announced initial support of €100m in provisional allocations to a total of 88 projects, including €6m of initial support for the Waterford North Quays Project. The letter confirming this initial support also outlined my agreement in principle to further URDF support for this project.

Under the first URDF call for proposals, the Council's bid included four very significant elements:

- Relocation of the City's railway station;
- A new pedestrian/cyclist/public transport bridge and associated urban greenway;
- Site access roads and road realignment;
- Off-site roads in the wider north bank of the Suir area in Waterford/Kilkenny.

It is intended that the infrastructural works involved will open up the site, making it more accessible and supporting the achievement of the objectives of the SDZ planning scheme more generally.

While I have agreed in principle to provide further URDF support for the overall project, its complexity means that its proposed composition, costs and sequencing must be refined and further examined so that the precise level of URDF support can be established, and apportioned to the various individual project components.

While the advancement of this project is, in the first instance, a matter for Waterford City & County Council, my Department is engaging actively on an ongoing basis with the Council with a view to early resolution of these matters.

Local Authority Housing

48. Deputy Joan Collins asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the choice base letting scheme works (details supplied); the way in which homes are allocated; and the grounds on which homes are allocated. [37709/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Choice Based Letting is a method whereby available social housing stock is let by being openly advertised by local authorities to persons on the social housing waiting list. This allows qualified applicants to 'register an interest' in available homes.

Applicants can act on their own initiative to respond to adverts and express an interest in dwellings that they would like to live in, rather than waiting for an authority to offer them a dwelling. This approach offers more choice and involvement for applicant households in selecting a new home, thereby reducing the likelihood of a refusal, and helping to build sustainable tenancies and stable communities.

The Social Housing Allocation (Amendment) Regulations 2016 required all local authori-

ties, if they had not already done so, to provide for Choice Based Letting as a method of allocation for social housing in their allocation schemes. The way in which Choice Based Letting is implemented, including decisions on which properties are to be offered through it, is a matter for the individual authority concerned. However, it must be done in accordance with the relevant regulations and their own scheme of priority.

Given the clear benefits offered by Choice Based Letting, my Department will continue to liaise with the local authorities to ensure that it is implemented as widely as possible across the country. This will be progressed as part of the implementation of a wider package of social housing reforms in respect of which proposals will be brought to Government shortly.

Departmental Bodies

49. Deputy Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 558 of 16 April 2019, the number of times the Galway social housing task force has met; if the minutes of the meetings will be provided; the work programme for the task force; the reports completed to date by the task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37722/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Galway Social Housing Taskforce, which I established earlier this year, has held two meeting to date and its third meeting is scheduled to take place in early October. The Taskforce is working to improve and accelerate housing delivery in both local authority areas. Its establishment mirrors a Taskforce established in Cork a number of years ago, which has provided a hugely successful framework through which new build social housing delivery across the 2 Cork local authority areas has increased more than tenfold in the 2 years to 2018.

Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered nationally through build, acquisitions and leasing in the period to 2021, the Galway Councils have a combined target of just over 2,000. While good progress has been made to date nationally, I want to see this replicated uniformly across the country, particularly in key locations such as Galway.

The Chair of the Taskforce recently wrote to me and updated me on the work of the Taskforce. She confirmed that both local authorities were intensively involved in the Taskforce's work and that it is providing them with an important opportunity for direct, roundtable dialogue with my Department, the Housing Agency and the Approved Housing Body sector, so that each Galway authority can be supported in building the momentum essential for expanded delivery. The Chair also advised that achieving the necessary levels of delivery will take focus, time and continuing prioritisation, but all participants in the Taskforce are committed to the Government's housing targets.

In relation to the minutes of the Taskforce, the secretariat for the Taskforce is provided by Galway City Council and I have asked my Department to liaise with the Council in relation to the publication of those minutes.

Homelessness Strategy

50. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the new homeless policy initiatives he will introduce to prevent the rise in homelessness in and outside Dublin in view of the fact that outside Dublin the number of adults in private emergency accommodation has increased from 40 in June 2014 to 1,200 in July 2019; and if he is consid-

ering allocating additional funding to specifically focus on preventing homelessness in Budget 2020. [37636/19]

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

Rebuilding Ireland is underpinned by over €6 billion in funding to support the delivery of 50,000 new social housing homes and 87,000 other social housing supports by 2021. In 2018, 8,000 new social homes were delivered nationally and this year, a further 10,000 new social homes will be delivered.

Within Rebuilding Ireland, supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness is identified as a key priority for the Government. Increasing the level of overall housing supply, particularly in terms of social and affordable housing, and ensuring stability in the rental sector are essential to addressing fully the challenging situation in relation to homelessness, and very substantial progress continues to be made in those areas. In parallel, additional and improved emergency accommodation is being provided, including through additional supported emergency beds and family hubs, in order to ensure that the needs of those experiencing homelessness can be responded to in as comprehensive a manner as possible. To date, 28 family hubs have been developed in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Limerick, Louth and Meath.

The Implementation Plan for Housing First, published in September 2018, is delivering permanent housing solutions for rough sleepers and long-term users of emergency accommodation. The Plan contains targets for each local authority, with an overall national target of 663 tenancies to be delivered by 2021. All regions now either have a contract in place or are at an advanced stage of the tendering process and tenancies are now in place in Dublin, Cork and Limerick.

Preventing homelessness continues to be a priority, and in this regard, the Government has introduced new legislation to strengthen the protections for tenants, including significantly extended tenancy termination notice periods. In addition, there are now Rent Pressure Zones in 42 areas nationally, in which rent increases are limited to 4 % p.a., and the operation of which has been strengthened further under the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019.

The Government has also increased the funding available to local authorities to deliver homeless services. Budget 2019 provided an allocation of €146m, an increase of over 25% on the 2018 allocation. Funding for 2020 will be determined as part of the estimates process.

In 2018, the comprehensive programme of actions under Rebuilding Ireland supported 5,135 adults in exiting from homelessness, an increase of 8.6% on 2017. For the first 6 months of this year, 2,285 adults exited homelessness, a 21% increase on the comparable period last year. My Department will continue to work closely with the local authorities to ensure that comprehensive housing supports for all families and individuals experiencing homelessness are delivered as speedily as possible.

Local Authority Funding

51. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to ensure that persons who pay their local property tax see an increase in the provision of local services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25569/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Local Property Tax (LPT) is a vital source of funding for local authorities. Authorities use the funding in the provision, for example, of parks, libraries, leisure amenities, fire and emergency services and improvements to the public realm, all of which ben-

efit citizens directly and improve the fabric of our communities and quality of life.

LPT allocations are based on estimated liability data from the Revenue Commissioners, with all of a local authority's annual allocation used to provide services locally. Local authorities have the power to vary the rates of LPT, up or down, by up to 15%. Where an authority varies the rate upward, it retains the additional income and, likewise, where the rate is reduced, the income is foregone.

Every local authority retains 80% of the estimated LPT liability in their area, notwithstanding local variation decisions. All local authorities contribute the remaining 20% to assist national equalisation funding. Some 80% of the total LPT allocation in 2019 is being used at each local authority's own discretion. In addition, some 20% of LPT is directly supporting the provision of vital Housing and Roads infrastructure and services.

I am satisfied that the current overall funding model enables local authorities to support an appropriate level of service provision across the State. However, the position will be kept under review in light of the outcome, in due course, of the LPT review being led by my colleague, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, as well as my own Department's LPT Baselines review.

Housing Policy

52. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when new rural housing guidelines will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37698/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the European Court of Justice ruling in the "Flemish Decree" case, a working group was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The working group comprises senior officials from the Planning Division of my Department and senior officials from the Planning Divisions of local authorities, nominated by the local government sector.

Taking account of the engagement with the European Commission regarding revisions to the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines and subject to the completion of the ongoing deliberations by the working group, I will be in a position to finalise and issue to planning authorities revisions to the 2005 Guidelines that take account of the relevant European Court of Justice judgment.

Local Authority Housing

53. Deputy Joan Collins asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the original policy on the land initiative of public lands will be revised in view of the fact that a site (details supplied) has been approved for cost rental and the disposal of the lands is on the Dublin City Council agenda for the October 2019 council meeting. [37701/19]

54. Deputy Joan Collins asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason that, in the midst of a housing crisis, Dublin City Council management, under direction from land initiative policy, has allowed the privatisation of 70% of public lands at a loca-

tion (details supplied) which leaves less public housing on the site than in the 1950s. [37638/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 and 54 together.

The development of publicly owned lands for housing is a priority for this Government and my Department is working closely with all local authorities to support the development of their sites. Decisions regarding individual developments and tenure mix for new housing on local authority land is, in the first instance, a matter for each local authority, including its elected members.

The sites referred to are two of three significant residential sites being brought forward by Dublin City Council under its Housing Land Initiative (HLI). The HLI's aim is to ensure the delivery of mixed-tenure homes within the City Council area. All sites under the HLI are identified as Strategic Development and Regeneration Areas (SDRA) within the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022.

Mixed-tenure developments are an important policy objective in Rebuilding Ireland and uphold the principle of sustainable mixed communities, where housing needs are not subject to rigid segregation, based on income levels. They also provide an opportunity to see major sites developed more quickly, and integrated into existing communities and areas.

With regard to the O'Devaney Gardens site, an exhaustive process has been undertaken over many years to allow the Council identify the current delivery model as the most effective to develop the site in a tenure sustainable and financially viable way. The intention is to provide 768 badly needed new homes (an additional 56 social housing homes are being built on the site separately), comprising a tenure mix of 411 private homes, 192 social homes and 165 homes offered for purchase at a discount from market rates of between 30%-40% under the affordable dwelling arrangements. I am informed that while 50% of the built homes will be sold by the developer at market prices, these will account for just 22% of the land.

In relation to the St Michael's Estate site, this has been selected as a Cost Rental 'pathfinder' development. A core objective of Cost Rental is to offer more moderate income households the choice of a more affordable and stable form of rental tenure. Over the longer term, as homes are delivered at scale, it is envisaged that cost rental would have a stabilising effect on the broader private rented market. The current tenure mix proposed by Dublin City Council is 30% social housing and 70% cost rental. While the proposal for the site development has not been brought to a conclusion, it is envisaged that structures will be put in place to ensure the tenure would remain Cost Rental over the longer term.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

55. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of the income eligibility limits for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37697/19]

71. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he expects the planned review of income eligibility limits for social housing to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37388/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 71 together.

Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. The current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this, providing for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households facing the greatest challenge in meeting their accommodation needs from their own resources.

However, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is under way. The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

56. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority homes that will be retrofitted in 2019 in order to protect tenants from high energy costs and to address climate change; if he has a monitoring process in place to ensure that the work is done and the funding allocated to local authorities is spent in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37495/19]

70. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for the retrofitting of council-owned dwellings; the grants and supports available for those that own their home to complete similar retrofitting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37389/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 70 together.

My Department has operated an Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme for local authority social housing since 2013, under which close to 70,000 social homes have been insulated to date with funding support of some €134 million. The programme improves the insulation

standards and overall energy performance of local authority housing stock, which can benefit those at risk of fuel poverty, as well as contributing to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction and energy reduction targets.

Support under this Programme is continuing in 2019, with €25 million available in grant aid to the local authorities. It is the local authorities' own responsibility to select properties for inclusion in the programme and to determine the level of works; accordingly, pending their decisions on 2019 activity, my Department does not have detailed information at this stage on the number of homes that will be retrofitted in all 31 Council areas.

The Programme is being implemented in two phases: Phase 1 is classed as a shallow retrofit and aims to ensure that the entire social housing stock has, as a minimum, cavity wall and attic insulation. Phase 2 focuses on the fabric upgrade works to those dwellings with solid/hollow block wall construction and includes the provision of heating upgrades; this is deemed to be a more deep retrofit. In transitioning to the deep retrofit implementation, my Department has requested local authorities to achieve a 'B2' or equivalent building energy rating for their housing stock.

In addition to the Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme, energy efficiency improvements have also been incorporated into the approximately 11,000 vacant social housing homes that have been returned to productive use under the Voids Programme since 2014.

Policy and programmes in relation to supports for insulation of privately owned homes falls within the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Tenancy Protection Scheme

57. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which tenants will be protected in co-living units if they are not to be given tenancy agreements; if he plans to update the regulations for co-living units to ensure that tenants have rights and protections under housing and tenancy legislation; his views on whether all tenants in the private rental sector should have rights and protections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36519/19]

66. Deputy Mick Barry asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will legislate to ensure that those in co-living accommodation will have tenants' rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37711/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 66 together.

The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019 regulate the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented sector, including tenancies in co-living dwellings, and set out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019 apply to every dwelling that is the subject of a tenancy, subject to a limited number of exceptions. The dwellings to which the Act does not apply are set out in section 3(2) of the Act and include, for example, a dwelling within which the landlord also resides.

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. Where a dwelling is occupied by a person under a tenancy, arrangement or agreement to which the Act does not apply, such as instances where a bona fide licensing arrangement exists, the RTB does not have any function in relation to such agreements or ar-

rangements.

If a dispute arises as to whether a purported licence in a co-living dwelling is in fact a tenancy, the RTB can determine the matter and if it is a tenancy, the Residential Tenancies Acts apply. Where the owner of a dwelling enters into an agreement with a person for the occupation of that dwelling, it is a private contractual matter between the parties as to whether that agreement is a licence or a tenancy.

Given the relatively new nature of this form of accommodation, my Department will monitor the emerging shared accommodation sector and is keeping all aspects under review.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 38.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

59. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress made on the delivery of serviced sites under national objective 18b to ensure the provision of affordable houses nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37676/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities already have powers to make low-cost sites available to individuals, who are qualified for social housing support, and also to voluntary or co-operative not-for-profit housing associations.

More broadly, the provision of affordable housing, either to buy or rent, is being facilitated by the €310 million Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) that runs from 2019 to 2021. The fund is to provide facilitating infrastructure on local authority sites so that more affordable discounted homes can be delivered. I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per home and, on this basis, at least 6,200 affordable homes can be provided.

The affordable dwelling purchase arrangements under which homes will be made available will be based on the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, which were commenced in June 2018. Further regulations will be put in place over the coming months and when the operational procedures for the programme are finalised, and before dwellings are made available for purchase under the scheme, a programme of communication will be undertaken by my Department.

Two calls have been made under the Serviced Sites Fund to date, and approval in principle has been granted for funding of approximately €127 million, to support almost 3,200 homes. While more focused on urban areas, and building at scale on local authority sites, the fund remains in place for the provision of housing in all locations where there is a proven affordability challenge. It is anticipated that further calls under the Serviced Sites Fund will be made in due course.

It should be noted that in addition to these new homes being made available at a significant discount on market norms, households have also been supported through other key Government affordability initiatives. These include, for example, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan and the Help to Buy Scheme, which have helped address the housing needs of over 13,000 households.

Local Authority Housing Rents

60. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the additional interventions he is considering such as increased service site fund allocations and longer loan maturities to ensure entry level rents for a site (details supplied) are at affordable levels of between €700 and €900 per month. [37635/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Dublin City Council-owned St. Michael's site in Inchicore has been selected as one of two 'pathfinder' developments for Cost Rental homes in Ireland. It is estimated that this site can accommodate approximately 470 homes in a high quality mixed-tenure development, including approximately 330 Cost Rental homes.

Under the Cost Rental model, rents cover the cost of delivering, managing, and maintaining the homes only, less both the profit margin seen in the private rental sector and any financial supports provided by the State/local authorities. With the resulting rents significantly below market levels, this would mean that many households on moderate incomes will have access to a more affordable and stable form of rental tenure than would otherwise have been the case.

The rents for Cost Rental units will obviously depend upon the overall cost of each development and will vary according to the site and design specifics. However, my Department has identified several factors that can put downward pressure on costs and make Cost Rental more affordable for tenants - these include low/zero land costs, a design approach with value engineering and long-term maintenance in mind, and subvention through the Serviced Site Fund, where €310 million is being made available to local authorities over three years, 2019 to 2021, to support the delivery of infrastructure for affordable housing.

More competitive rental levels under the model can also be supported by accessing low-cost, stable finance that is paid back over an extended period of time. This long-term financing has, for example, been accessed via the European Investment Bank (EIB) who have indicated a strong interest in the St. Michael's project. My Department's engagement with the EIB has facilitated a research project into the development of the broader Cost Rental sector in Ireland.

Plans regarding the development of the St. Michael's site are, in the first instance, a matter for Dublin City Council and my Department is engaging with the Council to support the process. Potential financing options for the project are under consideration, and long loan maturities may form part of the financial model. A working group is meanwhile working to develop a sustainable national approach to Cost Rental, so that the lessons from pathfinder projects like St Michael's can be applied to future larger-scale projects.

Local Authority Housing Data

61. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of completions he expects for the full year in 2019 in view of the fact there were 2,022 local authority new build housing completions in 2018 and only 251 local authority new build housing completions in quarter 1 of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37678/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The total target for social housing build output under Rebuilding Ireland in 2018 was for 4,969 additional homes to be provided under a variety of mechanisms. By year-end, 4,811 had been delivered, representing 97% delivery against target. This included 4,251 new build homes, and 560 vacant local authority dwellings brought back into use following substantial remediation.

Focusing on one specific build delivery stream in isolation is failing to see that new build

homes are delivered for households on social housing waiting lists through a range of build programmes and schemes. When setting targets for build activity, it is recognised that there will be a blend of delivery required to achieve the maximum, sustainable output and deliver the highest volume of homes with the available capital and current budgets.

Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are a vital component of all build activity for social housing. The properties provided through AHBs under these mechanisms are allocated to households on waiting lists in the same manner as local authority properties. In addition, through Part V delivery, even more homes are available to local authorities for tenants.

Accelerating local authority build on local authority land is of course a very important focus of all stakeholders, and this Government wants to continue to drive further increased delivery in that regard. Progress to date has been very strong, with an almost doubling of local authority new build output between 2017 and 2018.

My Department continues to engage very intensively with all local authorities to keep momentum on new build output as high as possible. By nature of the construction cycle, a substantial volume of output is weighted towards year end, as seen in previous years.

When we examine the pipeline for new development, there are reasons to be optimistic in terms of meeting our ambitious delivery plans for 2019 and beyond. The Construction Status Report covering the period to June 2019 shows that there are now over 22,000 homes in the build pipeline, up more than 8% on quarter 1 of this year.

It should be noted that the number of homes on site at the end of June 2019 was 6,439. Given the healthy pipeline and expected delivery profile over the coming two quarters, I am confident that we are on track to meet our targets.

Homelessness Strategy

62. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the strategy in place to stem the increase in the number of children in homeless services in view of evidence of the negative affect on their lives; if he will introduce a time limit on their stay in homeless services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37493/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, is designed to increase the delivery of housing across all tenures to help individuals and families meet their housing needs and address homelessness. The plan focuses on increasing the delivery of social housing, with a target of delivering 50,000 social housing homes in the period to 2021, while also making the best use of existing stock and laying the foundations for a more vibrant housing sector.

Supporting families experiencing homelessness is an absolute priority for the Government and for my Department in particular. In 2019, the Government increased the budget available to local authorities to deliver homeless services by over 25% to €146m. This funding supports the delivery of services to prevent families having to enter emergency accommodation and to ensure that those families in emergency accommodation are supported to identify and secure an independent tenancy within the shortest possible timeframe. In 2018, the HAP Placefinder service was made available to all local authorities to support households experiencing homelessness to identify and secure a tenancy in the private rented sector. My Department has approved funding for 23 Placefinder officers nationally.

The Government is also supporting local authorities to develop family hubs, through the provision of capital and operational funding. Family hubs provide a more secure and stable placement for families than is possible in hotels and B&B's. Under the service level agreements in place with the operators of the family hubs, targets are in place for the operators to secure a tenancy for each family within a six-month period. In some cases, it is not possible to achieve a tenancy within this period, including because of the housing requirements or preferences of an individual family. While I have no immediate plans to introduce a limit on the time that families spend in homeless services, I and my Department will continue working with local authorities to ensure that housing solutions are delivered within the shortest possible timeframe for all households in emergency accommodation.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 41.

Home Loan Scheme

64. Deputy Mary Butler asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when further funding will be made available to local authorities to fund successful applications made under Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme in particular for local authorities in which the allocation has been spent to date and have many approved applicants waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25232/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) scheme was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans would be approximately €200 million over three years. However, the RIHL proved to be more successful than initially anticipated. My officials began engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 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.

Following positive engagement with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department received correspondence in July conveying sanction to increase the funding for the scheme by €363 million for the remainder of 2019, bringing the total scheme funding to €563 million.

My Department wrote to all 31 local authorities on 15 August 2019, advising of their revised allocations for the RIHL, thereby giving them certainty regarding the amount they have available for mortgage lending.

Wind Energy Guidelines

65. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of wind farm planning regulations; when the new draft guidelines will be published; if there will be a public consultation on this issue; and when he plans to introduce new guidelines. [37634/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines in line with the "preferred draft approach" which was announced in June 2017 by the then Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, in conjunction with the then

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. The review is addressing a number of key aspects including sound or noise, visual amenity setback distances, shadow flicker, community obligation, community dividend and grid connections.

As part of the overall review process, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is being undertaken on the revised Guidelines before they come into effect, in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, otherwise known as the SEA Directive. SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process.

While the revised draft guidelines had been expected to be published in Quarter 1 2019, some delays to the planned schedule arose, due to the publication of updated World Health Organisation (WHO) noise standards and the need to focus on certain Brexit-related planning issues.

As part of the SEA process, there will shortly be an eight-week public consultation on the revised draft Guidelines, together with the comprehensive environmental report. Finalised Guidelines will be prepared following detailed analysis and consideration of the submissions received during the consultation phase, and the conclusion of the SEA process. My Department is aiming to commence the public consultation by the end of this month.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála, must have regard to guidelines issued under section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts. In the meantime, the current 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines remain in force.

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 57.

Commercial Rates Impact

67. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to support businesses concerned regarding the impact of commercial rates increases on the future of their businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26974/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Local businesses play a vital role in supporting local authorities to deliver critical services to their communities. Commercial Rates, at c€1.5bn per annum, make up roughly one third of local government current income. The Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 was enacted earlier this year, in order to modernise and improve the rates system for ratepayers, local authorities and local communities.

The rates paid by individual rate-payers is a factor of the valuation carried out by the independent Commissioner for Valuation and the Annual Rate of Valuation (ARV), decided by local authority members. The Government has consistently encouraged local authorities to show restraint in terms of ARV increases, in order to support local businesses, and local authority members have generally responded very positively.

The Commissioner for Valuation is currently conducting a national programme of revaluation to provide consistent, up-to-date valuations so that rates are equitably distributed. The

purpose of revaluation is not to increase the overall rates take and therefore after a revaluation of a local authority area the Minister may set a Rates Limitation Order to ensure that the overall rates collected in the area doesn't increase beyond normal inflation.

To date, revaluations have been fully completed in 16 local authorities, a further 8 are being completed and the final tranche should be completed by 2021. At all stages of the process, ratepayers are consulted and informed and can bring relevant information to bear on the valuation. Ultimately ratepayers have a right of appeal to the independent Valuation Tribunal. Interestingly, in terms of revaluations to date, I understand that the trend is that approximately 60% of ratepayers have experienced a decrease.

Where ratepayers have legitimate issues in paying their rates liability, local authorities will work with them to facilitate flexible payment options that reflect capacity to pay. The 2019 Act will further facilitate this flexible approach once ratepayers engage with the local authority. Importantly, the 2019 Act also provides for new Rates Vacancy Abatement and Rates Alleviation schemes, to be decided by local authority members in order to promote national and/or local policy objectives. This will add to the suite of options already available to local authorities to support local businesses and rate-payers.

Protection of Tenants in Receipt of Rental Supports

68. Deputy Mick Barry asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will prohibit evictions of tenants in which a property has failed a HAP inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37710/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019. All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these Regulations. Responsibility for enforcement of the Regulations rests with the relevant local authority.

Under sections 18A and 18B of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992, a housing authority may issue an Improvement Notice or Prohibition Notice, respectively, where a property is found to be non-compliant. Under Section 34 of that Act, any person who by act or omission contravenes the Regulations, fails to comply with an improvement notice, or re-lets a house in breach of a prohibition notice, will be guilty of an offence and will be liable, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding €5,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or both. If an inspection identifies that a property has been found to be non-compliant with the regulations, it is a matter for the local authority to determine what action is necessary and appropriate, including the issuing of an Improvement Letter, Improvement Notice, Prohibition Notice or further legal recourse.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is underpinned by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. Under section 41 of the 2014 Act, local authorities are required to commence the inspection process within 8 months of the commencement of HAP support being provided in relation to a particular dwelling, if not already inspected within the previous 12 months. HAP may be provided on a property which is the subject of a subsisting improvement notice under section 18A of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. HAP shall not be, or shall cease to be, provided on a property which is the subject of proceedings or a prohibition notice under section 18B of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. Where a prohibition notice has come into effect, HAP may continue to be paid for 13 weeks from the date of HAP commencing or the notice coming into force, as appropriate.

Questions - Written Answers

Section 62 of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004 - 2019 provides that a landlord must state a reason for the termination in any tenancy termination notice served, in accordance with the grounds for terminations set out in the table to section 34 of the Acts.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 enhances further the security of tenure for tenants by providing the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) with new powers to investigate and sanction improper conduct by a landlord who contravenes the tenancy termination provisions; and requiring landlords to copy a tenancy termination notice to the RTB.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 also provides that where a landlord terminates a tenancy because he/she needs vacant possession to substantially refurbish/renovate the property, that property must be offered back to the former tenant who provides their contact details, upon completion of the works. Also, such a termination notice must contain or be accompanied by a written certificate from a registered professional under the Building Control Act 2007, such as an architect or surveyor, stating that the proposed substantial refurbishment/renovation works would pose a health and safety risk necessitating vacation by the tenants and that such a risk would be likely to exist for at least 3 weeks.

My Department will continue to monitor the effectiveness and enforcement of the security of tenure provision in the Acts with a view to making any necessary and justifiable amendments.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

69. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Housing First tenancies that have been provided in 2017, 2018 and in the first half of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37494/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing First enables homeless individuals with high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive housing and health supports to help them maintain their tenancies. The National Implementation Plan for Housing First was published in September 2018 and contains targets for each local authority. The Plan includes an overall target of 663 tenancies to be delivered by 2021.

A total of 386 tenancies have been created to date. This includes 106 tenancies in 2017, 83 tenancies in 2018 and 96 tenancies in the first six months of 2019.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 56.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 55.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

72. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the provision of affordable homes and the eligibility criteria for such homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37390/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 was commenced in June 2018 to provide a statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase.

Regulations in respect of the making of Schemes of Priority were signed on 12 March 2019,

and these were issued to local authorities on 22 March 2019. The purpose of a Scheme of Priority is to set out the affordable purchase arrangements at local authority level. This includes the methodology that will be applied to determine the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households where the demand for such affordable dwellings exceeds the number available. All 31 local authorities have submitted draft Schemes of Priority to my Department and, to date, I have approved 21, which were adopted by their respective Councils. My Department is currently engaging with the remaining local authorities to ensure that the remaining Schemes of Priority are finalised.

Further regulations will be put in place over the coming months regarding eligibility and other matters. When the operational procedures for the programme are finalised, and before dwellings are made available for purchase under the scheme, a programme of communication will be undertaken by my Department and local authorities.

To support the delivery of affordable homes to buy or rent the Government has committed €310 million under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), from 2019 to 2021 to provide infrastructure support for the delivery of over 6,000 dwellings. The first call for proposals under the SSF in June 2018 was specifically targeted at 11 local authorities, where the greatest affordability pressures exists. In December 2018, Approval in Principle was announced for funding for 10 infrastructure projects, in Dublin and Cork, with an allocated budget of €43 million. This will support the delivery of approximately 1,400 affordable homes.

A second call for proposals under the SSF issued in April 2019 to 19 local authorities. I announced Approval in Principle for 25 infrastructure projects across 13 local authority areas on the 6th August 2019. This significant funding commitment of €84 million will support the delivery of 1,770 affordable homes for purchase. This announcement means that, to date, funding support has been allocated to enable delivery of almost 3,200 affordable homes for purchase under the 2 calls of the Serviced Sites Fund.

The overall cost and the timing of delivery for these projects is contingent upon the completion of planning and procurement in the first instance, and local authorities are working to achieve delivery, as quickly as possible.

The SSF will also play an important role in making cost rental projects as affordable as possible. My Department is developing a national policy approach to Cost Rental. This is being informed by the learning from two pilot cost rental projects, one of which, at Enniskerry Road in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, has commenced construction, with first homes anticipated to come on stream from 2021, with a second, at the former St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, at an earlier stage.

My Department is also engaging with the Land Development Agency (LDA), which is examining the potential to deliver Cost Rental homes at scale from its land portfolio and the broader State land bank. The initial portfolio of sites that the Agency has access to will have the potential, over the short to medium term, to deliver 3,000 affordable homes in line with the Government policy of achieving 30% affordable housing on State lands generally.

There is also capacity to deliver up to 2,350 further affordable homes on mainly publicly owned lands supported through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). An additional c. 5,600 homes will benefit from a LIHAF-related cost reduction, some of which are already coming to market.

These schemes will complement other key Government affordability initiatives, such as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, and the Help to Buy Scheme, which have supported some 15,000 households.

73. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the contact he has had with local authorities regarding the implementation of the short-term letting regulations since 1 July 2019; and his views on the level of exemptions and planning applications to date. [37637/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has been in regular contact with relevant planning authorities regarding the new short-term letting legislation, both before and subsequent to its commencement on 1 July 2019.

In order for the new legislation to have the desired effect and achieve its objective of returning much-needed accommodation to the long-term rental market, it is essential that relevant planning authorities adopt a pro-active approach to enforcement. This will add to the planning enforcement workload of the affected planning authorities, necessitating dedicated additional staffing and complementary resources.

In this regard, my Department wrote to planning authorities on 4 June 2019 seeking estimated resource funding requirements for the implementation and enforcement of the new provisions. My Department wrote again to planning authorities on 2 July 2019 seeking new or revised estimates following my designation of additional Rent Pressure Zones in certain parts of the country, which extended the application of the short-term letting provisions to the new areas.

Since then, further communication has taken place between my Department and all relevant planning authorities regarding the clarification and refinement of the resourcing requests, as well as in relation to the practical implementation of the short-term letting provisions. As an example, on 2 August last, my Department issued a detailed “Guidance Note for Planning Authorities on the Regulation of Short-Term Letting” to planning authorities to assist in this regard and to facilitate a consistent approach in the implementation of the provisions.

My Department will continue to engage with relevant planning authorities regarding the implementation and enforcement of the short-term letting legislation. The legislation does not require planning authorities to report statistical information to my Department regarding the receipt of notifications from concerned property owners of the letting of their properties on a home-sharing basis, thereby being eligible to avail of the exemption from the requirement to obtain planning permission, or the number of change of use planning applications that have been received further to the commencement of the provisions. However, as part of my Department’s provision of enforcement funding, planning authorities will be required to submit an initial progress report six months after the commencement of enforcement activity, and to submit further reports at subsequent appropriate intervals.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

74. Deputy Jan O’Sullivan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of sites that are being considered for development of cost rental homes in each relevant local authority area; the specific sites under consideration in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37496/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The provision of Cost Rental homes will focus on areas where housing cost affordability is a challenge for moderate income households. As a result, this will see the initial emphasis on

major urban areas. While two ‘pathfinder’ pilot projects are located in Dublin, it is intended that Cost Rental will become a national scheme, to be delivered at scale over the longer term.

The following table includes the two Cost Rental ‘pathfinder’ pilot projects at Enniskerry Road and St. Michael’s Estate. Also included is a site at Shanganagh, where Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is currently working with the Land Development Agency (LDA) to explore the possibility of undertaking a Cost Rental development. The remaining sites comprise the initial portfolio of sites to which the LDA has access. The LDA is very committed to the concept of Cost Rental and it is likely that it will form a significant element of delivery at the majority of these locations.

Site Name	Location	Local Authority Area
Enniskerry Road	Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	DLR County Council
St. Michael’s Estate	Dublin City Council	Dublin City Council
Shanganagh Castle	Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	DLR County Council
Skerries	Dublin - non local authority	Fingal County Council
Naas	Kildare- non local authority	Kildare County Council
Dundrum	Dublin - non local authority	DLR County Council
St Kevin’s	Cork- non local authority	Cork County Council
Cherry Orchard	Dublin- non local authority	Dublin City Council
St Teresa’s Gardens	Dublin - non local authority	Dublin City Council
Poolbeg	Dublin - non local authority	Dublin City Council

In tandem with these pilot projects, my Department is developing a national policy approach to Cost Rental for Ireland. This requires that serious consideration is given to the many delivery options possible, and the challenges posed, in order to ensure that a coherent Cost Rental model can be delivered at a scale and in a manner that will have the desired positive impact on the Irish housing sector.

To this end, I have convened a working group within my Department, in conjunction with the Land Development Agency, the Housing Agency, and other expert bodies. This group is developing the policy framework for the broader Cost Rental model and to consider how a sustainable financing structure can be established to then commence delivery of units at the scale required to get this new category of housing off the ground. The work of this group is being assisted by a consultancy and research support that is being undertaken by the European Investment Bank on our behalf.

The selection of further sites for Cost Rental consideration will be informed largely by the financial and operational model that will emerge from this evidence building. Given the 30% affordability requirement that the Government has agreed must be met on State lands that are to be utilised for housing, I anticipate that Cost Rental will have an important role to play in the development of these lands.

Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 41.

Ministerial Functions

76. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his role and responsibilities regarding the Defence Forces. [37644/19]

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

(Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 (S.I. No. 299 of 2017) was approved by Government on 5 July 2017 and came into effect on that date. Pursuant to the Order, statutory responsibility for a wide range of Defence matters has been delegated to me. The principal responsibilities delegated include powers to make Regulations under various provisions of the Defence Acts 1954 to 2015 and powers in respect of personnel-related issues affecting members of the Defence Forces.

As well as specifying the powers that have been delegated, the Order also specifies the Ministerial powers and responsibilities arising under these enactments that have not been delegated. These are as follows:

- the power conferred under the enactments specified in the Order to prosecute an offence;
- powers arising under sections 11, 17, 87 and 88 of the Defence Act 1954.

Defence Forces Strength

77. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he and his officials are concerned regarding the depletion of the number of members of the Defence Forces. [37690/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have previously acknowledged that there are recruitment and retention issues in the Defence Forces. This is reflective of the current buoyant economic environment and jobs market. I brought these issues to the attention of the Public Service Pay Commission who recently produced their report.

The Commission's recommendations have been accepted by Government and an implementation plan has been published. This is being progressed as a matter of priority. The Government remains committed to restoring the Permanent Defence to a strength of 9,500 personnel.

Defence Forces Recruitment

78. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the plans being prepared by his Department to recruit additional Army personnel should they be necessary to patrol additional Border posts in a post-Brexit scenario. [37868/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to a PDF strength of 9,500 personnel in order to undertake the roles set out in the White Paper on Defence (2015).

In this context the Defence Forces continues to implement its recruitment plan, targeting General Service Recruits, Cadets and specialists for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service.

Defence Forces Data

79. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Army personnel serving at Custume Barracks, Athlone. [37869/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The establishment of the Permanent Defence Force is 9,500 personnel. The military authorities have informed me that the establishment for Units based in Custume Barracks is approximately 995 personnel.

Military service entails personnel moving into and out of particular postings and as they serve at home and overseas, receive training and undergo educational and career development courses. Accordingly, there is a constant through-flow of personnel into and out of barracks, including Custume Barracks.

Defence Forces Retirements

80. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to ensure changes to the current regulations are made which would allow retiring Army personnel to take up roles within other State organisations for which they have suitable qualifications (details supplied). [37870/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am unaware of any restrictions in Defence Forces regulations such as those described by the Deputy. I would appreciate if the Deputy would furnish me with specific details of his concerns.

Defence Forces Pensions

81. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if changes will be made to the Army pension system which would allow retired personnel to work in more financially rewarding roles (details supplied). [37871/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The issue raised by the Deputy relates to the operation of Section 52 of the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012.

This provides that where a retired public servant who is in receipt of a public service retirement pension resumes employment anywhere in the public service on or after 1 November 2012, their pension is liable to abatement, that is, cessation or reduction as appropriate. The measure applies across the public service, including the Defence Forces. However, it does not apply in relation to employment with the commercial semi-State bodies or where public service pensioners are employed outside the public service.

Pension abatement in the public service is structured to ensure that a pensioner's combined earnings from their current public service job plus their existing public service retirement pension, does not exceed the current equivalent of pensionable salary from their old public service job. Depending on those variables, the actual impact (if any) from the measure on a person's public service pension will vary from person to person. For example, where a person's combined public service earnings from their current job plus pension are less than the current equivalent of their pensionable earnings from their old job e.g. in the Defence Forces, there is no reduction of pension.

I should point out that prior to 1 November 2012, this abatement principle / concept already operated as a standard feature of public service pension schemes generally. However, this was only within individual sectors and bodies where a public service pensioner resumed working in his or her former occupation, e.g. Defence Forces, Garda, Civil Service etc. The 2012 Act extends the principle across and between all sectors without exception, thereby restoring the arrangements that were in place until 1965.

I should also state that a public service pensioner already in public service employment immediately before 1 November 2012 is not affected by the change while he or she remains in that

post/position. However, if their employment status changes after that date, for example, where they secure a new post through promotion with their current public service employer or where they move to a different post or public service body, their pension is subject to abatement in accordance with the legislation.

The Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012 comes under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, and the question of any changes to that Act would therefore be a matter for him in the first instance.

UN Security Council

82. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the securing of a UN Security Council seat; and if he has spoken to other foreign ministers regarding same. [37691/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The expected date of the election for the two available seats in the Western European and Others Group (WEOG) for the UN Security Council term 2021-2022 is approximately nine months away.

The campaign is a priority across the whole of Government. The UN is central to Ireland's foreign policy. Our effort to secure a seat, which was announced in 2005, reflects this. I am particularly conscious that we are seeking a seat on the Council at a time when multilateralism is being undermined. It is my strong belief that, in these circumstances, it is important that Ireland should demonstrate its willingness to participate in the work of multilateral institutions. I know this view is widely shared in the Oireachtas.

All appropriate regional, multilateral and bilateral engagements are being utilised by An Taoiseach; me, as Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade; Ministers across Government and by Ministers of State, to promote and discuss Ireland's candidature. Officials at my Department are also fully engaged in the effort to ensure success. Ireland last served on the Council from 2001-2002.

In making our case to the 192 other Members States of the UN, we are highlighting our consistent record at the UN throughout more than six decades of active membership. We have a strong record at the UN in the areas of peacekeeping, sustainable development, humanitarian action, disarmament and human rights.

The case for our candidature echoes our policy interests, our values and our history of positive engagement at the global level. We are committed to the principles and values of the UN Charter which have stood the test of time for 74 years and we will demonstrate this commitment if we are elected to the Council.

The contest for the two seats is very competitive. Our opponents, Canada and Norway, are strong members of the UN and important bilateral partners. We enjoy excellent relations with both and cooperate on many issues at the UN and beyond. Indeed, my Norwegian counterpart visited Ireland just last month and I had the opportunity to meet with her to discuss a range of issues of mutual interest.

Later this month I will travel to the 74th session of the UN General Assembly with the President, and the Taoiseach. The UN is organising five Summits in as many days, addressing Climate, Financing for Development, Health, Small Island Developing States and the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition to participating in the Summits, we will take the opportunity

to raise the profile of our Security Council candidature with Member States. We aim to meet senior representatives of a wide range of States to press our case and seek their support at the election which is expected to take place in June 2020. In addition to those bilateral meetings, the President, Taoiseach and I will participate in events that showcase Ireland's principled and consistent foreign policy on issues such as the Middle East Peace Process, disarmament and the importance of multilateralism. Our programmes will, of course, include a number of events with important bilateral and Irish community dimensions.

Passport Applications Refusals

83. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the basis for refusing to issue a passport renewal in respect of a person (details supplied); the instances in which a person must produce a public services card in order to obtain a passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37777/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since March 29 2016, the Passport Service has required all first time passport applicants, aged 18 and above, who are resident in Ireland to submit a copy of their Public Services Card (PSC) with their passport application. This requirement also applies to adult applicants whose most recent passport has expired more than five years previously and to adult applicants whose passport was issued before 1 January 2006 and has been reported as lost, stolen or damaged.

The application referred to was registered with the Passport Service in March of this year. The Passport Service did not issue a passport to the applicant on the grounds that the applicant declined to submit a copy of their PSC, which was required for the applicant's specific category of application. The basis for rejecting an application where a PSC is required and not submitted is Sections 6 and 7 the Passports Act, 2008 (as amended) and section 263(3) of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005.

The Passport Service is aware of the Data Protection Commission's concerns on matters pertaining to the PSC. I have directed the Passport Service to undertake a review of documents required for first time adult passport applicants with specific reference to the requirement to submit a copy of their PSC as part of their application.

The Passport Service will continue to accept a copy of an applicant's PSC as valid identification for first time adult applications and other applicable categories of application. Where the applicant does not present their PSC, an application can proceed if an applicant either presents original Government-issued photographic identification, such as a driver's licence or a passport from another country, or attends for interview in person at the Passport Offices in Cork or Dublin.

Passport Service staff will contact the applicant directly.

Foreign Policy

84. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions he and his EU foreign minister colleagues are taking with regard to repression of the independence movement in West Papua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37904/19]

85. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade if he has raised the issue of autonomy or independence for West Papua with the European Commission, Parliament and Council of Ministers and at the General Assembly of the United Nations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37905/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 84 and 85 together.

Ireland, together with our EU partners, respects the territorial integrity of Indonesia and regards the province of West Papua as being part of Indonesia.

I am concerned by the escalation in violence since August in both Papua and West Papua. While access to information has been somewhat constrained, including by restrictions on the use of internet, reports of violence in the region and the deaths of both protesters and security forces personnel are especially disturbing.

I welcome efforts locally and by the Indonesian Government to find a peaceful, inclusive and lasting solution, including through the proposal for further and deepened dialogue with civil society.

Officials in my Department, including in our Embassy in Jakarta, will continue to closely monitor the situation in West Papua and will liaise with our international partners on this issue as appropriate.

Human Rights Cases

86. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he and his EU colleagues are taking to request the extradition to the International Criminal Court in the Hague of the alleged killers of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37906/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I remain deeply concerned about the death of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi almost one year ago. In the days and weeks that followed his death, disturbing information came to light that points unequivocally to the fact that Mr Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul by agents of the Saudi State.

In January 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions announced that she would initiate a human rights inquiry, under the terms of her mandate, into the unlawful death of Mr. Khashoggi. The report by Agnes Callamard was published in June. Ms Callamard found that Mr Khashoggi was the victim of a premeditated extrajudicial execution, for which the State of Saudi Arabia is responsible.

The report was discussed during an Interactive Dialogue with Ms Callamard at the Human Rights Council on Wednesday 26 June. An EU statement thanked Ms Callamard for her report, condemned the killing, reiterated that those responsible for the killing of Jamal Khashoggi must be held to account, and again called for ‘prompt; effective and thorough; independent and impartial; and transparent investigations’. The statement called upon Saudi Arabia to disclose all information available and to fully cooperate with all investigations into the killing.

Ireland also made a national statement at the dialogue, emphasising the importance of the protection of journalists and media workers, and joined calls that those responsible for the killing must be held to account. Officials from my Department have continued to raise our concerns about this case directly with Saudi officials - most recently with the Saudi Ambassador in Ire-

land last week - and to press for a transparent legal process.

In her report Ms Callamard called for the Human Rights Council, the UN Security Council or the UN Secretary-General to conduct an international follow-up criminal investigation for the purpose of determining individual liability and identifying options towards judicial accountability. The call by UN Special Rapporteur will need to be considered in these fora.

Ireland fully supports a follow up investigation by the Human Rights Council, as called for by Ms Callamard. The Special Rapporteur did not identify the ICC as among the next steps to be considered at this stage. Recourse to the International Criminal Court is only possible in certain circumstances and for specific types of crimes.

Ireland is a strong and unequivocal supporter of a free press. As a global community, protecting journalists and media workers must be an essential component of our efforts to protect and promote freedom of expression.

EU Sanctions

87. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request his EU counterparts to consider introducing sanctions against the current Saudi Arabian regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37907/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have been clear in this House on my concerns about human rights within Saudi Arabia – including the use of the death penalty, and the situation of human rights defenders. I have expressed deep concerns, in this House, in multilateral fora, and directly to Saudi officials, about the way in which the war in Yemen is conducted, by all parties. My Department has also consistently highlighted these concerns in our bilateral contacts with a number of third states which are involved in the conflict, including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Iran.

We have emphasised the need for an end to human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, and for full and unfettered humanitarian and commercial access. Most recently, my officials raised our concerns about the situation in Yemen with the Saudi Ambassador, in a meeting last week.

The promotion of human rights is a key element in Irish and EU foreign policy, and there are of course many states around the world in relation to which Ireland and the EU have human rights concerns. In addressing these, we need to tailor the different approaches available to us to different contexts, according to what is most likely to be effective.

Restrictive measures or ‘sanctions’ are one potential tool of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy. Care needs to be taken to avoid counterproductive impacts of sanctions, including due to the potential they have to isolate the target country from the kinds of interactions where diverse views are expressed, and minds changed. In most cases, public and private diplomacy is the preferred approach.

There have previously been calls in this house for an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia in light of that country’s involvement in the war in Yemen. Some, though not all, of the EU Member States which have arms industries have decided to halt arms exports to countries involved in the Yemen conflict. Although EU consensus on a full EU arms embargo does not currently exist, all EU Member States have signed and ratified the 2014 Arms Trade Treaty.

The Treaty exists to ensure that arms sales do not fuel conflicts, lead to serious violations of

international human rights law, or allow arms to fall into the hands of non-state actors or terrorists. It is often more effective to press for the implementation of commitments already made, reminding partners of what they have agreed to, rather than seeking agreement on new measures. Ireland's efforts are concentrated on ensuring the effective implementation of the Treaty.

Brexit Negotiations

88. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he was last briefed on the ongoing Brexit discussions between the EU and the UK. [37645/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My officials and I remain in close contact with the European Commission and Taskforce members on Brexit matters.

Together with EU partners, we are regularly briefed by the Commission regarding ongoing talks between the EU and the UK on Brexit.

Talks between Task Force and the UK's Chief Negotiator David Frost have been ongoing since the end of July, becoming more frequent since the end of August.

In his recent address to the European Parliament Conference of Presidents on 12 September, Mr Barnier said that the EU is willing to consider any proposals from the United Kingdom which are workable and compatible with the Withdrawal Agreement, but that 'ball is clearly in the United Kingdom's court'. The European Commission is yet to receive concrete written proposals that are legally operational from the UK Government.

Mr Barnier has made clear that the EU remains firm on the need to avoid a physical border on the island of Ireland, the preservation of the integrity of the Single Market and the protection of North-South cooperation and the all-island economy, all of which are essential elements for peace and stability in Ireland.

Northern Ireland

89. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when talks will resume with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Julian Smith, and with the political parties in Stormont in relation to the need to have the political institutions in Northern Ireland restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37944/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The continuing absence of the power-sharing Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland and the North South Ministerial Council is of grave concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government.

I have engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland throughout the latest talks process, to encourage the parties to reach an accommodation. I continued this engagement over the summer months and I remain in regular and ongoing contact with Secretary of State Smith, meeting most recently earlier this week, to work to secure agreement between the parties to get all of the institutions of the Agreement up and running again.

All five political parties have engaged constructively in the talks process with that objective over the last number of months. Progress has been made across a range of important issues.

However, some key outstanding issues remain and finding final agreement on these issues will require genuine and courageous dialogue and leadership by the party leaders in Northern Ireland.

The awful murder of Lyra McKee and the outpouring of public feeling that followed demands a serious response at political level. People want the devolved power-sharing institutions up and running again to represent their interests and deal with the issues and challenges that Northern Ireland faces at present, not least the difficulties raised by the UK exit from the European Union. The functioning of the North South Ministerial Council is also urgently required, to bring together the Executive and the Government to oversee and develop co-operation on the island, and as a vital part of the Good Friday Agreement.

In this context, the political parties, in particular the two largest parties, must live up to their responsibilities and be open to fair and workable compromises on the small number of outstanding issues, to secure the overall interests of people in Northern Ireland and to protect and operate the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement again.

This will be difficult, but the two Governments believe that this can, and must, be achieved. Accordingly, the Government will continue to do everything possible to support continuing engagement and progress in discussions between the political parties, working with the UK Government in any scenario, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council Reports

90. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Finance if he and his officials have received the most recent Irish Fiscal Advisory Council report with its comments on a disorderly Brexit. [37689/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that I have received a copy of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council's Pre-Budget 2020 Statement, as published on Wednesday, 11th September. I have reviewed the Statement, along with my officials, and would make the following observations.

Firstly, I would welcome the Council's assessment that Government revenues continue to perform well this year to date. With tax receipts to end-August in line with expectations and showing year-on-year growth of 8.1%, it looks likely that our Budget 2019 target of €57.9 billion will be achieved.

I also note the Council's concerns around a 'hard Brexit' and in line with this view, last week I secured Government agreement to base Budget 2020 on this same assumption, that of a no-deal Brexit. In fact, given the uncertainty and lack of clarity regarding the timing and format that the U.K.'s exit will take, preparing for a no-deal scenario is the most sensible approach. This, I believe, will help us to ensure that we safeguard our recent hard won progress in stabilising the public finances.

In addition, it is important that we avoid a situation whereby decisions are made this year that may need to be reversed in the future. By assuming a 'no-deal Brexit', we can ensure that the Government has the necessary resources at its disposal to meet the impact of this exceptional challenge; whilst also preserving the longer-term sustainability of the public finances.

Finally, it is important to give certainty to businesses and citizens that the Government is prepared for a 'no-deal Brexit' and stands ready to support the economy in such a scenario.

Indeed, by continuing to balance our books, reduce our debt burden and build up the Rainy Day Fund, we are improving our resilience to the risks posed by Brexit and other risks that a small open economy such as ours faces.

Property Tax Exemptions

91. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the situations in which a householder with a house that has pyrite will be given an exemption from property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37856/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The pyrite exemption is intended to apply to those properties that have a significant level of pyrite damage. This means that not all properties that are affected by pyrite are eligible for the exemption. Under the relevant legislation, a property that has been damaged by pyrite is eligible for the LPT exemption where any one of the following conditions is met:

1. A certificate of damage has been completed by a competent person,
2. It has been accepted into the pyrite remediation scheme operated by the Pyrite Resolution Board,
3. An insurance company has remedied it or provided sufficient funds to carry out the remediation, or
4. The builder who built the property has remediated it or provided sufficient funds to carry out the remediation.

Property owners claiming the exemption under 1. above must provide a certificate to Revenue, which is completed in accordance with I.S. 398-1.2013 as set down by the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in Statutory Instrument (SI) No 147 of 2013. Property owners claiming the exemption under 2. to 4. above must provide appropriate supporting documentation.

Once granted, the exemption becomes applicable from the following 1 November and normally remains in place for a period of six years. The Finance (Local Property tax) Act 2012 (as amended) does not provide entitlement to the exemption for any years previous to a property being accepted as having significant pyritic damage, or in circumstances where the pyritic damage was remediated prior to the introduction of LPT on 1 July 2013.

However, usually the presence of pyrite, whether it has already caused structural damage to a property or has the potential to cause such damage, will have a negative effect on the market value of the property. This may result in a reduced LPT liability for the affected property, depending on the chargeable value that was declared for the property for LPT purposes on the current valuation date of 1 May 2013.

Property Tax Exemptions

92. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of householders originally given an exemption from the property tax and-or household charge but that subsequently had the exemption withdrawn retrospectively and were forced to repay the property tax and household charge previously foregone; the amount collected in these retrospective repayments; if he is satisfied that such householders were treated fairly in the application of criteria

for the retrospective withdrawal of the exemption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37857/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that Local Property Tax (LPT) exemptions are claimed on a self-assessment basis meaning that the onus is on property owners to correctly claim exemptions in accordance with the legislation as set down in the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) (LPT Act).

In respect of the household charge (HHC), this was governed by the Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011 which provided for certain exemptions and waivers. The criteria for these differed to the exemptions available for LPT. Property owners were obliged to submit claims and HHC waivers/exemptions were granted or refused by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) or the relevant Local Authorities. Revenue became responsible for the collection of HHC arrears, with effect from July 2013, but did not take on responsibility for the administration of exemptions or waivers. Data in respect of exemptions/waivers granted/refused is available from the Local Government Management Agency.

The number of exemptions fluctuate for a variety of reasons, including the receipt of new claims, the termination of existing exemptions or the amendment of claims. The latest statistics up to the end of July 2019, indicate that in excess of 49,100 exemptions are in place (including 1,700 in respect of significant pyrite damage) for the year 2019, broken down as per the following table:

Exemption	Total 2019 (Rounded)
Charitable Bodies (recreational activities)	200
Charitable bodies (special needs accommodation)	8,200
Certain properties purchased between 1/1/2013 and 31/12/2013	11,500
Properties fully chargeable to commercial rates	2,400
Properties vacated because of long-term mental / physical infirmity	7,600
Mobile homes	300
Registered nursing homes	300
Significant pyrite damage	1,700
Residence of severely incapacitated individual	2,000
Unfinished housing estates	3,310
Trading stock of builder / developer (unsold at 1/5/2013 or sold in the period 1/1/2013 to 31/10/2019	11,600
Total	49,110

As part of its compliance programme, Revenue carries out ongoing verification checks to ensure the various LPT exemptions are correctly claimed. Revenue is obliged to ensure that all property owners meet their LPT obligations and must make sure that compliant taxpayers are not disadvantaged. An exemption is only withdrawn where it has been claimed incorrectly and the property does not satisfy the specific exemption criteria.

I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible at this time to state the number of exemptions that have been withdrawn retrospectively as a result of compliance interventions but I will revert to the Deputy with additional statistical information.

As I am sure you'll appreciate taxpayer confidentiality prevents Revenue from providing personal information in each circumstance and as such I cannot comment on the details of individual cases.

Revenue is aware that the payment of outstanding arrears in certain circumstances could

cause financial difficulties and for this reason, has confirmed that it is willing to work with anyone in such a situation, to agree a mutually satisfactory arrangement.

Tax Code

93. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if the review of SARP has been completed and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37884/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In accordance with the Department of Finance Tax Expenditure Guidelines, SARP is currently the subject of an independent review, carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants. The review exercise affords an opportunity to look at all elements of the relief and it also includes consultation with stakeholders.

I understand that the report is currently being finalised and I expect that it will be submitted to me shortly. I hope to publish the report in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill.

Motor Tax Rates

94. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that detailed consideration is given to the submission of a society (details supplied) for budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37915/19]

95. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that no registration taxation changes in 2020 will increase the price of cleaner, safer cars and new cars in view of the potential of a disorderly Brexit, the decline in the past three years in new car purchases and the increasing level of imports of second-hand vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37916/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 95 together.

My officials give due consideration to submissions made in the context of the Budget.

As the Deputy will be aware, it is a long-standing 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.

Departmental Circulars

96. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will explain the rationale relative to circular 15/2016 from his Department on the subject of superannuation benefits; if there is an outcome as yet to the clarification promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37903/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Circular 15/2016 was issued by my Department on 27 April 2016 to give guidance on the operation of Section 52 subsections (6) and (7) of the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012, which imposes a limit, or ‘benefit cap’, on the total amount of pension benefits that can accrue where an individual has been a member of more than one public service

pension scheme.

Subject to a number of conditions, Circular 15/2016 provided that public servants subject to the benefit cap could choose the ‘most financially beneficial combination of service’ across the various pension schemes of which they were a member. This meant that, where it could be reasonably facilitated, an employer processing a retirement application might allow a retiree to forego less valuable pension service so that more valuable service (within the overall allowable limit) might be availed of. Where a pension had already come into payment, the member would make an appropriate recoupment to the relevant pension scheme.

As a result of a number of issues that have arisen in relation to the benefit cap and implementation of Circular 15/2016, my Department has carried out a review into the operation of those provisions. As part of the review, further legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General has been sought. Once that advice has been received, new/revised guidance will be developed and issued as appropriate. At that stage, public service employers and pension administrators will be in a position to consider the implications for the pension entitlements of affected individuals under their pension schemes, and to communicate with those individuals accordingly.

Flood Prevention Measures

97. Deputy Eugene Murphy asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the cause of the serious flooding which occurred recently at Coonagh on the counties Limerick and Clare border and the delay in the schedule of works by the OPW will be investigated; the reason an inadequate temporary barrier was erected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37760/19]

98. Deputy Eugene Murphy asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps being taken to address the impact of serious flooding issues at Coonagh on the counties Limerick and Clare border; the role the OPW will be taking in addressing the significant damage caused to services, facilities and sporting facilities in the locality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37763/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) undertakes routine inspections of all of its flood defences along the Shannon estuary.

During a routine inspection by OPW staff on the River Shannon Flood Defence Embankment system, damage to sluice outfall/embankment was noticed. The function of the sluice outfall allows the discharge of water from the area protected by the embankment to the estuary, and during high tides prevents tidal waters in the estuary backing up in to the protected area.

While repair works had started in mid-August, due to forecast high tides emergency repairs works were carried out on Friday 30th and Saturday 31st August. Unfortunately, these temporary works failed and water breached the embankments.

The OPW has now reconstructed an embankment at the breached area for the short term and is currently considering options for the construction of a permanent structure for the long term.

The OPW acknowledges that in trying to repair the damage to the sluice, the temporary structures did not initially provide the level of protection provided by the embankments and did lead to flooding in the area.

The OPW were in contact with the local authority over the weekend in question and sandbags were provided to the affected houses. Several pumps were also deployed to the area.

In relation to the five houses directly affected, four families were evacuated to a nearby hotel over the weekend of Saturday 31st August and Sunday 1st September. The OPW has met with and written to these homeowners and apologised for the damage to their house and contents caused by this exceptional situation.

The OPW has engaged a loss adjuster to help establish the quantum of costs in restoring the houses and contents affected to their pre flooding position. The loss adjuster visited these five houses on Thursday 5th September. The OPW has advised the homeowners that while this is an independent assessment, the OPW appreciates that some homeowners have engaged their own loss assessor and the OPW will cover the cost for that service.

The OPW will fund the costs of alternative accommodation, if needed, for the duration of restoration works.

The loss adjuster has also visited the sporting facilities affected and is working to establish the quantum of costs involved in restoring these facilities to their pre flooding position.

I visited the area on Sunday 1st September and met with those affected and I am anxious that an early resolution for all those directly affected by this flood event is found without delay.

I want to take this opportunity to again thank the affected homeowners for their ongoing co-operation.

Home Tuition Scheme

99. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications outstanding for home tuition grants as at 13 September 2019. [37773/19]

100. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications received to date for the 2019/2020 school term for home tuition grants. [37774/19]

119. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date on which home tuition will commence in September 2019; the number of children who will receive home tuition in September 2019; the number of teachers who are in place to provide same; the number of vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37885/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99, 100 and 119 together.

The Home Tuition Grant schemes application forms and related Circular were published on 8th August 2019 this year. Last year, the forms and circular were published on 26th July 2018.

The scheme provides funding towards a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement for whom such a placement is not available. The scheme also provides for early intervention for children with Autism.

Where the NCSE confirms that there is no suitable school place available for a child, the Department can provide Home Tuition Grant funding towards a compensatory educational service for the child until a school placement is available.

By its nature, the grant is intended to be a short term intervention and should not be regarded

as an optional alternative to a school placement.

Applications forms are signed by the NCSE local SENO to confirm that no school placement is currently available for a child. SENOs are processing home tuition applications as a matter of urgency.

It is an essential condition for the approval of grant funding that tutors engaged by Parents are registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland and vetted by the National Vetting Bureau via the Teaching Council of Ireland's on-line vetting process, prior to the commencement of the delivery of tuition.

The Department has no flexibility in this regard and cannot approve the Home Tuition grant until it verifies that these conditions are met.

The same conditions apply whether Parents use the grant to engage tutors to deliver tuition in their home or private providers to deliver tuition in a group setting.

The Home Tuition Application form outlines that it may take the Department up to 15 working days to process home tuition applications.

The Department is prioritising the processing of Home Tuition applications with a view to processing completed applications within 7 working days.

My Department also provides a Home Tuition Grant Scheme for students, enrolled in schools, with significant medical conditions, which has caused, and is likely to continue to cause, major disruption to their attendance at school for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school.

Schools Building Contractors

101. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent in 2018 on a company (details supplied) by legal fees, other professional and consultancy fees and other costs including construction and renovations in tabular form. [37776/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is liaising with the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the Attorney General's Office in relation to the on-going legal process related to the schools built by the contractor to which he refers. He will also be aware that proceedings have issued in a number of schools to date. The next date Court date is expected to be in October 2019. For legal reasons, my Department is not in a position, at this time, to provide any costs including legal, professional and other costs including construction and renovations costs to date.

School Transport Provision

102. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied) on a school transport issue from Carlingford to Dundalk, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37785/19]

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

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time have been accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that the family referred to by the Deputy did not complete the application process within timelines and therefore were not allocated a ticket for the 2019/20 school year. Bus Eireann has also confirmed that the service in question is operating to capacity.

Homelessness Strategy

103. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason he has not provided guidelines to schools in the way in which to deal with and be of help to school pupils and their families who are homeless. [37790/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A range of resources are available to support schools in dealing with identified additional educational needs, including needs which may arise for children who are experiencing homelessness. These include National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) supports and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) supports.

The staff of schools are very sensitive to the needs of children who are experiencing disruption in their lives and make every effort to support the additional needs they experience. Where they are aware of homelessness and where it is impacting on school attendance and participation they can engage closely with the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla and with the support services of my own Department including the National Educational Psychological Service.

Identification of Need and Early Intervention Strategies are considered key components to supporting children who experience homelessness. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) works with schools through the DES Continuum of Support framework. The NEPS Model of Service works through a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to support schools to meet the needs of individual pupils. NEPS psychologists can provide advice and guidance to Principals and teachers in relation to individual students needs and in the development of whole school approaches to support inclusion, participation and integration.

DEIS is the main policy initiative of my Department to tackle educational disadvantage. DEIS provides additional supports, through the DEIS School Support Programme, to schools identified as having the highest concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged communities. Schools can use these additional resources to meet the identified needs of their pupil cohort, including the additional needs that may arise for pupils experiencing homelessness.

DEIS Schools can also avail of Home School Community Liaison and School Completion supports provided by Tusla's Educational Welfare Service in relation to school attendance, retention and progression which can be areas of particular challenge to pupils experiencing homelessness. Tusla Educational Welfare service have produced guidance for home school community Liaison Co-ordinators and School Completion programmes for engaging with children and families experiencing homelessness.

TUSLA have also produced a guidance leaflet on school attendance information for families experiencing homelessness outlining how the educational welfare service can assist.

In addition the Department of Employment and Social Protection runs the School Meals Programme which is an important component of policies to address the educational and health disadvantages associated with an inadequately nutritious diet in childhood.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

104. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason he has not provided the needed number of school places for children with special needs at the beginning of this academic year. [37791/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Ensuring that every child has a suitable placement available to them is a key priority for me and the Government.

I am deeply conscious of the stress and anxiety facing parents and their children where difficulties are encountered in securing a school place.

We are investing heavily in supporting our children with special educational needs, with €1.9bn being spent in 2019, about €1 in every €5 of the education budget. An additional 1,000 special class places have been provided in this school year, with the establishment of 167 special classes. This brings the total number of special class places in Ireland to over 9,700, almost a trebling in this provision since 2011.

The NCSE has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs. This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where the NCSE identifies need. The NCSE works with families and schools to ensure that advance planning is in place so that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

As Minister I have a power under Section 37A of the Education Act 1998 to direct a school to provide additional provision where all reasonable efforts have failed. The legislation provides for a very transparent series of steps which can ultimately lead to the issuing of a legally binding direction to a board of management.

The initial step in the process is for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to inform the Minister that there is a shortage of places in a particular area.

The NCSE will only activate the legislation after it has taken all reasonable efforts to get schools and their Patrons to voluntarily agree to provide additional special class or school places.

The legislation was formally activated for the first time on April 18th following a report from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) outlining insufficient special school

Questions - Written Answers

and special class capacity in Dublin 15 and North Kildare. This followed extensive interaction between the NCSE, schools and my Department.

The shortage of places in North Kildare was resolved and additional post primary classes will open in 2020/21.

In relation to Dublin 15, the specific provision required was 8 additional primary Autism special classes providing 46 places and 40 special school places for students with complex needs.

New classes which will be coming on stream over coming weeks are the result of very intense engagement between the Department, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), Patron bodies and schools.

This follows the establishing of a Special School for up to 40 children in Dublin 15, under the patronage of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB.

As the new places come on stream in Dublin 15 over coming weeks, the NCSE will work closely with the Schools and the Parents of the children concerned to ensure there is a planned approach to the start-up of the new school and classes.

The NCSE has also indicated that some parents in South Dublin and Cork are experiencing difficulty securing school places for their children. It worked with schools over the last school year to establish 7 additional special classes and, since June 2019, established a further 6 special classes. This has created an additional 54 places in primary autism special classes and an additional 24 places in post primary autism special classes. NCSE continue to work with schools and has advised my Department that the legislation may need to be invoked in the near future, if sufficient schools do not respond voluntarily.

NCSE were aware of increased demand for special classes in Cork and have established 24 special classes for Setember 2019, creating over 140 additional special class places in Cork. In total there are 190 special classes in Cork.

At end of the school year in June 2019, NCSE was aware of 20 children in Cork seeking a special class or special school placement. At that time, there were approximately 60 specialist education places vacant in Cork and NCSE has worked during the school holidays to match children with suitable class places. Schools will confirm special class and school enrolments to NCSE this month and NCSE will review the final position.

NCSE is aware of a number of children still seeking specialist places and continues to work with schools and their patrons to establish additional provision.

The NCSE is actively engaging at local level with schools, Patron Bodies and the families concerned to resolve the issues involved as soon as possible.

If, following completion of that work, the NCSE establishes that there is a shortage of places in either area it can inform the Minister thereby activating the provisions contained in section 37A of the Education Act 1998.

Student Grant Scheme Applications Data

105. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students who qualified for a category of support from SUSI in each of the academic years 2010 to 2018; and the projected number for academic year beginning 2019. [37792/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The link below provides a breakdown of the awards for each of the academic years 2010/11 to 2019/20, as requested by the Deputy. SUSI is still accepting applications for the 2019/20 academic year. As such, the figures for 2019/20 are provisional.

The data encompasses students in receipt of a SUSI grant and grants from the other 66 awarding authorities who have continued to process renewal applications on a transitional basis, pending the full transfer of all grants to SUSI.

[Student Grantholders 2010-11 to 2019-20 (Prov)]

Home Tuition Scheme Provision

106. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Education and Skills when hours for children with autistic spectrum disorders who are awaiting home support hours will be sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37795/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Home Tuition Grant schemes application forms and related Circular were published on 8th August 2019 this year. Last year, the forms and circular were published on 26th July 2018.

The scheme provides funding towards a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement for whom such a placement is not available. The scheme also provides for early intervention for children with Autism.

Where the NCSE confirms that there is no suitable school place available for a child, the Department can provide Home Tuition Grant funding towards a compensatory educational service for the child until a school placement is available.

By its nature, the grant is intended to be a short term intervention and should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a school placement.

The application forms and related Circular for this year's scheme were published on 8th August 2019. Last year, the forms and circular were published on 26 July 2018.

Applications forms are signed by the NCSE local SENO to confirm that no school placement is currently available for a child. SENOs are processing home tuition applications as a matter of urgency.

It is an essential condition for the approval of grant funding that tutors engaged by Parents are registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland and vetted by the National Vetting Bureau via the Teaching Council of Ireland's online vetting process, prior to the commencement of the delivery of tuition.

The Department has no flexibility in this regard and cannot approve the Home Tuition grant until it verifies that these conditions are met.

The same conditions apply whether Parents use the grant to engage tutors to deliver tuition in their home or private providers to deliver tuition in a group setting.

The Home Tuition Application form outlines that it may take the Department up to 15 working days to process home tuition applications.

The Department is prioritising the processing of Home Tuition applications with a view to processing completed applications within 7 working days.

Home Tuition Scheme Administration

107. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason there is a month delay in payment being issued to home support teachers after they submit their hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37796/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The purpose of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide funding towards the provision of a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of specific reasons, are unable to attend school. The terms of this scheme are set out in circular 56/2019 which is available on my Department's website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0056_2019.pdf.

As set out in this circular my Department acts as a payroll agent only on behalf of the parent/legal guardian who has made the application for Home Tuition. Payments in respect of the tuition provided under the terms of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme issue on a monthly basis to the approved Tutor via the Non-Teaching Staff (NTS) payroll operated by my Department. In order for payment to issue, a payment claim form must be completed and signed by both the Parent/Legal Guardian and the Tutor and

forwarded to my Department at the end of each and every calendar month in which tuition was provided. Further details in relation to these arrangements and the dates by which payment claim forms are to be submitted are available on my Departments website at

<https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Home-Tuition/home-tuition-payment-information-note.pdf>.

Home Tuition Scheme Administration

108. Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether an online application for teachers to submit home support hours for payment is a better option; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37797/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is currently conducting investigations into the possibility of providing an online claims portal for payments to Home Tutors. This would be an additional feature to the current Department payroll systems. Whilst this would be a welcome addition it will have to be considered in the context of other Department priorities.

School Transport Applications

109. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied) on a school transport issue from Carlingford to Dundalk, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37813/19]

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

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time have been accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that the pupil referred to by the Deputy is deemed mainstream eligible to the school referred to by the Deputy.

The onus is on the parent to ensure that correct payment is made to Bus Éireann so that applications for transport are valid and can be processed appropriately. Bus Éireann has confirmed that in this case full payment was not received within the application process timelines.

Bus Eireann has further confirmed that the service in question is operating to capacity.

School Accommodation Provision

110. Deputy Michael Moynihan asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a permanent extension at a school (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the urgent need for this school to have certainty regarding its future enrolment capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37815/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is in receipt of an application, for additional accommodation, from the school referred to by the Deputy. The application is currently being assessed and on completion a decision will be relayed to the school authority. In the meantime, an interim accommodation solution has been agreed with the school Patron.

School Transport Appeals

111. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied) on a school transport issue from Carlingford to Dundalk, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37816/19]

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

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

Questions - Written Answers

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

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

Bus Éireann has confirmed that the child referred to by the Deputy is not attending their nearest school. The child is therefore not eligible for school transport under the terms of the scheme.

This case is the subject of an appeal to the School Transport Appeals Board. This Board is independent of my Department and I understand their next meeting is scheduled for 19 September 2019.

The Board will inform the family directly of their determination on the matter.

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

Pension Provisions

112. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if superannuation documents will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37818/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The person concerned is in receipt of pension benefits from my Department since 2014. Officials from the Pension Unit of my Department will contact the person concerned and discuss her pension benefits with a view to addressing any queries she may now have and will also forward her a copy of her superannuation papers which previously issued in 2014.

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

113. D'fhiarfraigheadh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an aontaíonn sé gur éagóir oideachais é a iarraidh ar dhalta atá chun an scrúdú ardleibhéal mata a dhéanamh i nGaeilge i mí an Mheithimh seo chugainn, i ndiaidh a bheith ag staidéar mata trí Ghaeilge ón gcéad bhliain ar aghaidh i nGaelcholáiste Lú, Dún Dealgan, iompú ar an mBéarla chun an scrúdú sin a dhéanamh; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [37827/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Mar is eol don Teachta, tá an Grúpa Stiúrtha maidir le Soláthar Múinteoirí, faoi chathaoirleacht Ard-Rúnaí mo Roinne, ag breithniú na saincheisteanna a mbíonn tionchar acu ar sholáthar múinteoirí i roinnt réimsí polasaí. Tá an Grúpa ag déanamh maoirseachta ar chur i bhfeidhm an Phlean Gníomhaíochta do Sholáthar Múinteoirí, a d'fhoilsigh mé i mí na Samhna 2018. Agus é ag tabhairt faoina chuid oibre, tá aird ag an nGrúpa ar an riachtanas nach mór do gach duine ar mian leis bheith ag múineadh i scoil aitheanta na caighdeáin chláraithe ghairmiúla agus na critéir arna leagan amach ag an gComhairle Múinteoireachta a chomhlíonadh. Is í an Chomhairle an comhlacht rialála gairmiúil do ghairm na múinteoireachta. Tá súil agam a bheith in ann tuilleadh beart chun tacú leis an soláthar múinteoirí a fhógaírt sna míonna amach romhainn.

Tugadh isteach roinnt beart a thacaíonn leis an soláthar múinteoirí do scoileanna Gaeilge mar chuid de chur i bhfeidhm an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022. Áirítear orthu sin an Mháistreacht san Oideachas (M.O.) nua trí mheán na Gaeilge do mhúinteoirí bunscoile agus iarbhunscoile, príomhoidí ina measc, ar cuireadh túis léi in 2018 i gColáiste Mhuire gan Smál agus an Baitsiléir Oideachais (B.O.) 4 bliana nua trí mheán na Gaeilge do mhúinteoirí bunscoile ar cuireadh túis leis in 2019 in Institiúid Oideachais Marino. Leis na cláir nua sin, déantar soláthar do suas le 60 áit nua gach bliain d'oideachas múinteoirí trí mheán na Gaeilge. Cuireadh foireann bhreise ar fáil don chlár Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas (MGO) in Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh chun an soláthar múinteoirí iarbhunscoile atá in ann oideachas ardchaighdeáin trí mheán na Gaeilge a chur ar fáil in ábhair éagsúla.

Maidir leis an Ardteistiméireacht, beidh mar rogha ag iarrthóirí, mura luaitear a mhalaírt, freagra a thabhairt i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla, ach amháin i gcás na n-ábhar Gaeilge agus Béarla, agus i gcás ábhair teangacha eile áit a dtugtar treoir an sprioctheanga a úsáid.

Tabharfar leaganacha Gaeilge nó Béarla de na páipéis scrúdaithe d'iarrthóirí de réir mar a chuireann siad in iúl ar a bhfoirmearcha iarratais. Ní thugtar ach an leagan Gaeilge den pháipéar scrúdaithe (mar réamhshocrú) d'iarrthóirí a thugann le fios sa phróiseas iarratais ar scrúdú go mbeartaíonn siad freagra a thabhairt i nGaeilge. Féadfaidh an Feitheoir an leagan Béarla a thabhairt don iarrthóir freisin ina dhiaidh sin ach é a iarraigdh.

Ach an páipéar a chur ar fáil sa dá theanga, tugtar deis dóibh a sheiceáil gur bhain siad an chiall cheart as aon cheist a gcuirtear orthu trí bhíthin comparáid a dhéanamh leis an gceist ar an bpáipéar sa teanga eile.

D'fhéadfai marcanna breise a thabhairt d'iarrthóir a thugann freagra i nGaeilge sa scrúdú scríofa sna hábhair éagsúla, i dteannta na marcanna a gnóthaíodh san ábhar.

Ní bhfaighidh iarrthóirí a thugann cuid den fhreagra i nGaeilge agus cuid eile i mBéarla aon mharcanna breise.

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

114. D'fhiadfraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé sásta leis na struchtúir sa Roinn a bhaineann le hAonaid Ghaeilge dara leibhéal; an bhfuil sé sásta gníomhú chun go gcuirfear struchtúir nua i bhfeidhm; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [37828/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Sa phlean gníomhaíochta don Straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge 2018-2022, tá an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna ina príomheagraíocht don ghníomh maidir le deiseanna a chur ar fáil chun tacú le leathnú an oideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge i gceantair lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht sa chomhthéacs a bhaineann le 42 scoil nua a bhunú sa tréimhse 2019-2022. I dtaca leis sin, tugtar aird ar sholáthair an oideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge mar chuid den phróiseas nua maidir le pátrúnacht scoile agus Gaelscoileanna á mbunú ag leibhéal na bunscoile agus Gaelcholáistí agus Aonaid Lán-Ghaeilge á mbunú ag leibhéal na hiar-bhunscoile.

Tar éis an fhógra i mí an Aibreáin 2018 go raibh 42 scoil nua le bunú idir 2019 agus 2022, d'fhorbair mo Roinnse Córas nua um Phróiseáil Phátrúnachta ar Líne, ar córas é a chuireann eolas oibiachtúil ar fáil agus a cheadaíonn do thuismitheoirí a roghanna maidir le pátrúnacht agus teanga teagaisc a léiriú, i.e. Gaeilge nó Béarla, sna scoileanna nua sin. Tá roghanna na dtuismitheoirí, chomh maith le ceisteanna amhail méid na héagsúlachta a bhaineann leis an soláthar i gceantar (lena n-áirítear an soláthar trí mheán na Gaeilge) thar a bheith tábhachtach

sa phróiseas cinnteoireachta agus chun a chinneadh an mbeadh scoil ag leibhéal na hiar-bhunscole in Gaelcholáiste nó, más scoil í ina ndéanfar an teagasc trí mheán an Bhéarla, an gcuirfí aonad Lán-Ghaeilge nó “Aonad” san áireamh sa scoil.

Tá líon d’Aonaid Lán-Ghaeilge ag feidhmiú in iar-bhunscoleanna in ndéantar an teagasc trí mheán an Bhéarla ar fud na tíre. Baineann éagsúlacht le méid na nAonad Lán-Ghaeilge sin ag brath ar chuínsí áitiúla. Déanann an húdaráis scoile ábhartha bainistiú ar na socruthe maidir le teagasc agus foghlaim na scoláirí in Aonad agus maidir leis na struchtúir eagraíochtúla laistigh den scoil. Tá an méid a thumtar na scoláirí sa Ghaeilge in Aonaid ag brath ar roinnt tosca gaolmhara amhail an tacaíocht ó bhainistíocht na scoile atá mar óstach aige, leibhéal an éilimh ar oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge, fáil a bheith ar áiseanna cuí sa scoil agus ar mhúinteoirí le saineolas. Tá sé de chead ag údaráis scoile teagmháil a dhéanamh leis na Rannóga ábhartha i mo Roinnse de réir mar is gá maidir leis na haonaid Lán-Ghaeilge sin.

Bhí teagmháil ag mo Roinnse le páirtithe leasmhara i dtaca le hAonaid a fhorbairt agus leanfar de theagmháil den chineál sin. Cuirfear aon eolas ábhartha a eascróidh as an athbhreithniú ar sholáthar sa dá Aonad atá cheana féin in iar-bhunscoleanna sa Ghaeltacht san áireamh in obair na Roinne i dtaca leis sin.

Maidir le hAonaid Lán-Ghaeilge atá ann cheana féin, más rud é go dtagann méadú ar an rollachán agus ar an aschur ó aon bhunscoleanna Lán-Ghaeilge i gceantar chuig leibhéal ina mbeadh cúis mhaith le haistriú chuig Gaelcholáiste aonair, bheadh an Roinn toilteanach breithniú a dhéanamh ar chás a dhéanfadh pátrún na scoile chun aistriú ó Aonad go dtí Gaelcholáiste.

School Transport Provision

115. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to help students travel to and from school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37832/19]

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

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of my Department’s School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time have been accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have

been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that there were a number of children in the area referred to by the Deputy were not allocated a ticket for the 2019/20 school year due to either late payment, or no payments being made at all.

Bus Eireann has also confirmed that the service in question is operating to capacity.

State Examinations

116. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Education and Skills when teachers will receive sample exam papers for the new junior cycle Irish course which is due to be first examined in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37861/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It has been long-standing policy of the State Examinations Commission to provide sample papers in the autumn of the examination year for the programme in question. This to allow the curricular changes, and the associated changes to teaching and learning to become embedded in schools.

Earlier publication of sample papers would result in an examinations focus too early in the change process, rather than on the curriculum content.

This is particularly important in the context of Junior Cycle Reform, which is promoting a very different approach to assessment and feedback to students to assist their learning over the course of Junior Cycle, away from the traditional focus on external terminal assessment through the state examinations.

Schools Building Projects Status

117. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a report on progress towards the building programme of a school (details supplied) will be provided; the schedule being followed; the details of contracts being made; if his attention has been brought to the concerns of the school community in respect of the delays and the view that the buildings are not safe and that the situation is affecting enrolments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37863/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school building project referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under the Department's Design and Build programme. Planning permission has been secured for a new 16 classroom primary school and tender documentation is being prepared. It is anticipated that the project will proceed to tender in Quarter 1 of 2020, with a view to being on site in Quarter 2 of 2020.

Schools Building Projects Status

118. Deputy Ruth Coppinger asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the delivery of a permanent school building for a school (details supplied); the assistance given to the school for a timely delivery of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37867/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The building project referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under my Department's Design & Build programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Management team to progress the project through the stages of architectural planning, tendering and construction.

The next step in the process will be the application for planning permission which is expected to be lodged shortly. Thereafter, as with all school building projects, the exact timeframe for delivery of the school will be dependent on the grant of planning permission. My Department will be working to have the first phase of the school's permanent accommodation handed over by September of 2021 with phase 2 to follow in a matter of months.

A meeting was held between Department officials and representatives of the Board of Management of the school on September 3rd. In the course of the meeting the projected timelines for the progression of the project were outlined and the factors underpinning those timelines were explained in considerable detail. Following the meeting an email issued to the Board confirming the timelines for the project.

For the school year commencing September 2020, the school will remain in its current location and plans are being put in place to provide the necessary additional accommodation.

My Department officials will keep the Board of Management fully informed of developments as they occur.

Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 99.

School Transport Provision

120. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of special school transport for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37887/19]

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

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The child referred to by the Deputy is eligible for school transport under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs.

Bus Éireann has been requested to organise a transport service for this child and they have been requested to liaise directly with the family in this regard. In the meantime, the family may avail of the Special Transport Grant towards the cost of providing private transport until this service is established.

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

Student Grant Scheme Applications

121. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a SUSI application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37894/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by SUSI, to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

School Accommodation Provision

122. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in advancing a project to provide additional permanent classrooms at a second-level school which was sanctioned in September 2013 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37917/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The ETB has proposed to amalgamate two schools in Cavan including the school in question and this has been approved by my Department. The schools will continue to operate from the existing school sites until a new school building can be provided for the amalgamated school. It is envisaged that the construction phase for the new amalgamated school will be facilitated with investment available during the second half of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 to 2027.

The new amalgamated school would enable facilities to be modernised in an energy efficient building that would be compliant with Part L of the Building Regulations 2017. It would also provide the opportunity for the school to have a fully equipped PE Hall facility with fitness suite together with a 2-class special education needs base.

I also wish to advise, the Deputy, that my Department is liaising with the Patron to assist with the school's interim accommodation needs pending delivery of the new school building.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

123. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the SUSI grant income threshold for families will be increased to the same amount as the affordable childcare scheme to reflect the growing costs of college education and rental accommodation for students in view of an announcement (details supplied) by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37948/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Different State support schemes have different objectives. The main objective of the Department's statutory based Student Grant Scheme is to provide assistance where parental income is below a certain threshold or in the case of independent mature students, where the level of income of the student and his

or her spouse warrants additional assistance by way of a grant.

The Student Grant Scheme contains a number of qualifying thresholds for various grant values. These gradations allow students just over a threshold margin, to remain in receipt of a grant, albeit at a reduced rate that reflect their relative income vis-à-vis other applicants.

The Student Grant Scheme also provides for different levels of income thresholds where families have (i) less than 4 dependent children (ii) between 4 and 7 dependent children and (iii) 8 or more dependent children. In recognition of the additional cost to families where more than one person is attending college, income thresholds may also be increased by up to €4,830 for each additional family member attending college at the same time. In this way, the Student Grant Scheme is responsive to the individual circumstances of particular families.

The assessment of means under my Department's Student Grant Scheme is based on gross income from all sources, with certain social welfare and health service executive payments being exempt. While the Affordable Childcare Scheme has both universal and means-tested elements, the Student Grant Scheme is entirely means-tested.

The Deputy will appreciate that the funding allocation for student grants is determined in the context of the overall estimates and budgetary process undertaken by all Government Departments. As such, it would not be appropriate to comment on specific issues or proposals including those relating to student grants at this stage. However, all proposals made in relation to education expenditure will be considered in the context of Budget 2020, having regard to overall resource constraints and other competing demands in the education sector.

Schools Building Projects Status

124. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the circumstances in which a school (details supplied) was told that a proposed temporary move would not go ahead; and the reason this major project has been delayed. [37949/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The building project referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under my Department's Design & Build programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Management team to progress the project through the stages of architectural planning, tendering and construction.

A meeting was held between Department officials and representatives of the Board of Management on July 26. In the course of the meeting the projected timelines for the progression of the project were clearly outlined and the factors underpinning those timelines were explained in considerable detail. The timing of the temporary move for decanting purposes was also discussed. Following the meeting an email issued to the Board of Management confirming the time lines for the project.

Any developments which might arise in respect of these timelines will be communicated to the Board as they arise.

School Transport Administration

125. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills the new bus routes established further to his changing or reinterpretation of the rules in summer 2019. [37950/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):

School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who completed the application process on time have been accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Minister McHugh has recently sanctioned an additional €1m on the school transport budget to allow for temporary alleviation measures to address a shortage of school transport capacity on the post primary scheme in 2019. The cost of these measures is being given to those areas where there is a significant concentration of post-primary children who have paid on time for the 2019/2020 school year and who are attending their second closest school.

A number of measures have been confirmed to alleviate some of the capacity issues in the areas of highest demand in some parts of the country. Bus Éireann continues to work with the Department of Education and Skills to process applications and design routes to ensure that all eligible pupils who paid on time are facilitated with school transport. In doing this they are endeavouring to facilitate as many concessionary pupils as possible where capacity exists.

The areas where additional measures have been implemented are listed in the following table.

County	Area
Cork	Coachford, Fermoy, Kinsale
Wicklow	Carnew
Meath	Trim
Limerick	Sixmilebridge
Monaghan	Monaghan
Wexford	Gorey, Kilmuckridge
Kilkenny	Johnstown
Galway	Loughrea, Spiddeal
Kildare	Johnstown Bridge
Tipperary	Cahir

New routes have not been established in these areas but additional capacity has been provided.

Direct Provision Data

126. Deputy Frank O'Rourke asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in direct provision centres; his plans to review and reform the asylum process with a view to extending the right to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37783/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):

My Department is responsible for offering accommodation and related services to international protection applicants while their claim for protection is being examined. As of 8 September 2019, 7,306 persons were being provided with accommodation by my Department. Currently, there are 6,056 persons residing in the 38 accommodation centres located nationwide. As the centres are at full capacity, there are also a further 1,250 applicants residing in 33 emergency accommodation locations in hotels and guest houses.

In terms of the right to work, holders of a labour market access permission already have a very broad and generous access to employment and self-employment. Eligible applicants have access to all sectors of employment, with the exception of the Civil and Public Service, An Garda Síochána, the Irish Defence Forces and Embassies or consulates accredited to the State. The exclusion of these employments is largely due to their requirement for long-term residence in the State or EU/EEA citizenship. There is no minimum or maximum salary threshold associated with the permission, no language requirement/assessment, and no evidence of a job offer is required before a permission is granted. There is no restriction with regard to temporary or permanent jobs, nor to full-time or part-time work.

The Government is committed to reducing the time that it takes to process applications for international protection. This is to ensure that we can identify at the earliest possible stage those who are in need of our protection and those who can safely return to their country of origin.

We provide access to the labour market if a person is waiting more than nine months without a first instance recommendation on their application. This is in full compliance with the provisions of the current EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive. Where a person does not have clarity on their status in the State within this period, it is reasonable to allow them to access the labour market.

A High Level Interdepartmental Group has been established in my Department, chaired by one of our Deputy Secretary Generals, to review the Direct Provision system in its entirety, including the interaction between labour market participation and the Direct Provision system. We are mapping a plan for immediate improvements and for medium to long-term transitional change.

Last month, we published agreed National Standards for accommodation centres. The Standards will apply to all service providers contracted by the Department to operate and manage accommodation centres. They provide a framework for the continued development of services and supports for residents by improving the quality of care and ensuring consistency across the centres.

Direct Provision System

127. Deputy Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procurement processes used in the procurement of commercial direct provision centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37799/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):

My Department currently has two separate ongoing procurement processes to identify and contract with privately owned properties for the provision of accommodation and ancillary services to persons seeking international protection – an expressions of interest process to meet immediate short-term demand and a full tender process to meet medium to long-term demand.

The expressions of interest process is advertised in the national media and seeks suitable premises on usually a one year contract. Any property offered to the Department under this process is inspected by an official to determine if it is suitable for the Department's short-term needs.

The tender process, which is conducted through the government's procurement portal www.etenders.gov.ie is a more in-depth process where bids are invited on a regional basis to meet a specification designed by the Department to deliver independent living for applicants in appropriate and safe surroundings. This process can take up to 5 months to go through the design, advertisement and evaluation stages. Following evaluation, bidders are advised whether they have been successful in being placed on a framework from which the Department can draw down accommodation, as required. Successful bidders have a further 16 weeks to complete all mobilisation works as set out in their tender bid before it becomes operational as an accommodation centre.

I am advised that, to date, the following regional competitions have progressed through the evaluation stage and are in the mobilisation phase; the South East, Midlands and the MidWest Regions. Evaluation is underway for the South West and Western Regions. The closing date for bids for the Mid East Region was the 16th September and evaluation will commence shortly. Advertisements for bids for the Dublin and Borders Regions are scheduled to be published by the end of this month.

Direct Provision System

128. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the procurement process for direct provision services in the western region has concluded; if so, the details of the successful bidder; if not, when it will conclude; when the successful bidder will be announced; the number of applications received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37819/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):
As the Deputy will be aware, the State has a legal obligation to offer accommodation, food, a range of other services (including utilities, healthcare etc.) and a weekly allowance to any person who claims a right to international protection in Ireland while their legal claim is being examined.

The number of applications for international protection has been steadily increasing and is up by 36% since the start of the year. To meet the associated increased demand for accommodation, my Department has initiated two processes to source additional accommodation. It has sought expressions of interest from parties who would be interested in providing accommodation and related services to people in the international protection process and has also launched a nationwide, regional tendering process.

Following the most recent tender process, an evaluation of offers is underway. I am advised that no decision has been taken as yet in relation to accommodation in the Western region for which eight bids were received. Therefore it would be inappropriate for me to comment further

while the evaluation process is ongoing. When the evaluation and other commercially sensitive aspects of the process are completed, the Department will begin engagement with local communities and their political representatives. I am not in a position at present to say when the evaluation process will conclude.

I appreciate that local communities have many questions when they hear that a centre may be opening in their area. We already have a network of 38 centres across 18 counties. In all cases, there is positive engagement between residents and local communities including through the Friends of the Centre Groups. These Groups promote integration across the communities and are a valuable support to residents and to centre managers and staff.

In terms of local services and supports, once it is confirmed that an accommodation centre is opening in an area, my Department links in with the other State service providers to ensure that all the necessary supports are put in place. Where GP lists are full, the HSE will arrange for access to GPs who have availability in the surrounding area. The Department of Education and Skills ensures access to schools for children and, if required, school transport. Children also have access to the free pre-school scheme, the Early Childhood Care and Education programme. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides a weekly personal allowance to each resident and covers any exceptional needs. The system operates under a whole-of-Government approach to ensure the best outcomes for residents and for local communities.

Direct Provision System

129. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the tender documents for the new direct provision centres (details supplied) which his Department recently published have as a mandatory requirement of the tender, the provision of kitchen and cooking facilities in order that residents of these potential new centres can live under the independent living model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37851/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I can inform the Deputy that the specifications detailed in my Department's regional procurement processes, done through the eTenders online system, require that all bids must provide for independent living, i.e. that all residents are able to cook meals of their own choosing as well as providing designated living room space for families.

Any bidder that is successful in being placed on a framework and is drawn down from that framework has 16 weeks to carry out all necessary infrastructural works to deliver the independent living model as detailed in their tender submission.

I expect that the continued rollout of the independent living model will deliver significant improvements in living conditions and standards for residents, in particular families and children. I also recently published agreed National Standards for accommodation centres. The Standards will apply to all service providers contracted by the Department to operate and manage accommodation and reception centres. They provide a framework for the continued development of supports and services for residents by improving the quality of care and ensuring consistency across the centres. A copy of the Standards can be found on the Department's website www.justice.ie.

Refugee Status Applications Data

130. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average length of time for a first instance decision on an application for international protection from the International Protection Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37866/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the deputy that new applicants arriving today at the International Protection Office (IPO), who complete their questionnaire, are now being scheduled for interview as follows:

- for prioritised applications, within 5 months of application; and
- for non-prioritised applications, within 8 to 10 months.

Prioritised applications include those from refugee generating countries, such as Syria and Eritrea and from especially vulnerable groups of applicants, such as unaccompanied minors.

The IPO target is to issue its recommendation within 8 weeks after the interview. This is, however, dependent on the complexity of the relevant case. The overall median processing time for applications processed under the International Protection Act 2015 to end August 2019 is 15.7 months with prioritised cases being processed in 8.7 months.

At the end August 2019, there were 1,143 applicants waiting to have their interviews scheduled. This figure must be viewed in the context of large numbers of new applicants entering the system. There have been 3,096 applications for international protection made in the period from January 2019 to end of August 2019, which is a 36% increase on the 2,276 applications made in the same period in 2018. When relocation applications under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) are excluded, this figure increases to some 54%.

Processing times are being monitored on an ongoing basis and the IPO is continuously working on ways to improve them.

Direct Provision Data

131. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who entered the direct provision system in each year since 2000; the numbers of persons having been processed through the direct provision system that were subsequently naturalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37888/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the International Protection Office (IPO) that, in the period 1 January 2000 to 31 August 2019, a total of 86,533 people made an application for asylum (2000 -2016) or international protection (from 2017 onwards) in the State. A breakdown of the figures for each of the years is set out in the table below.

As the Deputy may be aware, not all applicants for international protection avail of the accommodation services offered by my Department. However, I am advised that over the period concerned it is estimated that some 64,594 people availed of this accommodation.

I am further advised that a total of 7,372 persons with Refugee Status have subsequently become naturalised in the period 2005 to end August 2019. Figures prior to 2005 are not available.

The Immigration Service of my Department have advised that there is no means of interrogating the system to determine whether applicants were, at the time of application, residents within the direct provision system or if they had previously been in accommodation provided by the Department. The Deputy may be aware, in this regard, that two of the five years total

Questions - Written Answers

residency requirement for naturalisation are waived, for those defined as refugees under the 1956 Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, as amended.

Year	Total Asylum/International Protection Applications	Total Persons with Refugee Status who became Naturalised
2000	10,938	Figures not available
2001	10,325	Figures not available
2002	11,634	Figures not available
2003	7,900	Figures not available
2004	4,766	Figures not available
2005	4,323	0
2006	4,314	29
2007	3,985	254
2008	3,866	1,050
2009	2,689	681
2010	1,939	687
2011	1,290	1,139
2012	956	1,055
2013	946	1,153
2014	1,448	551
2015	3,276	317
2016	2,244	259
2017	2,926	116
2018	3,673	51
2019 to end August	3,095*	30
Total	86,533	7,372

*The figure for the number of International Protection applications in 2019 to end August is provisional.

EU Bodies

132. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the level of Irish involvement in Eurojust; his assessment of the involvement; if the involvement will be continued or altered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37900/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, Eurojust is the EU agency for criminal justice cooperation and its role is to provide assistance to Member States in criminal investigations involving two or more EU Member States.

I can confirm for the Deputy that Ireland is a member of Eurojust and has been since its inception 17 years ago. This membership has been valuable - for example in the 4 years up to the end of 2018, the Irish desk at Eurojust has handled 804 cases with an Irish dimension. These have included cases involving serious international fraud, sexual offences and people trafficking.

Transnational challenges require cooperation and transnational approaches and the State's continued membership of Eurojust plays an essential part in allowing Ireland respond in a comprehensive way to such challenges challenges.

Eurojust currently operates under the provisions of 'Council Decision of 28 February 2002 setting up Eurojust with a view to reinforcing the fight against serious crime (2002/187/JHA)',

the original Eurojust Regulation. From 12 December this year, Eurojust will operate under a new Regulation which retains many of the provisions and structures of its predecessor, but also provides a framework for the modernisation of the agency.

Because the new Regulation comes within Protocol No 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice, annexed to the TEU and to the TFEU, there is a necessity for the Oireachtas to agree that Ireland should accept the measure. The Oireachtas took the necessary decision to opt in in June this year.

I would add that in practice, Eurojust's primary role is in assisting in clearing difficulties and logjams that arise in multi-national criminal investigations and dealing with mutual legal assistance requests for evidence and surrenders under the European Arrest Warrant. The location of EU prosecutors under one roof at Eurojust facilitates the rapid exchange of information and addressing of issues of relevance. The agency makes a valuable contribution in this regard.

Bail Law

133. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has had contact with the Garda Commissioner on the objection of the State to bail in the case of persons (details supplied); his further plans to ensure that the relevant authorities examine the situation from a humanitarian position in view of their advanced years and the fact that the seizing of their passports has resulted in their being separated from their families for over six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37901/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, changes to the bail laws were introduced by the Government in the Criminal Justice Act 2017, with the aim of strengthening the bail system and making the law as effective as possible.

The courts have the power to refuse bail where there are reasonable grounds to believe the person is likely to commit a serious offence. In assessing this likelihood, the court must take into account the nature and seriousness of the offence, the accused person's previous offending and may also take into account the danger he or she poses to the public if bail is granted. The Act also increases the range of conditions that may be attached to bail, in relevant cases.

However as the Deputy will be aware, a decision to grant or refuse bail in any particular case is a matter for the courts, which are independent in the exercise of judicial functions subject to the Constitution and the law.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on an individual case such as that referred to.

Work Permits Eligibility

134. Deputy Seán Haughey asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to ensure that overseas general nurses who are diploma holders working here can receive critical work permits in the normal way; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37802/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The critical skills employment permit is designed to attract highly skilled people into the labour market. Eligible occupations, on the critical skills occupation list, under this type of permit are deemed to be critically important to growing Ireland's economy, are highly demanded and highly skilled and in significant shortage of supply in our labour market. For this employment type

Questions - Written Answers

non-EEA nationals must be the holder of a degree level qualification or higher in the relevant field if the remuneration on offer is between €30,000 and €60,000 per annum. In cases where the remuneration is €60,000 or more the non-EEA national can be either the holder of a degree level qualification or higher in the relevant field or have the necessary experience for the role.

Qualified non-EEA nurses who wish to work in Ireland are eligible for critical skills employment permits where they have been awarded a relevant degree or degree equivalent and the proposed employment meets the criteria for this type of employment permit. Where a non-EEA nurse is qualified to practice nursing in Ireland but does not hold a relevant degree, they may be eligible for a General Employment Permit in order to work here.

The determination of qualification equivalence is made by NARIQ Ireland; information is available at <http://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Qualifications-Recognition.aspx>

Non-EEA nurses who wish to work in Ireland must normally complete an adaptation process in order to register with the Nursing & Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). Permission to be in the State to undertake this process is granted by the Department of Justice and Equality.

HSE Correspondence

135. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE failed to reply to correspondence (details supplied); if same will now be dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37945/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The aim of the National Dementia Strategy, which was published in December 2014 and is being implemented by the National Dementia Office, is to improve care, services and supports for people with dementia.

The HSE currently provides about €9 million per annum for intensive home care packages, including €7.9 million for dementia-specific packages. Since the packages were introduced at the end of 2014, 459 dementia-specific intensive homecare packages have been delivered, with 193 active at the end of July 2019.

With regard to the Deputy's specific query, as this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

136. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health the assistance that can be given to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37757/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to an operational matter, I have referred it to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland for attention and direct reply.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

137. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that recent requests by service users to be allowed membership of the group company of an organisation (details supplied) and to have representatives on the board have

been refused; if the organisation will be instructed to accept the request by service users for membership of the company and board representation in view of the report by the independent review group examining the role of voluntary organisations and recommendations in the report that such services should be service user centred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37758/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): NCBI is a not for profit charitable organisation which provides support and services nationwide to people experiencing sight loss. The overall aim of NCBI services is to enable people to live an independent life of their choice.

NCBI provide services to over 7,000 people every year. Almost 95% of these people have some degree of useful vision while less than 5% are blind.

NCBI offers community based services to help people to adapt to sight loss and maintain their independence. These services include emotional support to the individual experiencing loss of vision and to their families, advice and information on all aspects of vision loss as well as practical support and solutions to the challenges encountered by people with vision loss. Services are offered to people of all ages, from birth through to older age.

NCBI also provide a range of services to public and private organisations to make sure that their services are accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired.

NCBI advises government departments, companies and individuals on how to make the built environment and services accessible to people with sight loss.

HSE Disability Services fund NCBI, under Section 39 of the Health Act to provide a range of centre, domiciliary and community based services to people who are blind or vision impaired. This funding is governed by a Service Arrangement, which identifies service delivery provided by the agency in return for the money being provided to them.

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.

Voluntary Sector Funding

138. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the reason, despite assurances from the HSE and his Department that there would be no cuts or reduction in services at an organisation (details supplied) that such reductions and cuts have taken place; if the restoration of these services will be ensured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37761/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): NCBI is a not for profit charitable organisation which provides support and services nationwide to people experiencing sight loss. The overall aim of NCBI services is to enable people to live an independent life of their choice.

NCBI provide services to over 7,000 people every year. Almost 95% of these people have some degree of useful vision while less than 5% are blind.

NCBI offers community based services to help people to adapt to sight loss and maintain their independence. These services include emotional support to the individual experiencing loss of vision and to their families, advice and information on all aspects of vision loss as well as practical support and solutions to the challenges encountered by people with vision loss.

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

Services for People with Disabilities

139. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Health if the expenditure of public funds at an organisation (details supplied) will be reviewed, in particular the decision to spend €800,000 on a prime site in Tallaght; the impact this has had or will have on other services and service users; if a value for money audit was carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37762/19]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

140. Deputy Martin Ferris asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an appointment. [37778/19]

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

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

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

Medical Card Applications

141. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health if a full medical card will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37779/19]

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

Electronic Cigarettes

142. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Health the status of examinations by his Department into the potential health impacts of e-cigarettes; if regulation will be forthcoming in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37782/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The current position on e-cigarettes is based on advice from the Health Information and Quality Authority ('HIQA') in its 2017 Health Technology Assessment of Smoking Cessation Products and Services. In relation to the safety of e-cigarettes the HIQA assessment concluded that this remains an evolving area of research; while potentially safer than smoking, evidence on long-term safety has yet to be established.

Although the HIQA assessment was published only in 2017, the research on e-cigarettes is rapidly evolving. In that context, in March this year I asked the Health Research Board to undertake a review of the evidence in relation to the health harms of e-cigarettes, their effectiveness as an aid to smoking cessation and whether they act as a gateway to smoking tobacco products. The evidence review is expected to be completed in March 2020.

In addition my Department continues to monitor developments and publications by authoritative bodies internationally on the safety of e-cigarettes and whether they facilitate smoking cessation.

E-cigarettes are regulated under the European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016 (S.I. 271/2016). These Regulations transpose the EU Tobacco Products Directive (Directive 2014/40/EU).

Under these Regulations health warnings which advise consumers that e-cigarettes contain nicotine which is a highly addictive substance are mandatory. The Regulations also provide for mandatory safety and quality requirements for e-cigarettes and refill containers, including maximum nicotine concentrations for e-cigarettes containing nicotine, and maximum volumes for cartridges, tanks and nicotine liquid containers.

Finally the Regulations require e-cigarette manufacturers or importers to notify the Health Service Executive of all products that they place on the market and, if a manufacturer, importer or distributor has a reason to believe that a product is not safe, they are required to immediately notify the Health Service Executive and to explain what corrective action has been taken.

Later this month I intend to bring forward a draft scheme for a Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill which will include provisions to:

- introduce a new licensing system for the retail sale of tobacco products and nicotine-

inhaling products such as e-cigarettes.

- prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products to persons under the age of 18.
- prohibit the sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products by persons under the age of 18.

HSE Expenditure

143. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Health the costs incurred to date and the projected costs regarding the integrated finance and procurement management system project design that is being refined to incorporate changes arising from the decision to create six new regional health areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37787/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My officials have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

144. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Health if a surgery appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37794/19]

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

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

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

145. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd asked the Minister for Health if final sign-off of the east Meath primary care centre has taken place; the details of the plans that were agreed on the meeting scheduled for 10 September 2019; if the east Meath primary care centre has his support; if the project will progress to construction phase; if so, if there is an expected date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37800/19]

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

Vaccination Programme

146. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Health the financial assistance available for parents and or guardians of boys who will miss the entry requirements to the programme in respect of the HPV immunisation programme for boys entering the first year of second-level education in 2019; if he will initiate a catch-up programme in respect of boys missing the vaccine in 2019; if holders of medical cards can avail of the programme outside of the thresholds set; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37803/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The committee's recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. It makes recommendations on vaccination policy to my Department. NIAC continues to revise recommendations to allow for the introduction of new vaccines in Ireland and to keep abreast of changes in the patterns of disease. Therefore, the immunisation schedule will continue to be amended over time.

As you are aware, NIAC recommended that the HPV vaccine should also be given to boys. On foot of NIAC's recommendation, my Department asked the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a health technology assessment (HTA) to establish the clinical and cost-effectiveness of extending the current immunisation programme.

HIQA completed the HTA in December 2018, recommending that the HPV immunisation programme be extended to include boys. A policy decision was made to extend the HPV immunisation programme to include boys starting in September 2019 with the introduction of a 9-valent HPV vaccine. However, the HIQA report published in December 2018 did not recommend an HPV catch-up programme for older boys for several reasons:

- Vaccinating boys in the first year of secondary school provides the best possible protection against HPV infection;
- Boys are already benefitting from the indirect herd protection provided by the girls' HPV vaccination programme which started in 2010.

The ages at which vaccines are recommended in the immunisation schedule are chosen by NIAC in order to give each child the best possible protection against vaccine preventable diseases. As the HPV vaccine is preventative it is intended to be administered, if possible, before a person becomes sexually active, that is, before a person is first exposed to HPV infection. Therefore, the gender neutral HPV vaccination programme targets all girls and boys in first year of secondary school to provide maximum coverage. All vaccines administered through the School Immunisation Programme are provided free of charge.

My Department will continue to be guided by NIAC's recommendations on any emerging evidence on this issue in the future.

Hospitals Funding

147. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Health the annual budget allocated to each hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2019; the number of open hospital beds in each hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37817/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As set out in the Sláintecare Action Plan 2019, the Department of Health is committed to fostering the support of citizens and stakeholders

Questions - Written Answers

ers in the Sláintecare reform process, consulting them about its delivery, and informing them about progress through engagement and open reporting. In line with this commitment, my Department publishes an Open Beds Report on its website each month.

The Open Beds Report provides a summary of the average numbers of open inpatient beds and day beds/places in the acute hospital system based on data provided by the HSE. It can be found on the Department's website: <https://health.gov.ie/publications/>

According to provisional data received from the HSE Acute Business Information Unit, there were on average 10,978 inpatient beds and 2,251 day case beds/places available nationally in June 2019.

In relation to the annual budget allocated to each hospital, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

HSE Staff Recruitment

148. Deputy Robert Troy asked the Minister for Health if the counties Longford and Westmeath clerical officer panel (details supplied) is still active; and if so, when persons will be called for positions. [37824/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

149. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health if the FreeStyle Libre device will be made available to all persons with type 1 diabetes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37826/19]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Staff

150. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health the proposals in place for job opportunities for speech and language therapists (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37833/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Rehabilitation Training Allowance Payments

151. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide a replacement for the recently abolished rehabilitation training allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37838/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): This 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. The 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 payment of the Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus came into place on the transition of Rehabilitative/Training Programmes to the HSE following the dissolution of the National Rehabilitation Board in June 2000.

The decision to phase out the Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus payment is designed to bring equity and consistency between people with a disability attending HSE funded rehabilitative training programmes who receive the payment, and those attending similar HSE funded Day Services or in other State schemes such as further education and training, who do not.

This action will ensure all HSE funded Day Services are provided on an equitable basis and will also ensure that the use of finite resources is maximised.

The Rehabilitative Training (RT) Bonus Payment is a historical payment, introduced in July 2001, aligned with a similar FÁS Training Bonus. However, during 2011 the FÁS Training Bonus was reduced to €20.00 and then eliminated the following year while to date the RT Bonus Payment has continued to be paid in the Health Sector

It is worth remembering that:

- There is no cut in the number of RT places available
- There is no cut in payment of the bonus - those who have it will continue to receive it for the remainder of their RT Placement
- All participants continue to be eligible for Disability Allowance of €203 per week
- All participants continue to be eligible for a free travel pass
- No expectation of an additional RT bonus payment has been created by HSE for 2019 participants

The redirected funding (€3.7 m over 4 years), which will be ring-fenced, will facilitate 148 full day placements or 370 enhanced day places nationally based on priority need.

Each CHO will have the flexibility to redirect its own savings to address local service requirements. The HSE will put in place a monitoring system and regularly report the additional placements realised to the Department of Health.

Pesticide Use

152. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the policy of the HSE on the use of pesticides on grounds managed by it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37839/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This is a matter for the HSE therefore I have referred the question to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

Questions - Written Answers
Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision

153. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the publication of the model of care for infertility being drawn up by his Department and the HSA; the timeline for the accessibility of the associated public fund for assisted human reproduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37846/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In October 2017, the Government approved the drafting of a bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, based on the published General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health published the report of its review of the General Scheme on 11 July 2019, as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January 2018. The Committee makes 11 main recommendations, which include proposals both related to broad policy objectives and more technical amendments. Given the comprehensive scope of the legislation and the ethical, legal and social issues which arise from AHR practices, it is anticipated that certain areas of the General Scheme will require further consideration and refinement during the ongoing process of drafting the bill. The Joint Committee's Report and its recommendations will be considered as part of this process.

Interlinked with the legislation, officials in my Department, in conjunction with the HSE, are developing a model of care for infertility and an associated public fund for AHR. This work includes developing proposals on the allocation of the €1 million fund for use in relation to AHR which was announced in December 2018.

Accordingly, options in relation to the parameters of any potential public funding model, including what eligibility criteria may be included, are still under consideration, and an announcement will be forthcoming once the relevant decisions have been finalised.

It should be noted that while AHR treatment is not currently funded by the Irish Public Health Service, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Arrangements administered by the HSE. Medicines covered by the High Tech Arrangements must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and authorised for supply to the client's nominated community pharmacy by the High Tech Hub managed by the Primary Care Reimbursement Service. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the client's eligibility, i.e., Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme. I understand that the impact on the total cost of AHR treatment for individuals who avail of these schemes is not insignificant.

In addition, there is other support available in that patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme.

Overall, the development of a model of care for infertility will help to ensure the provision of safe, effective and accessible services through the public health system as part of the full range of services available in obstetrics and gynaecology.

Disability Support Services

154. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Health the reason a new assessment of needs officer has not been appointed in the Dublin 15 assessment of needs area; if this is due to a recruitment freeze; when such an appointment will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37855/19]

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.

Pharmacy Regulations

155. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he has received rules (details supplied) for his consideration; if he has prepared plans to prevent job losses among pharmaceutical assistants nationally on these new regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37859/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Pharmacy Act 2007, my role in relation to the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (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.

Home Care Packages Eligibility

156. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider setting up a specialised home care unit for persons who have sudden onset catastrophic life changing injuries or illnesses that require specialised home care as a matter of urgency (details supplied); and his views on the matter. [37862/19]

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 a service issue, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

157. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 214 of 18 October 2018, the status of the plans to provide an appropriate adult day service for persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37882/19]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

158. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a date for surgery in view of the exceptional circumstances in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37886/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

159. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37914/19]

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

Medicinal Products Supply

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37924/19]

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.

Hare Coursing Regulation

161. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether live hare coursing has a place in a modern society in view of the grave concerns over greyhound welfare in general across Ireland raised over the past number of months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37893/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the provisions of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, the regulation of coursing is chiefly a matter for the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) subject to the general control and direction of Bord na gCon.

My Department has a strong and consistent record regarding the enforcement of animal welfare rules, including the review of 100 years of animal welfare legislation, leading to the enactment of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

In addition, my Department is working with Bord na gCon on the development of a suite of measures, including a ring fenced fund “The Care Fund” to address a range of welfare matters. Bord na gCon will also be using the provisions laid down in the newly signed Greyhound Racing Act 2019 to improve the traceability of greyhounds and there will be a review of how exchequer funding is allocated within Bord na gCon, with a view to refocusing the industry on welfare issues.

The ICC has assured my Department that it has systems and practices in place to underpin the welfare of hares and greyhounds involved in coursing. Hares can only be collected for coursing by clubs affiliated to the ICC, in accordance with the terms of two licences granted by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

These licences contain 26 conditions which have been refined over the years, the majority of which are central to hare welfare. These include a variety of measures, including a requirement that a qualified veterinarian attends all coursing meetings to report on the health of the hares, a prohibition on the coursing of hares more than once in the same day, a prohibition on the coursing of sick or pregnant hares and a requirement that hares be released back into the wild during daylight hours.

The ICC also attends to the welfare of the hare and undertakes a range of actions to address issues related to health and welfare. Coursing clubs are required to comply with directives, instructions and guidance notes issued by the ICC in all matters relating to the capture, keeping in captivity, tagging, marking, coursing and release of hares, and the muzzling of greyhounds.

A Monitoring Committee on Coursing is in place, comprising officials from my Department, the ICC and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), to monitor developments in coursing and, in that regard, the situation is kept under constant review to ensure that coursing is run in a well controlled and responsible manner in the interests of both hares and greyhounds.

The licence for the 2019/2020 coursing season has been suspended by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht due to the outbreak of the RHD2 virus and that department continues to monitor the situation.

I believe that it is critically important that those involved in coursing operate in accordance with the regulatory framework and that the welfare of both hares and greyhounds is prevalent

at all times.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

162. Deputy Eugene Murphy asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the role of the Competition and Consumer Protection Authority will be examined in investigating alleged cartels in the meat industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37765/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Competition and Consumer Protection Authority is the national competent authority for the enforcement of competition law in Ireland. It is an independent body under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and I do not have any oversight role in relation to its operation.

However, my Department has plans to commission a summary of competition law issues relevant to the beef sector, which will provide greater clarity on the various issues which are of concern to stakeholders.

Climate Change Advisory Council

163. Deputy Eugene Murphy asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the Climate Change Advisory Council called for a 53% reduction in the national suckler herd with no corresponding obligations being placed on other farming sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37766/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) Annual Review 2019 highlights the key role of the agriculture, forestry and land-use sector in reducing emissions between now and 2030.

The All-of-Government Climate Action Plan to tackle climate breakdown identifies a series of actions for the agriculture, forestry and land-use sector that ensure a fair contribution from agriculture and land use to our transition to a low carbon economy and society. This reflects our three pillar policy approach to achieving carbon neutrality without comprising sustainable food production. This plan sets an ambitious target for the sector to reduce its emissions to between 17.5 and 19 Mt CO₂ eq over the period 2021-2030.

These targets are not without its challenges but the Teagasc MACC report illustrates a suite of actions that provide opportunity for emissions reductions and a pathway towards achieving our commitments.

To reach the target of 19 Mt CO₂ eq in 2030 requires us to manage the emissions profile from the sector between now and then through mobilisation of as many of these actions as possible as early as possible with high levels of take-up across our 139,000 farms. The CCAC report highlights the importance of early adoption by farmers of the measures outlined in the Climate Action Plan. All mechanisms, such as the CAP reform, market incentive and regulation will also be investigated in full by all the relevant stakeholders, including industry, to mobilise the necessary actions as swiftly as possible.

The next Common Agriculture Policy will be fully aligned with this need to prioritise climate action. There will be a step up in environmental and climate delivery in the next CAP.

The development of our CAP strategic plan will ensure the delivery of this target. A consultation process on the next CAP has already started and negotiations on CAP policy will intensify over the coming months.

Beef Industry

164. Deputy Eugene Murphy asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the 30-month age limit for beef production will be removed in a bid to help alleviate some of the difficulties and income crisis being experienced by the farming community as a result of the beef crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37769/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is no rule limiting the age of cattle for beef production. However, meat processors do make in-spec bonus payments in respect of cattle which meet certain market specifications demanded by retail customers. The 30 month age limit to which you refer is one such specification. It is entirely a commercial matter and is not a condition imposed by my Department.

It should be noted however that almost all third countries have a 30 month age limit in respect of imports and this will be specified in the veterinary health certificate which will accompany the product. These requirements are a matter for the authorities in those countries.

On 15 September, I announced that agreement had been reached between Meat Industry Ireland and farm organisations and representatives (IFA, ICMSA, ICSA, Macra na Feirme, IN-HFA, the Beef Plan Movement and Independent Farmers of Ireland) on a two strand agreement for the reform of the Irish Beef Sector.

Two elements of this relate specifically to the 30 month age limit:

- the introduction of a new bonus of 8c/kg for steers and heifers aged between 30 to 36 months, which meet all non-age related existing in-spec criteria, and which up to now have not received any bonus;
- an independent review of market and customer requirements, specifically in relation to the four in-spec bonus criteria currently in operation in the Irish beef sector.

The entry into force of the Agreement is contingent on the cessation of all protests and blockades. All parties to the Agreement agreed to recommend it to those they represent. The future of the beef sector is now in the balance, and I would appeal to all those still protesting to step back, for the sake of their fellow farmers.

Beef Exports

165. Deputy Eugene Murphy asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps being taken by his Department and Bord Bia to establish new markets for Irish beef in non-EU countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37770/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Market development – developing new markets and growing existing markets on the basis of market insights – is one of the five themes of Food Wise 2025, the ten-year strategy for the Irish agri-food sector. Market development and diversification is also a key response to the challenges which Brexit poses for the agri-food sector, particularly for the beef sector.

My Department is continuously working towards opening and enhancing market access for Irish beef to key markets outside the EU.

In April 2017, I launched a seven-point action plan on market access. This is being implemented through a variety of actions, including:

- A market prioritisation exercise and subsequent detailed studies carried out by Bord Bia on behalf of my Department. The countries selected for a detailed examination of their meat markets were Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Mexico and Malaysia;

- A market access web portal which was launched in May 2018 and is available on the Department's website. It provides a wide range of valuable information on potential market opportunities to exporters

<http://www.marketaccess.agriculture.gov.ie/>

- An enhanced programme of Ministerial agri-food trade missions, in cooperation with Bord Bia and other State agencies.

Market access, both for beef and for live exports, has been a feature of these missions and over the last two and a half years, trade missions have focused on key growth markets such as:

- Asia: China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia;
- North America: USA, Mexico and Canada;
- The Gulf States and Turkey.

These missions feature high level political meetings as well as promotion opportunities for Irish beef and serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in those destinations.

Since the Brexit vote in 2016, I have allocated significant additional funding to Bord Bia to enable it develop new markets and enhance existing ones. Bord Bia's total grant in aid for 2019 is €46.6 million, representing a 60% increase in funding for the marketing and promotion of our food offering over five years.

The approach of my Department and Bord Bia for market development is a combination of targeted research, high-level diplomacy, consultation with important agri-food stakeholders and co-operation with officials in competent authorities abroad. This approach serves to make the most effective use of available resources and to maximise opportunities for market access.

Since April 2017, agreement has been secured for the export of beef to several new third country markets, including:

- Beef (frozen boneless, under 30 months) to China
- Beef (as well as pork) to Ukraine
- Beef (as well as sheepmeat and poultry) to Qatar and Kuwait

Furthermore, during this period, enhanced beef access was agreed with Japan, Israel, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

While the role of my Department is to secure market access for the industry, it is ultimately up to food business operators, with the support of my Department and Bord Bia, to exploit these opportunities.

Aquaculture Licences

166. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a report (details supplied) will be made available to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37772/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is aware, the report referred to remains in draft format and is not included in the documents currently under consideration as part of the aquaculture licence applications process for Kilmakillogue Harbour.

My Department is currently in communication with the Office of the Information Commissioner in relation to the possible release of this draft report. In the circumstances, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further pending the conclusion of that process.

Pigmeat Sector

167. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures in place to ensure that the pig sector is protected from possible contagion with African swine fever; if a case of has been reported or found here since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37788/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): While the threat posed by African Swine Fever (ASF) cannot be underestimated, it should be noted that ASF is not dangerous for humans, and meat from affected pigs does not pose any food safety risk.

ASF has never been detected in Ireland and my Department implements a range of controls to mitigate against the risk of the disease coming here. This includes monitoring the international disease situation, working with international partners and the implementation of an intensive communications campaign around the disease risk. This campaign aims to provide all relevant stakeholders including farmers, vets, hauliers and the general public with the information they need to play their part in protecting the national pig herd against the introduction of ASF into this country.

A specific awareness campaign reminding everyone that the feeding of food waste containing meat products to pigs is prohibited was recently launched. This is a particularly important point as the ASF virus is robust and can survive for months, even years, in pork and pork products and the feeding of food waste to pigs is known to have caused outbreaks of ASF in Asian countries. The key message is that it is vital that all food waste is disposed of safely away from pigs.

Checks for illegal food products are also carried out by my Department in conjunction with Revenue at ports and airports using a targeted, risk-based approach. Manual checks along with a trained food detector dog and scanning equipment is used at Dublin airport to detect food in luggage, for example.

My Department also has a contingency plan in place for ASF to enable us to respond rapidly and effectively to any potential outbreak.

Rural Development Programme Data

168. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the transaction costs built into 2014-2020 RDP schemes and the way in which they operate (details supplied); the detail of each scheme operating in the 2014-2020 RDP that has a transaction cost built in in tabular form; the transaction costs for each RDP scheme in percentage terms; the additional payment available to eligible participants if a scheme measure is difficult to implement; and the maximum transaction costs permitted for RDP schemes as set down under current EU CAP regulations. [37804/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Irish Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) is governed by Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Transaction costs are defined herein as:

Article 2.1.e

“transaction cost” means an additional cost linked to fulfilling a commitment, but not directly attributable to its implementation or not included in the costs or income foregone that are compensated directly; and which can be calculated on a standard cost basis;

Article 28, Agri-Environment and Climate, specifies how transaction costs are to be addressed under such schemes:

Article 28.6

Payments shall be granted annually and shall compensate beneficiaries for all or part of the additional costs and income foregone resulting from the commitments made. Where necessary, they may also cover transaction costs up to a value of 20 % of the premium paid for the agri-environment-climate commitments. Where commitments are undertaken by groups of farmers or groups of farmers and other land managers, the maximum level shall be 30 %.

Article 29, Organic Farming, specifies how they are to be addressed under those schemes:

Article 29.4

Payments shall be granted annually and shall compensate beneficiaries for all or part of the additional costs and income foregone resulting from the commitments made. Where necessary they may also cover transaction costs to a value of up to 20 % of the premium paid for the commitments. Where commitments are undertaken by groups of farmers, the maximum level shall be 30 %.

Finally, Article 33, Animal Welfare, specifies how they are treated under those schemes

Article 33.3

The payments shall be granted annually and shall compensate farmers for all or part of the additional costs and income foregone resulting from the commitment made. Where necessary, they may also cover transaction costs to the value of up to 20 % of the premium paid for the animal welfare commitments.

Further detail on individual schemes is provided in the link below as requested.

[Schemes available]

Forestry Grants

169. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the length of time to process forestry applications within the Forest Service; the longest, shortest and average processing times for the past five years in tabular form; his plans to speed up the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37814/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is required to carefully vet all afforestation applications, with regard to their potential impact on the surrounding environment; on habitats; on archaeological monuments; on the social aspects of the proposal and to ensure that silviculturally, the proposal meets the required standards. This detailed examination is carried out by district forestry inspectors, supported by experts in archaeology and ecology within my Department.

Following the commencement of the Forestry Act in 2017, site notices must be erected at the entrance to the proposed site for afforestation and forest road works, to inform the public that an application has been submitted. That site notice must remain in place for a period of five weeks. Applications are open to public consultation, facilitated by the site notice and advertising on my Department's website. Interested parties may make a submission in writing on any application, within 30 days of it being advertised. Certain public bodies may also be requested to provide an opinion on an application and up to eight weeks is provided for their response. Therefore, since the commencement of the Act, a decision may not be issued within 30 days at a minimum.

In recent months, officials of my Department have engaged additional archaeological resources. These inspectors have focused on afforestation applications and have worked to reduce the backlog in that area. In addition to this, changes have been made to the online application system with regard to how applications near an archaeological monument are treated, to ensure that only applications in close proximity or surrounding such a feature are examined. These changes have resulted in a reduction in the time taken to assess an application in respect of archaeology.

With regards to ecology, an additional inspector with ecological qualifications is now working on afforestation applications and further ecological resources will be obtained over the coming months. Officials of my Department have also been working to enhance the online application system, with regard to Appropriate Assessment procedures. I am confident that these changes will enhance the afforestation application system.

Following receipt of an application, my Department conducts an initial check to ensure that all relevant details have been submitted as required. The date an application is advertised on my Department's website is the date that complete information has been received in relation to an application. The tables below indicate timeframes from the date advertised to the date of decision. Accurate data is available and provided here since the start of the current Forestry Programme, when the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme commenced in January 2015.

The following table shows the shortest, longest and average time in days for a decision on an afforestation application. The Deputy should be aware that, in some cases, my Department requests further information from the applicant. In the case below of the application that took 1,119 days for a decision, for example, the applicant was asked to provide further information, but despite numerous follow-up letters, did not respond for many months.

Year	Shortest	Longest	Average
2015	5	522	74
2016	3	680	86
2017	3/30*	1,119	91

Year	Shortest	Longest	Average
2018	30	959	124
2019 to 31st August	30	826	139

* Note from the commencement of the Forestry Act, 2014, on 24 May, 2017, the shortest time before a decision is 30 days. However, some applications would have been decided in a shorter timeframe from January to 23rd May that year.

Horse Racing Industry Funding

170. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will request an additional €5 million for the sport horse industry (details supplied) via Horse Sport Ireland to be invested throughout the industry for the purpose of job creation, increasing exports and to ensure the industry can reach its true potential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37825/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is fully committed to maximising the potential of the Sport Horse industry and continues to provide support to it both financially and with policy initiatives. I have demonstrated my commitment to the industry by increasing the budget allocated to Horse Sport Ireland from €2.0m in 2017 to €2.5m in 2018 and I have approved a further increase of €500,000 to €3.0m in 2019. This is an increase of 50% on the 2017 allocation.

In 2016, my Department commissioned Indecon International Consultants to undertake a review of Horse Sport Ireland. The report was published in 2017. Horse Sport Ireland have been making great progress in implementing the Indecon recommendations. The proposal to rationalise the board is close to finality with only the Northern representative outstanding. A recruitment process through the Public Appointments Service was undertaken to select a new chairperson and three board members. These members are now in place alongside the four industry representatives.

I have recently received a copy of the Strategy Report and a funding submission from HSI for 2020. I will consider this request in the context of the 2020 budget negotiations.

Knackery Industry

171. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he is taking to address the impact of the closure of almost all knackeries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37876/19]

172. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that detailed and urgent consideration is given to the submission by an association (details supplied) in relation to the need for additional financial support due to the financial pressures on these businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37921/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

Discussions have taken place between the Animal Collectors Association and my Department officials on the fallen animal collection service. Following those intensive discussions, agreement has been reached that enables the collection of fallen animals to resume from 17 September. Continued animal collection will be contingent on written correspondence from my

Department to the ACA on the agreement reached at the meeting. Further discussions between my Department and the ACA are planned to progress issues relating to supports for the animal collection service.

TAMS Eligibility

173. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review and reduce or remove the eligibility clause on the minimum spend of €2,000 for TAMS to eliminate the disincentive to participate in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37947/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): To date, over 29,000 applications have been submitted under the suite of seven TAMS measures. Payment claims have been submitted in 11,500 of these cases. All approved applicants are encouraged to submit a payment claim as soon as they have completed their approved works.

The average spend of a TAMS II participant (€36,500) is significantly higher than the minimum investment level of €2,000.

In setting the minimum level of expenditure eligible for approval under TAMS II, consideration must be given to the administrative cost of processing an individual application and ensuring value for money.

Brexit Preparations

174. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if all oil reserves held in Britain have now been relocated to Ireland as part of no-deal Brexit contingency plans by his Department. [37781/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has made no decision to move the State's strategic oil stocks held in the United Kingdom back to Ireland. The National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) manages Ireland's strategic oil stocks. Currently, 62% of Ireland's stockholding is held in Ireland, 14% in the UK (including Northern Ireland) and 24% within other EU member states. NORA's preference to hold stocks in Ireland is in line with Government policy; however insufficient storage capacity within Ireland necessitates the holding of some stocks abroad.

When the United Kingdom leaves the EU, stocks held in the United Kingdom, including those in Northern Ireland, will still be counted towards our International Energy Agency obligation.

The Irish oil industry does not anticipate product shortages on the markets as a result of the United Kingdom withdrawal. Given this and the quantity of strategic oil stocks held in Ireland, there is no scenario currently envisaged where we would be required to repatriate and utilise Irish stocks held on mainland UK.

Dublin Port Company, under the auspices of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, are engaging with key stakeholders in putting in place contingency plans aimed at ensuring the port facility remains accessible, including the commercial oil terminals.

Waste Disposal Charges

175. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of those identified in work regarding the bin waiver as needing State assistance as a result of medical incontinence. [37822/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including representative organisations and public bodies, in an effort to see how best to provide a financial support to persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical incontinence wear. One of the difficulties associated with efforts to deliver a support to date has been trying to accurately estimate the number of persons in need of the support. Stakeholders agree that it is not possible at present to determine a precise figure.

While there are complex issues at play in this area, which are understandable given the sensitive nature of the medical data in question, my Department is continuing to examine options to address this issue.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Administration

176. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to appoint a hub controller installer for residents in County Monaghan that applied for the heating controls grant under the SEAI. [37840/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department funds the Better Energy Homes scheme which is administered by the SEAI. Works that are grant funded under the scheme, such as the installation of fully integrated heating controls, must be carried out by an installer listed on SEAI's register of contractors. As Minister I have no function in relation to the registration of contractors. In order to be listed on the SEAI register, contractors are required to give a commitment to undertake all works in accordance with the scheme's technical specifications; demonstrate tax compliance and insurance cover; and co-operate with the scheme's quality assurance programme.

I note that there are a number of contractors who are registered to install fully integrated heating controls operating in County Monaghan.

Waste Disposal

177. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if it is permissible for waste companies to decide not to service certain estates or areas in Dublin; his views on whether there is potential risk that customers will be left with just one available waste collection service; his further views on whether this risks the creation of monopoly positions in certain areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37850/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have no legislative power to compel a private company to provide a service to specific properties. The obligations on local authorities in relation to collecting household waste are set out in section 33 of the Waste Management Act 1996, as amended. In summary, it provides that each local authority shall collect, or arrange for the collection of, household waste within its functional area. The obligation to collect or arrange for the collection of household waste shall not apply if:

- an adequate waste collection service is available in the local authority's functional area,

- the estimated costs of the collection of the waste would, in the opinion of the local authority, be unreasonably high, or
- the local authority is satisfied that adequate arrangements for the disposal of the waste concerned can reasonably be made by the holder of the waste.

Under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, as Minister, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it.

A review of “A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland “ was initiated earlier this year. This review process will take account of a number of initiatives, such as the European Circular Economy waste and plastics legislation framework and the reports from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Price Monitoring Group. This process will inform the development of future national waste management policy, including our environmental goals, regulatory and market structures, and relevant policy instruments and tools.

Planning Issues

178. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a submission (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37874/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware Bord na Móna has been an integral part of the commercial and social development of the Midlands for decades, creating significant employment in the region. The company provides approximately 1,000 direct jobs at present, which in turn supports at least another 1,000 indirect jobs. In its strategy to exit peat, Bord na Móna envisages the development and scaling up of new business opportunities to ensure the future commercial viability of the company and enable it to continue to fulfil its mandate to be an employer of scale in the Midlands. This strategy is aimed at developing a transition from peat to sustainable new businesses which utilise the vast landbank over the period to 2028. ESB is also fully committed to the process to lead decarbonisation in Ireland.

On 23 July An Bord Pleanála refused ESB planning permission to continue operating West Offaly Power station beyond the end of 2020. ESB’s application sought planning permission for the plant to co-fire peat and biomass out to the end of 2027. ESB are currently evaluating An Bord Pleanála’s decision. ESB have also submitted to Longford County Council a planning application to continue operating Lough Ree Power station beyond the end of 2020. A decision by Longford County Council is expected shortly.

Following this decision my Department and I are intensively assessing the options to ensure a just transition, if an earlier exit from peat than planned is required.

On 31 July I met with the Bord na Mona Board and worker directors, and with Oireachtas Midlands representatives, the Midlands regional transition team, the regional enterprise plan team, and the regional skills fora team. I am scheduled to meet with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions this week.

Several strands are being considered in the context of the Government’s response:

- Bord na Mona diversification

- Accelerated programme of bog restoration by Bord na Mona
- An area based retrofitting initiative
- Other special initiatives for regional development

I have secured the inclusion of the Midlands in the Platform for Coal and Other Carbon-Intensive Regions in Transition, which supports regions affected by climate policy. Following a letter I wrote to Commissioner Canete in March seeking the inclusion of the Midlands Region under the Platform, the Commissioner confirmed in July that the region would be included.

Membership of the Platform enables the Midlands Region to avail of the support of a dedicated Country Team, comprised of Commission experts, to assist with the development of strategies and projects for the region, focusing in particular on the employment challenges faced by workers affected by decarbonisation. The Team will also assist in identifying appropriate EU funding opportunities for the Midlands. The meetings of the Platform also enable the exchange of knowledge and ideas between carbon-intensive regions. A preliminary meeting of this Team with officials from relevant Departments and other stakeholders is planned to take place in the middle of October with a view to the Country Team coming to Ireland in November. The already established Midlands Regional Transition Team, led by Offaly County Council, will play a central role in this process as it evolves.

An interdepartmental group led by Department of An Taoiseach has been established to develop a just transition plan for the Midlands. Clearly this work cuts across a number of Government Departments, including my own Department, Public Expenditure and Reform, Business, Employment and Innovation, Rural and Community Development, and Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

I will respond formally to the Deputy's submission in the coming days.

EU Programmes

179. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will define the midlands peat region as designated in the EU platform for coal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37875/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Platform for Coal Regions in Transition was launched in December 2017, as part of the Coal and Carbon-Intensive Regions in Transition Initiative of the Clean Energy for All Europeans Package. The aim of the Platform is to provide support for regions heavily involved in fossil fuel industries and provide opportunities for national, regional, and local representatives and EU staff to discuss how these regions can best decarbonise their economies. In March this year I wrote to Commissioner Canete requesting that Ireland's Midlands region be included in the Platform. At the most recent meeting of the Platform, in July, the European Commission announced that the Midlands region has now been included in the Platform.

Membership of the Platform enables the Midlands region to avail of the support of a dedicated Country Team, comprised of Commission experts, to assist with the development of strategies and projects for the region, focusing in particular on the employment challenges faced by workers affected by decarbonisation. While no new EU funds have so far been set up under this initiative, the Country Team will assist in identifying appropriate EU funding opportunities for the Midlands.

My Department is in discussions with the EU Commission in relation to the establishment of the dedicated Country Team, and also to define the areas to be included as part of the Midlands region in the context of the Platform. For the purposes of accessing the support of the Platform, the position of my Department is that the Midlands region will include all areas in the Midlands affected by the transition away from peat harvesting.

Rail Network Expansion

180. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a railway order made by An Bord Pleanála can contain elements which are contrary to zonings or local objectives contained in county development plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37858/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The law governing the planning process for railways in this country makes An Bord Pleanála the State body responsible for considering and, if appropriate, approving applications for railway developments. The law provides that any such approvals by the Bord are made through issuing a “Railway Order” which, in essence, sets out the terms of the planning permission for a railway works or development. As the Deputy will be aware, An Bord Pleanála is independent in the exercise of its statutory functions, and the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has no role in relation to its operation or deliberations on a particular application.

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006, provides that any proposed railway works in an application for a railway order made to An Bord Pleanála come within the definition of “strategic infrastructure development”.

In considering an application for a railway order, An Bord Pleanála is required, under section 37 of the Transport (Railway Infrastructure) Act 2001, to consider certain matters, including the likely consequences for proper planning and sustainable development in the area in which it is proposed to carry out the railway works. In addition, An Bord Pleanála is required to have regard to the policies and objectives referred to in section 143 of the Planning and Development Act 2000; the legislation specifies that these include the policies and objectives of the Government, a State authority, the Minister, planning authorities and any other body which is a public authority whose functions have, or may have, a bearing on the proper planning and sustainable development of cities, towns or other areas, whether rural or urban.

Local Authority Funding

181. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allocate specific funding to local authorities in the remainder of 2019 to carry out essential road repairs due to flood damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37946/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council’s own resources supplemented by State road grants. Details of the regional and local road grant allocations and payments to local authorities are outlined in the regional and local road grant booklets which are available in the Dáil Library.

I announced the 2019 Regional and Local Road (RLR) allocations in February and all grant

funding available to my Department has now been allocated.

While there is no dedicated RLR funding for flooding, local authorities may carry out repairs from the RLR grants available to them and from their own resources. In this context, it is open to each Council to determine and reprioritise its work programme following severe weather events.

National Transport Authority Administration

182. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of fines and-or penalties and-or warning letters issued by the NTA to companies (details supplied) in respect of non-provision of services and or unsatisfactory delivery of services in the past three years to 12 September 2019; the details of the issues raised with the respective transport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37764/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with the relevant transport operators and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Capital Expenditure Programme

183. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital expenditure of his Department from 1 January to 31 August 2019 under the heading of B3 road improvement, maintenance. [37836/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by Exchequer road grants. The 2019 Regional and Local Road allocation booklet available in the Oireachtas library outlines the allocations for this year and the table below outlines the Exchequer capital grants paid out to end August this year.

Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, construction and maintenance of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. The table below also shows the Exchequer capital grants paid to TII to the end of August in relation to national roads.

National Roads	Paid to end August 2019
Capital Expenditure (including PPP contractual payments)	€170,488,368
Regional and Local Roads	Paid to end August 2019
Capital Expenditure	€174,813,754

Rail Services Provision

184. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve Luas frequency particularly between Bride's Glen and Sandyford; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [37837/19]

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

The Deputy is likely aware of the Green Line Capacity Enhancement project, funding of which is being provided as part of Project Ireland 2040. This important project comprises three significant elements –

- The expansion of the Sandyford tram depot;
- The extension of the existing 26 trams used on the Green Line to 55metres in length; and
- The addition of 8 new 55metres long trams to the fleet.

I am delighted to inform the Deputy that the expansion works required in relation to the Sandyford depot are now essentially complete. A sequence of extended trams is being rolled out across the autumn and commuters will benefit in the coming months as these extended trams enter into service. Next year will see the arrival of the 8 additional trams and the entire project will result in the capacity of the Green Line increasing by around 37% which the Deputy will acknowledge is a significant and welcome development.

The issue of frequency of services is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Transdev and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Funding

185. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make extra financial provision in order that the bike locker scheme can be expanded in existing locations and extended to new locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37842/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to active travel. In terms of overall funding, significant increases have been secured under Project Ireland 2040 to support improved and expanded active travel infrastructure.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has certain statutory responsibilities for the provision of cycling infrastructure, cycling facilities and schemes to promote cycling.

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

Noise Pollution Legislation

186. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if regulations on road noise have been made under section 77 of the Roads Act 1993; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37844/19]

187. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered making regulations under section 77 of the Roads Act 1993 to control noise pollution created by traffic on the M50 motorway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37845/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 and 187 together.

I would like to advise the Deputy that Section 77 of the Roads Act 1993 was repealed by Section 42(1) Schedule 1 Pt. 2 Item 4 of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009.

However, Directive 2002/49/EC on the assessment and management of environmental noise was transposed into Irish law by the Environmental Noise Regulations, 2006. This legislation requires Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and local authorities to undertake strategic noise mapping every five years for all major roads carrying in excess of 8,250 annual average daily traffic (AADT). Noise maps identify and prioritise cluster areas which will require further assessment and may require mitigation measures to be put in place. Once strategic noise maps have been produced, the results are used for each local authority to develop Noise Action Plans as required by the Environmental Noise Regulations.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Public Transport Provision

188. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the new Pelletstown station will be open and pedestrian bridge across the Royal Canal complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37849/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the provision of a new train station at Pelletstown/Ashington on the Maynooth rail line.

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

Public Transport

189. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Transport for Ireland real-time application for mobile phones is based on actual real-time information provided by buses and trains; if it is based on their presumed arrival time at stations based on the published timetable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37852/19]

190. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if former Dublin Bus routes that have been transferred to a company (details supplied) have been fully integrated into the Transport for Ireland real-time application for mobile phone service; if buses working on those routes are providing actual real-time information to the application; if it is working off the published timetable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37853/19]

191. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Irish

Rail services have been fully integrated into the Transport for Ireland real-time application for mobile phone service; if the commuter trains are providing actual real-time information to the application; if it is working off the published timetable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37854/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 to 191, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with the relevant transport operators and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Funding

192. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide additional financial support to elite boxing athletes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37872/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards. Sport Ireland channels its funding through the recognised National Governing Bodies of Sport, in this case the Irish Athletic Boxing Association.

I have referred the Deputy's Question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

193. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason an Irish citizen and resident must give up their UK driver licence in order to swap it and obtain an Irish driver licence; and the reason the person cannot retain both licences without having to go through the process of 12 lessons and a driver test. [37920/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Irish driving licensing law operates within a framework of EU law. Under the EU Directive on driving licences and the relevant Irish regulations, driving licences issued by Member States are mutually recognised. The Directive stipulates that a person may not hold more than one driving licence, thus requiring that, in this case, the person must surrender their UK licence when exchanging it for an Irish one.

While the UK is still a Member State, a person may exchange their UK licence for an Irish licence, as both are EU licences. When a Member State licence is presented here for exchange, the licensing authority of that Member State is notified that the licence has been exchanged for an Irish licence.

In the event of a no-deal Brexit the driving licence of a UK licence holder living here in Ireland will not be recognised and the driver will not be able to continue to drive here in Ireland on that licence.

Legislation in the Road Traffic Acts allows for the recognition of foreign driving licences for exchange purposes. If there is a no deal Brexit, the UK becomes a 3rd country and the potential then exists for arrangements to be made under this legislation. Ireland will be actively pursuing this option however, this may take a little time to complete as it involves a formal agreement and legislation here in Ireland. However, the same principle applies regarding one licence being exchanged for another.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

194. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the exceptional circumstances in which a person may be enrolled onto the ECCE programme in situations in which birth dates do not meet the set criteria (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37812/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness, it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied evenly. An essential component of the ECCE programme rules is an eligibility start date to ensure that the programme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner. The programme has included cut off points since its inception in 2010.

A child born in January 2018 is eligible for two full programme years of ECCE from 1st September 2021 and once again from the 1st September 2022. Legally, children can be enrolled at primary school from the age of 4 years upwards and must have started their formal primary school education by the age of 6 years.

There are a number of other early learning and care schemes for which this family may be eligible. Further information is available at www.dcyd.gov.ie or from your local city / County Childcare Committee. It should also be noted that the National Childcare Scheme will launch on 29th October 2019 and income-assessed subsidies will be available to families with children aged between 24 months and 15 years. This is a means-tested subsidy and is calculated based on a family's circumstances. The rate will vary depending on the level of family income, the child's age and educational stage, and the number of children in the family. Further details of the new scheme due to be launched in October 2019 are available on the National Childcare Scheme website <https://ncs.gov.ie/>

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

195. D'fhiografiaigh Deputy Catherine Connolly den Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige an aontaíonn sí gur sárú ar chearta an duine óig é a iarraidh ar dhalta atá chun an scrúdú ardleibhéal mata a dhéanamh i nGaeilge i mí an Mheithimh seo chugainn, i ndiaidh a bheith ag staidéar mata trí Ghaeilge ón gcéad bhliain ar aghaidh i nGaelcholáiste Lú, Dún Dealgan, iompú ar an mBéarla chun an scrúdú sin a dhéanamh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [37829/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Níl scrúduithe stáit faoi chúram mo Roinnse.

Is í an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna atá freagrach as scrúduithe stáit. Dá bhrí sin, ba chóir an cheist seo a chur ar mo chomhghleacaí, Joe McHugh TD, An t-Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

196. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if funding will be allocated to a centre (details supplied) in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37831/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): A key priority for me as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs is to support the early learning and care and school age childcare sector through the provision of capital funding, where it is most needed.

Each year my Department reviews the capital programmes as a whole and determines the priorities for Early Learning and Care and School Age Capital grants for the year ahead. I have allocated significant funding in recent years for this purpose and for improving the quality of infrastructure nationwide.

Capital strands are made available to achieve the strategic priorities for the year 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.

As you may be aware, the Capital programmes are necessarily a budget limited exercise. Therefore, the maximum grant size available under each of these strands has been determined in consideration of both optimising what can be delivered by each individual grant, as well as maximising the amount of providers and children that will ultimately benefit from the funding. The maximum grants available under this year's capital programmes will not be subject to change.

Whilst there are no other capital funding programmes available in 2019, planning for 2020's Capital offering is currently underway and the details of this will be communicated to providers in due course. The service may be eligible to apply for this funding next year when details are announced.

Childcare Services Funding

197. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the projected financial impacts on each family type of the proposed universal childcare scheme; if those lone parents who are currently in receipt of the maximum subsidy will continue to receive this amount; and the way in which the proposed changes will be delivered in a manner that supports the financial and other needs of lone parents and low-income single-parent families. [37841/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) has two types of subsidies:

A universal subsidy is payable for children between the ages of 24 weeks and 36 months (or until the child qualifies for the Early Childhood Care and Education programme if later) who are availing of childcare services from an approved childcare service provider or childminder. The universal subsidy is not means-tested and provides 50c per hour towards the cost of a registered childcare place for up to a maximum of 40 hours per week.

An income-related subsidy is payable for children from 24 weeks to 15 years of age who are availing of childcare services from an approved childcare service provider or childminder. The level of subsidy payable is determined by the family's reckonable income (i.e. gross income

minus tax, PRSI and other deductibles and minus any applicable multiple child discount).

Many parents availing of current targeted early learning and care and school age childcare schemes will be better off under the new NCS and able to access higher levels of subsidisation. Many others will qualify for financial support for the first time.

The OECD's 2017 'Faces of Joblessness' report compared the childcare supports for lone parents previously available in Ireland with the expected impact of the NCS. The report found significant improvements for lone parents, for example, that for certain lower paid lone parents working full time, the Scheme will bring net childcare costs down from the highest across the OECD, to 11th highest.

Further, analysis of the impact of the new scheme conducted using the ESRI's SWITCH model indicates that, on average, the boost to disposable income by the NCS will be larger for one-parent families than for couples, reflecting the typically lower income profile of one-parent families. Employed lone parents are the family type which will experience the greatest gains.

These findings reflects the very considerable work undertaken to poverty-proof the NCS by ensuring that families at or below the relative income poverty line will benefit from the highest subsidy rates.

The Scheme also removes many of the current restrictive eligibility requirements linked to Social Protection payments or a Medical Card. In this way, the Scheme aims to combat poverty traps and to make work pay for parents.

Arrangements are in place to ensure that no one loses out in the initial transition to the new Scheme. Families can continue to access their current targeted supports, remaining on their current payment, until the end of August 2020. In addition, my officials are undertaking further analysis to identify if any refinements are required to the NCS in order to ensure that it fully achieves its aim to deliver quality, accessible, affordable childcare for families in Ireland. This analysis is currently informing some of the Department's priorities for the Estimates / Budget 2020 process.

The Department is also committed to a review of the Scheme 12 months after the first subsidy payments begin.

Childcare Services Regulation

198. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the names and locations of 37 childcare facilities that Tusla stated were on its critical list at its recent appearance at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37847/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are approximately 4,500 Tusla registered early learning and care and school-age childcare services operating in Ireland. Tusla has assured me that there is a high level of compliance with regulations across the country. This finding is also supported by education-focused inspections of the ECCE programme conducted by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills and by visits from the Better Start Quality Development Service, which has visited over 3,000 services in the last few years.

At the Joint Oireachtas Committee meeting on 31st July 2019, Tusla stated that 37 services were then at "critical" stage in its enforcement process. It is important to stress that this status

implies a high and intensive level of scrutiny by Tusla. It does not imply that children attending these services are at risk or should be removed from the services.

It is essential to note that where there is evidence of a serious risk to children, Tusla bring this to the attention of the social work services, in which instance parents are informed.

It is usual practice that the majority of services at “critical” level make the necessary improvements to the standards of care and are then de-escalated from this level of concern. The number of services at “critical” status is continually changing as some services come off the list and others come on to it. Of the 37 services highlighted at the Joint Oireachtas Committee, a significant number have already made the necessary improvements to the standards of care required and have been - or are to be - de-escalated.

It is not possible to provide names and locations of the services at “critical” level at any one time as sharing this information could prejudice future enforcement action and/or prosecution of any such services that do not demonstrate to Tusla that they are taking sufficient action to meet regulatory requirements, which would not be in the best interests of children and families.

In respect of its regulatory and prosecutorial role in relation to early learning and care and school-age childcare services, Tusla acts as an independent legal entity with responsibility for supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children. It would be inappropriate and acting beyond our powers for my Department to interfere with the functions of the statutory regulator.

Childcare Services Regulation

199. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the point at which parents are entitled to know that a childcare facility they are using has been failing to meet Tusla standards to such an extent that it has been placed on the critical list; her views on whether parents should be entitled to know that a childcare facility is being placed on this list as soon as this occurs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37848/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are approximately 4,500 Tusla registered early learning and care and school-age childcare services operating in Ireland. Tusla has assured me that there is a high level of compliance with regulations across the country. This finding is also supported by education-focused inspections of the ECCE programme conducted by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills and by visits from the Better Start Quality Development Service, which has visited over 3,000 services in the last few years.

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quired and have been - or are to be - de-escalated.

It is not possible to share information on the services at “critical” level at any one time as sharing this information could prejudice future enforcement action and/or prosecution of any such services that do not demonstrate to Tusla that they are taking sufficient action to meet regulatory requirements, which would not be in the best interests of children and families.

As I stated recently, however, I am committed to exploring new powers for Tusla, including powers to inform parents as early as possible regarding ongoing investigation / proceedings, and powers to require services to display, in a prominent position, the service’s registration status and any conditions attaching to the service. I am seeking to progress legislation in these areas as quickly as possible.

In the interim, I would continue to urge parents to check the Tusla website to ensure that their service is registered, to read published inspection reports and to note any conditions attached, and to talk to their service provider about any concerns they may have. If parents have any questions or concerns regarding an early learning and care service they may wish to contact their local City / County Childcare Committee, details of which can be found at: www.myccc.ie.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

200. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the case of a person (details supplied) will be assessed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37889/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for funding under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

However, in order to ensure objectivity and fairness, it is essential that clear and transparent rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied evenly. An essential component of the ECCE programme rules is an eligibility start date to ensure that the programme can be administered and budgeted for in a transparent and appropriate manner.

Since the introduction of the ECCE programme in 2010, age limits have been used to determine eligibility. The upper age limit was set for the ECCE programme in consultation with senior officials from the Early Years Education Policy Unit in the Department of Education and Skills and ensures that children transition into primary school with their peers.

From the details supplied by the Deputy the child in question would have been eligible to avail of the ECCE programme from January 2018 to June 2019. Due to the programme rules concerning the upper age limit, they will not be eligible to avail of ECCE for the 2019/2020 programme year (beginning in September 2019).

An overage exemption for the ECCE programme can be availed of in a case where a child has a special or additional need. Current policy requires that any request for an exemption from ECCE age eligibility must be supported by a letter from a relevant medical specialist (not a GP/ PHN), specifically recommending an extra year of preschool for a child. This requirement is not intended to undermine the view of a parent or teacher in relation to a child’s needs but, rather, to maintain a clear and standard basis for applying exemptions.

If the parents in this instance believe they may be eligible due to additional needs, they may

apply in writing for an exemption from the ECCE age eligibility rules. In this regard, the application should be accompanied by a supporting letter from a relevant medical specialist.

Examples of the type of specialist/medical reports accepted are as follows:

- Speech & Language Therapist
- Occupational Therapist
- Senior Psychologist
- Physiotherapist
- Paediatrician/developmental
- Neurologist
- Psychiatrist
- Psychotherapist
- Cardiologist
- Oncologist
- Ophthalmologist
- Otolaryngologist (ENT specialist)
- Gastroenterologist.

This is not an exhaustive list; however it provides an example of what is accepted.

The application and supporting letter should be forwarded to the following address:

ECCE Exemptions,
Department of Children and Youth Affairs,
Block, Block 1 Miesian Plaza,
50-58 Baggot Street Lower, Dublin 2,
D02XW14.

Alternatively, applications or further queries can be emailed to: EYQueries@dcya.gov.ie.

Early Childhood Care and Education

201. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for the future of the programme support payment for the administration of the ECCE scheme in view of the roll-out of the national childcare scheme; her plans to ensure adequate payments are made to childcare providers to meet the substantial costs in administration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37940/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department introduced the Programme Support Payment (PSP) in Summer 2017 to recognise the critical

role that childcare providers play in the delivery of various early learning and care and school age childcare schemes, including the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The PSP was created to recognise the work involved in the delivery of the schemes, beyond contact time with children. It is intended to assist with costs associated with administrative work, time spent registering children, recording attendance, assisting parents in understanding how they can most benefit from the DCYA-funded programmes and other non-contact activities.

In 2019, €19.4m was available for the Programme Support Payment across all schemes including ECCE. This equated, for example, to an annual payment of €90 per ECCE child. It is paid in addition to capitation or subsidies.

The Programme Support Payment is secured in the base budget for 2020 and consideration is currently being given as to how it will be calculated and administered for the 19/20 programme year in the context of the change from the old targeted schemes to the new National Childcare Scheme.

Public Services Card

202. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if it is still a requirement for parents to use a public services card to register for the national childcare scheme in view of the recent determination of the Data Protection Commission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37941/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): When it is fully up and running, applications for the National Childcare Scheme will be accepted both online and by post. A Public Services Card (PSC) and verified MyGovID account are required to apply online only. The online application process will be introduced first, currently targeted for 29 October, followed shortly thereafter with the paper based application process.

In regard to the report by the Data Protection Commissioner (DPC) into the PSC, the Government and the Attorney General have carefully considered the findings of the report, including the legal basis for the use of the PSC by specified bodies or persons (such as the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs). The Government has agreed to challenge the findings of the report, as based on the legal advice received, it does not believe the DPC's findings are correct in law. The advice of the Attorney General's Office is that there is a strong legal basis for the continued public service wide use of the PSC.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is continuing to engage with the DPC on this issue and is keeping the Department of Children and Youth Affairs updated.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs remains committed to delivering the National Childcare Scheme as planned and, in so doing, assisting thousands of families to access high quality and affordable early learning and care and school age childcare.

Security of the Elderly

203. Deputy Timmy Dooley asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when a person (details supplied) who has a fully operational landline will be provided with the panic button they applied for some months ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37789/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Depart-

ment is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The scheme is operated on my Department's behalf by Pobal, via a nationwide network of community organisations.

Following a review, a new version of the scheme was launched on 1st November 2017. A number of important new changes were introduced, including an extension of the eligibility criteria to include older people who live on their own for long periods during the day, and the introduction of free monitoring for the first year, following which a small charge will apply.

One of the eligibility requirements of the scheme is that the applicant is able to benefit from the equipment supplied.

I understand that the application by the person concerned was received by Pobal on 9 August 2019 and was approved the same day. Following receipt of a call from the applicant, the supplier followed up the application with the community organisation on 5 September asking for details to be forwarded. An engineer attended the installation on Monday 9 September. However, technical difficulties were encountered in installing the system. Neither the engineer nor the applicant's telephone provider were able to establish a connection, as an analogue connection is required to install the landline unit.

A number of potential solutions have been proposed to the applicant to be able to avail of the scheme. Where a suitable landline connection is not available, a mobile GSM unit can be installed. This would incur a cost to keep the SIM card in credit similar to the cost incurred for fixed line rental on a landline.

Carer's Allowance Applications

204. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37759/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care. Two carers who are providing care on a part-time basis in an established pattern can also share a single CA payment and the annual Carer's Support Grant (CSG). Each carer must be providing care from Monday to Sunday but can do so on alternate weeks. All other qualifying conditions for CA must also be met.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 5 February 2019 which stated that she was sharing care for the care recipient every second week.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 17 June 2019 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

As full-rate CA was already paid to the second carer, the person concerned was contacted by telephone to explain that an overpayment would arise for the original carer, if CA was awarded from date of application. It was proposed to award CA from a current date, which the person concerned accepted. CA was awarded on 13 September 2019 with effect from 19 September

2019. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 19 September 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Maintenance Payments

205. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of cases examined by the liable relatives unit; and the number of these cases which resulted in payments being commenced from said liable relative in 2018 and to date in 2019. [37780/19]

208. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the running costs of the liable relatives unit in 2018. [37805/19]

209. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost involved in examining a case by the liable relatives unit. [37806/19]

210. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount collected directly by her Department from liable relatives as a result of work by the liable relatives unit in 2018. [37807/19]

211. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the procedures in place in circumstances in which a determination order is made by the liable relatives unit and not complied with by the liable relative; the enforcement powers the unit has; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37808/19]

212. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the content of the letters issued to liable relatives when the child with respect to whom the one parent family payment is being made turns seven years of age . [37809/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 208 to 212, inclusive, together.

The issue of family maintenance payments is first and foremost a private matter for the people concerned.

Where a one parent family payment (OFP) is awarded, the Department seeks to trace the other parent, referred to as the liable relative, in order to ascertain whether he or she is in a financial position to contribute towards the cost of the OFP.

The legislative basis for the implementation of the Liability to Maintain Family Provisions is set out in Part 12 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended. The methods of assessment of the liable relative's ability to pay are specified in detail in Regulations (S.I. 571 of 2006, S.I. 142 of 2007 as amended).

In making a determination order, the Liable Relatives Unit will assess the financial position of each liable relative, based on the net weekly income after applicable allowances have been taken into account, as set out in the Regulations.

A liable relative is given the option to commence making payments to the OFP recipient or to the Department. Payments made directly to the OFP recipient are assessed as means and may have an impact on their weekly payment from the Department.

Where a liable relative fails to commence payments, the Department is empowered to ap-

ply to the District Court for an order directing that contributions be paid. The Department may also apply to the District Court to have an Attachment of Earnings Order made against a liable relative.

In 2018, the Department examined 8,244 cases. Some 1,039 liable relatives commenced making payments or made additional payments to the OFP recipient. In a further 65 cases, the liable relatives began paying the Department directly.

In 2019 to end August, the Department examined 9,834 cases. Some 1,001 liable relatives commenced making payments or made additional payments to the OFP recipient. In a further 69 cases, the liable relatives began paying the Department directly.

The amount collected directly by the Department from liable relatives as a result of work by the Liable Relatives Unit in 2018 was €269,949.

I am advised that it is not possible to disaggregate the running costs of the Liable Relatives Unit or to give the estimated costs involved in examining a case from the Department's overall administration costs.

Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

206. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on an invalidity pension backdating appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37798/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided on 7 February 2019 to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision and award Invalidity Pension from 2 September 2018. Under social welfare legislation the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts.

I am advised that the person concerned has submitted additional evidence seeking backdating of Invalidity Pension beyond 2 September 2018. This information was received by the Appeals Office on 12 September 2019 and the Appeals Officer will now review the decision. The person concerned will be contacted when the review of his appeal has been finalised.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

207. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed and the person advised regarding same; if the case will be viewed as an exceptional case by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37801/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care. It is payable for a maximum of 104 weeks for each person being cared for.

The Deputy states that the person concerned recently applied for carers and was refused on the grounds that her last stamp wasn't paid here. Although periods of insurance in another EU member state may be taken into account to meet the PRSI contribution conditions, the last week of insurance must be paid in Ireland.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CARB, evidence must be provided in respect of the care recipient's care requirement, the level of care the carer provides, the carer's hours of employment and their PRSI record.

The PRSI contribution condition requires that the carer must have the following:

- 39 reckonable contributions in the relevant tax year or
- 39 reckonable contributions paid in the 12-month period before the start of CARB or
- 26 reckonable contributions paid in the Relevant Tax Year and 26 contributions paid in the year before that.

As my Department has limited details of the person concerned it is not possible to provide a specific answer in relation to the person concerned. Should the Deputy wish to receive further information to the person concerned please note the identifying details of that person should be supplied.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 208 to 212, inclusive, answered with Question No. 205.

Child Maintenance Payments

213. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that more than half of lone parents in receipt of either the one-parent family payment or jobseeker's transition do not receive maintenance payments; her views on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37810/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Family Law Acts place a legal obligation on parents to maintain their children. In cases where the family unit has broken down these obligations continue to apply. Relevant maintenance payments can be arranged either directly between the parties themselves, or with the assistance of supports from the Department of Justice and Equality, such as the Family Mediation Service and the Legal Aid Board, or ultimately through the Courts. The enforcement of the obligation on parents to maintain their children is currently a matter for the Department Justice and Equality.

Within my own Department, the Social Welfare Acts provide that where certain welfare payments are in place (specifically, one-parent family payment, known as OFP) an assessment

may be made against a ‘liable relative’ requiring them to make a contribution in respect of maintenance.

In every case where OFP is awarded, the Department seeks to trace the other parent or liable relative in order to ascertain whether s/he is in a financial position to contribute towards the cost of the OFP.

The methods of assessment of the liable relatives ability to pay are specified in detail in Regulations (S.I. 571 of 2006 and S.I. 142 of 2007). The financial situation of each liable relative is assessed in detail. The assessment is based on the net weekly income (i.e. income from all sources less income tax and PRSI). Any maintenance currently being paid to the OFP recipient is also taken into account.

All liable relatives who are assessed with a maintenance liability are issued with a Maintenance Contribution Assessment setting out the amount assessed. The amount assessed can be reviewed where new information comes to light about the financial or household circumstances of the liable relative. The liable relative can either commence/ increase the current payments to the OFP recipient or can make their contribution directly to the Department. Decisions on the amounts assessed can be appealed to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and budgetary context.

Child Maintenance Payments

214. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the fact that lone parents with a maintenance order from the courts in which payment is taken by her Department as household means against other social welfare supports may not be actually paid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37811/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The issues relating to maintenance are currently a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, who has responsibility for the Family Law Acts, which govern maintenance requirements.

Existing Family Law Acts place a legal obligation on parents to maintain their children. In cases where the family unit has broken down these obligations continue to apply. Relevant maintenance payments can be arranged either directly between the parties themselves, or with the assistance of supports from the Department of Justice and Equality, such as the Family Mediation Service and the Legal Aid Board, or ultimately through the Courts. The enforcement of the obligation on parents to maintain their children is a matter for the Department Justice and Equality.

My Department operates a range of means tested social assistance payments. Social welfare legislation provides that the means test for these payments takes account of the income and assets of the person and a spouse/partner, if applicable. Income and assets include income from employment, self-employment, occupational pensions, maintenance payments as well as property owned (other than the family home) and capital such as savings, shares and other investments.

For social assistance schemes, such as jobseeker’s allowance, one-parent family payment, disability allowance and the state pension non-contributory, maintenance payments (including maintenance payments made to or in respect of a qualified child) are assessed by first disregard-

ing any housing costs incurred (up to €4,952 per annum or €95.23 per week), and then assessing the remainder at 50%. Budget 2019 introduced a maintenance payment disregard for the Working Family Payment (WFP). With a value of €95.23 per week, this brings WFP into line with other social assistance schemes.

Accordingly, the total value of any maintenance payments is never assessed as means for these weekly income support payments. Therefore, the total income received by the family (social welfare payment and maintenance payment combined) will be higher than someone not receiving maintenance payments.

The purpose of means testing is to ensure that resources are targeted to those with the greatest financial need. The current method of means assessment ensures that appropriate levels of support are available to those who need them, across the wide range of income supports available from my Department.

Customers should always advise my Department of any change in their circumstances and their means may be reviewed if necessary. For example, a customer in receipt of OFP who was previously in receipt of maintenance which has ceased should seek to have that maintenance reinstated and where this is not possible the customer should bring this to the attention of the relevant Officer(s) in my Department who may review the payment.

One-Parent Family Payment Data

215. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the one-parent family payment. [37820/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) is a payment for men and women under 66 who are bringing children up without the support of a partner. As at month-end July 2019 there are 39,606 families with 65,711 children in receipt of the OFP.

Working Family Payment Data

216. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the working family payment. [37821/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children relative to their family size. WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependents and to offer a financial incentive to take up employment.

There are currently 52,074 persons (families) in receipt of WFP.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

217. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity allowance review for a person (details supplied). [37830/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): On receipt of additional medical evidence submitted in support of the review of the claim, the deciding officer has decided that the medical conditions for the scheme are satisfied and the lady in question has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 07 March 2019. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 03 October 2019. Any arrears due from 07 March 2019 to 02 October 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. She was notified of this decision on 16 September 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Blind Person's Pension Data

218. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in Limerick city and county in receipt of the blind pension. [37834/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The number of persons in receipt of Blind Pension for Limerick city and county is currently 47.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

219. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in Limerick city and county in receipt of both the invalidity pension and the living alone allowance together. [37835/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the contribution conditions.

As of August 31, 2019 there were 499 recipients of both IP and the living alone allowance residing in the county of Limerick, including Limerick city.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

220. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the low uptake of hearing aids; her further views on whether cost is a barrier to low and middle-income workers when it comes to accessing hearing aids and the severe repercussions on health and well-being as a result; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37864/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The uptake of grants towards the purchase of hearing aids under the Departments Treatment benefit scheme has seen a 100% increase over the last 10 years, with almost €80m spent on the scheme over that period.

Access to hearing aids is provided for under the Departments PRSI scheme and the HSE

parallel scheme, which provides medical card holders with access to free hearing aids. The availability provided under the two schemes offers access to quality hearing aids to all sectors of society, either completely free or with a significant grant payable towards their cost.

The Department encourages those who require hearing aids to avail of the relevant scheme to ensure they get the appropriate device to match their needs.

Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and budgetary context.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

221. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider restoring the hearing aid grant available under treatment benefit to pre-FEMPI levels as has happened with optical and dental benefits; her plans to make access to hearing aids more affordable and equitable for persons with hearing loss; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37865/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department's Medical Appliance scheme, which provides grants to assist in the purchase of hearing aids, is available to those who have the required number of PRSI contributions, and their dependant spouse / partners.

The number of applications for hearing aids under the scheme has been rising in recent years, from 7,500 grants paid in 2009 to 14,600 in 2018. The extension of the scheme to the self employed in March 2017 has also proved to be very popular.

Access to hearing aids is provided for both under the Department's PRSI scheme and the HSE's parallel scheme, which provides medical card holders with access to free hearing aids. The two schemes provide access to quality hearing aids to all sectors of society, irrespective of their income category.

The numbers claiming under the scheme over recent years and the payments made by my Department bear testimony to the important contribution the scheme is making for PRSI contributors and their dependant spouse/partners who are experiencing hearing loss.

Any changes to the current arrangements in respect of these benefits would have to be considered in an overall policy and budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

222. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability payment will be approved for a person (details supplied); and if the matter will be expedited. [37902/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 29 May 2019. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this gentleman was substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 11 September 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

223. Deputy Willie Penrose asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37943/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 11 June 2019.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 16 September 2019 and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 19 September 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 13 June 2019 to 18 September 2019 will also issue 19 September 2019.

The person concerned was notified on 16 September 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

EU Legislation

224. Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to ensure that all the rights in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are fully respected and promoted in all the actions of his mandate; and the steps he will take to help remedy the housing crisis in Europe. [37899/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While the question has a broad ambit, I can only answer with reference to my own remit in terms of my responsibility for housing in this jurisdiction. The right to housing assistance is referred to in Article 34(3) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union dealing with social security and social assistance and it provides that:

In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the Rules laid down by Union law and national laws and practices.

The Charter rights are subject to certain limits and many of these rights and principles are defined by reference to existing law and practice at the EU or national level. In accordance with Article 51 of the Charter, its provisions are addressed to the EU institutions and "to the Mem-

ber States only when they are implementing Union law". The Court of Justice has clarified this means that the fundamental rights guaranteed in the legal order of the European Union are "applicable in all situations governed by European Union law, but not outside such situations."

In Ireland the many substantive rights regarding housing arising from legislation, including the right to be assessed for social housing support and, if qualified, placed on a waiting list for a social house or to avail of the housing assistance payment and be placed on a transfer list, are entirely consistent with the principles of the Charter.

The policy of this Government is that housing supports should be provided to those most in need and we do this in a variety of ways through, for example, the provision of the housing assistance payment, the provision of local authority owned housing, the funding of Approved Housing Bodies in the provision of housing supports and the provision of funding for homeless services. Indeed, it should be noted that the housing budget for 2019 is just under €2.4 billion. This is the highest level of funding ever provided for housing purposes in any given year in Ireland.

Continued delivery of social housing through Rebuilding Ireland and the development and implementation of further policies and measures as required in the future is the best way to ensure that the State continues to fully meet its obligations to those who need assistance to provide a home for themselves and their families. *Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 37.*

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

226. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expenditure on LIHAF in 2018 and from 1 January to date in September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37775/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As a key initiative of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is designed to fund the provision of public off-site infrastructure to relieve critical blockages and enable housing developments to be built on key sites at scale.

Funding of €200 million was originally made available under LIHAF, of which €150 million would be funded by the Exchequer with local authorities to match fund €50 million. 30 projects received final approval, at a total cost of €195.71 million, of which €146.69 million will be funded by the Exchequer with local authorities funding the balance. Details on all of the LIHAF projects by local authority area, budget allocation, project description, and housing delivery have been published on the Rebuilding Ireland website and are available at the following link:

www.rebuildingireland.ie/LIHAF

In terms of LIHAF expenditure, most projects have been at the design and planning stages, and this is reflected in the level of expenditure to date. However, more projects are now progressing to construction stage and it is expected that the expenditure will increase significantly towards the end of 2019 and into 2020.

Drawdown of LIHAF grant funding from the Department commenced with €1.603m in Exchequer funding provided in 2017, a further €6.814m in 2018 and €12.10m to date in 2019. Each of these Exchequer amounts was matched by 25% local authority funding. In line with the LIHAF administrative cycle, local authorities will submit claims of expenditure for Q3 expen-

diture over the coming weeks.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Grants

227. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will increase the level of grant aid for individual domestic water well supply grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37883/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Earlier this year I announced details of the new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. This included an improved funding scheme for individual wells.

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 changes that I have approved to the individual wells grant scheme are, as follows:

- A maximum grant for rehabilitation works of €3,000, which represents an increase of 47% on the current maximum grant amount;
- Where the local authority agrees that the most appropriate solution is to provide a new well, the maximum grant payable would be €5,000;
- Recognising the role of the grant in improving quality, the water quality treatment element (typically filtration and UV filtration) will qualify for 100% funding up to a maximum of €1,000;
- Up to 85% of other costs would be met, subject to the total combined maximum costs of €3,000 for well rehabilitation or €5,000 for a new well;
- For clarity, applicants would not be able to avail of both grant amounts, so they would not be able to avail of €3,000 for well rehabilitation as well as the €5,000 for a new well.

Work is at an advanced stage of development for the new scheme. I expect that the process will be substantially completed shortly 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 the application form to issue to local authorities shortly thereafter.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports

228. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason her Department has to convene a meeting of the film forum following a recommendation in the July 2018 Joint Committee on Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht report on development and working conditions in the Irish film industry. [37896/19]

229. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the film forum is likely to meet. [37897/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josephine Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 229 together.

In July 2018, the Joint Oireachtas Committee published a Report on Development and

Working Conditions in the Irish Film Industry. One of the Recommendations of the Report involved calls for the Irish Film Board - now Screen Ireland - to constitute its Film Forum with an independent Chair, in order to allow all stakeholders within the sector to meet and work together to develop mutually beneficial solutions for the industry. While Screen Ireland commenced efforts to constitute the forum in autumn last year, it was unable to do so. There was disagreement between various bodies representing employees and workers in the industry who would not agree to meet and given the contrary positions of the parties who should participate in the Film Forum, Screen Ireland informed the Joint Committee in December that it could not proceed without excluding one or more of the parties who should participate. There was also a concern that rather than providing a mechanism for a collaborative and inclusive approach to develop and exchange ideas to enhance the industry, the forum would instead amount to little more than the airing of disputes and grievances that had previously been raised before the Joint Committee. As the deputy is aware, disputes and grievances should be dealt with through the formal mechanisms of the State and the Government has a well-resourced labour inspectorate, which forms part of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) whose core services include the inspection of employment rights compliance, the provision of information, adjudicating on complaints under employment protection, equality and industrial relations legislation and the provision of mediation, conciliation, facilitation and advisory services. In the meantime, efforts have continued to identify a way forward that might address concerns raised. I am now advised that following a joint request by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the Services, Industry, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), and Screen Producers Ireland (SPI), the WRC has agreed to undertake an audit of the Republic of Ireland Independent Film and Television Drama Production Sector with a view to:

- examining industrial relations generally, employment practices and procedure,
- assessing issues arising (if any), and
- making recommendations for their improvement where appropriate.

The WRC has published a Workplace Relations Notice on its website, inviting submissions from stakeholders on the above listed matters by 31 October 2019. The results of the audit should inform any further actions that might be taken on the matter of the film forum.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports

230. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a detailed assessment on the way in which the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht report on development and working conditions in the Irish film industry has been implemented. [37898/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Report of the Joint Committee was launched on 12 July 2018, just a few weeks after the Government published its Audiovisual Action Plan on 27 June 2018. The Report made 11 Specific Conclusions and Recommendations, many of which complement the actions set out in the Audiovisual Action Plan. In May of this year, the Dáil debated a motion regarding the Report wherein I set out the progress in implementing the recommendations of the Report.

Recommendations 1, 3, 5, and 11 have been addressed under revisions to the section 481 tax incentive.

Recommendation 1 sets out that “section 481 is a key and central component within the Irish Film Industry. This fact is accepted by the vast majority of the industry’s stakeholders.

Section 481 will remain central in the industry into the future". Changes were made to section 481 in the Finance Act 2018, designed to reduce the time required to decide on applications for the relief. Previously, applications were made directly to Revenue. Now, a producer company applies directly to the Department for a certificate stating that the film is to be treated as a qualifying film for the purpose of section 481. The Finance Act 2018 also made provision for the extension of section 481 tax relief beyond its 2020 deadline to 2024. It also provided for an additional measure, the Regional Film Development Uplift which is a short-term, tapered regional film development uplift commencing at 5%, for films made in an area designated as an assisted region under the State aid regional guidelines. The regional uplift will be phased out on a tiered basis with 5% available in respect of claims made on or before 31 December 2020, 3% in respect of claims made on or before 31 December 2021, 2% in respect of claims made on or before 31 December 2022, and reducing to 0% from year 2023 on. The consent of the European Commission to both these state aid measures has now been received and Regulations and a Commencement Order introduced in July 2019 gave effect to these measures.

Recommendation 3 saw the committee seek "the reform of training in the sector to ensure that all training has a recognised qualification where possible, has a beginning and an end, and that trainees are not forced to repeat specific training". The Committee proposed that "there be a wider geographical spread of training courses, the introduction of formal apprenticeships and additional finance to improve this training and development." The Regional Uplift measure outlined above is designed to support the geographic spread of the audio-visual sector and ensure a spread of production activity beyond the current traditional production hubs in Ireland by incentivising the training and development of new, local pools of talent in the film sector in areas outside the current main production hubs. In the matter of the training requirements of Section 481, changes targeted at improving outcomes have recently been effected and there is now a strong focus on skills development that is linked to quality, and a more expansive range of skills development at all levels, including hard skills, soft skills, future skills, technical skills and leadership skills. As part of these revised requirements, films with eligible expenditure of over €2 million must have their Skills Development Plans agreed in advance with Screen Ireland. The plans developed by Screen Ireland require applicants to consider carefully the skills needs of the production, the company, the participant and the sector as a whole and to reflect on how the planned activity will address skills needs across different levels and different departments of the production from new entrants, trainees and crew to above the line talent and company leaders. This is designed to move away from a system where individuals are labelled as trainees and go some way towards addressing the concerns that the Committee flagged. In addition, there is considerable work going on in relation to training. Last November, Screen Skills Ireland, the training and skills development division of Screen Ireland held an Education Forum for the audio visual industry, bringing together Screen industry stakeholders, education and trading providers and policy influencers to focus in the skills development challenges and opportunities. This forum was a success and will be repeated in early November this year. In terms of accredited courses, Screen Ireland has submitted two Level 9 courses (Creative Leadership and Advanced Producers) to be developed and certified through Springboard+. These courses are in direct response to one of the recommendations in the Olsberg Report that new business skills courses be generated, specifically focusing on the needs of creative sector companies. Screen Ireland is also developing a certified Level 8 Apprenticeship programme, for the role of CGI Technical Artist, in the animation and related sectors. A network of Regional Skills Fora was created as part of the Government's National Skills Strategy and provides an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions. Regional skills, in conjunction with SOLAS (The Further Education and Training Authority) has introduced a skills initiative "Skills for Growth" which is designed to make it easier for employers to identify their skill needs and receive guidance on which education and training providers are best suited to their requirements. Skillnet Ireland, the national

agency for the promotion and facilitation of workforce learning in Ireland currently has 23 programmes planned for 2019 that are of relevance to workers in the film industry. These programmes include courses in Business Skills, Leadership and Project management through Animation Skillnet; Design Enterprise Skillnet; Greasán Na Meán Skillnet; and Screen Skillnet.

Recommendation 5 outlined that an “international comparative study should be constituted to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the Section 481 tax credit”. Since the publication of the Report, as part of its work for the Finance Bill 2018, the Department of Finance published its review of the section titled ‘Review IV: Cost Benefit Analysis of Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 – Film Corporation Tax Credit’. This analysis was the catalyst for the administrative changes to the section 481 application process. I understand that the Department of Finance will conduct a further review in 2020.

Recommendation 11 called for “Public funding and adherence to employment standards” to be linked. The Film Regulations 2019, introduced to give effect to changes in the section 481 procedures include a signed undertaking in respect of quality employment which requires both the producer company and the qualifying company to comply with all obligations in the field of environmental, social and employment law. The producer company and the qualifying company must be responsible for compliance with all statutory requirements of an employer, have in place written policies and procedures in on Grievances, Discipline and Dignity at work (including harassment, bullying and equal opportunity). The companies are also required to provide details of any Work Place Relations Commission decisions aligned with confirmation that any findings against the companies have been followed or an explanation where the finding has not been followed. This also addresses Recommendation 2 of the Report which expressed concerns with regard to working terms and conditions. While matters relating to collective bargaining rights of freelance workers do not fall directly under my remit, my Department has used the opportunities presented by the changes made to the section 481 procedures to improve conditions in the industry particularly in relation to training and commitments undertaken by producer companies. Recommendation 8 also deals with working conditions and more particularly, calls for state support for “the precarious existence of actors and sustainable pension structures for workers within the Irish film industry”. This comes within the remit of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, who passed legislation in the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 in December 2018 which addresses insecurity and unpredictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and those working variable hours. In July this year, I was pleased to join my colleague and Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty TD, in announcing the extension of the Social Welfare Scheme for Self-Employed Artists to the wider Creative Community. This means that from this month on, self-employed artists in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance for the first year that they are out of work will be able to focus on their artistic work and developing their portfolio, rather than having to participate in the normal labour market activation activities. Artists eligible to apply to the scheme include actors, theatre and film directors, dancers, opera singers, set, costume and lighting designers, musicians, composers, choreographers, architects and street performers

Recommendation 6 called for workers within the craft grades of the industry to have representatives nominated to the Irish Film Board to feed in their perspectives and needs into the industry’s development. However, as I set out in May, under the provisions of the Irish Film Board Acts 1980 to 2018, the Board of Screen Ireland as it is now known is not a representative board in the sense of comprising representatives from the various industry sectors: Section 12 of the Act provides that 7 members shall be appointed to the Board by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht with the consent of the Minister for Finance for a period of not more than 4 years. When vacancies arise on the Board, they are advertised by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and are open to applications from anyone who meets the requirements as

set out by PAS. The next vacancies will arise in March 2020.

Recommendation 9 sought for the further integration of the film industry on a north/south basis with the creation of formal north/south structures, development plans and investment. While Screen Ireland is in competition with Northern Ireland Screen in its efforts to attract inward production into the Republic of Ireland, it also regularly cooperates with Northern Ireland Screen in efforts to attract inward production to the island of Ireland. Earlier this year, Screen Ireland announced that, in conjunction with Northern Ireland Screen, it had teamed up with an international sales and film finance company Bankside Films on a joint venture that intends to produce, and fully fund, up to two feature films per year. It targets projects with a budget of up to €1.5 million and creative teams on each project will come from both the north and south.

Recommendation 4 saw the Committee call on the Irish Film Board to constitute the Board's Film Forum, with an independent Chair, in order to allow all stakeholders within the sector to meet and work together to develop mutually beneficial solutions for the industry while Recommendation 10 called on the unions and the representative organisations to work towards a mutually beneficial and respectful understanding. As I set out in May, despite efforts made by Screen Ireland, last Autumn, it did not prove possible to constitute a forum of all stakeholders that would adopt a collaborative approach as suggested by the Report. Instead, it seemed that the forum would simply comprise of the airing of disputes and grievances which are more properly dealt with by the State through other mechanisms such as the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). In recent days, the WRC has announced its intention to conduct an audit of the Republic of Ireland Independent Film and Television Drama Production Sector with a view to examining industrial relations generally, employment practices and procedure, assessing issues arising (if any), and making recommendations for their improvement where appropriate. The WRC invites submissions by 31 October 2019 and it is hoped that this audit will provide an appropriate mechanism to progress matters raised in Recommendation 4 and Recommendation 10. In addition, my Department will continue to work through the Audiovisual High Level Steering Group to address issues raised in the audiovisual industry, and to support the industry and the people who work in it.

Na hOileáin amach ón gCósta

231. D'fhiadfraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil túis curtha le féidearthachtaí na n-oileán a mheas agus tosaíochtaí straitéiseacha á gcur chun cinn i gcomhar le pobail na n-oileán sna réimsí cultúrtha, sóisialta agus eacnamaíochta; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [37939/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tá na hoileáin áitrithe mar chuid tábhachtach d'oidhreacht an Stáit agus tá sé mar chuspóir lárnach ag mo Roinn go leanfaidh pobail bhríomhara, inmharthana ag cur fúthu ar na hoileáin.

D'ainneoin go bhfuil dul chun cinn déanta ag mo Roinn le blianta anuas i dtaoibh feabhas a chur ar sheirbhísí rochtana do na hoileáin agus infrastructúr caipital, is gá dul i ngleic leis an dúshlán sin agus féidearthachtaí na n-oileán a mheas agus tosaíochtaí straitéiseacha a chur chun cinn.

Sa chomhthéacs sin, tá cinneadh tógha agam, le haontú an Rialtais, Coiste Idir-Rannach do na hoileáin a bhunú. Beidh an coiste faoi mo chathaoirleacht mar Aire Stáit don Ghaeilge, don Ghaeltacht agus do na hOileáin agus beidh sé mar aidhm go n-eascróidh polasaí oileánach

idir-rannach as obair an choiste.

Is féidir liom a dheimhniú go gcuirfear próiseas cuimsitheach comhairliúcháin ar bun le muintir na n-oileán ionas go mbeidh a dtuairimí curtha faoi bhráid an choiste freisin.

Tá áthas orm a dheimhniú don Teachta go dtionólfar an chéad cruinniú den choiste nua ar an Mháirt, 24 Meán Fómhair agus go bhfuil cuireadh tugtha d'ionadaithe ó Ranna Stáit ábhartha bheith i láthair ag an gcruiinniú úd.

Tá mé muiníneach go gcuirfidh an Choiste seo agus na moltaí a thiocfaidh uaidh go mór le forbairt réimsí cultúrtha, sóisialta agus eacnamaíochta na n-oileán.