



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 17 Deireadh Fómhair 2019

Thursday, 17 October 2019

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 9.30 a.m.

Paidir.
Prayer.

Financial Resolutions

Financial Resolution No. 9: General (Resumed)

Debate resumed on the following Financial Resolution:

THAT it is expedient to amend the law relating to inland revenue (including value-added tax and excise) and to make further provision in connection with finance.

- (Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government)

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I wish to touch on a few matters that are particularly important to the part of the country in which I live. When the debate was adjourned yesterday, I was about to deal with carbon tax. There are three Deputies in the Roscommon-Galway constituency and I am the only one who supported the introduction of carbon tax. I do not like taxes and I do not like the carbon tax. We have to be particularly careful in rural areas not to be pushing people too much on carbon taxes but our party is trying to recognise the need to revitalise our area now, particularly in view of what is happening with Bord na Móna. The Turf Board was established in the 1930s and Bord na Móna was established in 1946. For more than 60 years it has kept the local economy going, particularly in the area around Mountdillon, Lanesborough and the Lough Ree power station. In recent years there has been a massive reduction in the number of workers at the ESB power station in Lough Ree. Now, the position of Bord na Móna is going to change completely. Our party wants to see how we can help communities because, as the Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Canney, knows, communities in our part of the country will be very badly hit by this development.

I live only a few minutes from the Lough Ree power station and all the Bord na Móna workers live near my home. Regardless of whether we talk about Lough Ree or Shannonbridge,

there is no doubt that a serious situation is developing. Bord na Móna workers were told only a year ago that the just transition would occur over eight to ten years. They are now being told that it will happen in one. Our area will be a black spot unless the Government gets serious about coming up with new ideas. That is why, in the context of discussions on the budget, our negotiators, the Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party and our Front Bench insisted that there would have to be a just transition fund. The fund is for the communities, not for the Bord na Móna workers. The problem in this regard is two-pronged. First, there will be damage to the communities and, second, there is the prospect of unemployment for Bord na Móna workers. Some people will accept redundancy packages. It is great to talk about repairing the bogs but it will not be possible to have the same number of workers in Bord na Móna as used to be the case. It is extremely important, therefore, that a just transition fund and just transition commissioner be put in place as quickly as possible. The goalposts have moved dramatically for Bord na Móna in the context of my part of the country.

I welcome the €5 increase in the living alone allowance. The increase of €2 a week in the fuel allowance is not enough to compensate people who will be hit by fuel poverty because of carbon taxes. The National Treatment Purchase Fund will not solve all the ills in the health sector but Fianna Fáil fought for the extra money. I hope that money will in some way help to shorten waiting lists and assist people who have been waiting for treatment for a long time to get the care they need.

Deputy Brendan Smith: My colleagues and our party leader have outlined our disappointment with some aspects of this budget, which was framed against the backdrop of Brexit. As we meet here this morning, we do not know what the final outcome of the negotiations on Brexit will be. We sincerely hope that there will be a successful outcome and that Britain will be able to leave the European Union with a deal. This is an issue that has consumed political life in the Oireachtas. For all the deficits and deficiencies in our political system, the Oireachtas has worked very hard to ensure that we have a united front on Brexit, analysing and outlining the difficulties and challenges that it poses for the entire island. It is particularly disappointing that for the past three years there has been no Assembly or Executive in Northern Ireland when we could have advocated strongly and with one voice in the best interests of all the people in Northern Ireland. It is to the shame of the DUP and Sinn Féin that they could not reach agreements, along with the two Governments, to ensure that the people who elected Assembly Members to Stormont would have their voices heard. Not only do we not have a functioning Executive, there is no North-South Ministerial Council. The council is one of the very important bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement and it allowed members of our Government to meet their counterparts in the Executive twice a year. In addition, Ministers met in sectoral format to discuss issues of common concern to their Departments. They worked together and achieved progress that often went unheralded in the public domain. They were doing good and important work on behalf of all the people of this island and using the potential of the Good Friday Agreement.

Last week, I put questions to the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation on the need to ensure that adequate supports would be put in place to assist enterprises through the difficulties that will arise on foot of Brexit. I highlighted the needs of the Border region, including counties Cavan and Monaghan. There is a high level of interdependence between the economies on both sides of the Border and, in particular, between people in Cavan and Monaghan and our neighbours and friends in Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh. We have many common interests. The major sectors in these five counties are agrifood, construction products and engineering and

they will be the most adversely affected by Brexit because they are heavily dependent on Britain for their export market. I appeal to the Minister of State, and to the Ministers for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and for Finance, to ensure that specific programmes are put in place to assist those sectors in that region through the challenges and difficulties that will arise no matter what form of Brexit we have. I have appealed to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport on many occasions to prioritise the infrastructural needs of the Border region. Our road infrastructure needs to be upgraded. Unfortunately, legacy issues caused us severe difficulties with lack of investment in infrastructure due to the difficulties and the troubles over so many decades. As that region will be most adversely affected the Government needs to prioritise investment there to assist enterprise and business to remain competitive, not alone to create new jobs but to ensure we maintain as much as possible the existing employment we have. Already there has been a negative knock-on effect from Brexit. I know of businesses in Monaghan and Cavan which had proposals to invest in expanding their operations but which put them on hold because of the uncertainty that has arisen on foot of Brexit.

It is absolutely scandalous that 10,700 people, including 70 children, were homeless last month. This Government has failed abysmally in the context of housing. It is most disappointing that there has not been a better rate of progress in the provision of social housing. When the Tánaiste was Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, I asked him repeatedly, through parliamentary questions and in committee debates, to ensure that income eligibility limits for social housing would be increased. Not only do people not get council houses, they cannot even get on the list to be considered for council housing. I have previously given the example of a lone parent, a young woman who has three children who are going to school. She was working four days a week, poorly paid, and was getting family income supplement but could not get on the council housing list. It is ludicrous that the family income supplement payment is factored in as part of a person's income when being assessed as an applicant for social housing. That person and thousands of others like her have no chance of getting mortgages from financial institutions. At the same time, they are not eligible for local authority housing. Year after year, we have been promised a review of the income eligibility limits but nothing has happened. There are many vacant local authority houses, known as voids, throughout the country. The Department provides very limited funding to local authorities for the upgrade and return to habitable use of vacant local authority houses. It needs to properly fund the local authorities to ensure that they have the resources to bring up to standard those houses that have been vacant for some time. The number of boarded up houses in housing estates across many towns is a regrettable sight. The councils do not have the funding to bring them up to the required standard such that families or individuals could be allocated tenancy of them. This is bad housing policy.

I welcome the increase in home help hours but it is not adequate. In the region that the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and I represent - Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan - there are lengthy waiting lists for home help provision. Applications are being approved but people have to wait up to, on average, 80 days for the service to be put in place. In many instances, the applicant is in a residential nursing unit or an acute hospital and in urgent need of the support. Additional home help provision would result in a saving to the Exchequer as it costs less than supporting a person in a residential unit and it also enables the person to remain at home.

Yesterday, I attended an exceptionally good presentation in the audiovisual room by Acquired Brain Injury Ireland, where it outlined the need for service provision for people who have suffered a stroke or brain injury. Acquired Brain Injury Ireland is doing exceptionally

good work. I appeal to the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, to bring to the attention of his colleague, the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, the need to ensure that this organisation is properly funded and that its request for a regional neurorehabilitation centre is progressed without further delay.

On mental health, at Fianna Fáil's insistence additional funding has been provided for this area over the past few years but, unfortunately, the services are far from adequate. Not only do we need increased funding, we need policies and programmes put in place and personnel and clinicians to be appointed to ensure that services are brought up to a proper standard.

All of us in the Chamber now represent rural constituencies. An issue of major concern to us is the proposal at EU level to reduce the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, budget post-2020 by 5%, which, when calculated over a seven-year timeframe, will mean a 15% cut by the end of the term of that budget cycle. The Taoiseach has indicated his opposition to the proposal. I hope that he will enlist the support of other Government leaders to block this proposal that would do huge damage to farming throughout Europe and to the agri-sector as well. The Common Agricultural Policy is not about a transfer of funds to the farming sector. Rather, it is about ensuring that Europe has a secure supply of safe food for its citizens and it also plays an environmental role through various schemes. It is important that Ireland resists any reduction in the CAP budget. It was disappointing that during the term of the Fine Gael-Labour Party Government, when Ireland held the Presidency of the European Union and the previous CAP policy was finalised and agreed, there was, unfortunately, a 10% cut in funding, the first time in the history of the Common Agricultural Policy that CAP funding was reduced. I again ask the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, to bring to the attention of the Ministers for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform the need to ensure that the Border region is prioritised for investment.

I have previously discussed with the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, the concerns of communities in Magheraclone, County Monaghan, in regard to the subsidence that occurred there some time ago. Along with others, I asked him to meet a local group to discuss the matter, and he did so. I now ask him to ensure that the Department keeps in mind the concerns of the local community and works with people there to allay their fears and ensure that safety issues are dealt with in the best possible way.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Can we restart the clock on the basis that it would be to the benefit of everybody in the House?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: How many minutes will the Deputy need?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Approximately ten minutes.

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: I will need approximately eight minutes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As there are no other Members offering, the Deputy can have 20 minutes.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I do not like having to rush a speech which I have prepared. I appreciate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle facilitating me. I also appreciate that other Deputies are not here.

It is fair to say that this stage of the budget debate is a bit like cold turkey a week after

Christmas. On the other hand, there are important points to be made. Backbenchers do not get to contribute in the high profile part of the debate but there is no reason to think that what they have to say is any less worthy of concern.

I am very disappointed with this budget. Within the financial constraints the country faces, much more could have been done on a number of issues. Climate change is the flavour of the month. I will comment on the carbon tax later. There are more fundamental challenges facing society on climate change than the carbon tax. In terms of public discourse, particularly in financial and Government circles, everything seems to be predicated on continuous economic growth and output. If every country in the world does this, we will accelerate the day we all run out of resources and lose our ability to create a sustainable society. The basis of modern society is to encourage people to buy more even if they do not need what they are buying. The reality of the consumer society is that it is focused on ever increasing sales and not on people's real needs. At the same time, homelessness and poverty are rife in our society and the gap between the most well-off and the poorest in society, not only in income but in standard of living terms, is widening. The future cannot lie in the continued destruction of our resources and ecology, but in a much better distribution of wealth and ensuring that everybody's basic needs - a home, adequate means, the opportunity of gainful employment for those who are fit to take up employment, suitable welfare for those who are not, heat, food, etc. - are catered for. This Government, while tinkering around the edges, has not engaged in any meaningful vision of the future of Irish society. The same can be said of the European Union, which is fixated on economic growth and is not doing much for the people that I represent. In my view, the carbon tax is only justifiable if there are suitable mitigating measures for those most affected and alternatives to enable a change of practice. In the case of the carbon tax in this budget, people living in rural Ireland and the less well-off are going to be most affected and the mitigating measures will do little for them.

As the Minister of State knows, in rural Ireland the use of a car for leisure and work is a necessity because there are no public transport solutions provided. This is not because rural areas are naturally more carbon intensive but because of inequities in policy. It is extraordinary to note that the expenditure per head of population on bus services in rural areas is one fifth of that in urban areas. This is a fact that few people recognise and certainly the elites do not want to know about it because it does not suit. It is also a fact that bus fares per kilometre in rural areas are twice those in urban areas. I would have thought that the carbon tax was an ideal opportunity for the Government to address this injustice to rural dwellers and start giving equality of fares and improving the services. *10 o'clock*

On page 20 of the budget, the Minister states there are going to be measures on rural transport. I asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport a parliamentary question this week about what measures we were going to get. All he did was rehash a cold dinner and tell us that he had given more money for the last three years to Rural Link. He referred to some minor changes in bus services, some of which affect my constituency, that are already decided for the last six months and are going to happen. The budget says one thing but cold reality from the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport says another because we are beyond Stepaside.

On home heating and the fuel allowance, as many rural dwellers live in stand-alone houses, they have great opportunities with renewable energy, particularly renewable micro-energy such as solar, small windmills and so on. Again the Government has not grasped the nettle. It has not included feed-in tariffs or allowed for payments out of the public service obligation, PSO, to be given for micro-renewable energy. Someone who has a large windmill can get a payment

under the PSO but if he is producing renewable energy and feeding back into the grid, which most people cannot do, he does not benefit from this. People do benefit in many other countries. The Government has missed an opportunity to introduce it.

Another problem we all come across is that of people living in older, badly constructed houses in terms of thermal quality. Some of these houses need repairs beyond insulation and the better energy warmer homes scheme and so on. They need more fundamental repairs and improvements to things like doors and windows. Many of the people living in these houses are of low means. Again, we need a scheme dealing with these basic infrastructural deficiencies that would be available on an ongoing basis through the local authorities, like the housing aid for older people scheme. That is quite a good scheme but the amazing thing is that if one is under 66 years of age in Galway - I think it is 60 in some other local authority areas - it does not matter how bad one's house is, there is no help to do it up. There is no point in talking about insulating a house that has draughty doors and single glazed windows. There is no point in increasing the fuel allowance when all the heat is going out the windows in every direction in a way that the existing insulation schemes will not deal with.

I would like to say a word about disability. The lack of provision of adequate funding for disability since 2011 has been scandalous. In examining the expenditure report that forms part of the budget documentation, it transpires that all that is provided for this key sector is €25 million. This has to include all of the standard wage increases that are going to public servants in the roll-back of the financial emergency measures in the public interest legislation, FEMPI; the increased number of people with significant disabilities due to population growth and the thankful fact that people with a disability are living longer; and also the massive increase in the standards of care that need to be provided to people. I had a parent on the phone to me recently who has an adult daughter with multiple and very significant disabilities. They told me that the financial envelope they have for 2019-20 to provide services for that adult is exactly the same as it was in 2008. What other service can be provided for the same cost as in 2008? In this case particularly, new HSE regulations mean that it quite rightly takes two people to do what one used to be allowed to in the past. This family is finding it impossible to buy basic services for a highly disabled person. The measure of any government is its commitment to the most deserving and the voiceless in society. By this measure this Government is an abject failure.

Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá faoin nGaeltacht, faoin nGaeilge agus faoi na hoileáin. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil iompar an Rialtais i leith na Gaeilge, i leith na Gaeltachta agus i leith na n-oileán náireach. Níl focal ar bith eile faoi ach “náireach”. Tá an tAire Stáit ag déanamh a dhíchill go pearsanta, ach is léir nach bhfuil aird ar bith ag an Rialtas, mar Rialtas, air. Nuair a cheadaigh an Rialtas an straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge i mí na Nollag 2010, thug gach páirtí tacaíocht dó. Dúirt siad más rud é go raibh rud ar bith mícheart leis, b’shin nach raibh dóthain airgid ar fáil. In 2010, an bhliain a cheadaíodh an straitéis, bhí €71 milliún ar fáil sna Meastacháin don Ghaeilge, don Ghaeltacht agus do na hoileáin gan Foras na Gaeilge a chur san áireamh. Deich mbliana ina dhiaidh sin, agus lucht an Rialtais ag maíomh go bhfuil an straitéis á chur i bhfeidhm acu, níl ach soláthar de €58 milliún déanta don bhliain seo romhainn. Is léir go bhfuil laghdú de €13 milliún i gceist. Tá titim thubaisteach ó €33 milliún go €15 milliún i gceist ó thaobh caiteachas caipitil de.

Níl anseo ach gearradh siar ar bhunstruchtúr na Gaeltachta agus na n-oileán. Mar shampla, sa deich mbliana idir 2000 agus 2010, caitheadh €100 milliún ar bhunstruchtúr oileánda. Ní dhearnadh aon togra ar luach de níos mó na €1 mhilliún ar na hoileáin ó shin. Tá sé spéisiúil go raibh €15 mhilliún ar fáil d’Údarás na Gaeltachta mar airgead caipitil sa bhliain 2010. Úsáide-

ann an t-údarás an maoiniú sin le deontais a thabhairt do thionsclaithe atá ag teacht isteach le fostaíocht a chruthú sa Ghaeltacht agus le foirgnimh a chur ar fáil do na tionscail éagsúla. Ní bheidh i gceist an bhliain seo chugainn ach €9 milliún. San iomlán, ní bheidh i gceist ach €2 mhilliún breise don Ghaeltacht, don Ghaeilge agus do na hoileáin sa bhliain 2020. Go bunúsach, is léir nach bhfuil spéis ag lucht an Rialtais sa teanga agus nach bhfuil sé i gceist acu an straitéis 20 bliain a chur i bhfeidhm. Tá sé in am acu é sin a admháil. Ba cheart dóibh stop a chur leis an gcur i gcéill agus an fhírinne a insint. Mar a dúirt mé ag an tús, tá díomá an tsaoil orm faoin gcáinfhaisnéis seo. Creidim gur teip ar phobal na hÉireann atá inti.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: Alas, this may be the budget that draws a line in the sand and brings the Government to an end. Fianna Fáil facilitated the operation of this Government for four budgets now. This was through the confidence and supply arrangement which many grassroots supporters found hard to stomach but I acknowledged the responsible role my party leader Deputy Micheál Martin took. This budget had a bit of all things great and small, but not everyone was happy. This is understandable. As stated this budget was arrived at by providing safeguards in the event of a no-deal Brexit and was even headlined as such in the document.

If our Taoiseach, Deputy Leo Varadkar, gets a universal agreement from Boris Johnson, the UK Prime Minister, and our counterparts in Europe, could we have changes in spending and perhaps a supplementary budget introduced?

Budget 2020, as well as being Brexit-proof, attempts to bring in measures to get us to play our part in climate change. A climate action programme is an urgent requirement as are some of the initiatives proposed, such as greater and faster conversion of our social housing stock to incorporate heat conservation measures and safeguards for workers who face career changes due to climate change. Economies, however, do not run alone on clean air. A transition period is needed to allow improvement in work practices. I say this when one references our agriculture and transport sectors. The carbon taxes proposed must give exemption from proposed increases in fuel taxes to hauliers.

The Government of 2011 had a productive agricultural sector as one of its forte sectors in returning the economy to recovery. I ask it not to throw it in front of the bus now. This budget is a lost opportunity for the beef sector the confidence of which has been undermined in the recent disputes at the factory gates of beef processors.

We hear of money being sent back by the Minister’s, Deputy Creed’s, Department. How can this be the case when we have applicants for targeted agricultural modernisation schemes, TAMS, left waiting unnecessary periods for approval and in turn payment of their grant applications?

I am a member of the Oireachtas Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has received a whopping €2.7 billion, an increase of €384 million over 2019. That is fine. The money is supposedly in the bank, but yet we see on road construction that there is a standstill regarding some projects like the Dunkettle interchange and the Ardee bypass to name but a few. What happens next? We see €240 million allocated to another project namely the Westport-Ballina dual carriageway. I am in favour of opening up the western corridor but could we not progress at a faster pace the provision of the M20 motorway, Cork-Limerick via Mallow, Buttevant and Charleville? I acknowledge the announcement in the last few days of the Macroom bypass in another sod-turning ceremony but we need to get more boots on the ground.

Given that I am the Fianna Fáil spokesperson on sport, I have to express my dismay that no overall increase in spending has been provided for. The projected spending of €125 million is the same as last year. Yet the Government does a robbing Peter to pay Paul exercise. That is, capital expenditure has been cut. So much for the commitment of the Minister, Deputy Ross, to a multi-annual sports capital spending programme. I welcome that Euro 2020 and the Tokyo Olympics 2020 have been provided for. I also welcome that the national sports policy is further progressed with the provision of extra investment.

Tourism still plays an important role in generating extra economic activity. I welcome the additional Government funding in budget 2020. Rural Ireland is forever more dependent, thus we must ensure that we get the same attention and promotion. I must highlight some of the attractions we have in north Cork outside of the Munster Vales initiative. I will name a few: Doneraile Court, Annesgrove Gardens, Kingston Square and Mallow Castle, all of which have benefitted from Government funding down through the years. Another attractive stately structure is Castlehyde House, the purchase of which I put before the Government. This leads me to Fermoy, a town situated on the River Blackwater, renowned for its angling richness, recreational activities and, of course, home to Fermoy Rowing Club. The River Blackwater, however, has a weir that day by day goes into further disrepair. Its structure is close to total collapse. It is fitting that the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, is here. Planning is currently being prepared by Cork County Council, but we are looking for a commitment from the Government for funding. I suggest that the Minister of State might bring back to his senior ministerial colleague, the Minister, Deputy Ring, that his Department of Rural and Community Development take up the matter under the urban rural regeneration fund which would be welcome.

Housing is an ongoing crisis and we need to expedite the construction of more houses. I note the Minister in his budgetary statement acknowledged that there has been a great reduction in the number of people working in the construction sector which must be a worry.

Health has also been covered in the budget which is also an ongoing crisis and our spokesperson, Deputy Stephen Donnelly, has given a good outline as to where issues can be resolved and addressed. I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Robert Troy: I thank my colleague, Deputy O’Keeffe, for sharing time.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on budget 2020. I am very conscious in contributing that I do so with one hand tied behind my back. While we are very much an Opposition party, the budget would not have been passed were it not for the confidence and supply arrangement that currently exists. Were it not for Brexit we would not have facilitated a fourth budget. This has proven to be the correct decision when one looks at the turmoil that exists across the water in the House of Commons, compared to the stability that we have here. That stability has given the space to the Government to be able to go out and negotiate with our European counterparts and with the UK Government.

Yesterday I was at a talk by the Right Honourable Ken Clarke in Dublin Castle who acknowledged the sensible approach being taken by the House of Parliament in Ireland in comparison to the ongoing charade in the House of Commons. While this morning and yesterday there has been reason for a little bit more optimism on Brexit than there was on budget day, even with the DUP putting up some resistance, the fact that the party is continuing to engage with the UK Government and that the UK, Ireland and the EU will work right up until 31 October to achieve a deal, is a good sign. It is imperative for both of our countries that a no-deal Brexit is

prevented. When one looks at the figures for 2018, Ireland exported €16 billion worth of goods to the UK, which is 11% of our exports, and imported €20 billion worth of goods from the UK, which is 22% of our imports. The level of trade and interdependence between both countries cannot be underestimated. In saying that, while the mood music has changed, it is important that we continue to prepare for the worst case scenario as our businesses and companies rely on that.

In that context, I was somewhat concerned about some of the proposals that came from the Minister, Deputy Humphreys, on the business supports. In particular - I raised this the following day in questions to the Minister - there are no grants available to small micro-businesses. The only supports that are available to micro-businesses are repayable grants and loans while larger multinational and larger indigenous firms will be able to avail of grants. It is important to point out that we must be able to support our smaller businesses by way of grants. Putting additional financial burdens on smaller businesses may not be the answer and may not help them overcome a difficult period. I hope a hard Brexit is prevented. People sometimes forget that, even if a deal is achieved, it will only be the first phase. There will still be many more phases. While there will be a transitional period in which to work out a trade deal, what supports will exist for SMEs? They will still face many challenges under the transitional arrangements.

Albert Einstein once said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result. The last Fianna Fáil Government was rightly criticised for over-reliance on transactional taxes, including stamp duty, and for using the yield for current expenditure. The problem was compounded by the international downturn and when the transactional stamp duty dried up, it led to corrective measures being more severe. I fear the current Government is poised to make the same mistake, but this time by over-relying on corporation tax. In 2011, €3.5 billion was taken in, which was 10% of our overall tax receipts. In 2018, the yield increased to €10.4 billion, which is 19% of all tax collected. More worrying, of the €10.4 billion, 45% was from ten multinational companies. This amounted to €4.7 billion from ten international companies in 2018.

What has been very positive in this regard is that both of the main centre ground parties have been consistent in their support of the corporation tax rate of 12.5%. The consistency and certainty have been a foundation stone in attracting foreign direct investment. We will continue to support this but we also need a policy that will attract the key decision-makers among the foreign direct investment companies, the multinationals. We need a policy that ensures the decision-makers of the companies will locate in Ireland. If the decision-makers of a company are here during a downturn, there will be a much better chance of the company weathering it and staying in this economy. In saying that, we need to consider rebalancing our tax base. We need to consider introducing much greater supports for our SMEs. The existing supports are not working. That is not a message coming from me but a message coming loud and clear from the SMEs and their representative bodies. I acknowledge there has been an increase in terms of the tax credit but it is still not on par with the arrangement for PAYE employees, despite there being a commitment to this effect in the programme for Government.

With regard to capital gains tax, the objective is to incentivise entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and to reward risk. Growing business creates additional jobs, which is good for the economy, but our lifetime limit of €1 million is paltry by comparison with the limit in the United Kingdom, which is £10 million. This needs to be addressed. Our research and development regime is laden with red tape. Only 2% of SMEs are availing themselves of the measure in this regard. That also needs to be addressed.

What really needs to be addressed is the high cost of insurance. I do not see the Government doing this with any sense of urgency. Fraud continues to be a major problem, and there are no repercussions. The number of claims paid out is a major problem, and there is no sense of urgency in dealing with it. The lack of transparency is a major problem. Despite a promise to have the national claims database on the record by 2018, we are now approaching 2020 and it still has not been done. Borrowing costs for the SME sector are 65% higher than in the rest of the European Union. That is simply not good enough.

Undoubtedly the commercial property sector will shrug off the rise in stamp duty given that demand is currently strong but I worry that this create a competitiveness issue in the longer term. There have been five changes to commercial stamp duty rates in recent years. This leads to uncertainty. While uncertainty will be accommodated in a buoyant market, it will become a competitiveness issue in the future. This needs to be examined.

The living city initiative was extended in the budget but, funnily enough, there was no funding allocated for the extension. This clearly demonstrates people are not availing of the incentive. It is not working and it needs to be reviewed so that more people will avail of it.

The rebate mooted for hauliers was misleading. It does not do what it says on the tin. This needs to be addressed in the Finance Bill.

The greatest failings of this Government are in health and housing. In the coming weeks, for the fifth time, I will bring a bus of patients to the North for treatment. This is a serious indication of how our health service is failing our citizens, despite the fact that there have been many supplementary health budgets. There could be no more vivid description of the housing issue than the description in this morning's newspapers of a five year old child eating dinner while sitting on cardboard on the streets of Dublin. While the Taoiseach tried to portray a loss of life in Cork as the fault of the victim, surely he could not convince even his hardened right-wing Fine Gael supporters that a five year old is to blame for being homeless. The Government is failing in so many areas. I look forward to the new year, when we will have a general election and the Government's contribution to society will be adjudicated upon by the wider public. I predict and hope it will rightly be issued with its P45.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If Deputy O'Loughlin wishes to contribute, she will have only two minutes.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: I was to have seven minutes but I will take two.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I can control only what I have in front of me.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: I accept that. My request was sent to the office.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: If the Deputy takes two minutes now, that will be all the time she will have. She might want to wait until next week.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: I will take two minutes now.

Since I have so little time, I will just refer to a few issues concerning education and equality. With regard to the budget's approach to the education sector, 150 mainstream teachers were announced but this will only cover demographic changes rather than provide a reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio. My colleague, Deputy Thomas Byrne, and I have raised consistently the need for additional supports for educational services for children with special needs. We have

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used our Private Members' time twice over the past six months in this regard. We are happy there has been some progress but the fact that one in four children with an intellectual disability is being put on a short school day illegally is absolutely appalling. Over 850 children with special needs across the country received home tuition in 2018 because school places could not be found for them. That is absolutely appalling.

We have discovered that €19 million seems to have disappeared from the capital budget of the Department of Education and Skills, despite the need for new schools, even in my constituency. I am not even talking about extensions. St. Paul's secondary school in Monasterevin comes to mind, and a new secondary school has been promised for Newbridge. The amalgamation of primary schools in Monasterevin and the needs of Coláiste Íosagáin in Portarlinton must also be borne in mind. That there is less money in the budget is completely shocking.

That nothing has been done to address investment at third level is absolutely appalling. The Irish Universities Association reports a real deficit in core funding in 2019 of €138 million. There is a huge gap between what is provided and what is needed. The Cassells report has been lying idle on the Minister's desk for four years despite the real concerns it highlighted about third level. The Minister has essentially said that he will not do anything to address the approaching demographic crisis. Instead, we have seen a solo run on third level fees over the past year, with a commitment to take no action on the Cassells report. That is not good enough.

We in Fianna Fáil have stated that a Department of higher education and research is necessary. Such a Department could not get away with leaving something like the Cassells report on a shelf for years. That Department should be established to change the relationship between the State and educational establishments. This situation is disappointing.

I am conscious that I only have a short time, but I will be able to contribute again later.

Debate adjourned.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): Before we proceed, I wish to point out that we lost a little time trying to get a quorum this morning. I ask all Members to stick to their time slots. Usually, they are quite good, but I will not allow people to wander all over the place. Deputies have 30 seconds each to introduce their questions, the Minister has a reply of two minutes, there will be a supplementary question from each Deputy, a one-minute response from the Minister, a final supplementary question and then a final answer. I beg Members' indulgence and support so that we might try to get through as many questions as we can.

Schools Building Projects Expenditure

1. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will conduct a review of the costs of school building projects in view of the rapid increase in the cost per square metre of school construction projects in the context of a reduced capital budget in education; his plans to ensure that value is achieved; and if increases in cost have led to delays in tendering under the school building programme. [42699/19]

Deputy Thomas Byrne: For the past year or more, I have had serious concerns about the Department of Education and Skills's capital budget ranging from the number of major projects currently out to tender, which is at a record low, to the cost of each school place increasing by 50% and the number of school places being delivered decreasing. It is clear that the education budget is not providing the same outputs as previously. Despite that, a Minister has accepted for the first time ever a reduction in the education capital budget. How does the Minister intend to deliver the projects around the country that he keeps announcing and to meet his previous commitments?

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department monitors the cost of school building projects on an ongoing basis. School building costs, as reflected in the Department's published basic building cost limit, fell significantly during the period of the economic downturn and took a number of years to return to a standard level. The Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland tender index also tracks tender levels in the industry.

The basic building cost reduced from €1,230 per sq. m in June 2006 to €930 per sq. m in January 2011 and increased gradually from April 2014 to December 2018 and now stands at €1,490 per sq. m, an increase of €260 over the peak levels in 2006. The bulk of the increase reflects tender prices returning to more sustainable levels compared with those during the period of the economic downturn and improvements in building standards for schools over the period. Improvements in standards include new standards for acoustics and sanitary facilities introduced in 2014, improved costs allowances for standards for roof finishes introduced in December 2018, and changes in Part L of the 2017 national building regulations to reflect the EU directive on the energy performance of buildings, that is, near zero energy buildings, NZEBs, which were also introduced in December 2018.

NZEBs are buildings that have a very high energy performance. The nearly zero or very low amount of energy required should be covered to a significant extent by energy from renewable sources, including sources produced on site or nearby. The NZEB standard will apply to all new buildings occupied after 31 December 2020. For public sector bodies, the standard applies to all new buildings owned and occupied since 31 December 2018. As with previous building regulations, there are transitional arrangements in place where buildings are occupied after these dates but work commenced prior to 31 December 2018.

My Department continues to have a strong roll-out of projects to tender and construction under the national development plan. This will continue to be the case up to 2027, with a ring-fenced capital budget of €12 billion to be spent on school buildings during that period.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The Minister should not insult the intelligence of the Dáil by saying that the capital budget is ring-fenced. At the first opportunity, he cut it. At the very first fence on the racecourse, he fell and let education down by agreeing a cut in the capital budget. I want to know how that happened and how the Minister plans to deliver school buildings. The

figure for the capital budget was set out in Government documents, the national development plan and negotiations with my party in October, yet the Minister at some point late on agreed with the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, to reduce the capital programme of the Department of Education and Skills.

I cannot see how the Minister, Deputy McHugh, can deliver projects. Recall the WBS fiasco, which I presume the Department is still funding despite having a smaller budget. Consider the demand for school places and other issues that have arisen. For example, the Dunboyne College of Further Education in my constituency has been told that work on a new building will not now proceed. The reason given was a review, but I have no doubt that it is because of the reduced capital budget. As regards the price of sites, the Department continually pays over the odds instead of parking at the dog track and DIT.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I must stop the Deputy.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Let us be clear about the exact mathematics. In 2016, capital expenditure on the school buildings programme was €530 million. In 2017, it was €532 million. In 2018, it was €547 million. In 2019, it was €622 million, a 14% increase on 2018. Next year, it will be €620 million, some €2 million less. I have publicly stated what my first line of defence in the budget was. As the Deputy knows, it is a no-deal Brexit budget and I wanted to ring-fence special education provision. I did that.

The pressures coming off the capital budget relate to the sale of a property on Kevin Street. The sale closed in August and means that the Department no longer needs to set aside a significant funding element for the Grangegorman development.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I thank the Minister.

Deputy Joe McHugh: This is important, so I will make it my last point. The Kevin Street property sold for €140 million, approximately €60 million above the guide price.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): The Minister will have a further minute.

Deputy Joe McHugh: This has reduced the pressure on the 2020 capital budget.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am glad to see that the Department of Education and Skills is not the only organisation buying above the guide price. Unfortunately, the Department has paid as much as double the guide price several times. That is my problem with this. The Minister has admitted that the budget has decreased by €2 million, but the overall capital budget has decreased by €19 million. During the summer, we in Fianna Fáil tried to shame the Government into action on special education. In truth, however, that action has been a failure already, given that one of the largest single component increases of next year's budget is that of transport for special needs education, which is meant to bring people to schools that are many miles away from their homes. That policy has failed and must end. Instead, the policy must be for children to attend schools in their local areas and for suitable places to be available for them. We cannot keep raising the special needs transport budget year on year when we are not able to provide those children with places in their local areas.

Will the Minister commit to a review of capital spending and identify why these costs are constantly increasing? Just as I asked the previous Minister, Deputy Bruton, will this Minister ask the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, for more money for the capital budget? The

Minister, Deputy McHugh, does not have enough.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Since 2016, we have invested €3 billion in the school building programme. We will continue with that. Prior to this budget, I sat down with a dedicated team of my officials in Tullamore. They wanted to continue delivering on the programme. We agreed on rolling out 60 new schools in 2020. That was before the budget. The budget has passed. After the budget, we will still be rolling out 60 new buildings in 2020. Nothing has changed. The €2 million will make no difference to our material plans for next year, under which 30,000 extra places will be provided through permanent and additional accommodation. I will continue to do that. If we are still standing in 2020, which probably will be the case, we will ensure that we deliver those buildings.

Schools Building Projects

2. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of additional school places for Swords, County Dublin, in view of demand and the growing population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42730/19]

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The population of Swords is almost 45,000 and growing. The town is a great place to live, with a fantastic community, but it is under pressure with respect to school places. I and others in the constituency have raised this issue with the Minister previously, so he is not unfamiliar with it. We have also sought a meeting with him to discuss the matter and I will press the Minister for such a meeting because he needs to hear from the parents. Of particular concern is the waiting list for the Holy Family school. The Minister will be aware of that issue from correspondence and exchanges in the House.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I thank the Deputy who I appreciate has been in direct contact with me, as have colleagues in the constituency, Senator James Reilly and Deputy Alan Farrell, regarding the pressures and demographics in the area. As the Deputy will be aware, in 2018 the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the four years from 2019 to 2022, including two new primary schools to be established in the Swords school planning area. The first of these is a new eight-classroom primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Swords south school planning area. This school, River Valley community national school, opened in September in interim accommodation. The second is a new eight-classroom primary school to serve the Swords north school planning area. The opening of this school, Broadmeadow community national school, has been deferred until September 2020. In addition, Swords community college, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school, was established in the Swords school planning area in 2018.

The requirement for new schools will be kept under ongoing review and will have particular regard for the increased roll-out of housing provision, as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. My Department is in regular contact with local authorities in this regard, including Fingal County Council in conjunction with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in terms of recording and enumerating the level of increased potential demand.

I advise the Deputy that the current status of large-scale projects being delivered under Project Ireland 2040 may be viewed on my Department's website, www.education.ie, and this information is updated regularly. The capital programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has

been identified or an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of schools listed on this programme can be found on my Department's website and this information is also updated regularly.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Will the Minister meet parents in the area who are at their wits' end? If not, will he give his reasons for not doing so? I and other Deputies in the constituency signed a letter requesting that the Minister meet directly with the parents. These parents want their children to be able to go to school close to where they live, as we all do.

A temporary school will be built on Main Street in Swords to replace a temporary school currently housed in the Riasc Centre. That is not acceptable. The parents have questions they want to put directly to the Minister. I will put them now. Can the Minister confirm that the school will be built as part of phase 1 of the development of Fosterstown, rather than being left to the end, as has been done with other schools? When will the temporary school on Main Street in Swords be ready? Will the Minister meet the parents who want to put their concerns to him directly?

Deputy Joe McHugh: My Department was awaiting final grant of planning permission for the site of the temporary school at 85-87 Main Street, Swords, and it issued on 27 August 2019. A commencement notice was submitted to Fingal County Council on Friday, 11 October, and it is envisaged that works will commence on site at the end of October. Once works are complete and the building control regulations certification is validated, the school can then move in. My Department will continue to liaise with the school authorities in that regard.

The proposed acquisition of an identified site to accommodate River Valley community national school in the Swords south area is currently being progressed by Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board with the assistance of the Department of Education and Skills. Due to commercial sensitivities, it is not possible at this time to confirm the proposed location for the school. However, I can confirm that the identified site is appropriately located to meet the needs of the community it is intended to serve.

In response to the Deputy's question about meeting the parents concerned, I am inundated with requests to meet parents from every parish around the country. I can organise a meeting between the Deputies and the relevant officials if further clarification is needed.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: When will the premises at 85-87 Main Street in Swords be ready? Parents were told it would be a matter of weeks and it now appears it will be a matter of months. There is another temporary arrangement in operation now and the site on Main Street will not be the permanent location of the school either. This is unfair on the parents. The population of Swords is growing. All people see are houses going up all around them. While that is to be welcomed because we need houses, there is nowhere for children to go to school. All the parents want is for their children to be able to go to school locally. I welcome the Minister's statement that we can meet officials. Will he ensure planners from his Department are also present at the meeting in order that we can have a discussion with them? The parents believe they have been forgotten and their children do not matter. They are being moved from Billy to Jack. The children are now being taught in a temporary location and parents still have no idea when their children will be able to move into the other temporary site on Main Street in Swords, much less a permanent school site. Many of the children will be finished school by the time this matter has been resolved. The parents need to know some firm dates.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I understand the sense of urgency and the frustration on the part of the parents who want clarification on the timeframe. The commencement notice was submitted to Fingal County Council on Friday, 11 October and it is envisaged that works will commence on the site at the end of October. Through regular contact with my officials, I will ensure that we prioritise this project and make it happen as soon as possible.

Special Educational Needs

3. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure each child with a special need has a school place in the 2019-20 school year; and if he will report on the planning under way for special education places in September 2020. [42700/19]

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Some of my constituents have contacted me since I asked the first question. I am pleased they are watching proceedings here, but they are also very concerned about the issues raised this morning with regard to the Government's plans for capital spending.

My question is to ask the Minister his plans to ensure that each child with special educational needs has a place in school next September. If I were the Minister, I would not rest on my laurels because we are finally getting some children into school for this year. What planning is in place for next September?

Deputy Joe McHugh: As Minister for Education and Skills, I believe that every child should have an education provided for him or her that best supports the child and meets his or her individual needs. The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for the Government. Currently, we spend almost 20% of the total education Vote of €1.9 billion on supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and special needs assistants are at unprecedented levels.

The National Council for Special Education, NCSE, has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs. The council has well-established structures in place to plan and co-ordinate special education provision throughout the country. Normally, special classes are established with the full co-operation of the schools in areas where they are required. However, in some parts of the country councils face challenges in getting schools and their patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places. I know that this has caused much anguish for parents and families involved. 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 was used for the first time in April, not July, in respect of the Dublin 15 area. We have made significant progress in a relatively short period with the opening of seven new special classes and a new special school that will provide 88 places for children with special needs. I met the principal of the new special school last week. I acknowledge the work she and her team, in conjunction with the education and training board, have contributed to ensure that the project has progressed. The new places will help these families and ensure that the children concerned have access to education.

The experience of Dublin 15 shows the real and practical challenges that can be addressed when opening new special classes and how we can resolve these challenges by working together and in partnership. The NCSE is continuing its work at local level to ensure all children can access a suitable school placement for the forthcoming school year and beyond.

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As Minister, I would much prefer that schools provide places for children in their community. Where that is not the case, I am prepared to use the legislation to ensure that children can access a suitable education.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I acknowledge what the Minister says about Dublin 15. I ask him to confirm that all of those classes and schools are open. He and his Department seem to be under a misapprehension regarding the purpose of the legislation, which gives the power to force classes to open. That is not a tool to plan school places. It is there for a small number of recalcitrant schools that refuse to do their share and provide education for children with special needs in their areas. As stated, that to which I refer is not a planning tool for every school. Planning is about sitting down with the NCSE and the special educational needs organisers and working out what places will be available next September. We are of the view that it should be possible to do it demographically for five years. It is possible with other aspects of special education and it needs to happen. The problem will not be solved overnight. Nor will it be solved if the Minister and Department are asleep at the wheel, as they were for the previous year. This problem seems to have suddenly come upon them when everybody else knew it was an issue. Other parts of the country need urgent attention.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I am happy to provide an update on the seven schools and classes. The situation is fluid, with training ongoing to ensure that teachers and staff are enabled and equipped to carry out these duties. For example, the special school is down to the final checklist to make sure it is ready. The feedback from people involved in the special school was that the training provided to the staff to ensure that they are equipped and enabled to deliver the proper services was of a high standard. There was also feedback about ensuring that we progress in these specific areas and that parents, teachers, staff and principals want to ensure that they have the proper training, capacity-building capability and professional development. I am happy to forward to the Deputy information about how many of them are open. Of course we need a better plan, a better way of doing things and a better way of communicating with parents. We still have a situation where some parents are told about certain schools which turn out to be full. That is not good enough and I have asked the NCSE to work on the matter.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: If it was 17 August, it might be appropriate to state that training is being done, that everything is being made ready and that the parents want everything to be right. The latter is something I do not doubt. However, it is 17 October, weeks into the school year, and the Minister is happy to keep telling us about all of this work being done in, I remind the House, the Taoiseach's constituency. What is happening everywhere else? Every child has a constitutional right to primary education, one of the best moves made by Éamon de Valera and the people and parties who voted for and supported the Constitution when it was introduced. The right to which I refer was unrecognised in other constitutions at the time. The 1937 Constitution was visionary. That vision is not being implemented or taken seriously by this Government. We should be here in August, July or June - or a year before, as I suggest in this question, or even five years prior - doing our best to work out the demographic requirements. None of that is happening. Instead, the Minister is acting as if this is an emergency response. Since I mentioned an emergency response, I pay tribute to Dublin Fire Brigade regarding the work it did yesterday.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Charges are being levelled but let us be honest about what exactly is happening. The figures that we have are that, since this time last year, we have an additional 1,064 places in 167 extra classes. That figure has gone up to almost 1,600. I needed to ensure, in the context of the budget, that I protected the extra SNAs. We had 16,000 SNAs before the

budget and we now have an additional 1,000. That brings the number to 17,000, the highest ever, a 61% increase in SNAs since 2011. We spend €1 out of every €5 on special education and inclusion education. That is the right thing to do, particularly as we have moved from an education system that was exclusive through to an integrated system and on now to one that is inclusive.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I thank the Minister.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Inclusion means that the child is at the heart of everything. Parents are still struggling to get their young sons and daughters into classes and I am willing to meet that challenge head on.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I thank the Minister.

Deputy Joe McHugh: The Deputy levelled a charge against me in respect of the past year. There are more than 1,000 extra places, 167 extra classes and 1,000 extra SNAs.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I ask for Members' co-operation. I do not want to stop anybody from speaking. They should try to adhere to the allocated times.

Special Educational Needs Staff

4. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding for additional SNAs and improvements in the pay and conditions of SNAs will be provided for in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42572/19]

Deputy Bríd Smith: My question follows on from the previous one to some extent. Will the Minister clarify if the additional funding announced for 1,000 SNAs includes the 800 extra SNAs that he announced in May or is it a further 1,000? Will this announcement of extra funding include an improvement of conditions, hours and precariousness under which these workers work? I also want to talk about the pay levels.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Special education is a priority, as outlined in the previous answer. The Department's policy aims to ensure that all children with special needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in mainstream school settings, and where parents have chosen for the child to go to special classes, for which there are 125 facilities in total in the country, that choice is available.

Following the recent budget, €1.9 billion or about one fifth of the overall education budget will be invested in the provision of additional supports for children with special educational needs in 2020. The 800 were part of the previous budget, which brought the number to 16,000. We are now going from 16,000 to 17,000, which is a 61% increase since 2011.

This will include funding for an additional 1,064 SNA posts that will be available for allocation next September. This will support the extended roll-out of the new school inclusion model and ensure that students with additional needs get the right support at the right time as well as supporting the provision of up to 1,300 new special class places.

I am satisfied that the level of provision we have made in recent years has ensured that all children with special educational needs can participate in education and that most children with

special needs have been able to be enrolled in the school or placement of their choice.

Remuneration for SNAs is set with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. SNAs benefit from the increases approved under public service pay agreements. The most recent increase in pay of 1.75% took effect from 1 September. Two further increases are scheduled for January 2020 and October 2020. Other matters relating to terms and conditions of employment, including claims, are managed through the established industrial relations structures.

Deputy Bríd Smith: It is great that the Minister is announcing all these extra hours. The public would state that this is an amazing achievement and that an additional 1,000 on top of the previous 800 is what we need for the children, the parents and to take the pressure off the teachers and SNAs. The difficulty is that many SNAs still work under very precarious terms. They do not know until May what will be their allocation for the following year. Previously, they did not know what the allocation would be until August or September, so that is a bit of an improvement but nevertheless, a person could end up with 0.6 or 0.25 of a post. Often, if the special education needs organiser determines that a child does not need as many hours, then it is a last-in, first-out situation. There is significant precarity and uncertainty in terms of who one is looking after, where one works and the hours one works. There is an outstanding issue of 72 extra hours that the SNA works in each academic year that are flexible within the school. SNAs often clean or photocopy material. They are not cleaners, they are special needs assistants. They are trained and value the work that they do, as, I believe, does the Minister. Can we look at the detail of the conditions of SNAs?

11 o'clock

Deputy Joe McHugh: The figures for the collective teaching staff across primary and secondary stand at 71,000. As of September next year, we will have 17,000 SNAs.

I have met with the Ulster branch of the SNA groups up in the north west over the last year and I get the sense of insecurity around future prospects. That is why I am taking the recommendations to have a proper national training authority mechanism for SNAs seriously. We also need to look at how we can have a better mechanism in place for their future sustainability, their future prospects and their career progression, as other people in the system have.

An SNA industrial relations forum was recently established in the Department. It has met once. This has only happened in recent weeks. This forum mirrors those fora operating in other education sectors, such as the education and training board, ETB, industrial relations forum and the institutes of technology forum. The parties to this forum include officials from the Department of Education and Skills, management bodies, and Fórsa trade union. I know the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union, SIPTU, represents 600 to 900 SNAs as well. I am conscious we need to get proper mechanisms in place. This is not the end game of where I want to go to but *tús maith leath na hoibre*. It is important we start the conversation.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I want to emphasise it is not just about the future prospects and the possible improvements in training. On the day-to-day level, the experience of thousands of SNAs is the fragmentation and insecurity they experience. There is an idea that there is a 72 hour block in a given year where they are flexible to do what has to be done in the school, whether it is cleaning, washing, taking kids to the toilet or doing office work. That is not what they are there for. We have to take a holistic approach to how we look after our children with special needs. As the Minister knows, and he has often stated he has huge admiration for SNAs,

they are mainly female, they are loving and caring and they really mind and care about the children, but for them to be treated as lesser workers with lesser rights leads to demoralisation and insecurity. That fragmentation of their lives is not a good sign of how we treat the package of special needs in school. It is a package. It is done with the parents and children and, crucially, the special needs assistants who look after the children. My question is on the fragmentation of their lives and jobs, the insecurities they face and the 72 wild hours in a year in which they might have to do anything that is requested of them. That needs to be looked at.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I appreciate the extent of the contribution they make. That is important because this is an important issue and an issue I want to work on. I assume the issue of the 72 hours has been raised through the forum that has been set up. I also want to point out that young students do not differentiate between SNAs and teachers. They know now they are part of an all-inclusive school model. Their contribution is something I value. That fracturing and fragmentation is something I want to focus on as well. The Deputy is correct in saying it is primarily a female dominated profession but I am starting to see and meet a lot of men in the profession, and I mention two in particular. One of those men was a butcher and the other was a construction worker. They have moved into training to become SNAs. We are lucky to have a great place like St. Angela's College in Sligo, which the Acting Chairman will be familiar with. It is inspiring to see these men who have gone from traditional sector work into this work. It is transformative and they feel they are in a job that is really important. Words are only words and that is all I am providing today. We have set up a forum and I want to continue to work on the recommendations. Fórsa and SIPTU are the trade union representatives and I know they have voiced a lot of these opinions as well but as I said earlier, we have gone from an education model in this country over the last 100 years of exclusion to one of integration and inclusion. If we are serious about inclusion, SNAs will be at the heart of that.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I want to say to the Minister and to Deputies that there are time slots agreed by the House. I do not mind Members taking eight or ten seconds but Members continuously go over time-----

Deputy Joe McHugh: The Acting Chairman is wile hard on me today.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I know it is an important issue, but at the same time, I have to chair this and the fact that we go over time means that our colleagues are being left out at the end.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I apologise.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

5. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the allocation for Vote 26 in budget 2020 will impact on class size at primary level or significantly address the longstanding concerns of an organisation (details supplied) in relation to much needed additional personnel and resources for primary education. [42634/19]

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The €11.4 billion from Vote 26 and the Estimates for 2020 from last week is welcome. I welcome the improvements that have been made with SNAs and we just heard about 150 extra teachers for demographic reasons, but overall we still have the biggest class sizes in the eurozone and nearly the biggest in the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development, OECD. A key aim of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, INTO, and the National Principals' Forum is to reduce these. The Government has not really made progress on this in this year's budget.

Deputy Joe McHugh: We have made a little bit of progress but it is not at the level I would have liked. The budget is not reflective of where I would like to be as Minister for Education and Skills, but it is reflective of where we are at a given point in time. Since we started here today, I do not know where we are in the conversation that is ongoing across the water, but hopefully we will get into a better place.

Despite budget 2020 being prepared in the context of a possible no-deal Brexit and the Government's necessity to plan for the economic impact of such a possibility, since May 2016 we have provided for an additional 3,000 SNAs and over 7,300 new teaching posts, with a further 1,000 SNA positions and 581 teaching posts for the 2020-21 school year as a result of budget 2020. We have cut the staffing schedule at primary level twice, which brought the position to a general average of 26 pupils to every teacher, the lowest ever allocation ratio at primary level. We have to go further with that. The reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio is indicative of where I want to go and that has to be brought across the spectrum of primary school education. We have introduced a more favourable staffing schedule in small schools from September 2020. This budget 2020 measure for improved teacher staffing levels for schools with four teachers or less will see a more favourable pupil-teacher ratio in small schools. This improved schedule will apply in two, three and four teacher schools and will ensure one less pupil is required to retain or recruit a teacher. We have provided 1,300 new middle management positions at primary level and 1,300 new middle management positions at post-primary level. We have increased significantly the number of release days allowed to teaching principals, with a further additional release day to all schools in September 2020. We have increased capitation by 5% in budget 2019 and by a further 2.5% in budget 2020. We have increased the ancillary grant in primary schools by €22 per pupil.

I have taken steps in budget 2020 to build on the steps taken in recent budgets to meet the goals set out in the action plan for education. In the current school year, the numbers employed in our schools have reached their highest ever level at almost 71,000. Teacher numbers at primary level have increased by almost 3,500 when comparing the 2015-16 school year with the current school year, and this has led to a steady improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio. Substantial extra resources for primary education have been gained in the past three budgets and it is through the annual budgetary process each year and future budgets that further progress will be made.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: We were promised in the confidence and supply agreement that is now three and a half years old that in each budget we would see an incremental improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio. The Department's analysis in August showed that 350,000, or 63% of our pupils at primary level, are in classes of more than 25. Examples are Scoil Naomh Colmchille in Carndonagh in the Minister's constituency, Scoil Náisiúnta Róis in Taylor's Hill in Galway and Bunscoil Phádraig Naofa in Tuam with classes of 42. I note that Scoil Mobhí in Glasnevin has 32 pupils in eight classrooms. The Government has still not made a decisive move on this in response to the commitments the Government and Fianna Fáil gave to the people back in 2016. Schools across Leinster and in Waterford are more likely to have those bigger class sizes. If the Minister looks at the OECD standings, we come in behind the USA, Russia and a plethora of about 25 countries in class sizes. It is no wonder the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the National Principals' Forum are very unhappy with the budget

outcome in many respects. Did the Minister ask for the extra €140 million or so that would have been needed to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio by one pupil?

Deputy Joe McHugh: To answer the Deputy's last question, I certainly did ask for a lot more money than I got and I battled it out. The line was clear that we were working within a threshold and that is why I wanted to ensure all the front-line services, especially special education, were protected. I am a year in the job this week and I have realised that the primary school sector and the pupil-teacher ratio is an issue that keeps coming up. One of the things I wanted to set out was that if I look at changes for the two, three and four teacher schools, I want to see that pupil-teacher ratio coming down. That is where I want to get to. I know there are legacy posts within DEIS schools for primary schools. I want to look after them. I do not want to lose them either. I know this is a conversation piece. I want to protect what we have. The Deputy is correct with regard to the pupil-teacher ratio. To give every student a chance, there has to be a smaller numeral, but obviously schools will decide their classroom sizes for themselves. At present, the pupil-teacher ratio is 1:24 and this will continue.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: In its analysis in August, the Department said appropriate learning experiences were very hard to achieve in classes of more than 25. It is no wonder that in one response to the budget last week the INTO stated classes continue to be super-sized, school leaders are not supported, and capitation is underfunded by at least €46 million. The Minister has read the survey published last year on teaching principals, which stated they were overworked, underpaid and grappling with never-ending administrative work. There are huge problems here, particularly with regard to the pupil-teacher ratio.

I thank the Minister for visiting Scoil Chaitríona Cailíní yesterday, where a terrible fire has destroyed nine classrooms, the library and the hall. The Minister has already sent an architect. I know he will do his very best for all of the children. It is a fantastic school and has been for generations. One Deputy said her mother went there. Accommodation and reconstruction as soon as possible is what we need. It is an iconic school that is very important to our community in Coolock and Artane in Dublin Bay North.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): We all sympathise with the community there.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I have met the principal, staff, some of the parents and some of the young people. It was a devastating day and they were still in shock yesterday. Out of the ashes they will rebuild. There was a lot of community fundraising for the new library so it was an especially difficult day. The mother of one of the teachers, Gráinne Campbell, whom I did not meet, sent a message last night to say she was also devastated as all of her teaching materials were gone. They will rebuild and I will ensure it gets proper focus. Yesterday morning, I met the architect from the Department out there and we will absolutely prioritise it.

With regard to what we need to do within the educational system, we have 125 special schools, more than 3,300 primary schools and more than 750 secondary schools. We have a lot of schools that are doing absolutely amazing and incredible work. Obviously, supports in terms of financial bread and butter stuff are very important. The Deputy mentioned capitation. There had been a reduction of 11% and we had an increase of 5% last year. We are now up to 7.5%. We are not there yet. The price of running schools is a big thing. The Deputy also mentioned leadership. One more teacher in the day will take a wee bit of pressure off teaching principals. It is not where I want to be but it is an indication of where I want to go.

17 October 2019

Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions

Education Policy

6. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to support small schools and the communities they serve. [42607/19]

Deputy Peter Burke: What steps will the Minister take to support small schools and the communities they serve?

Deputy Joe McHugh: I thank the Deputy for the question. Rural schools make up the majority of our primary school sector, with almost 2,000 out of just over 3,100 schools. As such, I fully recognise their value to communities throughout the country. They provide a vital link to local heritage and history, help sustain rural populations and often act as a link for sports and social activity.

The majority of rural schools, more than 1,200 of them, are classed as small, having four or fewer teachers. While facing the challenges and opportunities that all schools do, this particular group of schools has specific challenges. I will continue to listen to our partners on this and discuss what we can do to support small schools and ensure they have a sustainable future. The programme for Government makes a commitment not to close any small school without the consent of parents and I am honouring this partnership approach as I examine the issue.

I have spoken to international colleagues to hear their perspective and, together with my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring, I hosted a symposium on small schools. I want to engage actively with the people and organisations who work in and with small schools and who understand the value and opportunities they offer their communities.

Already, we as a Government have shown that we are listening and I was pleased to announce additional supports for small schools in budget 2020. Improved teacher staffing levels will be introduced for small schools with four teachers or fewer. The one-point reduction in the staffing schedule will help ensure better teacher retention in schools with up to four teachers by ensuring that one less pupil is required to retain and recruit a teacher. To be clear, we are dropping the retention and recruitment figure by one simultaneously. More than 1,300 schools will benefit from the pupil-teacher ratio reduction.

One additional release day will be provided for primary school teaching principals. The extra time to carry out administrative duties will apply to 1,760 schools with fewer than seven teachers. The work now under way on small schools seeks to build on this in a sustainable way.

Between now and next March, I will continue to engage with the main partners through the primary education forum and the Department's small schools steering group to develop a new policy of supports for small schools and feed into the Estimates process for 2021.

Deputy Peter Burke: I acknowledge the work the Minister is doing at the Department and the work in securing an increase in the Department's budget by 3.4% on 2019 levels to €11.1 billion. This will enhance the opportunities for young people and adults to access education and give them an equal chance and opportunities to achieve what they can in life. It is very important that the Minister outlines the commitment in the programme for a minority partnership

Government not to close rural schools. As he reflected in his statement, they make up 64% of our school network.

The one-point reduction in the staffing schedule, together with the announcement made, will assist them. I commend the work the Minister is doing through joined-up thinking with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, on the hot meals programme, which was piloted this year. Ballymore in County Westmeath in my constituency is benefiting from it. It is a brilliant initiative to ensure everyone gets an equal chance, and this is what education is about.

Deputy Joe McHugh: The Deputy used the phrase “joined-up thinking”. Obviously, this has to happen at an interdepartmental level, which is why I was anxious to have the Minister, Deputy Ring, at the symposium on small schools. When we speak about rural development and regional development, it is important that we have somebody of his stature in the equation. Small schools, whether they are in urban or rural communities, are the lifeblood and heartbeat of those communities, as the Acting Chairman, Deputy Eugene Murphy, knows from his constituency of Roscommon. Many communities might have nothing except a school.

Boards of management work on a voluntary basis. Nobody has contradicted my belief that the biggest voluntary organisation in the country comprises the boards of management in primary and post-primary schools. There must be more numbers involved and it must be more expansive than even the GAA. It is a big thing. It is good to have community engagement, and something that boards of management do a lot of is fundraising. I know this is because of pressures in capitation and, as I have said, the budget is not reflective of where I want to be as the Minister for Education and Skills, but the increase of 2.5% is indicative of where I want to go. We need to make gains on this the next time.

Deputy Peter Burke: I thank the Minister for his response. It is very important that we listen to the voice of the community. We can see the Minister is reflecting this and doing it in his daily work. He took advice on the subject of history, stress-tested it against the voice of the community, and made a decision. It is very important that we have Ministers who respect the community, equally respect the advice that has been given, stress-test it appropriately, and then make a decision. Essentially, this is what Ministers are there for. I thank the Minister for the work he is doing for the small school network. As I have said, they make up 64% of the school network. It is very important to see the programme for Government acknowledge these schools are not being closed, that they are supported and that we make changes to ensure our small school network will flourish. I note the Minister’s acknowledgement of boards of management and the work they do in the community to ensure schools are run well and the fundraising element of their role. I thank the Minister for his ongoing work and for securing such a budget for the Department for 2020 in the backdrop of Brexit.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I thank the Deputy for his comments. Something that is very helpful in ongoing discussions in the primary sector is the primary forum, where all of the stakeholders are around the table. It is very important and it is a forum I certainly value. It is a model that we must continue to use, and we must ensure we keep the communication lines with it open. Politicians get things wrong and sometimes get them right. The mention of stress-testing made me think about the primary forum which is a forum to stress-test many things within the primary sector. I acknowledge my team of officials who have been working proactively in this regard. The stakeholders themselves are central and fundamental because they value the forum and their contributions are paramount to any future change.

Question No. 7 replied to with Written Answers.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I call Deputy Burton next. I ask all Deputies and the Minister to stick to the time limits because we are running behind.

Schools Building Projects Status

8. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress on the acquisition by the Louth and Meath Education and Training Board of a permanent site for a school (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the lack of further education facilities in the County Meath area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42581/19]

Deputy Joan Burton: I ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he can explain to the Dáil and the staff and students of the Dunboyne College of Further Education, which is an excellent college with 900 students on the outskirts of Dunboyne, why the college is still waiting for a permanent site on which to build a permanent school. This is a fine educational institution, but to progress further, it really needs to get a permanent site. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the school has not been facilitated.

Deputy Joe McHugh: As the Deputy is aware, Dunboyne College of Further Education is currently located in a number of rented buildings and prefab accommodation at Dunboyne Business Park. The Department approved stand-alone status to the college in 2015. It has 800 students.

Prior to achieving stand-alone status, the college was considered part of St. Peter's College post-primary school. Louth Meath Education and Training Board, LMETB, as patron of Dunboyne College of Further Education, was requested by my Department to identify potential suitable site options. In response to this request the education and training board, ETB, has proposed one site option of significant scale and cost. As the Deputy will be aware, the first ever dedicated capital budget for further education and training has been established under Project Ireland 2040. This will see €300 million invested in the period up to 2027 in the development of modern, fit-for-purpose facilities nationally. The site option proposed by the ETB will have to be appraised in a wider context, including in the context of the strategy for the further education and training sector generally.

Deputy Joan Burton: I thank the Minister for his reply but it is a deeply disappointing one after the recognition of the college and the progress that was made in 2015. I represent the neighbouring constituency of Dublin West which has many students who attend the college, as has the whole of County Meath. The Minister may not be aware that Meath has no third level institution. Students from as far away as Kildare are using Dunboyne College of Further Education as one of the few very large institutions of further education that are available to them.

The college has a track record, which the Minister can inspect, of students going on to study for degrees in DIT, Maynooth University and across the range of third level colleges and options that are open to them. Many of them have gone on to get work directly or set up their own businesses. The lack of a site is hampering the development of the college.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I appreciate that the frustration here is over the timeline. In May 2018, Department officials gave approval to LMETB to advertise to seek expressions of interest

for a suitable site to accommodate Dunboyne College of Further Education, requiring that any identified sites be technically appraised and that the reports of the technical appraisal be made available to my Department. In September 2018, the Department approved the appointment of a consultant to support it in the site identification process. In July 2019, LMETB provided details on its preferred site and requested approval to make an offer. The site in question was considerably larger than expected and the anticipated acquisition costs were significant due to its partial residential zoning. The reports of the technical appraisal have not yet been received. On 3 October 2019, LMETB was advised that the Department was not in a position to consider the proposal further until such time as a broader strategy was agreed in respect of further education provision and associated accommodation requirement.

We are not going to come up with a conclusion to this issue today in this House but my message is that I concur with Deputy Burton that we need momentum behind this initiative now. I call on LMETB to engage proactively with my officials to see how we can move this forward. There is a roadblock here on the scale of the development and we need to bang our heads together about this.

Deputy Joan Burton: I do not mind if Deputy Thomas Byrne wishes to make a contribution.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I thank Deputy Burton for raising this matter. I have a question further down the list of questions about the matter because I do not know if this also applies to other colleges around the country.

The roadblock to which the Minister referred is not in LMETB. The roadblock is a letter that his Department issued on 3 October baldly stating that the Department is not prepared to consider the project further. That is the roadblock. The Minister said that a number of leases are in place. There are 16 separate buildings, 14 leases, and 100 students being bussed to Navan every day. A constituent of mine comes from Ardcath to Dunboyne and then has to get a bus to Navan.

It is outrageous that this development was cancelled. This is another result of the Minister and his Department accepting a reduction in the capital budget. This college serves young people from all across my constituency and Deputy Burton's. The Minister goes on about working together. I will work together if the Minister sends out a letter saying the Department is considering the project further. The Department's letter to the contrary is what stopped progress. The Minister must reverse that and I am calling on him to do so.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister should, at a minimum, visit the college, and he would be very welcome to. Alternatively, he should meet the Deputies who represent the areas from which the students who attend the college come.

The Minister has delivered very bad news for the college. What do people have to do? The staff, principal and deputy principal are all working their backs off to give young people, particularly those who are not going the direct route to third level education, a future. For many of those young people in areas like the west side of Dublin West, while the official rate of unemployment is 5%, the real rate in more disadvantaged and rural areas is, in practice, maybe 11% or 12% and, in some cases within council estates, can even reach 20% or 25%. The key to unlocking a future for those people and getting them into employment is to give them opportunities around further education. This will not be money in any way misspent. It will produce a

future every year for up to 1,000 people in the areas of Meath, Kildare and the constituency of Dublin West. It is a good investment.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I thank Deputy Burton for raising this matter and appreciate what she is trying to do and how she is trying to move it forward. We in this House can pretend that one plus one equals four. The Deputy can claim that the Government is not committed to further education and training, but there was no capital plan for further education and training when she was in government. There never was. There is a €300 million investment earmarked for projects such as this. I want to see this moving forward. There is a great legacy and tradition of third level training in Meath, although the Deputy is right to point out that the county does not have a university or institute of technology. That notwithstanding, there is Drogheda Institute of Further Education, Dunboyne College of Further Education, and O’Fiaich College in Dundalk.

Deputy Thomas Byrne is saying that we should go ahead with the development no matter the size, scale or cost. On the other hand, his party is telling the Government it is not frugal enough and is overspending. Sometimes I do not know what Deputy Thomas Byrne is asking me to do.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am asking the Minister to consider the matter further when his Department has said it will not.

Deputy Joe McHugh: Acquisitions of such magnitude must be carefully considered and any curricular requirement for land above what would be typically provided for a further education college must be assessed in the general context of further education.

Teachers’ Remuneration

9. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for delays in the payment of teachers salaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42541/19]

Deputy Louise O’Reilly: I am taking this question on behalf of my college, Deputy Ó Laoghaire. It is a fairly straightforward question. We are looking for an explanation as to the reason for delays in the payment of teachers’ salaries by the Department of Education and Skills. There is also an issue around the payment of increments for special needs assistants. I do not need to explain to the Minister that these people need their wages. They are doing the work and have submitted the documentation. We want an explanation for the delay.

Deputy Joe McHugh: At a broader level, there are no unnecessary delays for the payment of teachers on payrolls operated by my Department. Some 120,000 payees are paid fortnightly. The process for the payment of an individual teacher is that the managerial authority of a school submits the application form to my Department to enable payment to be set up. The application form must confirm that a teacher is qualified for the appropriate sector and confirm his or her registration details with the Teaching Council. Once a completed application form has been received, the payment is processed as soon as possible. Normally, payroll closing dates are ten days before the payment date.

Where an application form is not complete or where there are queries about some aspect of

the application, the forms will be returned to the schools, which can result in a delay to payment being set up for a teacher. Where a teacher's registration is not active with the Teaching Council, payment cannot be made for the period he or she is unregistered. Where a teacher works on a casual or non-casual basis, school authorities enter details of the employee and the claim for payment into the online claims system, which will transfer to the Department's payroll, and the employee will be paid according to the payroll schedules.

Schools authorities have details of payroll closing dates. Payments cannot be processed until they are signed off by the school authorities. If the deadline for payrolls is missed, payments will not be made until the following payroll date. If the Deputy conveys to me individual examples of problems in the system, I will be happy to follow up on them.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: There are examples. My colleague, Deputy Ó Laoghaire, was contacted by a teacher in his third consecutive year working at a school. He submitted all the required documentation but it was returned to him in June. The man has three children and had to get a loan to pay his rent. He has done the work and submitted the documentation. There are instances where the teacher has done everything he or she was supposed to do but the delay appears to happen at the Department. It is not acceptable to say there is not a delay or that if there is one, it might be the individual's fault. I have outlined one individual who contacted us and we have been contacted by others. It is not acceptable for a young man with three children to have to apply for a loan to pay rent, given that he turns up for work. It is the second time the problem has happened to him.

The fault, as we understand it, lies with the Department in cases where the people concerned have submitted all the relevant documentation and where the school has done its part.

Deputy Joe McHugh: There was a big issue with the payroll at the beginning of the year because the system changed on 1 January. It was a live issue and my officials worked around the clock, including on weekends, to ensure they got it right. If issues remain, I will be more than happy to follow up on the individual submission Deputy Ó Laoghaire received.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: What is the Minister's opinion on the payroll division? Does he believe that it is adequately resourced and that there are enough personnel to do the job it is supposed to do? We will convey the details of the cases we have received to the Minister but if they are resolved, will the Minister state it will not recur in the future? Our understanding is that such cases have happened. I appreciate there was a change in the system but the Minister must understand that changes can result in negative impacts for people on the front line, doing the work and delivering the services. Is the Department sufficiently resourced to ensure he can give a commitment it will not happen again?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Yes, I can. With my officials, I have dealt with the issue at first hand. That 120,000 payees are paid fortnightly, including current workers and those on pensions, is a phenomenal exercise and it requires adequate resources, which I am satisfied we have. Nevertheless, I am conscious my Department is responsible for the largest payroll. Of the €11.1 billion budget I have, a total of 80% goes on pay and pensions. It requires an enormous-----

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: It is a labour-intensive sector.

Deputy Joe McHugh: It certainly is but the people who work in the area are dedicated and able. When there was a transition to the new system on 1 January, there were outstanding issues for temporary teachers, as well as for retired teachers who worked as substitute teachers.

We resolved the vast majority of issues but if any remain, I will be happy to follow up on them.

Schools Refurbishment

10. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the project brief for a school redevelopment project at a school (details supplied) has been finalised; when the brief will proceed to the next stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42602/19]

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: It has been almost four years since the then Government committed to extending Coláiste Ghobnatán i mBaile Bhúirne. The school population has continued to grow. As a member of the board of management, I could see there was little apparent progress as we waited for Department approval, although that was until recent days. While approval has been granted, which is a timely and good opportunity to move matters along, time is tight. Will the Minister outline the next steps in the process to bring the extension to fruition?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as an cheist. Tuigim go bhfuil an Ghaeilge i gceist sa scoil sin. Bhí muid ag labhairt tríd an Ghaeilge arú inné.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy the building project for the school is in the process of being devolved for delivery to Cork Education and Training Board, CETB. My Department has engaged with the school on developing the project brief. The execution of a service level agreement between my Department and CETB, which is being arranged, will be the last step in finalising the brief. It is also the first step in moving the project into the design phase and can be expected to be completed soon. Once the service level agreement is in place, CETB will procure a design team for the project to design the buildings and obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions. It will then move the project through the design phases to tender and construction in due course.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Toisc go bhfuil sé thart ar cheithre bhliain ó rinneadh an gealltanais sin, tá an-chuid ama cailte idir an dá linn gan puinn dul chun cinn. Tá breis brú ar an scoil. Tá an tinreamh ag fás an t-am ar fad. Feictear i measc an phobail, go háirithe sna bunscoileanna sa cheantar, go bhfuil borradh ar an daonra agus go mbeidh an slua sin ag teacht isteach sa scoil go gairid, thar ceann dhá bhliain. Tá an-chuid acu tagtha cheana féin. An féidir leis an Aire clár ama a leagadh amach don síneadh seo? Cathain a bheidh sé ar fáil? Tá brú ar an scoil cheana féin. An mbeidh sé ullamh nuair a bheidh an slua mór sin tagtha isteach? Cé chomh tapa a tharlóidh sé? Toisc go raibh moill ceithre bhliain ann cheana féin, an féidir é seo a leagadh síos mar cheann de na pointí príomha agus prioritising a dhéanamh ar Choláiste Ghobnatán chun é a bhrú ar aghaidh go tapa?

Deputy Joe McHugh: Níl an tiomantas i gceist. Tá dul chun cinn déanta. Táimid ag fanacht anois ar an chéad chéim eile - an togra a bhogadh ar aghaidh go dtí an próiseas pleanála. Is é sin an bhealach is fearr agus is é sin an cloch choirnéil is tábhachtaí ó thaobh an phróisis. Níl mé in ann gealltanais a thabhairt go mbeidh sé ullamh i Meán Fómhair nó in aon mhí eile, ach tá dul chun cinn déanta. Níl aon deacrachtaí ann faoi láthair. Gabhaim aitheantas don fhoireann uilig i mo Roinn atá ceangailte leis an obair thábhachtach ar an scoil seo. Geallaim inniu go mbeidh mé ag coinneáil an bhrú ar an phróiseas sin. Bhí mo chomhghleacaí, an Teachta Creed, i dteagmháil liom faoin togra seo araon leis an Teachta Moynihan. Tá sé i gceist dul ar aghaidh chuig an chéad chéim eile. Is é an próiseas pleanála an rud is tábhachtaí. Tá sé sin socraithe anois. Bogfaimid ar aghaidh ina dhiaidh sin.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: Tá sé sin go breá.

Schools Administration

11. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied the provisions of section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998 do not place an unnecessary administrative financial burden on national schools; if he is satisfied the insistence by an organisation (details supplied) that national schools must submit accounts online via an accountant, as opposed to the school treasurer, thus incurring a significant fee, does not place an unnecessary administrative financial burden on national schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42354/19]

Deputy Bobby Aylward: Is the Minister satisfied the provisions of section 18(1) of the Education Act 1998 do not place an unnecessary administrative financial burden on national schools, and that the insistence by an organisation that national schools must submit accounts online via an accountant, as opposed to the school treasurer, thus incurring a significant fee, does not place an unnecessary administrative financial burden on national schools? Will he make a statement on the matter?

Deputy Joe McHugh: It is important to ensure that appropriate governance arrangements are in place for transparency and accountability in the management of public money. All boards of management of schools, therefore, are obliged to comply with section 18 of the Education Act 1998 and the arrangements set out in my Department's Circular 0060/2017 and Circular 0002/2018 on the operation of the financial services support unit, FSSU. This includes the submission of accounts to the FSSU by an external accountant or auditor who has a current practising certificate, professional indemnity insurance and is registered with a prescribed accountancy body in the State. I am satisfied that this is the appropriate mechanism by which schools can comply with the requirement to make their accounts available for inspection by me in accordance with the Education Act 1998.

The independence of an external accountant or auditor provides assurance to the board and the State that the accounts are prepared in line with good accounting practice and standards. Use of the standard templates provided by the financial support services unit, FSSU, will help to reduce costs associated with the employment of an external accountant. These costs may be met from the capitation funding provided by my Department.

In budget 2020, I was pleased to have been able to provide for a further 2.5% increase in standard capitation funding for primary and post-primary schools that will apply from the start of the 2020 to 2021 school year. This is in addition to the 5% increase that applied from the start of the 2019 to 2020 school year.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: I have been contacted by a trusted constituent who is a book-keeper and accountant and has been the treasurer on his local school's board of management for 12 years. The board has always been fully compliant with PAYE and VAT to ensure value for money while keeping costs for parents to a minimum so that children's education costs are as low as possible. However, by its own admission there is one area where the board has not been fully compliant as it does not fully conform to all provisions of the Act referenced in my question.

The reason for this is simple. The school receives around €6,000 in capitation fees. Over the years, the treasurer of this school has made inquiries as to the cost of certification or audit costs. The lowest quote the treasurer could find for certification of the accounts was €350, while audits were in the region of €1,000. This treasurer maintains that spending money on something that is quite simply a box-ticking exercise that produces nothing tangible while running the school on a shoestring budget is a waste of valuable resources. Moreover, getting the accounts audited would require an outlay of 20% of the annual school funding on the audit itself. With these administrative costs, are we placing an undue financial burden on small schools operating on small budgets? I appreciate the need for oversight but there must be some sort of middle ground.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I always value people's ideas and suggestions. The Deputy's constituent has gone through the system and has contacted several public representatives with the same observation. However, transparency and accountability are two very important cornerstones here. The FSSU, is acting in line with the requirements of the Department. The relevant circulars clearly state that it is the responsibility of the board of management to ensure financial accounts are submitted to the FSSU through an external auditor. This would satisfy the requirement for schools to make their accounts available for inspection under section 18 of the Education Act 1998. I understand the Deputy's point about the pressures on capitation funding. There was a reduction of about 11% in 2011. Funding rose by 5% last year and 2.5% this year. That is not where I want it to be. This budget does not reflect where I want capitation to be, and it is something I will continue to pursue.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: As a final comment, and while I appreciate what the Minister is saying, all I am saying is that this is an extra cost for small schools, particularly in rural Ireland, that may have two or three teachers. The Minister said it already. They receive a capitation grant of €6,000. A proper audit costs a minimum of €1,200. That is 20% of the €6,000. There is a qualified accountant on the board of this school who is willing to do the books free of charge and submit them to the Department. Could that not be considered? This is not a fly-by-night auditor. I agree with the Minister on accountability. Everything must be accounted for and money has to be well spent. However in this case a school could save a cost of €1,200 just to get a stamp on a request. There is already an accountant doing voluntary work who is willing to send it in. Could some system be put in place to make use of this? Maybe the Department could have an audit every five years to check on these accounts. No one is talking about deviousness with money or anything like that. This is about saving money for local schools that are under pressure.

Deputy Joe McHugh: The Deputy would not be raising this if he thought there was no value in doing so. There is value in raising a matter that will take pressure off individual schools. I am going to say something that is not policy. I am saying it as a Minister. I am looking at the future. I refer to the collection of small primary schools that are found even within one parish. The small school symposium will look at ways to run schools more effectively in the future. As the Deputy says, each of these individual schools currently has to submit accounts to the Department. It costs every single school the same amount. This is what we need from politics. We must be big enough and mature enough as a political system to say that if there are better, more competent and more proactive ways of doing things that will allow savings for schools that have to fill their tanks, pay for the gas, or look after the bread-and-butter issues, they will be discussed at the small schools symposium. I ask the Deputy to contact me formally on this issue if he would like it to be raised in that forum.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Eugene Murphy): I am going to attempt to break all records and accommodate the three Deputies who are here, so I will ask the three Deputies to co-operate.

School Closures

12. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the analysis his Department undertook of detailed submissions forwarded by community groups about the proposed closure of two second level schools (details supplied); if the analysis by his Department was brought to his attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42594/19]

Deputy Brendan Smith: Through correspondence and parliamentary questions I have raised with the Minister the total opposition of local communities in west Cavan to the proposal by Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board to close St. Bricin's College in Belturbet and St. Mogue's College in Bawnboy. Local committees did exceptionally good work in seeking the views of the local communities on the future of second level education in north-west Cavan. They made detailed submissions to the Minister's Department outlining very clearly the people's desire to retain those schools. Unfortunately, not only did those submissions get no reply, they did not get an acknowledgement.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. As he is aware, the decision-making authority for any amalgamation is the patron or trustees of the schools, subject to the approval of my Department. Any proposed change involves extensive negotiations at local level and must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of students, parents, teachers and local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system. My Department was not involved in these negotiations.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the report received by my Department, dated 11 July 2019, from Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board, which sets out the proposal to amalgamate both schools, was analysed by officials in my Department along with submissions from the groups referred to by the Deputy. In addition to considering the submissions received, officials in my Department's planning and building unit carried out an analysis of the current enrolment trends, intake patterns, future demographic demands and the current curriculum provision. The outcome of this analysis concluded that the best outcome in the interests of all stakeholders was the approval of a new school building to facilitate the amalgamation of the two existing schools.

The two schools due to amalgamate will continue to operate from the existing school sites until a new school building is provided. 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 running from 2018 to 2027.

The new amalgamated school will be built to the highest standards and will be compliant with Part L of the 2017 building regulations. This will also provide the opportunity for the school to have a fully equipped PE hall with a fitness suite as well as accommodation to meet special educational needs at post-primary level in west Cavan.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Minister for his reply but I must say it is most disappointing. It is literally a rehash of what I have received in written replies to parliamentary questions in recent months. I doubt the veracity and provenance of the Department's analysis of the

submissions that were made to it. Those detailed submissions from committees representative of the school communities of St. Mogue's College in Bawnboy and St. Bricin's College in Belurbet were not even acknowledged, either by the Minister's office or his Department. How can I accept that they were analysed in detail when they were not even acknowledged? I had an understanding with the Minister that he would meet the group. Unfortunately that commitment was not honoured. When those groups corresponded with the Minister's office to seek a meeting, they said that if it was not possible to meet his good self due to time constraints, they could meet a senior official or officials. Those requests were not even acknowledged.

Does the Minister stand over that type of governance and maladministration on the part of his Department? It is deplorable. Volunteers carried out excellent research through public meetings, online information gathering and questionnaires. They outlined that information and presented it in a comprehensive fashion to the Department and it was not even acknowledged. I do not accept that it was properly analysed if it was not even acknowledged.

Deputy Joe McHugh: It is very important to put on the record of the House that my Department does not and did not make that decision. It was a responsibility of the patron. The patron advised that an invitation to consultation meetings was forwarded to the boards of management of both schools in question and to all representative groups identified in both communities. Eleven groups were identified and meetings were arranged between February and July 2019. The patron advised that the majority of the meetings proceeded and the majority of views were taken into consideration. A small number of meetings were cancelled by the groups or associations concerned and did not proceed.

Following the Deputy's intervention, we had informal conversations on the issue. I acknowledge his bona fides and take his representations seriously. There was urgency over reaching a decision on the matter. I asked for this not to happen. We had conversations in January, February and March of this year. Following the Deputy's intervention, I spoke to my officials to ensure that time was given for consultation, but it was consultation through the patron, not my Department. Obviously, once that letter came in, a decision had to be made.

This is not about closing schools but about the amalgamation and strengthening of a school. It is also trying to ensure that students in west Cavan stay in west Cavan rather than going to other schools.

Deputy Brendan Smith: The Minister has now admitted that the Department made the decision before the new ETB met. That is the suspicion in the local community and the Minister has confirmed that now. The decision was made at the end of August, just days before the new ETB was about to meet, at which point it might have had a different opinion. The consultations the Minister mentioned took place after the ETB made its decision; there was no proper consultation. I ask the Minister to stand over not implementing the recommendations of the Action Plan for Education 2019, which states:

To protect the sustainability and viability of rural communities we will not close any small school without the consent of parents. Existing support schemes will remain open for new infrastructural investment in schools.

In response to a Topical Issue I raised, the Minister of State, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, stated:

...any proposed changes must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates

the interests of parents, teachers and local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system. If I may add, students' views must also be taken into account. Any proposals are then subject to the approval of the Department of Education and Skills.

That *modus operandi* of how amalgamations should take place is laid down in successive departmental policy statements and strategies. That policy has not been adhered to in this decision coming from the ETB and approved by the Minister. It is not acceptable and the two local school communities will not accept the decision that has been made.

Deputy Joe McHugh: It is my understanding that representatives of St. Mogue's College parents association were due to meet the patron in February 2019. This meeting was cancelled at the request of the parents association-----

Deputy Brendan Smith: The decision was made in November 2018.

Deputy Joe McHugh: -----until an architectural assessment of the building was carried out. Following this assessment, another meeting was scheduled for the end of June 2019. I understand this meeting was subsequently cancelled by the parents association on 24 June. Meetings were scheduled for the end of June 2019 and early July 2019 with both Belturbet and Bawnboy community groups. I understand both of these meetings were cancelled by the community groups. However, I believe both groups submitted to the patron a written response to the architectural assessment. I again emphasise that the patron makes the decision and not the Department.

Further Education and Training Programmes Places

13. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the lack of provision for further education and the limited number of post-leaving certificate, PLC, courses available to those in the Dublin 15 and Dunboyne areas; if his attention has been further drawn to the number of young persons who lack opportunities to progress to third level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42579/19]

Deputy Joan Burton: What does the Minister propose to do for the many thousands of young people aged under 25 who are unemployed, sitting at home aimless and purposeless owing to insufficient further education places or post-leaving certificate, PLC, courses being available. I cite my area of Dublin 15 where, despite major community efforts to make PLC places available, the Department appears to have an extremely negative attitude to the further development of PLC courses. It is the only opportunity for these young people to get into education, and get a career and employment.

Deputy Joe McHugh: The further education and training sector provides a broad range of options to meet the needs of over 300,000 learners. The PLC programme is the largest of the full-time further education and training, FET, programmes with up to 30,000 PLC places available annually. Each ETB determines how best to distribute and plan the programmes to meet the needs of their area.

This year, 2,697 PLC places were allocated to Dublin-Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, which is responsible for FET in Dublin 15. As part of a plan to establish PLC provision in this area, Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board has been working

with two local community schools to start PLC courses in September 2019. Unfortunately, the lack of uptake for these courses has meant they were unable to commence as planned. The education and training board will continue to work with my Department and the schools in Dublin 15 to support the establishment of PLC provision in 2020.

Also this year, 2,438 PLC places were allocated to Louth-Meath Education and Training Board, an increase of over 40%. This increase gives scope for further expansion in PLC enrolment in the future, including for Dunboyne.

Opportunity to progress to third level is a national priority for the Government and my Department. A review of the National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015 to 2019 was published in December 2018. The review acknowledges significant developments in implementation, including increased investment in new access initiatives.

Deputy Joan Burton: We have a serious problem. The construction industry cannot build enough houses because it does not have enough skilled people. As Professor John FitzGerald said this morning on RTÉ and also at a public meeting that I sponsored a short while ago in Dublin 15, we do not have the skills to do the evaluation of how householders can spend their money wisely to retrofit their homes.

There is a demand with people interested in taking up further education for personal development, but no PLC places are available in Dublin 15. PLC places are available in Dún Laoghaire but very few people in Dublin 15 or the rest of Fingal can travel to Dún Laoghaire to access a PLC place. What does the Minister propose to do?

Deputy Joe McHugh: I got a great insight into the benefits of PLC courses in Letterkenny a number of weeks ago. Looking at the transition and progression, people who finish a PLC course after two years are going on to do electronic engineering in Technical University Dublin, TUD, getting into access courses, and getting into first and second year to do degree courses in Letterkenny Institute of Technology, LIT. Obviously, there is a capacity issue and we need to provide the courses. When the courses are not taken up we need to ask why. In respect of the current leaving certificate review the big issue is progression. It is not necessarily about points and getting into higher level education or universities. This is about creating new pathways through apprenticeships and PLCs. I see the value in them and we need to continue to work on the matter. I am happy to follow up on any capacity issues in Dublin 15.

Deputy Joan Burton: As we speak today, many young people are sitting at home looking at the four walls in their house without having any possibility of a career path to qualification, employment and potentially setting up their own business. The Government is missing a great opportunity for young people by leaving significant areas of the Dublin region without any PLC opportunity. The Minister is talking about the future and putting it out for another four or five years. That will do nothing for the people sitting at home unemployed at the moment. The official unemployment figure is about 5%. In areas of disadvantage and certain rural areas the unemployment figure, particularly for many younger people, stands at between 9% and 11% and it is even higher in areas of deep disadvantage. Without the PLC option, there is very little future for these people other than sitting at home.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I acknowledge the work of the Minister of State, Deputy Halligan, in this area. We are driving towards extra apprenticeships and opportunities. Various institutes of

technology are looking at building apprenticeships into their course offerings. However, now - not in four years - we need to ensure that pathways and progression and not points are central to our education system.

We have to get away from the hang-up that, in the context of the leaving certificate, it is a race to an endgame of points. Our education system has to embrace the fact that there are different outlets, options and opportunities for different people. We are all different, we are all equal and we have to acknowledge that. Central in this regard is the realisation that it is about pathways not points. That is why apprenticeships have to be at the heart of the conversation.

Question No. 14 replied to with Written Answers.

Schools Building Projects Status

15. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the brief for a redevelopment project at a school (details supplied); the most recent contacts with the school patron in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42601/19]

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: A commitment was given to provide a new school for Coachford college almost four years ago. As a member of the board of management, I am in a position to state that there has been little progress as we have waited for the Department to give a further approval along the way. The population in the area has continued to grow and all we have seen are plans to put in place temporary accommodation that would be classroom-based. This is despite the fact that there is a high demand for practical subjects at Coachford college and that laboratories, woodwork rooms and so on would be require as a result. A solution involving temporary accommodation will not relieve the significant pressure that exists. Given that there has been such a long delay, can the Minister prioritise Coachford college? Will he outline where the project stands and what the next steps will be in order that we can get on to building the new school?

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have a 30-second reply from the Minister?

Deputy Joe McHugh: We are into injury time, extra time and, possibly, penalties. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the building project for the school to which he refers is being devolved for delivery to Cork Education and Training Board, CETB.

My Department has been in ongoing contact with the patron of the school in question relating to the proposed building project and the brief for same. The most recent contact took place last week in that respect.

The execution of a service level agreement, SLA, between my Department and CETB, which is currently being arranged, will be the next and last step in finalising this brief. Once the SLA is in place, the ETB will procure a design team for the project to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions, and move the project onward to tender and construction in due course.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas Website.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Dara Calleary: To quote President Juncker this morning:

Where there is a will, there is a #deal — we have one! It's a fair and balanced agreement for the EU and the UK and it is testament to our commitment to find solutions. I recommend that #EUCO endorses this deal.

And so say all of us, but let us not get carried away. There is a long way to go yet. This is only avoiding a drop-off Brexit. It will be a difficult process for our island. I commend the Tánaiste, all the Government officials, Members and everybody else who got us to this stage. There has been a massive political and personal effort by many and on the part of all our negotiating teams. We have been here before and we are once again in the hands of Westminster.

Can the Tánaiste outline his most up-to-date understanding of the position? We are all still digesting the deal. There is a commitment that there will not be any border or customs checks on the island. Can the Tánaiste confirm that? Can he confirm that the Single Market retains its integrity? Can he assure the House that the Good Friday Agreement is intact in the deal? These are the three key questions.

Has the Government, either through the Tánaiste, the Taoiseach or the relevant officials, engaged with the DUP in recent days about its concerns regarding the deal? Does the Tánaiste have any plans at political or official level to engage with it to see if the Government can assuage its concerns, whatever they may be, about this deal? What is the Tánaiste's view on the implications of the Benn Act which demands a very solid update for Westminster by 19 October, 48 hours from now? What does he see as the likely timeline of the deal getting through Westminster and will it result in Britain exiting the EU on 31 October?

The Tánaiste: First, I urge caution. While an agreement between the Prime Minister and EU leaders has been announced in Brussels - I expect it be confirmed at the Council meeting later today - that is not the end of the process because it needs to be ratified by the British Parliament and the European Parliament. This is a big step forward. It is a new deal that recognises all the issues we have been raising for the past three years and that will protect people, peace and trade on the island. It will also ensure that there will be no checks of any kind. In that context, there will be no sanitary or phytosanitary checks, no regulatory checks, no checks on live animals and no customs checks on goods being traded between the North and the South. That is a significant achievement. I want to particularly thank the chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, and his team. They have done a really extraordinary job in putting together a new deal that reflects the new approach of the British Government and the new Prime Minister. Much in this deal is the same as previously. The language and the guarantees relating to citizens' rights remain the same. The language and commitments in terms of UK contributions to EU budgets remain the same. The approach to the transition period is still clear and intact. The transition period after the UK leaves, if it leaves at the end of this month, will conclude at the end of 2020 unless the it decides to request and trigger an extension of one or two years' duration, which it has the option to do before next summer.

The part of the withdrawal agreement that has changed relates to Ireland. Much of the Irish protocol in respect of issues such as the common travel area, CTA, etc., remains the same. The provisions previously referred to as the backstop have changed. We have always stated that if

we could replace the backstop with something else that does the same job on the key issues I outlined earlier in the context of protecting the peace process, preventing a hard border and protecting Ireland's place in the EU Single Market and the customs union, then we would always look favourably on a new approach as long as the outcomes were guaranteed. I am of the view that they are guaranteed. This deal is worth supporting because it protects core Irish interests.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I want to bring the Tánaiste back. Prime Minister Johnson spoke of not being quite at the summit but of being “on the Hillary Step”. He stated that the summit is not far away but that it is shrouded in cloud. That cloud remains in the form of the DUP. In getting to the point we have reached, political relationships on the island have been damaged. They are not what they could or should be. It is important that we, as well as those in London, engage with the DUP on its concerns. Does the Tánaiste have any plans to do that at political or official level between now and Saturday in order to try to bridge the gap in the same way as has been done over the past week in the context of the agreement? Is he confident that Brexit will proceed and that the UK will depart the European Union on 31 October?

The Tánaiste: We maintain open lines with all political parties in Northern Ireland. I am available to meet in person or to talk by phone to any one of those parties that wants to speak to me. We reach out too. Earlier this week, I was in Belfast meeting the Secretary of State. I also had a breakfast meeting of approximately 90 minutes duration with representatives of Sinn Féin a few days ago. I have also spoken to the leaders of the SDLP and the Alliance Party at length this week during several phone calls. Our approach to this has always been to listen to all political parties, including both unionist parties. Of course we do not always agree, but it is important to say that while we want to reach out and to ensure a deal is something that all parties in Northern Ireland can live with, that does not mean we can change the deal between now and when it is potentially voted on in Westminster, and we should not pretend that we can. The deal is what it is. I expect that it will be put to a vote in the Westminster Parliament on Saturday. The management of that vote from the Government's perspective is a matter for the Prime Minister and his team.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Last week in this Chamber the Government announced budget 2020 with the support of Fianna Fáil. At that time, I made the point that the housing crisis had become wrapped up in statistics rather than on the people behind those statistics. Late on Tuesday last, just before midnight a group of volunteers who offer food and clothing to Dublin homeless posted a photograph online. I am not sure if the Tánaiste has seen the photograph. It shows a five year old boy eating his dinner from a sheet on cardboard on the ground in this city. Sam is the boy in the photograph. He is five years old and, like any other child, he attends school, but Sam is homeless. Like thousands of other families in this State, Sam and his mum live in emergency accommodation. The Homeless Street Café, the volunteer group that met Sam on Tuesday night, made clear that his mother is trying her best to provide nutritious home-cooked meals for her children, but like so many parents of the homeless children of this State, they live in emergency accommodation that strictly forbids them cooking meals for their children.

This is Sam's life, without a home or the comfort and security that should be a right for every child in this State. This is the life of nearly 4,000 children who, like Sam, have been condemned to this type of nightmare. There is only one place our children should be on a Tuesday night, namely, safely tucked up in their beds in homes with their families. The moral stain of child homelessness in Ireland is creating a lost generation. Children are having their childhoods stolen from them right before our eyes. Homelessness is stunting their development, harming

their education and exposing them to hardships that no child deserves and no society should accept.

Behind the statistics with which the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, tries to bamboozle the public, there is a stark and dark reality of our housing crisis, a crisis manufactured by this Government and from which many are profiting from the suffering of others. At the end of August last, more than 10,000 people were recorded as homeless. August was the seventh month in a row in respect of which that number of people were recorded as homeless. There has been a 365% increase in homelessness during a five-year period of unending, uninterrupted economic growth. These figures do not provide the full picture. They do not include the women and children living in domestic violence shelters funded by Tusla, adults and children living in hostels that are not funded by Departments, and those still living in direct provision despite having secured their leave to remain.

This is the republic that the Tánaiste and the Government is building. The Government is failing parents and children like Sam. This is not a republic of opportunity that cherishes all of the children of the nation equally. It is a national shame. How can we, as a nation, accept this? How can the Government stand over it? What does the Tánaiste have to say to Sam and his parents and the many other children like Sam who find themselves in this situation?

The Tánaiste: First, I do not accept it and nobody in this House should. No five year old child should be eating his or her dinner from a piece of cardboard on the street. We live in a country that does not accept this, and that is why it is being raised in the House today, as it should be.

The budget allocation for homeless services next year is €163 million. When I became Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, the allocation was significantly less than €100 million. Ultimately, we need to ensure that Sam and little boys like him have security, safety and predictability in terms of their parents having a safe tenancy or a home of their own in which to look after their families. This is what we are working towards. It makes me angry that the supports being put in place are not succeeding in ensuring that little boys like Sam do not find themselves in the position Sam was in a few nights ago.

We are making progress in regard to homelessness but, significant numbers continue to come into homelessness. For example, in 2018, more than 5,000 adults exited homelessness into homes, which is an increase of 8% on the previous year. In the first half of this year, 2,825 adults exited homelessness into homes, which is a 21% increase on the previous year. Next year, we expect that in excess 5,000 adults and families will exit homelessness into homes of their own. It is not just about homes, it is also about supports for many families who find themselves in vulnerable positions.

In response to the Deputy's question, this is not acceptable. This will remain a priority for Government until we can ensure that a five year old boy eating his dinner on the street is an absolute exception that angers people. That is how it should be and how it is. This is not necessarily the case in many other countries, but in this country homelessness, particularly for children is not acceptable. We will continue to prioritise it from a policy and spend perspective to ensure we bring it to an end, but that cannot be done overnight. It will take some time. This year, we will add more than 10,000 social housing units to our social housing stock. Next year, we will add more than 11,000. We will continue to provide this number of houses and more until we get on top of the housing pressures that are being contributed to by an increasing population and a

broken housing market, which we are in the process of fixing over time.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Sam is not alone. There are other photographs of children who are homeless eating their dinner on the steps of the GPO, the same place where the leaders whose busts are displayed around this Chamber came together and proclaimed an Irish republic and that Ireland would cherish all of the children of the nation equally. The Government has let down those leaders and, more important, it has let down our children. The Tánaiste once again rhymed off statistics, but he failed to mention that child homelessness continues to grow. Included in those statistics are children like Sam who are forced into these situations.

The Government has blocked the solutions that could be delivered and would result in serious changes in society. It blocked the Focus Ireland amendment that would have prevented families and children like Sam becoming homeless in the first instance. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil also recently voted against the right to housing being enshrined in the Constitution. Many families are forced into homelessness because of escalating rents. Again, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have blocked the Sinn Féin proposal for a rent freeze. These are real solutions. This Government has no answers. The budget announced last week provides for a €20 million increase in funding for homelessness services, which is an acceptance that the crisis will worsen. It is not a policy or a solution. The Government needs to take on board the proposals we and others, such as Focus Ireland, have been putting forward.

What does the Government propose to do in the here and now for Sam? What does it propose to do for the other children like Sam also eating their dinner outside the GPO? What does it propose to do for the children being given sleeping bags instead of a home or emergency accommodation because neither is available? These are the questions that the nation is asking having become aware of this terrible situation where children are forced to eat their dinner from cardboard on the ground. This is not acceptable. As a nation we want to reach out and provide comfort. This Government needs to implement policies and take action to ensure this never happens again.

The Tánaiste: Nobody has moral superiority on this issue. We have and continue to prioritise homelessness and housing in terms of a response. As Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government I introduced the rent pressure zones to limit rent inflation when that was needed. Approximately 60% of rental properties in this country are now subject to those provisions. We have debated in this House some of the solutions proposed by Sinn Féin. The problem with those proposals is that the majority of Deputies believe they will not work. They make for a good headline on the floor of the House but if we do not believe they will work when they are tested, we cannot introduce them.

Deputy John Brady: They do not work for the landlords.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Or the private sector.

The Tánaiste: What we are doing is introducing policies in housing that are delivering where there is a need for delivery. That is in the context of supply right across the board, whether that is social housing, affordable housing, more rental accommodation or the private purchase market. Supply is being increased in all of those areas, in most instances quite dramatically. The idea that all of this can be solved by putting a provision in the Constitution without the homes to back it up is just nonsense.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: We are saying that the amount of money should be doubled.

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The Tánaiste: I have no problem with changing our Constitution when it comes to housing but I do have a difficulty with stating that it is going to solve the problems of Sam, the five year old child to whom the Deputy referred.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Nobody suggested that.

The Tánaiste: We need to put in place practical, emergency solutions-----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Stop relying on the private sector. Let us build social and affordable housing.

The Tánaiste: -----while we develop medium and long-term solutions to correct the supply problem in the housing market. The Deputy knows this only too well.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The shameful human consequences of the Government's failure in the area of housing are personified in Sam's tragic plight and are well known. I also want to highlight another fairly shameful failure on the part of the Government in not providing a key public service to citizens. I refer to what is happening in the context of public transport and bus services. Anybody who uses buses in this city, particularly at peak times, will know how frequently buses do not arrive or arrive late. In the latter instance, when they do arrive, there are such lengthy queues that people cannot get on. Earlier this week, the National Transport Authority, NTA, produced a performance report on Go-Ahead, the privatised bus service. The privatisation of bus services is the policy the Government has pursued and implemented. It has handed out 10% of routes in this city to a private, for-profit operator and the report shows what the consequences have been. Since it took over 24 routes in 2018, Go-Ahead has consistently failed to meet its performance targets. It got away without being fined for the first few months but now fines are being imposed. On route after route, and overall in terms of its performance, the company is failing to meet the performance targets set for it by the NTA. It is discommoding young people getting to school, workers, people with disabilities and all sorts of other individuals who rely on public transport.

When the Government proposed the privatisation and outsourcing of routes, it stated that this would be cheaper and that the competition would produce better performance. Neither of those things has turned out to be the case. Go-Ahead's tender price - €171 million - was higher than that of Dublin Bus. It cost us more and its performance is way below that of Dublin Bus. We all know that Dublin Bus services could be a hell of a lot better but it must be stated that the privatisation experiment has failed. The Government should acknowledge this and abandon the privatisation agenda relating to public transport. If we want to do something about the climate, make our city work, deal with congestion and improve air quality, then we need better, cheaper public transport. With the privatisation of routes, the Government is going in precisely the opposite direction to that in which it should be going. Private bus services are not cheaper or better. At no level are they working to provide for the public transport needs of this city or the country. Will the Tánaiste accept that we need to reverse the privatisation experiment and put more money into providing better and cheaper public transport for our citizens?

The Tánaiste: We are putting a lot more money into public transport projects right across Dublin and the rest of country, whether that is in the form of the BusConnects project, light rail systems or whatever. The Deputy approaches this from an ideological perspective.

Deputy Bríd Smith: And Fine Gael does not.

The Tánaiste: Privatisation is something he can never accept on any level, on anything, whether it is housing, public transport or public-private partnerships to deliver schools.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Essential services is what they are called.

The Tánaiste: If there is a private sector element to any project that involves the State, the Deputy sees that as just unsupportable from an ideological point of view. It is a blind spot. What we are doing in public transport is trying to provide the best possible public transport for people. We are looking at certain routes in respect of which competition can lead to the provision of the best possible services.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is ideology.

The Tánaiste: If the companies that win those contracts are not performing to the standard set down in the contracts to which they have signed up, there are consequences and so there should be. There are plenty of private bus operators that are doing a really good job. There are also plenty of Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann services that are really good. When providers, public or private, are not delivering what they need to deliver, we have to pull them up on it. The issue for the Government is the delivery of the service, not whether it is public or private. That is how we are approaching the delivery of public transport. The vast majority of public transport in Ireland is being provided for and supported by the State. That is the way it should be but there is absolutely nothing wrong with certain routes being opened up to competition. Bus Éireann or Dublin Bus can actually compete for them if they want but if somebody else is providing a different proposition that gives better outcomes for commuters, we should be encouraging that. We should be encouraging private sector investment to deliver those solutions, which is what we are doing. If certain companies are not delivering what they promised in the context of those contracts, there is a consequence to that built into the contract which may result in fines.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Our policy is to have free public transport and better public transport. That is incompatible with private sector investment because private sector investment is about profit. The Government has not put more money into Dublin Bus. In 2008, €85 million in subvention went to Dublin Bus and we had 1,200 buses. Today, there is €41 million going to Dublin Bus and we have 1,115 buses. There is less subvention, fewer buses, more people needing and using those buses, higher fares and poorer performance. Then the Government makes a bad situation worse by privatising it. Since Go-Ahead has come in, it has admitted that its poor performance was related to higher than expected driver resignations. I wonder why that is. Might it have anything to do with the poor conditions and pay of those bus drivers? There have been 4,000 complaints in respect of just 10% of the routes since the beginning of this year against Go-Ahead bus services. By the way, the company also had a very poor performance in the context of service provision in Britain, where the privatisation of public transport has been a disaster. How can we get more people into public transport if it is privatised, for profit, if fares are too high and if performance is as bad as we are seeing from Go-Ahead?

The Tánaiste: When the Deputy talks about free public transport, there is no such thing.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: There is in Luxembourg, Estonia-----

The Tánaiste: In those countries there is no such thing as free public transport. The State decides to pay for it or subsidise it if it wants to do it.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Through taxes.

The Tánaiste: Whether that is through a private sector company that is delivering the service or a public sector company does not make any difference. Free public transport, if we choose to subvent and support it, will be a policy and budgetary choice. It is not free just because we decide to declare it free. Someone has got to pay for it.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: People always pay.

The Tánaiste: Either the consumer pays for it or the State pays for it, whether it is being provided by a private sector company or a public company.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: The taxpayer pays.

The Tánaiste: Deputy Boyd Barrett should not present this as something that it is not. I will come back to what I said before.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Who buys the tyres?

The Tánaiste: It is the outcomes that matter in the context of a delivery of efficient public transport, whether buses, trains or whatever. I do not hold a candle for any company that is providing a service here, whether it be State or privately run. We have a regulator to do that job. If people do not meet the standards that have been set for them, there needs to be a consequence. As I have said to the Deputy before, there are many private sector bus companies in the country that are doing a great job, as indeed are Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus on many routes.

Deputy Joan Collins: A deal has now been agreed between Boris Johnson's minority Government and the negotiators on behalf of the EU. It is still unclear whether this deal will pass through the British Parliament. We should remember that Theresa May's deal with the EU was put to the British parliament three times and failed to get approval. It seems to be the case that the DUP are saying "No" to this deal and it is still not clear if Brexit will take place or what type of Brexit it will be.

What is clear is that the deal being pursued by Johnson, and the deal which his predecessor Theresa May failed to get done, is a hard Brexit. Nobody should be under any illusions that the Brexiteers are making compromises or softening their stance in any way. Brexit is a means by which they will initiate a race to the bottom on regulation, food standards, and workers' rights, and Europe will continue its neo-liberal agenda. Brexit is a thoroughly reactionary Tory agenda to turn Britain into a Singapore off the coast of Europe. It will be a disaster for working people.

The Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn are absolutely correct in opposing this reactionary Tory scheme. I just heard on the radio a half an hour ago that Deputy Howlin is going into a meeting in Europe to try to convince Jeremy Corbyn to accept the deal. The only possibility of avoiding no deal or a hard Brexit is a British general election with, it is to be hoped, the Labour Party being elected. The Labour Party has committed to negotiating a soft Brexit, with the UK staying within the Single Market and customs union. It is prepared to put that deal or the option to remain to a popular vote. To see the right-wing media, including the BBC, trying to pretend that they do not know the position of the Labour Party is farcical. It has clearly said that it would negotiate a soft Brexit and put it to a vote. For the people in this country, North and South, the position of the British Labour Party is the best option we can hope for.

Having made these points, I certainly do not regard the European Union as any sort of

workers paradise and I sincerely hope for a left Labour Government in Britain that can raise the banner over Europe for the many and not for the few and initiate a cross-EU movement to reverse neo-liberal policies.

Trillions of euro have been made available to bail out the banks and prop up the bond markets, money that has, by and large, ended up in property and other forms of speculation. What if these trillions had been invested across Europe in public housing, public health, public transport, other public services, an effective climate change plan, and full employment with a four-day week, a living wage, state pensions, and a welfare payment to keep people out of poverty? Would the Tánaiste agree that whatever comes out of this situation, whether is no deal or a hard or soft Brexit, we can move on then to discuss how to build a better and more democratic future for the people of Europe?

The Tánaiste: I thank the Deputy for the question. I completely agree with her in the last sentence of her statement about a more democratic and better European Union for everybody. In the context of this deal, I have been very careful not to endorse party political positions in the context of UK politics when it comes to Brexit. Our role has been to negotiate through our chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, with the British Government and with whoever the British Prime Minister happens to be at the time to get the best deal possible to protect Irish interests. That has been our focus and the outcome today reflects that.

The main change in the political declaration that the Deputy referred to is to the future EU-UK economic relationship, where the current UK Government has opted for a model based on a free trade agreement, FTA, which is not what Mr. Corbyn would like, but that is what Prime Minister Johnson has advocated. The political declaration provides for an ambitious FTA with zero tariffs and quotas between the EU and UK. It states that robust commitments on a level playing field should ensure open and fair competition. That is a must for the European Union. The precise nature of the commitments will be commensurate with the ambition of the future relationship and take into account the economic connectedness and geographic proximity of the UK. What that means in simple terms is that if we are going to have a close trading relationship facilitated by an FTA in the future, which has no tariffs and has no quotas applied, which I certainly hope will be the case, then the EU will insist on this being a level playing field as to how those goods are produced and the standard around that. These relate to some of the issues the Deputy has referred to. Otherwise, it is not fair trade as regards competition or equivalence, if one wants to call it that, which is the term often used.

There are two documents today that are going to be agreed between the British Government and the European Council. One is the withdrawal agreement, which is the legal text of a future international treaty, and which I referred to earlier when raised by Deputy Calleary. The second is a political declaration, which is like a political signal of intent for the kind of relationship that the UK is seeking from the EU in the future with some of the conditions around how that might be managed.

Deputy Joan Collins: The Tánaiste made a point about the EU-UK relations and a level playing field and provisions having been agreed. How is that going to be policed? Where is the detail and the text available on this, which I would like to see and read?

I have just seen an announcement a minute ago from Jeremy Corbyn who says that, from what we know, it seems that the Prime Minister has negotiated an even worse deal than Theresa May's, which was overwhelmingly rejected. He said that the proposals risk triggering a

race to the bottom on rights and protections, putting food safety at risk, cutting environmental standards and workers' rights, and opening up the NHS to takeover by US private companies, which he said is a sell-out deal. I agree with him. The best outcome for Ireland is a general election in Britain and a Labour Government negotiating a Norway-type agreement with the EU, and a referendum on that deal with an option to remain. We have to remember that this has been negotiated by a neo-liberal European Union with a Tory Government which has not got the interests of workers at heart. That is why I asked the Tánaiste the question about democracy and economic equality in the European Union.

The Tánaiste: The first thing I want to reject is the assertion just made by the Deputy that EU negotiators have not negotiated in the interests of the Irish people. They have taken an extraordinary amount of time to understand the complexities, vulnerabilities and exposure on this island to the potential downside of Brexit. This whole process has been held up to try to resolve those vulnerabilities in a way that everybody can sign up to, in a way I hope that all parties in Northern Ireland will support in time, and in a way all parties in this Chamber will be able to support as well as they study the detail of what has been agreed. I do not want to let that charge stand unchallenged. Michel Barnier and his team have shown an extraordinary willingness to understand our island in all of its complexity and history, and have factored that in to what is a very complex 800-page document that is being published today.

The second thing is that I would caution against getting involved in the British political debate between parties, which debate will undoubtedly not take place on the back of this agreement. As a Government, we have stayed out of that because our job here is to negotiate on the EU side in a way that can protect our peace process, our relationship with the United Kingdom into the future, and our place in the EU and its Single Market. I believe the deal today achieves those ends.

Ceisteanna ar Reachtaíocht a Gealladh - Questions on Promised Legislation

An Ceann Comhairle: For questions on promised legislation, 30 Deputies have indicated. There will be one question, then one minute and no more for an answer. I call Deputy Troy.

Deputy Robert Troy: I thank the Ceann Comhairle. I want to raise the issue of a documentary which was aired on RTÉ 1 on 5 and 6 October. I appreciate that the Tánaiste may not be aware of it as he has been extremely busy. It concerned the sad story of the late Eileen Kenny, who was first diagnosed with cancer in 2008. Following surgery and chemotherapy, she received the all-clear in 2009. A follow-up scan confirmed this in February 2010. Ms Kenny had a scan in 2012 but she was never told the result of that scan, which showed a clear recurrence of the disease. Ms Kenny had no scans between 2010 and 2012. She should have started treatment in February 2012 but it did not start for a further eight months. She settled a medical negligence claim and received an apology from the treating consultant oncologist but the family is bitterly disappointed with the response from the Irish Medical Council. Could the Tánaiste bring this matter to the attention of the Minister for Health and ensure he will make contact with the family and review the decision of the Irish Medical Council?

The Tánaiste: I am always very cautious about replying on the details of an individual case, particularly one as serious as the one the Deputy has just raised. I did not see the programme

and I am not familiar with the case but I will certainly commit to raising it with the Minister for Health. I will try to revert to the Deputy with a detailed answer.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: This morning, we had the revised text of the Irish protocol for the withdrawal agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom. We welcome it. We will parse it and examine it in detail to make sure it protects the Good Friday Agreement, our peace process and the all-Ireland economy, including the North–South economy.

One concern articulated in recent times was that of a unionist veto. We see from the revised text that it will be up to the British Government to notify the EU institutions in regard to the process of consent, yet it will be for the Assembly to practise that consent. The text states the consent of the Assembly is required for the provisions to continue. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that if 30 Members petition the Assembly expressing their concern about a matter that is to be voted on by the Assembly, the vote on the matter shall require cross-community support. This translates to a unionist veto. Can the Tánaiste assure this House that this provision will not pertain in relation to the issue of Assembly consent?

The Tánaiste: The straight answer to that question is “Yes”. The purpose of the consent mechanism, which Mr. Michel Barnier rightly described as a long-term democratic support mechanism - every four years, or potentially every eight years, depending on how people vote and the number who vote to extend arrangements, if they do that - is to ensure that Northern Ireland will not be kept in any arrangement against its will. The text is also framed in a way that ensures it will be a majority in the Assembly that will make the decision. The provisions are made very clearly in Article 19A of the agreement made today.

Deputy Joan Burton: This morning, Professor John FitzGerald said Irish households will spend between €25 billion and €75 billion over the next 30 years to retrofit cold homes. The vast bulk of resources will come from householders’ own pockets. At present, we do not have the skills to do what is required so households that want to be climate friendly and reduce their carbon footprint simply cannot do so. We have nobody to advise on how to go about it. We had a public meeting recently with Professor FitzGerald and he explained in detail how this is a massive problem. We do not have Dermot Bannons to advise people, unless, of course, they have €100,000 or more to invest in a whole-house refit. In the context of thousands of young people unemployed and sitting at home, when does the Government propose to take action to create apprenticeships, training opportunities and jobs in this most vital sector for those who want to respond and reduce their carbon footprint? The Government will not help them.

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that retrofitting will be a major part of the journey. We need to see a tenfold increase in the scale of retrofitting by 2030. Obviously, Professor FitzGerald is indicating we need to go beyond that. That will represent less than 1% of GDP, large and all as it is. Therefore, we will be able to accommodate what is proposed. The approach the Government is taking is to initiate in 2020 an aggregated model in the midlands, where I am confident, given other difficulties in the region, we will be able to attract the skills to deliver on scale. I have been working with the regional skills forum in the region to identify the training needs to support such an approach. Following the move in the midlands, we will extend the initiative nationwide. I agree with the Deputy on this. One of the key challenges for the Government has been the expansion of apprenticeships from the traditional 27 roles to 100. That is being rolled out. This is an area in which there will be scope for new traineeships and apprenticeships.

Deputy Gino Kenny: I wish to ask the Tánaiste about the proposed review of income thresholds to qualify for social housing. Thousands are being discriminated against because of their income. They are lucky enough to earn a certain amount but they are being discriminated against because of it as they are being told they cannot apply for social housing. Over the past five or six years, thousands have been knocked off the housing list because they earn an income above the threshold. The review has been going on for the past two years. When will it conclude?

The Tánaiste: I am well aware of that review. The debate on the appropriate threshold for gaining access to social housing is ongoing. It is obviously linked to the questions of affordability and income. I do not have a date but I know the review is under way. I am pretty sure it is close to being concluded. I will ask the Minister to revert to the Deputy directly.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The recent daily reports by the Irish Prison Service on the prison population, who number approximately 4,000, indicate very serious overcrowding, particularly in the women's prisons, including Dóchas and the one in Limerick. They may be at a capacity of 125%. Similarly, the men's prisons, such as Mountjoy, are very close to capacity. Unfortunately, where individuals have to be imprisoned, perhaps they could be held in humane and decent conditions. I did not notice any significant increase in the prisons Vote in the overall justice Vote in the recent budget. Is this a matter the Government is prepared to take action on?

The Tánaiste: I have a detailed note on female prison overcrowding. Maybe I could send it across to the Deputy rather than read it out. The Government is aware of the issue. We are somewhat fortunate in this country in that our percentage of the population in prison compares very well with that in most other countries. That is the way we want it but there are some overcrowding issues. We are responding to those. I will send the Deputy a detailed note on it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I want to raise an issue of unfairness and discrimination against men and women, but mainly men, over 70 who drive school buses and perhaps smaller minibuses transporting autistic children. The companies are contracted to the Department of Education and Skills. The drivers are barred from driving at 70 years of age. I agree there should be medical tests and eye tests twice per year but what is occurring is complete discrimination against people of 70. It is ageism at its worst. The drivers are well able to drive for private work. They can bring schoolchildren to matches or swimming classes but cannot bring them to and from school. The companies are finding it very difficult to get drivers. The drivers very often have considerable driving experience and are very careful and prudent. This matter should be examined by both the Department of Education and Skills in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport because what is occurring is discriminatory in the extreme.

The Tánaiste: I am aware that many bus operators are finding it difficult to get drivers. Obviously, the age limit for transporting children has been set for a reason, but I will raise----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Drivers should be able to transport them to swimming or games.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, please.

The Tánaiste: There are many sectors of society where, for various reasons, there are age limits for work. It is not discrimination.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Of course it is.

The Tánaiste: It is a child protection issue. Regardless of whether it is appropriate to review the matter, I will raise it with the Department of Education and Skills. We will revert to the Deputy.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The main objective of a carbon tax should be to get people to change their behaviour, particularly as regards home heating. Does the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment accept that a major problem for many people is that they cannot afford to avail of the grant schemes because of how they operate, with substantial amounts of money needed up front? The Minister has promised a pay-as-you-go-type scheme and to reform the warmer homes scheme, which is overly restrictive. Will he follow through on those promises and when can we expect developments in respect of both schemes?

Deputy Richard Bruton: I am glad to say that, in the 2020 budget, we doubled the provision for the warmer homes scheme compared with the 2019 provision. It is the scheme that provides 100% retrofitting free of charge-----

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I asked about the reform of that scheme.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----to people who are on the fuel scheme, including pensioners and those on social welfare payments long term who earn less than €100 per week in addition to their pensions and social welfare payments. We also assigned €20 million to the roll-out of a new aggregated model. This is the first test of a new approach. It will be piloted in the midlands and build on a core of social homes. It is intended to expand-----

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I am sorry, but I did not ask about that.

Deputy Richard Bruton: -----it to a wider range of homes that can participate under-----

Deputy Róisín Shortall: With all due respect, I asked about reform of the grant scheme, not the initiative in the midlands.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy.

Deputy Richard Bruton: They are grant schemes. They will be supported and will use a suite a measures. We are moving towards an aggregated model that will offer an easier way to pay. The current grant scheme, approximately 30% of which applies to those who are not eligible for the warmer homes scheme, will continue.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Minister ignored the question.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will move on to those Deputies whose questions have carried over from our last session.

Deputy Mary Butler: Yesterday, Family Carers Ireland protested outside the gates of Leinster House. I went outside to meet its members. They are on their knees. The word they used was “caged”. They feel caged in their own homes when it comes to home support hours and respite hours. They feel there is a postcode lottery for services. Rural isolation and desperation were also mentioned.

Home carers who apply for the carer’s allowance are means tested, which results in just one in five carers receiving the allowance. The income disregard in the budget remains at €332.50 per week for a single person. This has left carers upset and angry. While they welcome the

extra 3.5 hours that a carer can work, he or she may well be penalised, as the income disregard did not increase. Is this something that the Government can revisit? The opportunity to work an extra 3.5 hours is welcome, but not if it is a financial burden.

The Tánaiste: To be honest, that is a matter for the line Minister and the Minister for Finance. It is unlikely that the budget provisions will change.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: What about a Supplementary Estimate?

Deputy Eamon Scanlon: Yesterday, Deputy Micheál Martin raised the issue of cutbacks in disability payments. The Taoiseach denied it, but I do not know how he could do so when the rehabilitative training allowance of €31.80 for people with disabilities was wiped out. To add insult to injury, participants are now being asked to pay €20 per week. In my book, that is a €2,500 cut for the most vulnerable in society who have no voice whatsoever. It is wrong. Will the Tánaiste ask his colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, to rescind these cuts, which he has implemented in recent weeks?

The Tánaiste: There was a long debate on disability yesterday between the two leaders. The Taoiseach made it clear that we had seen dramatic increases in funding for the disability sector in recent years and into next year. However, there is an increasing demand, too. We will continue to prioritise this sector in terms of increased funding.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony: Tá mé buíoch go bhfuil an tAire, an Teachta McHugh, tagtha ar ais chun mo cheist a fhreagairt. The Minister’s timing is great. If I may, I will direct my question to him.

The Tánaiste: No problem.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony: In Dunmanway in west Cork, a little girl with severe learning difficulties was accepted to her local national school. That was great. Unfortunately, though, her backup services are not great. Before she started in the school, it had four special needs assistants, SNAs. There are still four even though she needs her own SNA. She must share them with the children who were already in the school. What is happening is difficult to see in this day and age. She has little support. This situation is also impinging on the other students in the school who need SNAs. I can send the Minister the details.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I would be anxious to get them. There has been a transformative change in the way we allocate SNA resources. We are trying to get away from individual assessments and placing pressure on parents to get individual reports completed. I will follow up this case directly with the Deputy.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony: I thank the Minister.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I have asked numerous times about the 50-bed unit at Sacred Heart Hospital, Roscommon, which was promised by the Tánaiste’s party before the last election and was to be in place by 2020. I now understand that it is listed in the capital programme with a date of 2022. I do not expect the Tánaiste to have answers for me today. He has been a very busy man doing a lot of good work on behalf of the country. Will he revert to the Minister for Health? If the Taoiseach is thinking of calling a snap general election, might the Minister have good news about bringing this project forward as quickly as possible?

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Re-announce it.

Deputy Pat Buckley: I am sure that Deputy Naughten would-----

The Tánaiste: The second element of that question is well above my pay grade.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Hold the election now.

The Tánaiste: I will ask the Minister for Health to respond to the Deputy. I am familiar with this project being on the capital programme, but I do not know the timings.

Deputy David Cullinane: I support the €90 million that has been made available for a transformative fund for institutes of technology. It is necessary if they are to be allowed to transform into technological universities. As the Minister for Education and Skills will know, there is an application from IT Carlow and WIT to become a technological university. It seems to be still bogged down in process and is far behind some of the other applications. We need to get a push on if we are to get it over the line. To reinforce the point for the Tánaiste and the Minister, the south east does not have a university. This would be the region's first university in the history of the State. According to the national planning framework, Waterford city's population will grow by 50% and the region's population will grow, yet many students are leaving the region to get third level qualifications. When will we see progress on this issue for people living in the south east?

Deputy Joe McHugh: The Deputy used the word "process". The process is important in this context, with a number of institutes of technology engaged in it. We are committed to this process in the south east. The Minister of State in the Department of Education and Skills, Deputy Halligan, is constantly highlighting it. Those engaged in the process are CIT and IT Tralee, GMIT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT, and more recently Limerick IT and Athlone IT. There is momentum at a general level, but the momentum in the south east needs to be maintained. That is why we made a €90 million provision. My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, is anxious to see many of the institutes of technology in question obtaining university status. That journey will continue for the south east.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: My question is for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and relates to the knowledge transfer scheme, the three initial years of which ran out during the past month or so.

In particular, will the Minister agree to extend the scheme for a further year? As he is aware, at the outset it was budgeted for up to 28,000 farmers to participate but only approximately 19,000 farmers have taken part in it. Given the initial envelope, there is enough funding to extend it. The scheme is of great benefit in terms of knowledge transfer but it also assists with the incomes of farmers who participate. Will the Minister give a commitment to examine the matter and to extend the scheme for a further year?

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I think I answered a parliamentary question to the Deputy yesterday on this matter. I am a big admirer of the knowledge transfer programme. As Deputy McConalogue rightly acknowledges, budget 2020 provides for the existing liabilities to be met in 2020. The question is whether we will have a knowledge transfer scheme subsequent to that. That is a matter that will be considered in the context of the budgetary parameters within which the next scheme will be set. It is my ambition that we should have a successor programme. It is important for the knowledge that is transferred but also for the social engagement between farmers in the various disciplines

that participate in the knowledge transfer scheme. In a profession that is practised mostly in isolation, that is as important as the knowledge that is transferred. It is my ambition, subject to budgetary constraints, to have a scheme to succeed the current one.

Deputy Bobby Aylward: It is with regret, disappointment and sadness that I must again raise the issue of Spinraza. Twenty-five children have been identified as suffering from spinal muscular atrophy, SMA. We fought a hard fight here and four months ago the HSE approved the provision of Spinraza for those children. When I went back to Kilkenny, I informed a family there that the drug was approved by the HSE following lobbying by this House and I saw the delight on the faces of the parents and grandparents. Four months on, not one thing has been done for the children. Twenty-five children are waiting for Spinraza to improve their quality of life, yet nothing has been done. What is wrong with the system? What is wrong with the HSE? The drug has been approved and was due to be handed out. That was the expectation of 25 families in this country but they have been left high and dry. They are waiting for an improvement in the quality of life of their children. Something must be done about this immediately.

Deputy Pat Buckley: Twenty-five families are waiting. One family in particular came from Youghal to the gates of Leinster House and they were in contact with me recently. The HSE approved Spinraza in June, the Minister welcomed that in July, but the families still have not got it. Some of the families have contacted me and asked me if I could get a final date for when this vital medicine will be provided. All people want is clarity on what date they will have some relief and solace for their families.

Deputy John McGuinness: Isaac Brennan was here with the Minister in the course of lobbying for the drug in question. A commitment was given that treatment would be started once the drug was approved. The drug has been approved but the treatment is being delayed. I understand there is a need for investment in personnel and infrastructure at Temple Street Hospital. Will the Tánaiste investigate the matter and ensure that young people like Isaac Brennan are given priority and that the commitment given by this House on Spinraza is honoured?

Deputy John Curran: This is a matter we raised in the House on Tuesday of this week. It was taken at the time by the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly. To be honest, the response is not what we expected. It was quite poor. The HSE stated:

Application for approval is based on clearly defined criteria and follow these guidelines: the number of individuals treated and their commencement on treatment is as per the clinical guideline. All patients that have been recommended clinically for treatment have been approved to date.

That does not answer the question. The parents are telling us that not one of the 25 children that we have identified and with whom we spoke in June of this year when the drug was approved has received the treatment to date. The answer is appalling. It is a disgrace. We have simply asked if the Minister could indicate when the children are likely to be treated. There is a suspicion that the budget for the drug does not exist this year and the Department is trying to delay it until next year's allocation. Is that the case?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is shameful that we find ourselves having to rise on this issue once again here in this Chamber. After a concerted effort by a collective of different voices across this House, we reached a point where approval was announced, yet here today, several months later, we are asking once again in the context of nothing having been done in terms of

these families and those children's access to this very important drug. I urge the Tánaiste to raise this matter with the Minister and to come back to each of the Deputies to advise us exactly when this programme will commence.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As Deputy Curran outlined, the issue was raised on Tuesday on Leaders' Questions. I did seek a response from the HSE on Tuesday to provide an update to the Deputies. On Tuesday the response I gave was to Deputy Gino Kenny and Deputy Curran. I accept the response is not satisfactory and I have asked for further clarity from the HSE, for it to give an exact date for when the drug will be available, and to be more specific for the parents of the patients involved. That was yesterday. As soon as I have a response I will circulate it to the Deputies.

Deputy Peter Burke: I seek an update from the Minister for Education and Skills on the progression of the Holy Family primary school in Mullingar on behalf of the principal, staff, parents and children. I urge the Minister to continue working with the Department and all contracted parties to ensure that the school is delivered by the end of the year.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I thank Deputy Burke for the continued pressure he is putting on in raising this question again. I know it reflects the desire of the community to see a conclusion. There have been so many false expectations on the date and I do not wish to add to the frustration and anxiety. I have received feedback from my officials. We are very lucky to have a great clerk of works and a good team involved who are very vigilant. I will say that we need to have the project completed by the end of the year. It has gone on for too long and we must finish it by the end of the year.

Deputy Tom Neville: I welcome the increase in funding for the arts, with particular reference to funding for the first time for amateur dramatic groups, which have taken a particular foothold in rural Ireland. They involve the amalgamation of people in the community involved in amateur dramatic groups. Will the Minister outline when the funding will come on stream and what the application process will be?

An Ceann Comhairle: I wonder if any of us here could get a grant.

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The overall budget increase for the culture side of my Department was 2% this year, which is €4 million, bringing the total funding for the area to €193 million. Out of that, for the first time in more than a decade, €250,000 will be allocated to amateur dramatic and musical societies throughout the country. That is very much to be welcomed. We hope to have a mechanism set up, probably in conjunction with the Drama League of Ireland in the coming weeks. I am sure there will be many groups of players in Limerick that will be very interested in this initiative.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I wish to ask about the cost of insurance working group in light of the possibility that climbing centres throughout the country will be forced to close because of the exit of insurance providers. I refer to places such as the Dublin climbing centre in Tallaght, which provides facilities for large numbers of young people and older people. It is very important in terms of physical and mental health. Does the Tánaiste agree that there is another failure here of a for-profit insurance market, which incidentally was very profitable for the insurance companies, but where they want they can simply walk away? It points to the need for a State insurance company to provide insurance on a not-for-profit basis.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Page 33 of the programme for Government refers to tackling

insurance costs. The reason I raise this issue is because there is probably not a Deputy in the Chamber who has not been lobbied by business groups, community groups and individuals whose premiums have skyrocketed. We do not believe the Government has made any particular intervention to address the situation. I urge the Government to make an urgent intervention.

The Suas climbing centre in Gillogue on the outskirts of Limerick is at risk of closure, resulting in job losses for its workers and the loss of an excellent facility that is used by many people in Limerick, Clare and Tipperary. What specific measures will be introduced to address the insurance problems? The Government has done nothing so far.

Deputy Carol Nolan: The leisure industry not being able to get insurance is a significant one that must be urgently addressed. I have been contacted by a number of businesses. I ask for an update on the actions taken to date. I urge the Minister to hurry up with this matter because jobs across the State are at risk unless the matter is resolved.

Deputy John Brady: Jobs are at risk due to the inaction by the Government in tackling the hikes in insurance costs right across the State. Jobs have been lost across the State. Businesses close down weekly. I am working with a number of businesses which provide for outdoor pursuits and activities. They are at risk. One business recently told me that its insurance has gone from €9,000 to more than €60,000 in a couple of years. We cannot afford to wait and to hope that something takes place in the future. I refer to the Judicial Council Bill. That seems to be the only hope that the Government is giving to these people but it is built on many ifs and buts. We need action otherwise thousands of jobs will be lost across the State.

Deputy John Lahart: I know the Tánaiste has other matters on his mind today but this needs to be reinforced. Deputies have mentioned motor, business and commercial residential insurance. This is beginning to bite in community facilities. The Minister, my constituency colleague, Deputy Zappone, will also know that Fettercairn Youth Horse Project has seen its public liability insurance rise to €46,000. This valuable community project has almost exhausted its cash reserves to deal with the matter. Killinarden Community Centre has seen its insurance cost rise from €6,000 to €26,000 in the space of six or seven years. The Tánaiste may nod at this but they are threatened with closure. These are the beating heart of local communities. It was the first item that my colleague, Deputy Michael McGrath, raised in this Dáil during Private Members' business, three years ago. Nothing has happened to effect any real change.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Michael D'Arcy): The single biggest issue with insurance is the level of awards. We have all seen people with low damages with a low impact on them receive substantial awards. Insurance companies in a number of sectors have left those areas because of the levels of awards. We have passed the Judicial Council Bill. The Judiciary and Chief Justice have been very helpful. The establishment of the personal injury committee within the judicial council will happen in parallel with the establishment of the judicial council. We expect the announcement within days of the seven judges who will participate in the review of the guidelines. The Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach has publicly asked insurance companies if premiums will come down if awards come down and they have all said that they will. The companies have said the same thing to me in private. I have been to London to meet the London-based underwriters about insurance here in Ireland. They also say that if awards come down, so will premiums, and the risk appetite will be improved. The work is being done. Those who say nothing is being done are wrong. The objective is to get the five primary areas of personal injury reduced by the end of the year.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: On 19 January, the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, spoke here. I congratulate her on being a member of the Tánaiste’s Brexit team. On that day, she spoke on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, about wastewater treatment plants in north Cork. Irish Water gave her a commitment that Glanworth wastewater treatment plant would be incorporated into a building tender process but in the last week or two, it seems to have fallen out of this bundle. The local authority, Cork County Council, is interested in this village. It has committed to build 14 local authority houses and a local builder has agreed to do that. He cannot get the go-ahead until the treatment plant is upgraded. I ask the Tánaiste to intercede.

The Tánaiste: I know Glanworth very well but I am not familiar with where Irish Water is in delivering that wastewater treatment plant. I can pass it on to the Minister and ask him to come back to the Deputy.

An Ceann Comhairle: That concludes Questions on Promised Legislation. Six Deputies have not been reached.

Housing (Homeless Housing Assistance Payment) (Amendment) Bill 2019: First Stage

Deputy Frank O’Rourke: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 to introduce a new statutory obligation on local authorities to assist eligible households directly after a notice of tenancy termination has been issued.

I acknowledge the work done on this Bill by my colleague, Deputy Darragh O’Brien, the staff in the Library and Research Service and my own staff in my office. The focus of this Bill is to assist people who have received termination or eviction notices to find alternative property in the private rental market until they are allocated a social house, avoiding them going homeless or into emergency accommodation. This Bill proposes that if a family gets an eviction notice which has been validated by the local authority, whether in Kildare or another local authority, the family will then be able to access the homeless housing assistance payment, HAP, which comprises two months’ rent and a month’s deposit. There is no cost to the State in this Bill. There is a saving to the State because if a family eventually goes homeless because they cannot find alternative accommodation, when they then go into hotel accommodation, it can cost the State between €60,000 and €70,000 per annum.

The way the homeless HAP and placefinder payment currently operates is that when the family is given their termination or eviction notice, validated by the local authority, they have to seek alternative accommodation privately. When they go out into the marketplace, they are competing with others who can access this money more quickly if they are not depending on the State to support them with rental supports. At present, HAP through the traditional method and application takes between seven and nine weeks to resolve. Some 80% of landlords are accidental landlords. The banks will not wait for seven to nine weeks for that payment to come through. These people facing homelessness with valid eviction and termination notices are being put under pressure and are at a severe disadvantage. The current timeframe for when the homeless HAP payment kicks in is in the last month before termination. People can only access

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that funding with four weeks before their eviction date, which gives them very little time to be competitive in the current climate and to find a property, which we know are very scarce.

This Bill proposes changes when a person's eviction notice is being validated by the local authority, the independent body which does so. Normally, an eviction notice has to be for a month for every year that the family has been in the home. Traditionally, the eviction notice is for approximately three to five months. When the notice is being validated, that would automatically allow a person to access to the homeless HAP and placefinder payment from that time. That gives people a longer time to access private rental accommodation and gives them a fair advantage in the rental market when competing with others.

It is important that the Government accepts this Bill. It may not be perfect and it could be tweaked as it goes through the legislative process. It gives a family a longer time to avail of private rental accommodation in the current market and to be able to access the placefinder and homeless HAP from the date that the eviction notice is deemed valid. We need to focus on that to assist people. In the month in which people can currently get that payment, they are not able to find accommodation, especially in Kildare, and I know from talking to colleagues in Dublin, Wicklow and Meath that it is a problem. These families are put into shelters or hotels at enormous cost to the State.

I hope the Bill gets cross-party support when it progresses through the House. It is about assisting the most vulnerable and helping the families who are most at need to be able to access private rental accommodation and a home so that they are not homeless, and to give them every possible opportunity to provide for their family while waiting for that allocation of a social house from the local authority.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): No.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Frank O'Rourke: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Mandatory Beef Price Transparency Bill 2019: First Stage

Deputy Brian Stanley: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the establishment of a source of data on the prices being received for beef products throughout the supply chain and to provide for related matters.

I welcome the opportunity to introduce this Bill.

We have had a difficult situation with the beef sector and we are all well aware of the crisis that exists there, but there has been an agreement with seven farming organisations and processors. There is still work to be done there and there are issues with the legal injunctions served against some farmers and representatives of their organisations that all need to be lifted. Much more needs to be done. One particular issue that remains outstanding in the sector is the complete lack of trust between farmers and processors. I met farmers in Rathdowney a number of times, I met farmers who had been at the gates of other factories and I met people who had been protesting over those weeks. The one issue that kept coming up was the lack of trust between them and the factories and factory-owners. Beef farmers have little information on which to determine whether or not they are being given a fair price for a carcass. The way things are set plays right into the hands of the processors, many of whom are taking advantage of the situation where there is little transparency around pricing. We are therefore calling for the right to beef price transparency to be enshrined throughout the supply chain. The Bill I am introducing will go some way towards providing that much needed transparency.

This Sinn Féin Bill would put a mandatory obligation on all processors to provide price transparency through a central system on a daily basis. This would mean there would be a record farmers could easily tap into in order to see exactly what price is being paid by factories and processors that would be categorised by grade. For example, the beef market observatory would compile daily information on the price of cattle per kilogram, the live weight, the dress weight, the quality grade and the breed etc., and any premiums or discounts associated with the transaction. Without this basic information, farmers are put at a serious disadvantage each time they engage with the factories. This leaves the door open for processors, which are making huge profits while farmers are making a loss, to exploit the situation further. The type of legislation we are introducing works because we know it works in the United States, where the beef sector is regulated through legislation. We have examples of where this works elsewhere. We do not want to hear this cannot be done or it is risky. All this legislation does is open everything up to broad daylight so farmers and people working in the sector can see what is happening.

Having said that, we understand the beef price index and the observatory are not a silver bullet. We are not naïve enough to think that but we believe it would go some way towards ending any suggestion of manipulation of prices by processors. That is important. We see the huge margins and profits some of the factories are turning out and on the other hand we see farmers producing and selling at a loss. There are some issues, such as base price, that we in this House cannot get directly involved in, but there are other issues, such as transparency, where we can improve the situation.

This is a sector that has been unstable for years with huge uncertainty for farmers in terms of price. They do not know if they will be able to get a price to cover their costs. There is also huge uncertainty for workers in factories. A lot of them are being exploited by factory owners. Workers who were skilled boners were cleared out of a lot of factories. I have seen people who were on €14 an hour and €15 an hour being let go and other people were brought in on the minimum wage to take their places. The situation is unstable. It has been unstable for workers because they have been let off recently due to the blockades. That is no fault of the farmers or the workers. It is the fault of the factory owners and the processors.

We need to bring stability, certainty and transparency to this sector. We can start doing this by underpinning the rules and the agreement that has recently been made with legislation. Any step forward is welcome. We acknowledge there has been progress but we need transparency now. I call on all parties in the House to support this legislation. We are open to amendments.

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We are not saying this Bill is perfect. We are saying it is the place to start. When I raised this with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, twice in the past, he indicated to me he may be open to considering this Bill. I am saying to the Government Deputies on the far side of the House and to the Ministers present to bring the message back to the Minister, Deputy Creed, that we need to move on with this and create transparency and certainty for farmers and for workers in factories.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): No.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 29A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputies Anne Rabbitte and Michael Fitzmaurice - to discuss a date to reconvene the new beef task force meeting; (2) Deputy Seán Haughey - the need to provide emergency accommodation for Scoil Chaitríona, Coolock, Dublin 5, following a devastating fire on Wednesday 16 October 2019; (3) Deputy Mary Butler - to discuss the Mental Health Commission report into conditions at the department of psychiatry, University Hospital Waterford; (4) Deputy Joan Burton - to discuss the delay with a permanent school on the Phoenix Park racecourse site for Edmund Rice College; (5) Deputy John McGuinness - the need for the Minister for Health to update the House on the provision of the approved medication Spinraza to children with spinal muscular atrophy; (6) Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin - to discuss the status of a new school building at St. Paul's secondary school in Monasterevin; (7) Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Joan Collins - to discuss the impact the moratorium on Garda overtime has in providing cover over the Hallowe'en period; (8) Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin - to discuss resource allocation to the regional drug and alcohol task force to deliver on the national drugs strategy; (9) Deputy Bríd Smith - to discuss service level agreements with the Go-Ahead Ireland bus company; (10) Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett - to address the matter of child homelessness; and (11) Deputy Martin Heydon - to discuss the progression of a second bridge in Newbridge, County Kildare through the urban regeneration development fund.

The matters raised by Deputies Anne Rabbitte and Michael Fitzmaurice, Seán Haughey, Martin Heydon and Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Joan Collins have been selected for discussion.

Forestry Sector: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Eamon Ryan on Tuesday, 1 October 2019:

That Dáil Éireann:

acknowledges:

— that Ireland has the second lowest forest cover in the European Union (EU) at 11 per cent, compared to a European average of 30 per cent and that the majority of the forests are monocultures;

— that the State forestry policy has been predominantly based on a rotation, clear-fell and replant cycle using monoculture;

— that the extent of hedgerows declined massively during the 20th century but has since recovered slightly;

— that having started from a forest cover of 1 per cent in 1923, the State and the forestry industry has grown substantially, and afforestation has brought major positive benefits including the development of a forestry sector and forest products industry that currently employs 12,000 people;

— that aspects of the current afforestation model, in particular the emphasis on largescale monoculture have, in some cases, had negative impacts on local communities, biodiversity, water quality and landscapes;

— that in the light of the need to address the challenges of the climate and biodiversity emergency, now is the time to move to the next stage in Irish forestry;

— that it is desirable for the forestry system to provide a range of services in a way which strengthens local communities, provides employment for a new generation of foresters and access for the public to more varied woodlands, which are rich in biodiversity;

— that there is a potential for higher value, higher quality wood products from Irish forests, including a potential for long-lasting products as low carbon inputs for construction and other sectors and as stores of sequestered carbon for the lifetime of the buildings and products;

— the declining populations in certain rural areas, the high average age of farmers, and the developing crisis in Irish agriculture; and

— the inappropriate nature of current land use in many parts of Ireland, including the inability to make a living from current farming models and the difficulty for young people who might want to work on the land to get access to land which they do not directly inherit;

notes:

— the impacts of biodiversity loss and the loss of ecosystem services, and the consequent economic losses and risks we face globally and in Ireland;

— the gravity of the global biodiversity crisis, including the loss of species, the loss of important populations of species and the undermining of ecosystem services;

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— the vital role of land use in the hydrological cycle, managing flooding and drought, maintaining water quality and dealing with pollution and the role which changed land use practices must play in meeting the objectives of improving water quality in line with the EU Water Framework Directive;

— the vulnerability of even-aged monoculture plantations, e.g. to disease, fire and windthrow, especially given the increasing dangers of climate change;

— the role which changed land use practices must play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in sequestering and storing carbon, and in providing resilience to the effects of climate change;

— the essential role that afforestation, land use and soil carbon management must play in Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) 2021-2030, which is to be drafted by the end of this year; and

— the commitments Ireland has entered into, in the context of the Natura 2000 network and the EU Birds and Habitats Directives to protect habitats and species, and the fact that Ireland is failing to meet those commitments and that biodiversity loss is continuing, as demonstrated in Ireland's reports under Article 16 of the EU Birds and Habitats Directive;

agrees:

— that Ireland was once covered by great forests and that our mild climate and the influence of the Gulf Stream make for one of the best habitats for trees in the world;

— that the Irish population wants to spend more time in nature and the public health benefits of enabling them to do so;

— the economic value of ecotourism and associated economic activities; and

— that the success of rewilding initiatives in other countries, and the plans for a recognised wilderness area in the Nephin range, as well as Coillte's recent recognition of the amenity value of forestry in the Dublin and Wicklow mountains; and

calls on the Government to:

— make a fundamental change in forestry policy away from a narrow vision of 30 year cycle to a permanent woodland approach that would provide greater and more diverse social, environmental and economic benefits to society as a whole;

— move away from large-scale monoculture of fast-growing species such as Sitka spruce on 'marginal land' towards mixed, diverse forestry, with a wider range of forest types (short rotation, longer rotations, agroforestry, semi-wild) delivering a range of services and benefits and forest products;

— rebalance the premiums and payments made for planting and thinning to support this strategic change in Irish forestry;

— start the restoration of large areas of natural woodlands, formerly the dominant terrestrial ecosystems of Ireland, including the productive use of much of them

through a system of continuous cover and close to nature forestry;

— begin a national programme of transformation of existing young, even-aged monoculture forests to continuous cover forestry;

— implement the recommendation of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate Action, accepted and endorsed by the Dáil on 9th May, for a review of land use to inform a national land use plan;

— establish a system of local forestry plans, developed in an open participative process including all parts of civil society, in each county, informed by the national land-use plan, which would form the framework for Government support for small-scale afforestation in the county;

— use Strategic Environmental Assessment to develop these local forestry plans, to ensure the meeting of objectives, including carbon sequestration, water quality and hydrology, biodiversity protection and restoration, landscape and public amenity;

— provide for these local forestry plans to include financial support for small-scale afforestation with mixed woodland with a high proportion of native species in all parts of the country;

— provide budgetary support to enable every registered farm holding to plant a hectare of natural woodland on their land within the next five years, on agreed sites within the farm which minimise the effect on farm operations and maximise the biodiversity and ecosystem service benefits;

— develop opportunities for community ownership of and community investment in afforestation within national forestry policy and local forestry plans;

— reorient national supports and incentives for afforestation in line with the local forestry plans in the direction of forestry closer to nature;

— provide better support for the restoration and planting of new hedgerows to provide biodiversity corridors, carbon shelters and nutrients in our agricultural system;

— engage local authorities and local communities in a radical expansion of urban tree planting and neighbourhood and community forests and for urban trees and forests;

— resource the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD) and forestry non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at a level appropriate for them to carry out all of their functions and develop new areas of responsibility;

— review the objectives and legal structure of Coillte to establish a new mandate for the company which delivers multiple benefits from forestry, including environmental and community objectives as well as the production of high-quality timber;

— establish better educational infrastructure and funding to support apprentice-

ship programmes in forest management in line with the new forestry policy;

— increase investment in higher and further education and training as well as for the modernisation of equipment available for craft apprenticeship provision to conduct such a transformation of existing strands; and

— promote the use of high-quality wood materials in new building construction, including by amending building regulations, and to encourage Irish enterprise agencies to further support the development of local enterprises which develop a wide range of products to use natural wood material.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“notes:

— the extent of forestry development achieved over the last number of decades, through the combination of State funding and participation of the private landowners in the State’s afforestation programmes;

— the findings from the third cycle of the National Forest Inventory, that the national forest estate is still expanding and has now reached 11 per cent of the total land area, with a wide variety of forest types present and that share of broadleaf species in the national forest estate is 29 per cent;

— the multi-functional benefits of forestry including environmental, social and economic;

— the contribution which the sector makes to the rural economy through the provision of 12,000 jobs;

— the Government’s commitment to tackling climate change as contained in the ‘Climate Action Plan 2019 To Tackle Climate Breakdown’, and the ambitious targets set for the agriculture, forestry and land use sector therein, including an afforestation target of 8,000 hectares per annum;

— that meeting the afforestation target is challenging and that it will require a collaborative response from Government, private land owners, public bodies and local communities;

— that the enhancements following the 2018 Midterm Review (MTR) of the Government’s Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020, including increased grant and premium rates, have directly led to an increase in the proportion of broadleaf trees planted in Ireland, including a 25 per cent increase last year compared to the previous year;

— that significant increases for planting of agro-forestry were introduced in the MTR with premium rates trebled;

— that initiatives by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine include the introduction, in January 2019, of three new support measures to further support biodiversity in Irish forests, including a scheme to support Continuous Cover Forestry, and changes to the Woodland Improvement Scheme to introduce grant aid to carry out a

second thinning intervention for broadleaf forests;

— that afforestation applications are subject to detailed scrutiny regarding environmental suitability, including site inspections, statutory referrals, public consultation, and the application of procedures around Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment;

— that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine operates a range of afforestation-related protocols in the context of the Natura 2000 network and the European Union Birds and Habitats Directive to protect habitats and species; and

— that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine provides support, through schemes such as the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) and under the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020, to landowners to undertake actions and measures which support and enhance biodiversity; and

recognises:

— the role that hedgerows play in nature-based solutions to both mitigate climate change (carbon sequestration and storage) and help in the creation of landscape resilience in the face of climate change, and notes that 6,758 kilometres of new hedgerows have been established since the introduction of agri-environmental schemes in 1994;

— the funding provided under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine NeighbourWood Scheme to local authorities and other landowners, both public and private, to create ‘close-to-home’ woodland amenities in partnership with communities, for local people to use and enjoy;

— the growing interest in planting native woodlands under the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 is increasing steadily year on year with 374 hectares of native woodlands planted in 2018, an increase of 38 per cent compared to 2017, and this upward trend has continued into 2019 which is ahead of the 2018 planting figure year to date;

— that under the Woodland Improvement Scheme which promotes active management of broadleaf forest, almost 680 hectares of woodlands received support under this scheme this year, this represents a 76 per cent increase in activity when compared to the same time in 2018;

— that support for Continuous Cover Forestry was introduced for the first time in the MTR of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020, where funding was allocated for 30 projects up until the end of 2020;

— the establishment by Coillte of a specific entity ‘Coillte Nature’ within the company to focus on the environment and recreational forests, with Coillte Nature to target the delivery of new woodlands facilitating species diversity, biodiversity and carbon sequestration as part of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020;

— that Coillte Nature will be undertaking large discrete projects with a separate noncommercial focus, with the intention of increasing the national forest estate but with a strong emphasis on carbon sequestration, species diversification, biodiversity and the development of outdoor recreation and tourism amenities;

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— that the National Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD) proposes to track the implementation of the recommendations in ‘Forests, products and people – Ireland’s forest policy – a renewed vision’ and to monitor and report on progress in implementing the stated strategic actions and to engage and influence stakeholders in relation to policy changes and developments focusing on afforestation and the promotion of forestry; and

— that the continued support of members of the House will be required for the ongoing development of forestry in order to maximise the range of benefits for the economy, society and the environment.”

- (Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding close to nature forestry. On Tuesday, 1 October 2019, on the question that the amendment to the motion be agreed to, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 70(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 37; Níl, 72; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Stاون</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>D’Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	

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<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	

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	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Peter Burke; Níl, Deputies Catherine Martin and Catherine Murphy.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I move amendment No. 2:

To insert the following after “develop new areas of responsibility;”:

“— provide for planning permission for all forestry developments over five hectares;”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 19; Níl, 82; Staon, 7.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staan</i>
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	

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	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	
	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	

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	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell; Níl, Deputies Catherine Martin and Catherine Murphy.

Amendment declared lost.

Question put: "That the motion be agreed to."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 70; Níl, 38; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	

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<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	
<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>		
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>		
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>		
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>		
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>		
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>		
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>		
<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>		
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>		
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>		
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>		
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>		
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>		

<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>		
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>		
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>		
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Catherine Martin and Catherine Murphy; Níl, Deputies Seán Kyne and Peter Burke.

Question declared carried.

Living Wage: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Quinlivan on Tuesday, 15 October 2019:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

— according to the Central Statistics Office, 137,200 workers reported earning the national minimum wage or less in the fourth quarter of 2018;

— female workers are currently more likely than male workers to earn the national minimum wage or less;

— half of all those earning the national minimum wage or less in the fourth quarter of 2018 were aged 24 years or under;

— according to Social Justice Ireland, 110,000 workers are living at risk of poverty across the State;

— the current living wage stands at €12.30 per hour, as calculated by the Living Wage Technical Group;

— according to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the ‘no-deal Brexit caveat’ contained in the Low Pay Commission’s report makes absolutely no reference whatsoever to a possible deferral of the recommended increase in the national minimum wage in the event of a no-deal Brexit;

— there are legal protections currently in place for those companies who can show they cannot afford to pay the national minimum wage; and

— there is no legal obligation on businesses who can afford to pay their workers a living wage to do so;

condemns the Government's recent decision not to increase the national minimum wage;

agrees that:

— the decision by the Government not to increase the national minimum wage or introduce a living wage will place further financial pressure on thousands of workers and families who need a break;

— work must pay now and not just at some undetermined time in the future;

— proper wages and the eradication of precarious working practices should be the essential foundations of economic growth and productivity; and

— the implementation of a living wage would play a critical role in ending in-work poverty and reducing the financial pressure on many households; and

calls on the Government to:

— recognise the huge contribution low paid workers make to the Irish economy;

— immediately reverse its decision not to increase the national minimum wage; and

— introduce a living wage of €12.30 per hour in 2020, with appropriate legal protections for those small- or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who can show they cannot afford to pay the living wage.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 4:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann:” and substitute the following:

“recognises that:

—for 2020, the Low Pay Commission made its recommendations on the basis of current economic data and the assumption of an orderly transition for the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, and recommended that the rate of the national minimum wage for an experienced adult worker be fixed at a rate of €10.10 per hour;

—the Commission made its recommendations on the basis of an orderly Brexit and acknowledged that the Government may wish to review this recommendation in the event of a disorderly Brexit; and

—the Government has accepted the recommendations of the Commission in their entirety, however, given that the terms of Brexit are not yet finalised, the Government has decided that a decision on the date of implementation will be made when the outcome of the Brexit negotiations becomes clearer.”

- (Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to the motion regarding the living wage. On Tuesday, 15 October 2019, on the question that the amendment to the motion be agreed to, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 70(2),

that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 36; Níl, 67; Staon, 1.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Breen, Pat.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	

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	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Peter Burke; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Robert Troy: I move amendment No. 2:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann:” and substitute the following:

“notes:

— the valuable contribution that workers make to Irish society;

— the commencement of the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 in March 2019, which restricts the use of zero-hour contracts;

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— micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) currently employ over one million people in Ireland, according to the Central Statistics Office;

— that the cost of employer liability insurance and public liability insurance is a direct threat to the competitiveness and sustainability of many businesses throughout the country, including SMEs;

— the failure of the Government to tackle the high cost of living in Ireland, in particular, in the areas of housing and childcare; and

— that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average for childcare costs represents about 12.6 per cent of net family income, whereas in Ireland the figure stands at about 27.4 per cent; and

calls on the Government:

— as the largest employer in the country, to act as a role model in terms of implementing the living wage in the public sector, which will set a broader standard without placing an undue legislative burden upon employers struggling to keep down costs;

— to refer the question of the living wage to the Low Pay Commission;

— to tackle the high cost of living in Ireland, including housing, childcare, insurance and public transport;

— to accelerate the roll-out of the affordable purchase scheme for housing;

— to establish a national affordable rent scheme; and

— to tackle the high cost of insurance which is crippling businesses and progress the Civil Liability and Courts (Amendment) Bill 2019.”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 30; Níl, 73; Staon, 1.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Stاون</i>
<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Brassil, John.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Curran, John.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	

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<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	

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	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies John Curran and John Lahart; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell.

Amendment declared lost.

2 o'clock

Deputy Willie Penrose: I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “not to increase the national minimum wage; and” and substitute the following:

“— instruct the Low Pay Commission to ensure that the national minimum wage becomes a genuine living wage from 2020 onwards, with appropriate legal protections for small- or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who can show they cannot afford to pay the living wage.”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 16; Níl, 85; Staon, 1.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	

Dáil Éireann

<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
	<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	
	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	
	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	

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	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Ryan and Jan O'Sullivan; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I move amendment No. 3:

Dáil Éireann

To delete all words after “not to increase the national minimum wage; and” and substitute the following:

“—introduce a minimum wage of €12.30 per hour in 2020 as a step towards €15 per hour.”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 18; Níl, 81; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Stاون</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	
<i>O’Sullivan, Jan.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
	<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	
	<i>Deasy, John.</i>	
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	
	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	

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	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	

	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mick Barry and Ruth Coppinger; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Denise Mitchell.

Amendment declared lost.

Motion agreed to.

Road Traffic (Amendment) (Use of Electric Scooters) Bill 2019: Second Stage (Resumed)

The following motion was moved by Deputy Marc MacSharry on Thursday, 16 October 2019:

That the Bill be now read a Second Time.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “That” and substitute the following:

“Dáil Éireann resolves that the Road Traffic (Amendment) (Use of Electric Scooters) Bill 2019 be deemed to be read a second time this day three months, to allow for the consideration of the outcome of the Public Consultation on Powered Personal Transporters, as commissioned by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to be finalised and to allow for that outcome to be then taken into account in the consideration of the Bill.”

- (Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport)

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 62; Níl, 32; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Brassil, John.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Casey, Pat.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Chambers, Lisa.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	

<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Daly, Jim.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>Deasy, John.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
<i>English, Damien.</i>	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>O'Sullivan, Maureen.</i>	
<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Scanlon, Eamon.</i>	
<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>		
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>		
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>		
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>		
<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>		
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>		
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>		
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>		
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>		
<i>Noonan, Michael.</i>		
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>		
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>		
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>		
<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		

<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>		
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>		
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>		
<i>Stanton, David.</i>		
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>		
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Peter Burke; Níl, Deputies John Curran and John Lahart.

Amendment declared carried.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The motion, as amended, is agreed and the Bill will, therefore, be read a second time in three months.

Topical Issue Debate

Beef Industry

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: Deputy Fitzmaurice and I want to discuss a date to reconvene the new beef task force. We are raising this issue today because the inaugural meeting of the task force, due last Monday, did not take place. My understanding is that when representatives of the Beef Plan Movement, the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association, INHFA, and Meat Industry Ireland, MII, turned up for the meeting, one of them got in the door but the others did not. The meeting did not take place due to unforeseen circumstances outside Agriculture House. Those unforeseen circumstances have left the beef task force parked. We need to have a date for the start of this process.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: We need clarification on when the beef task force will meet. We all acknowledge that it is not good when people do not get to the table. There is a beef crisis. We cannot just bury our heads in the sand. We know that injunctions have been taken against some people. People were told that if the protests were stood down, the injunctions would be lifted. Can the Minister of State use his influence to help address that situation? In addition, the most important factor is that the farmers' representatives get back to the table and get the task force up and running. The beef industry is on its knees. We need solutions. We do not need to hear that this, that or the other set us back. We need to make sure that the chairman of the task force takes it by the scruff of the neck and moves it forward. If we listen to the farm leaders, we will not be able to move forward while there are injunctions hanging over people.

That needs to be resolved.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputies did not use up all their time. I know Deputy Eugene Murphy has an interest in this matter but, unfortunately, due to Standing Orders only those who tabled the matter can speak.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: He can talk.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: No, I cannot speak but that is all right.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Andrew Doyle): As the Deputies will be aware, the inaugural meeting of beef task force scheduled for Monday, 14 October had to be suspended following events outside Agriculture House. Members of the task force were prevented from attending the meeting and were subject to physical violence and intimidation. Members of staff of my Department were also subjected to abusive and threatening behaviour. While I fully support the rights of individuals to engage in peaceful protest, I hope Deputies will agree that there are no excuses for the behaviour which occurred on Monday. It was completely unacceptable. I thank departmental staff who managed the situation in a calm and professional manner.

As I have previously stated, it is in the interests of everyone involved in the beef industry that the work of the task force goes ahead. The independent chair and my Department officials are continuing to consult stakeholders with a view to progressing key elements of the agreement. The task force's remit is to monitor the implementation of the actions arising from the agreement reached on 15 September and offers the most viable platform for strategic engagement with key stakeholders. The agreement involves a number of interventions which will provide immediate benefit for beef producers, as well as a range of strategic measures which seek to address structural imbalances in the sector. Beef producers will benefit from an immediate increase in a range of bonuses. This will increase the level of bonus being paid on certain animals, as well as significantly increasing the number of animals which will be eligible for a bonus. The cumulative effect is that more than 70% of all steer and heifers slaughtered will now be eligible for a bonus on top of the basic price.

A number of actions in the area of market transparency, beef promotion and strengthening the position of the farmer in the supply chain are included in the agreement. These measures set a course towards greater clarity for all stakeholders. The Department is also proactively engaging with several potential beef producer organisations which have the potential to strengthen the bargaining power of beef farmers in the supply chain. Two beef producer organisations have been formally recognised in recent weeks.

We established the beef market task force to provide the leadership to develop a sustainable pathway for the future of the beef sector in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability. The intention was that the task force should provide a robust implementation structure for commitments entered into in the agreement, with timelines and stakeholder engagement. I urge all parties to make every effort to ensure that this important work can commence.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I thank the Minister of State for his reply but, regrettably, he has not provided what I sought, namely, a date. We all acknowledge the pressure on family farms. The formation of the new beef task force was one of the nuggets of the agreement secured on 15 September which encouraged people to step away from the picket lines. We need a date for when it will reconvene. We all agree that there are many questions to be answered and much

work to be done.

What happened last Monday was regrettable on all sides. Nobody could condone it. I am sure I am not the only person who sent out an email advising of the potential for disarray outside Agriculture House. It could have been avoided but it was not. What I am seeking from the Minister of State in the House today is a date.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I, too, thank the Minister of State for his reply. There are a number of issues on which clarification is needed. Where stands the price index promised a month ago? As pointed out by the Minister of State, threatening behaviour serves no purpose and none of us here would agree with it. In regard to the judgments hanging over people's heads, we need a goodwill gesture such as a phone call by the parent company. Someone needs to stand up and be counted.

The Minister of State might indicate how many times it is envisaged that the task force will meet. My understanding of the agreement that was reached is that four months notice is required before weights can be changed. Over the past week, processors have announced different weights and categories. Is this within their remit? If not, why is this behaviour not being tackled? The chairperson of the task force must show leadership and stand up and be counted. He must ensure that issues are resolved behind the scenes before they get out of hand.

Deputy Andrew Doyle: On the final point made by Deputy Fitzmaurice, the chairman has shown leadership. He and officials from the Department passed through the group outside Agriculture House to meet other farm organisations that had declined the offer to meet him in the Department. He will continue his engagement of bilateral discussions with each stakeholder.

I cannot indicate a date at this point. I wish I could. The issue of injunctions could have been dealt with at the meeting in Agriculture House had members of the task force been allowed in. Rather than preventing them from entering the building, the protestors should have allowed them to be confronted on that issue under the structure of the task force. The issue could, perhaps, have been dealt with as a preliminary to the meeting.

In the context of the proposed number of meetings, there will be as many as is necessary. I do not want to pre-empt the work of the chairman. There are a number of measures that need to be addressed but all of them will not necessarily require consideration by the full task force. It may be possible for some of them to be addressed by working groups. However, I am only speculating. There may be a range of meetings that will be led by working groups comprised of members of the task force rather than the full task force.

There is an agreement in place and actions and measures that need to be taken and addressed. I will come back to Deputy Fitzmaurice on the price index because I do not have an answer to hand. These issues should be dealt with through the forum. I appeal to everybody, including those who feel aggrieved at the way they were treated on Monday last in not being allowed to attend the meeting and those who prevented them from doing so, to let this task force set about its work. There have been two meetings already, one in Backweston and the other in Agriculture House. Let the task force get up and running. It is the interests of those of us who are committed to the beef sector to seek progress on all fronts.

17 October 2019

School Accommodation

Deputy Seán Haughey: Yesterday morning, there was a devastating fire at Scoil Chaitríona Cailíní at Measc Avenue in Coolock. As a result, the school has been closed and approximately 200 pupils who attend it have no accommodation. The junior school has also been closed for the remainder of this week at least. The mood in Coolock, Artane and Harmonstown is one of absolute shock. Teachers and staff, parents and children, are upset and cannot believe what has happened. This school has been at the heart of the local community for almost 60 years and there has been huge loyalty to it, with parents actively involved in fundraising for it and maintaining its surrounding gardens and so on. The school also facilitates local charity and other events. The area is an old established Dublin community, as evidenced yesterday when local people, St. Paul's youth club and the Coolock Residents Association rallied to the cause and provided tea for all those affected.

When I visited the site yesterday, I spoke to some of the staff and parents. I again extend my solidarity and support to the principal, Ms Imelda Whelan, the deputy principal, Ms Fiona Gormley, the board of management of the school and all those affected by the fire. A Garda investigation into the cause of the fire is under way. Hopefully, we will know the outcome of this investigation sooner rather than later.

I pay tribute to the fire services for their professionalism and bravery in bringing the fire under control as quickly as possible. Six units of Dublin Fire Brigade fought the blaze and eventually extinguished it. Thankfully, nobody was injured. As a result of the efforts of fire-fighters, the junior school suffered only water and smoke damage and it is hoped that it will be up and running again soon. There are reports that the efforts of the fire services were delayed owing to poor water pressure in the area. Yesterday, I met a resident who told me that the fire hydrant outside his house is full of concrete and not working. I understand the area experiences poor water pressure on an ongoing basis. These issues will need to be examined by Dublin City Council, Irish Water and Dublin Fire Brigade.

There is now an urgent need to provide alternative accommodation for the teachers and pupils. Everyone in the area is anxious that this be done as soon as possible. I acknowledge that the Minister and his officials visited the school site yesterday, and I thank them. The junior school which was damaged by water and smoke needs to be reopened quickly. Options for the senior school include temporary prefab accommodation on site. As the school is located on a large site, there is space for prefab accommodation but there may be planning requirements around putting them in place. As a result, consideration may need to be given to availing of spare capacity at other schools in the area. When the Minister spoke to the parents yesterday, they told him that they want their children to continue their schooling in the immediate area. I hope this can be facilitated.

It is hoped that the process of repairing and renovating the damaged school building can commence without undue delay, with a contractor on site in the shortest possible timeframe. This is a resilient school community that will overcome this setback. I look forward to hearing from the Minister what progress has been made since he visited the school yesterday.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I thank Deputy Haughey for raising this matter. As he stated, I met him and other representatives from the area at the school yesterday. I know all of them want to see this matter prioritised. We are as one in that regard.

In raising this matter, the Deputy has given me the opportunity to outline the steps being taken to ensure that Scoil Chaitríona Cailíní agus Scoil Chaitríona Naíonáin reopen as quickly as possible following the fire early yesterday morning. Like the Deputy, I commend the principal, Ms Imelda Whelan, and the deputy principal, Ms Fiona Gormley, on their leadership in respect of this issue. I heard very strong sentiments coming from the community that it is looking for a locally based solution. I will pass that on to my officials.

Scoil Chaitríona Cailíní agus Scoil Chaitríona Naíonán are located on the same site at Measc Avenue, Coolock, Dublin 5. Scoil Chaitríona Naíonán is the junior school and enrolls boys and girls from junior infants to first class. Some 236 pupils were enrolled in this school in September 2018 and the current staffing is a principal, 13 mainstream teachers and three special education teaching posts. Scoil Chaitríona Cailíní is the senior girls' school and enrolls girls from second to sixth class. The enrolment in this school in September 2018 was 202 pupils and it has a current staffing of a principal, nine mainstream teachers and 2.6 special education posts. Boys from the junior school are enrolled in the adjacent St. Brendan's national school which has not been impacted by the fire. All three schools participate in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, DEIS, programme.

As the Deputy is aware, following a fire early yesterday morning, Scoil Chaitríona senior national school was completely destroyed. While Scoil Chaitríona junior school was not damaged by the fire, it suffered some minor water damage. Both schools will remain closed for the rest of this week. I visited Scoil Chaitríona Cailíní yesterday morning to see for myself the impact of the fire and speak to the principal and school management. This is obviously a traumatic incident for all those connected to the school. My Department will provide every assistance to the school community during this difficult time. The immediate focus is getting the schools back in operation as early as possible next week. I understand that a number of local schools have offered assistance in meeting the immediate accommodation needs of Scoil Chaitríona senior school. Scoil Chaitríona junior school, while not damaged by fire, suffered some minor water damage. It will remain closed for the rest of this week and will hopefully be in a position to open next week.

The Department had a senior official liaising with the principal and school management throughout yesterday and this liaison will continue for as long as necessary. A senior architect from my Department was also out at the schools yesterday to assess the situation and met the principals of both the senior and junior schools. I understand the school authorities are meeting today, although I have had no feedback from that meeting at this juncture. They will update parents and staff in the first instance on the accommodation arrangements proposed for next week. Once the school has reopened, my Department will be in discussion with the school patron and board of management to explore all options available to address the school's accommodation needs pending the reinstatement of the destroyed building.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank the Minister for his response. I appreciate that this is an evolving situation and that meetings are taking place today, as the Minister said. Parents and children are very anxious about this matter. They need more definite arrangements to be conveyed to them as soon as possible. I appreciate that discussions are ongoing and various options are still under consideration, including utilising spare capacity in neighbouring schools. I thank those schools for offering their assistance. The sooner we can have clarity on all of these issues, the better. Deputies will be aware of the inconvenience caused for parents in particular when their children are off school. Parents have work and various commitments. It is not good for the children themselves, although they may not appreciate it, to be off school for long.

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This was a devastating fire. There are a number of issues that need to be investigated. I know it is not the responsibility of the Minister but the Garda investigation should be concluded as soon as possible. Issues in respect of water pressure were reported in some of the media today and I heard about them at first hand yesterday. Apparently there was a delay in getting adequate water supply to the school to deal with the fire and water had to be taken from the Malahide Road, which is a little further away. All these issues need to be looked at but the sooner we can have clarity on this outcome and the new arrangements to be put in place, the better.

This is a resilient school community. It has experienced a setback but where there is a will, there is a way. We need the practical help and support of the Minister and his officials in their discussions with the school authorities to ensure that the accommodation is provided as soon as possible and the school is repaired and renovated in the shortest possible timeframe. Normality for all concerned has to be restored as soon as possible.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I agree with the Deputy and reiterate that a timeframe is needed. An outline is needed to allow families to make preparations. We are hoping to be in a position to have the junior school back next week. We are looking at all options in respect of temporary provision prior to the school being rebuilt, from prefabs to spare capacity in local schools. Everything is on the table. I do not want to highlight one option over another but we need a common sense solution. We certainly have an understanding that we need some sort of outline that gives parents confidence that their sons and daughters will be back in the classroom. We will keep the communication lines open. As soon as we get an information update, it will be conveyed to the parents through the usual channels of the principal and leadership of the school.

The Deputy used the word “resilience”. I should say to everybody involved, from the emergency services right through to the Garda and school community, when push came to shove yesterday the community came together. We have a duty in the Department to respond to the needs and demands of that community and I am happy to step up to the plate in that regard. As soon as we have any direction or information on what will happen in the short term, not the medium to long term, I will be happy to forward it.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

Deputy Martin Heydon: Newbridge in County Kildare has seen significant population growth in recent years. With a population of more than 22,500, it is the biggest town in County Kildare and the tenth biggest town in Ireland. It also has potential for further sustainable growth and development through planned developments as well as land zoned in other areas. Newbridge faces challenges, however. The main challenge is that of traffic as the main street is choked with congestion. Kildare County Council has an important proposal that identifies a site for a second bridge over the River Liffey. Along with road construction, it would create a link between Great Connell Road and the Athgarvan Road. While the council still needs to acquire planning permission for the bridge, some of the road linkages are being developed through private sector developments as part of ongoing planning permissions.

As the Minister of State is aware, Project Ireland 2040, the Government’s national development plan for the years to 2040, acknowledges the direct pressure on areas Kildare, which I represent, and Meath, which he represents. These areas experienced massive growth during a very short period in the Celtic tiger. Many housing developments were built while the key infrastructure around them was not built at the same speed or to the same capacity. Project Ireland

2040 identifies the need to support areas like these where we can play catch-up. Newbridge is a perfect example. We need to see investment in key infrastructure; the return on investment for the State will be tangible.

I am mindful that the next round of the urban regeneration and development fund, URDF, is due to open soon. I am raising this matter to see what steps Kildare County Council needs to take to strengthen its previous application and make a second bridge for Newbridge a top priority in its new application. The previous proposal sought to reduce congestion by moving traffic out of the town centre and off the main street. A new bridge would also complement other projects that have been developed or are being worked on. A grant has been allocated under the URDF towards the development of a cultural quarter in Newbridge. This will be at the lower end of the town closer to the river, where it will complement the redevelopment of our county grounds in St. Conleth's Park, the refurbishment of our town hall, which has happened, the planned upgrade of Riverbank Arts Centre and the development of a state-of-the-art library in that area. All of those elements are being funded through Project Ireland 2040 and there are ongoing plans for development of this cultural quarter. On the other side of Newbridge, further away from the river, we have a thriving retail hub around the Whitewater shopping centre. Our main street has benefited from that. Our side streets can take more capacity and investment, all of which stems from ensuring we have a sustainable traffic plan for the future.

We can work on these projects because the National Transport Authority has a national transport framework developed for Newbridge. This plans to make Newbridge Main Street more accessible to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. The project could result in investment of €10 million by the NTA into Newbridge. The proposed improvements would see the displacement of traffic off the main street, but the delivery of a second bridge is crucial to that. The improvements would result in a reduction of our carbon footprint as well, allowing more residents to move within the town, either by cycling or as pedestrians, and by ensuring that the traffic is taken away. This was identified in the previous application from Kildare County Council, which sought to help compact and consolidated development on the zoned lands in Newbridge's south-east quadrant. This bridge makes sense in a whole realm of different areas and I ask the Minister of State how Kildare County Council can put its best foot forward for the next round of funding for the urban regeneration development fund.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I thank Deputy Heydon for raising the need for a second bridge over the Liffey at Newbridge, County Kildare to be progressed through Project Ireland 2040 and the urban regeneration development fund, and for giving me the opportunity both to discuss that today and to outline how we as a Government believe that Project Ireland 2040 helps causes like this and helps to achieve, through the urban regeneration development fund, vital infrastructure like the bridge the Deputy has just outlined and other infrastructure.

The Deputy is correct in saying that Project Ireland 2040 sets out the plans for the next 20 to 25 years in this country, and through it we are going to try to rebalance population growth and housing construction with all of the required services. It will not just happen on the east coast, in Meath, Kildare, Dublin and many other places, but throughout the country. An important part of that regional balance is that while accommodating future development and growth in all counties, including additional growth in Meath and Kildare, we rectify some of the mistakes of the past. A key part of Project Ireland 2040 is recognising that examples can be seen in many areas in the greater Dublin region of Kildare, Meath, Wicklow and probably Louth where increased housing development, with all of the pressures that brings, was not matched with the

infrastructure or services required. We want to try to correct that through the various funds as well as allowing for more compact development, developing a lot of those back streets in towns and villages, which the Deputy referred to, together with those brownfield sites that are not necessarily being used very well.

The urban regeneration development fund, URDF, is a flagship element of Project Ireland 2040, comprising an allocation of €2 billion in the national development plan to 2027, with €58 million available in 2019 and an overall Exchequer allocation of €550 million earmarked up to the end of 2022. The URDF was established to support more compact and sustainable development - sustainable is the key word when it comes to Newbridge - through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland's five cities and other large towns, like Newbridge, in line with the objectives of the national planning framework and the national development plan. This is to enable a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of cities and towns and to ensure that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work as well as to invest in and visit.

That is the key part here, which is trying to go back into areas that experienced housing development - the Deputy pointed out Newbridge has quite a large population of 22,500 - and make such places are more attractive as places that people want to live in and raise their families. It is also to help these towns win investment and jobs to support people already living there and who will live there in the future. It is important that we get that right. We know that by investing through these funds, we are making towns, villages and cities more attractive and secure. This is about future-proofing communities, neighbourhoods, towns and villages, and that is what we are trying to achieve here.

Bids were invited from public bodies for funding under the URDF and a total of 189 applications were received by my Department in the first call for proposals earlier in 2018. On 26 November 2018, the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, announced the initial URDF support of €100 million for a total of 88 projects throughout the country. The applications received contained a wide variety of themes and sectoral areas, from urban regeneration and public realm works to enabling strategic infrastructure to leveraging further development to cultural and amenity development. Applications received fell into two categories: projects that were ready to go and funding to support the initial development of projects, that is, master planning feasibility to ensure a pipeline of projects into the future.

The Deputy asked me what Kildare can do. Kildare County Council submitted seven proposals on the previous occasion, one of which was Newbridge. It was not successful at that time. It was the link road on the bridge from Great Connell Road to Athgarvan Road in Newbridge. This proposal did not achieve full marks and was not awarded the go-ahead then. The Deputy asked whether planning should be applied for. Planning would certainly help. There is also funding available under section B, to progress the planning, study, marketability and feasibility of that, which is also the case in Celbridge, County Kildare. That funding can be used as proof of concept to bring it through the various planning stages and to have it ready for funding under section A as well. There are two options with this fund that would suit this project, and Kildare County Council should make another application, as applications will be open again in the near future before the end of this year. I hope such an application will be successful this year.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I thank the Minister of State for his detailed response and will

take his points of view on board. I am glad the urban regeneration development fund will open up for applications again before the end of the year. I will work closely with officials in the Kildare County Council, as I have done up until now, to ensure that we put our best foot forward for a second bridge for Newbridge. This bridge meets the objectives of the national planning framework, that is, sustainable, balanced development. It ticks all of those boxes. There is a pot of money of €10 million from the NTA for it to use Newbridge as a pilot scheme to develop an overall transport framework that could then be rolled out as a template for other provincial towns. This is a massive opportunity for us and we cannot allow that opportunity to be wasted. A second bridge is needed for that plan to work in its entirety.

Project Ireland 2040 is about making our towns and counties better places to live in. Many of my constituents in Newbridge aspire not to have to travel up the N7 or on the overcrowded trains out of Newbridge every day, and instead to be able to work locally in the area. A second bridge over the River Liffey would make Newbridge an even more attractive place for industry to invest in. We have jobs, industry and investment at the minute, but we yearn for more to give more options to our residents to live there.

I take the Minister of State's point of view on board that it would help if the bridge had planning. There are ways that we can further that objective, perhaps, as we have developed sections of road privately. It may be possible to do that as well with a bridge. We will continue to do that work.

I will finish by saying that there are maps dating back to 1752, drawn up before the town started, marking the new bridge in the vicinity of Old Connell, and that gave its name to Droichead Nua. Hundreds of years later, our needs are very different but the demand and pressure on our town is very significant. Newbridge requires a second bridge or traffic will have nowhere to go off Main Street because it is currently congested. The benefits for residents and for the wider socio-economic environment in the greater Newbridge-south Kildare area are very significant, and I look forward to an application going into the Minister of State in the near future.

Deputy Damien English: The Deputy is making a strong case for Newbridge and this infrastructure in the next round of funding. I understand the council has engaged with the officials in my Department since the previous round, in which it was not successful, although it had some success in other areas. It would be important that it would make a second application and make it as strong as possible by highlighting all the issues the Deputy has just highlighted, such as the potential growth of the town, the spaces that could still be used for compact development, more housing, community services, and – the key phrase – winning jobs to match the existing housing and population. That is what these funds are for.

Something that always happened was that long-term plans were set out, but under Project Ireland 2040, we are trying to back up those plans and make them happen by putting real money behind them. There is no point in having long-term planning and thinking if they are not backed up with the finances. For the first time, with the national development plan and the national planning framework, we have a ten-year plan of €116 billion in taxpayers' money that is being and will be spent. A review of the first 18 months of Project Ireland 2040 shows that is happening. It can be seen that projects are part of a national plan. It is very important that when local authorities are making applications to these funds, they align them to the national objectives and strongly align them with local objectives to allow for a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing built-up footprint of cities and towns, which is exactly what the Deputy outlined in Newbridge. There is the opportunity, and

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it might correct some of the mistakes of the past and free up space and land for future development. That is key, as is making those links very clear. I hope that Kildare County Council will do that in the next round of funding, which I am happy to clarify will be open for applications before the end of the year.

Garda Overtime

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I commend the front-line personnel, particularly those from Dublin, on their bravery. I commend the personnel in An Garda and Dublin Fire Brigade and the hospital staff on their actions last year and in previous years. I congratulate all those who were involved in community festivals and the like last year. Annually, a crisis seems to be caused by a shortfall in the Garda Síochána budget. This year, the Commissioner has announced that there is an overtime ban in place. This will obviously affect the deployment of gardaí around the Hallowe'en period. It is bizarre that at Hallowe'en, the busiest time of the year for An Garda, personnel are expected to operate with reduced numbers. If the ban is not reversed, there will be 50% fewer gardaí on duty this year to give support to Dublin City Council. Council staff will come under attack when removing illegal bonfire material from public parks, back gardens and derelict sites. There will be 50% fewer gardaí on the streets to stop the attacks on Dublin Fire Brigade personnel when they seek to put out bonfires and the like. There will be 50% fewer gardaí to prevent criminal and anti-social behaviour during what is supposed to be a joyous occasion. I appeal to the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, to release the funding required so that people throughout Ireland, not only in Dublin, will be safe in their homes and neighbourhoods this Hallowe'en night and in the run-up to the festival.

I will give the Minister of State an illustration of the scale of the problem in Dublin City Council and the problem facing Garda Síochána management, using an example from my area, Dublin South-Central. Some 175 tonnes of bonfire material was removed from premises in my area, at a cost of €43,000, not including the cost of the clean-up. Hundreds of tonnes in addition were removed across the city. Some 3,500 pallets were removed in my area alone. They were stockpiled dangerously in flat complexes, at the rear of shops, on derelict sites, at houses and in garages. They were a threat to residents. I appeal to the Minister of State to address the shortfall in the Garda budget and to appeal to the Commissioner to lift the overtime ban for the duration of the Hallowe'en festival period.

Deputy Joan Collins: I received an email from the Dublin South-Central Forum, which was concerned not about the fact that the Commissioner has control over overtime funding but that there would not be enough gardaí on the streets in the next week or so over the Hallowe'en period. It is crucial to residents and Dublin City Council officials and staff, including those in the parks, to have the support of gardaí, especially between 6.30 and 10.30 on Hallowe'en night. In most areas of Dublin South-Central festivities proceed satisfactorily, but there are pockets of anti-social and crime related activity. Such activity was evident last year, causing major problems in the area. There was great concern. Residents' associations and others, along with Dublin City Council, had to try to deal with the matter with the Garda.

It is very important to indicate to the Commissioner that where the council indicates there are problems, gardaí should be doing overtime on the evening in question to control any serious activity. Is there a cut? Will gardaí be deployed? Will there be more gardaí on the streets on

Hallowe'en night?

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

On behalf of the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, who cannot be here this afternoon, I thank both Deputies sincerely for raising this important issue. I join Deputy Ó Snodaigh in recognising the work of front-line personnel at this time and throughout the year, in addition to the community personnel, who do such good work. The Deputy is correct in what he says.

As the Deputies will be aware, the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team. The Minister has no direct role in this regard. However, I can assure the Deputies that An Garda Síochána continues to take all forms of anti-social behaviour very seriously.

An Garda Síochána has put in place measures in every division to prevent and detect the sale and organised importation of fireworks in the lead-up to Hallowe'en. Operation Tombola is designed to address all aspects of the policing of the Hallowe'en period, including the prevention and detection of illegal fireworks for sale and associated public disorder and anti-social behaviour. Specific policing plans under Operation Tombola are designed and determined by local district officers in advance of and during Hallowe'en night. These plans address issues of anti-social behaviour that may arise through the incremental deployment of resources, including public order unit personnel, to augment local plans where required.

Gardaí have developed a partnership approach to problem solving with the community and agencies. Intelligence is collated and appropriate actions are taken to make any necessary seizures. Local intelligence is acted upon through searches under warrant where appropriate, with liaison maintained with local authorities to ensure the removal of bonfire material. Immigration officers at ports work closely with customs staff at points of entry to the State in the run-up to Hallowe'en, including to search for illegal fireworks being brought into the country.

Liaison is also maintained with Dublin Fire Brigade in the run-up to and including Hallowe'en night. Routine patrols by plain-clothes patrols and high-visibility uniform personnel are also carried out to combat the sale of illegal fireworks and prevent or mitigate against public disorder and other anti-social behaviours. Garda personnel are briefed on and watch out for the use of fireworks, with checkpoints mounted on principal roads to search for any illegal fireworks being transported into this jurisdiction.

Leading up to Hallowe'en every year, special efforts are made by An Garda Síochána to combat the illegal importation, sale and use of fireworks. I remind Deputies that each year as Hallowe'en approaches, my Department runs an advertising campaign highlighting both the public safety aspects of using fireworks, in addition to the illegality. The campaign will be launched this Monday, 21 October 2019, and will commence in print and online media.

The Commissioner is, by law, responsible for managing this budget. I am aware of his recent direction regarding measures to address budgetary pressure, including a halt to certain discretionary spending, including on overtime for administrative duties. The overtime budget cannot be considered in isolation, however. As part of the Government's plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, there is ongoing and increased recruitment of new gardaí in addition to Garda staff, allowing for redeployment of gardaí to operational duties at the front line. There are currently more than 14,200 gardaí nationwide, supported by more than 2,700 Garda staff, and these numbers are increasing. This ongoing recruitment

will provide the Commissioner with resources to deploy increasing numbers of gardaí to deliver a visible, effective and responsive policing service to communities across all Garda divisions. This ongoing investment is with a view to providing the best possible policing service to all our communities, rural and urban.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: In all that, I did not hear that the overtime ban was being lifted. I heard it is a matter for the Commissioner. He is trying to save €6.5 million with the overtime ban, yet he had to spend in excess of €13 million on security for the US President, Mr. Donald Trump, and the US Vice President, Mr. Pence. That would go a long way towards addressing the shortfall and the dangers posed by overtime ban, especially in the period in question. There are successful festivals in local areas, such as the Liberties, Markievicz Park and California Hills Park, Ballyfermot, and at Clogher Road sports centre. There are quite successful diversionary projects but we are talking about very dangerous elements who cause major damage to public properties. I ask the Minister of State to consider the consequences for the affected communities, at the time and afterwards. Can a supplementary budget be considered to address the shortfall in the Garda Síochána Vote to ensure that all communities, not only in Dublin but also throughout the rest of the State, will have the required level of policing so there will be no major damage done or loss of life as a consequence of an overtime ban?

Deputy Joan Collins: I agree with Deputy Ó Snodaigh. The Minister of State, in his reply, made no reference to requesting the Commissioner to work with his superintendents to find out the areas that could have problems. There was no reference to identifying where the problems were last year, particularly considering there were crime related groups involved in the anti-social behaviour. They nearly started a turf war last year in parts of Dublin South-Central. I understand that there will be a meeting of superintendents tomorrow morning. It is their routine Friday meeting. Perhaps they could be asked to consider these areas and approach the Commissioner to say that additional resources are needed. We cannot have 50% fewer gardaí than last year in areas where there are serious problems. It was difficult enough to deal with them last year.

Deputy David Stanton: I again thank the Deputies for raising this very important matter, and I mean that. Working with communities to tackle public disorder and reduce anti-social behaviour is a key priority for the Garda.

Deputy Joan Collins: The Garda cannot get the extra resources for that work.

Deputy David Stanton: This approach includes a strong focus on quality-of-life issues and collaboration with local authorities to help address the causes of antisocial behaviour. I agree that Garda visibility in our communities is important, especially during the Hallowe'en period. The Government remains committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. The Garda Commissioner makes the decisions on the ground, though. The Garda's new operating model is structured to achieve these goals. It will mean increased numbers of gardaí working on the front line and community policing teams dedicated to working with communities to identify and tackle problem crimes in their areas. These changes will see the delivery of a more responsive, more efficient and better service to local communities.

The Government is making an unprecedented investment in the Garda. The allocation for 2020 is increasing by €122 million to an unprecedented €1.88 billion. The capital allocation in

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the Garda Vote is also increasing by 26% to a total of €116.5 million. Some €95 million was provided for Garda overtime in 2019. This level of overtime is being maintained for 2020. The ongoing recruitment and increasing size of the Garda workforce is expected over time to alleviate pressure on the overtime budget. The more gardaí we have in the force and the more we can release to the front line, the less pressure there will be on the overtime budget.

We will ensure that the Garda Commissioner is made aware of the Deputies' concerns. I will also speak to the Minister to ensure he is aware. I thank the Deputies for raising this important matter and for their interest in it.

The Dáil adjourned at 3.15 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 22 October 2019.