

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 7, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 8 to 20, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 21 to 32, inclusive, answered orally.

Land Development Agency

33. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether the Land Development Agency will become a vehicle for the privatisation of public land and will be unable to deliver the affordable and social homes needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45221/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The need for more active land management by the State has been articulated in many policy documents, including report No.145 of the National Economic and Social Council which stated that Project Ireland 2040: the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) provided the perfect moment to transition to a new system of urban development and land management. This is crucial in ensuring that future developments are planning led rather than developer led.

The Land Development Agency (LDA) is being established in this context with an immediate focus on managing the State's own lands to develop new homes, and regenerate under-utilised sites. In the longer-term, it will assemble strategic land-banks from a mix of public and private lands, making these available for housing in a controlled manner, bringing essential long-term stability to the Irish housing market.

The LDA is the State's developer. The proposed primary legislation will establish the LDA as a commercial State body with the capacity and mandate to fulfil this important public purpose. The shareholders will be the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and myself. The LDA cannot be privatised as the proposed legislation will provide that the shareholding in the LDA can only be held by a Government Minister or a body under their aegis.

In parallel, the Government agreed that new requirements will attach to the disposal of surplus State lands, in that, where appropriate, a minimum of 30% of residential units should be affordable housing, in addition to statutory requirements under Part V of the Planning and Development Acts. This is a matter of Government policy, which applies to public lands provided to the LDA. The LDA will be accountable to the Government for the delivery of such housing in line with its mandate.

Vacant Properties

34. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when approval will issue to Cavan County Council in respect of the upgrading of houses under the voids programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45229/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Funding approval was given to Cavan County Council earlier this year under the voids programme, based on the number of properties submitted by them at that time. In recent weeks, the Council has submitted substantially more properties for inclusion under the programme and funding approval has now issued in response to that second proposal.

While my Department is supportive of Cavan County Council in bringing vacant social homes back to productive use under the voids programme, I am advised that the increased level of submissions being made by the Council, arises from a reduced funding commitment on their part, to the maintenance of their own housing stock. The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs, are matters for each individual local authority under the Housing Acts. To facilitate the early re-letting of social homes when an existing tenant leaves a property, it is vital that local authorities make provision in their own budget, for pre-letting works. Indeed, the support of Councillors to make adequate budgetary provision for this important work is a key element in ensuring that local authorities can re-let social homes as soon as possible to those on their waiting lists.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

35. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units anticipated to be secured through long-term lease in each of the years 2019 to 2021; the amount to be spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45197/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Over the course of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 138,000 households. This will be achieved through blended delivery, involving increasing the social housing stock by 50,000 homes, through build, acquisition and leasing programmes, and supporting some 88,000 further households through the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, over 10,000 homes will be leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies under leasing arrangements from a range of different sources, including direct leasing by local authorities and approved housing bodies, the Repair and Leasing Scheme, the Mortgage to Rent Scheme and Enhanced Leasing. The exact blend of delivery under leasing in any given year will depend on the availability of existing stock and new homes in any particular county.

A total of 2,130 dwellings are targeted to be delivered under leasing in 2019; the target increases to 2,631 dwellings in 2020 and is set at 2,450 dwellings in 2021. It should be noted that progress by each local authority against target under Rebuilding Ireland is published quarterly on my Department's website.

Leasing is funded under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), which also meets the current costs of dwellings delivered by approved housing bodies under the CALF and Housing Agency Acquisitions Programmes. The SHCEP budget for 2019 is just

under €155 million. An allocation of €191 million has been secured for SHCEP in 2020, which is an increase of €36 million on the 2019 allocation. The allocation for SHCEP in 2021 will form part of the annual estimates process.

Building Regulations Amendments

36. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is updating the current regulations on the fire safety aspects of new high-rise buildings further to the Grenfell fire in London; and the way in which the Dublin and other fire brigades are being resourced to fight fires in high-rise buildings. [45138/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Grenfell Tower tragedy took place on 14 June 2017 and I established a Fire Safety Task Force to examine fire safety in Ireland, and in particular the risk of a similar tragedy happening here, on 27 June. The Report of the Task Force which is available on my Department's website, was brought to Government in May 2018.

Overall, the Report, which included a review of fire safety in 839 buildings over 6 storeys, found that the combination of factors that contributed to the Grenfell Tower fire do not seem to be present in Ireland and that the current fire safety strategy in Ireland, which includes evacuation, is appropriate and effective in protecting people living in medium to high-rise buildings.

The Report did, however, make a range of recommendations for improvements in relation to fire safety and work is underway in terms of: regulatory provisions; fire service operations and fire safety, particularly around fire detection and alarm systems.

I have now asked my Department to review the Report on Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, which was recently published and to bring forward any additional recommendations as appropriate.

In relation to Building Regulations, work has been on-going to review "Part B: Fire Safety - Volume 2" and a new Technical Guidance Document came into force on 1 July 2017. A revised Volume 1, is being prepared for public consultation at present.

In terms of equipment, this is generally a matter for fire authorities based on their assessment of fire risk and requirements. However, to support authorities in procuring specialist equipment, as part of my Department's capital programme, Dublin Fire Service has recently received approval to purchase a 42-metre Turn Table Ladder (TTL) and Cork City Fire Service has been approved to purchase a 32-metre Hydraulic Platform.

Homeless Persons Data

37. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of adults and children registered as homeless in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by local authority area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45233/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities on a regional basis and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System. The report captures details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. The most

recent report is for September 2019, which showed that there were 6,524 adults and 3,873 dependants in emergency accommodation in that month. Monthly reports for 2016, 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019 are available on my Department's website.

Supporting families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. Budget 2020 has increased funding available to local authorities to provide homeless accommodation and related services to €166m, an increase of €20m on this year's budget. While the priority is to support families to secure a home, the Government is also committed to ensuring that appropriate emergency accommodation is available until a home can be provided. In this regard, the Government is providing funding to local authorities to develop and operate family hubs. To date, 29 family hubs have been developed nationally, providing almost 680 units of family accommodation.

Rebuilding Ireland is delivering significant results in supporting exits from homelessness. In 2018, 5,135 adults exited homelessness into homes, an 8.6% increase on 2017. In the first six months of 2019, 2,825 adults and their associated dependents exited homelessness into homes nationally. This is a 21% increase on the numbers recorded at the same point in 2018. In the Dublin region, data provided by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive shows that 786 families have exited from emergency accommodation into homes over the first nine months of this year. This is a 48% increase on the exits achieved over the same period last year. Family presentations in the Dublin region have also fallen by 9.5% in the first nine months of the year, compared to 2018, with 48% of the families presenting to homeless services prevented from having to enter emergency accommodation.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 32.

Housing Assistance Payment

39. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties faced by tenants granted HAP in securing properties that accept the payment; if he will report on efforts to ensure HAP is a realistic option for tenants currently on local authority waiting lists in view of the difficulty in securing tenancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45086/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): HAP plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. At the end of Q2 2019, there were more than 48,000 households in receipt of HAP support and over 28,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme.

Rebuilding Ireland sets annual national targets for additional HAP-supported tenancies. In 2018, this target was for an additional 17,000 HAP tenancies, which was exceeded by more than 900 tenancies. A target was set to support an additional 16,760 households through HAP in 2019; at the end of Q2 2019 an additional 8,667 HAP tenancies were set up.

The HAP Placefinder, an initiative started in Dublin and Cork to provide targeted assistance to homeless households, was rolled out nationally in January 2018. This structure provides local authorities with enhanced resources, both staffing and financial, to directly assist households to secure HAP properties, including as appropriate- working in emergency accommodation to assist families exit to HAP; liaising with agents and property owners; attending viewings; paying deposits and advance rent as needed. Over 8,100 households who were either homeless or at urgent risk of homelessness have been assisted under the service to date.

A landlord or an agent acting on behalf of a landlord is not legally obliged to enter into a

tenancy agreement with a HAP recipient. However, on 1 January 2016, the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 introduced “housing assistance” as a new discriminatory ground. This means that discrimination in the provision of accommodation or related service and amenities against people in receipt of rent supplement, HAP or other social welfare payments is prohibited.

If a person feels that they have been discriminated against by a landlord or their agent, they can make a complaint under the Equal Status Acts to the Workplace Relations Commission.

Electoral Register

40. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of review of the electoral registration process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44792/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Following an initial consultation with local authorities on a set of policy proposals, I launched a public consultation on the electoral register modernisation project in December 2018. 187 submissions were received from a broad range of stakeholders and I intend to publish a report on the consultation very shortly.

The responses to the consultation are informing ongoing work in my Department on various options for the project, including:

- the development of a simplified standardised registration form;
- the introduction of a rolling national register;
- the use of unique identifiers such as PPSNs to avoid duplicates;
- the potential for data-sharing with other public bodies to further improve the quality of the register; and
- the provision of an optional online platform for individuals to update their details.

A separate project being undertaken by the Dublin local authorities - voter.ie - has, among other things, developed an online facility to enable Dublin electors to manage their information. My Department is currently working with the Dublin local authorities to arrange an independent evaluation of Voter.ie to assess its suitability for a national roll out.

A draft General Scheme of a Bill to give legislative effect to the proposals is currently being developed and I expect to bring that to Government by year-end.

There will be ongoing engagement with local authorities as the project progresses and further stakeholder consultation will take place on the development of specific proposals. Additional public awareness campaigns are also planned to keep people informed of progress.

Land Development Agency

41. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether the board membership of the Land Development Agency will be able to provide sufficient social and affordable public housing on public lands to deal with the current crisis; his plans to appoint housing rights advocates or NGO activists to the agency; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [45148/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On enactment of the primary legislation, a permanent board and Chairperson for the Land Development Agency (LDA) will be appointed in accordance with the Guidelines on the Appointment to State Boards. The exact make up of the Board will be determined after an open recruitment process, having regard to the mix of skills required for the appropriate governance of the LDA.

For the intervening period, I have appointed an interim Board to direct the Land Development Agency. The composition of the Board is drawn from the private and public sector and provides a good mix of skills and expertise.

The Board is collectively responsible for leading and directing the State body's activities. Accordingly, the Board oversees the running of the LDA, which includes its obligation to deliver significant affordable and social housing on public lands.

The LDA will also work closely with local authorities and will use its professional expertise to assist them with their delivery of social and affordable housing on relevant sites.

Social and Affordable Housing

42. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will discontinue the strategic housing development scheme. [45238/19]

44. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to abandon the strategic housing development legislation entirely in view of the fact that it has failed to deliver much-needed affordable homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45223/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 44 together.

As part of the actions under the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (the Act) introduced new streamlined arrangements to enable planning applications for strategic housing developments (SHDs) of 100 housing units or more, or student accommodation or shared accommodation developments of 200 bed spaces or more, to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

The Act provides that the SHD arrangements apply until the end of 2019, but that I may, by order, extend that period by a further limited period of 2 years, up to the end of 2021, coinciding with the timeframe of Rebuilding Ireland. However, prior to the making of such an order, and not later than 30 October 2019, the Act requires that I review the operation and effectiveness of the SHD arrangements and lay before both Houses of the Oireachtas a report of my conclusions of the review.

In this regard, a Strategic Housing Development Review Group was established in June 2019. The Report of the Review Group was received on 24 September 2019. The Report acknowledges that the SHD arrangements have generally been a success in meeting their objectives to contribute to addressing housing undersupply issues by providing a fast-track development consent process aimed at incentivising developers to bring forward applications for large-scale housing developments.

Notwithstanding the positive contribution the SHD arrangements have made, the Review Group notes that there continues to exist a deficit in housing supply and affirms that the original rationale for the introduction of the SHD arrangements remains. In light of these findings, the Review Group considers that there are sufficient grounds for extending the SHD arrangements until the end of 2021.

I concur with the finding of the Review Group in this regard and propose to shortly sign an order to this effect. A report on my conclusions of the review, as well as the Review Group's Report, has been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas, as required by the Act and copies of both reports are available on my Department's website.

In addition, I have reflected on the views of the Review Group on the rate of activation of SHD sites, and I consider it appropriate that developers should be sufficiently motivated to commence development on foot of an SHD permission in a timely manner given the benefits the SHD arrangements provide. Therefore, I consider that it would be appropriate to introduce a "use it or lose it" measure in this regard and I intend bringing forward the necessary legislation to address this matter.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

43. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will announce the review of income limit eligibility for council housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45224/19]

45. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to increase the income eligibility limits for social housing, particularly for areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan in which present limits are too low; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45226/19]

50. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether increasing numbers of individuals and families are being removed from the council lists even though their incomes fall short of allowing them to provide secure housing for themselves in view of the fact that income eligibility criteria for social housing have not been reviewed since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45222/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43, 45 and 50 together.

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

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment

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

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

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

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 42.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 43.

Homelessness Strategy

46. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the housing first programme; the number of housing first tenancies; the locations it has been rolled out; his plans to extend it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44983/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing First enables homeless individuals with high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive housing and health supports to help them maintain their tenancies.

The National Implementation Plan for Housing First, published in September 2018, extends the delivery of Housing First nationally, with the introduction of targets for each local authority. The Plan includes an overall target of 663 tenancies in the period 2018-2021. The implementation of the Plan is a joint initiative of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Health, the HSE and the local authorities.

In line with the National Implementation Plan, Housing First is being delivered on a regional basis by the local authorities and the HSE. During 2019, contracts for the delivery of services have been put in place or are at an advanced stage in each of the nine regions responsible for the delivery of homeless services. To date, 352 individuals have been housed under the Housing First Programme, including 100 individuals who have been housed since the publication of the National Implementation Plan. A copy of the National Implementation Plan is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/housing-first-national-implementation-plan-2018-2021>.

Housing Data

47. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

if he has undertaken an evaluation of the affordability of rent and house purchases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39048/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Increasing the supply of new homes is a central goal of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, not least because such increases will help to moderate price movements. Lead indicators for housing supply, such as planning permission and construction commencement activity, provide a strong basis for confidence that the number of new home completions will continue to increase.

Aside from encouraging greater supply, my Department has deployed a range of measures to help address affordability. The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is a targeted support to help first time buyers to attain homeownership. Total funding available for the loan is over €563m for 2018 and 2019 combined. This measure complements the Help to Buy scheme, which helps first time buyers saving for a deposit. The designation of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs), helps to constrain price inflation in many residential rental markets. There are now 44 RPZs across Ireland, covering 68% of all registered tenancies. Other supports, such as the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) and the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), will support the provision of new affordable homes for purchase and rent.

My Department, working with the Economic and Social Research Institute, operates a housing economics research programme which examines the various dynamics of housing and rental markets. Recent research under this programme in relation to affordability was published in the Spring 2019 edition of the Economic and Social Review.

A further paper examining affordability for prospective first-time buyers from a regional perspective is currently being finalised and will be published in due course.

Question No. 48 answered with Question No. 32.

Housing Data

49. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the total expenditure over the past three years on the provision of temporary housing accommodation in lieu of local authority housing; the extent to which an audit has been carried out on a value for money basis on such expenditure as opposed to a one-off strategic capital programme to deal with the housing crisis, thereby dealing with the housing issue directly as opposed to the more expensive route of engaging investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45182/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness undertakes to resolve both shorter term housing need and longer term structural capacity within the Irish housing market, through a range of blended delivery mechanisms, each tailored to address the complex range of challenges and needs before us.

As set out in the Action Plan, this Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 138,000 households. By 2021, the social housing stock in Ireland will have increased by 50,000 homes. This will be achieved using a combination of build, acquisition and leasing programmes. This will further contribute to the ongoing reduction in housing waiting lists.

Spending on the capital housing programme has been increasing significantly year on year under Rebuilding Ireland and this year more than 10,000 new social homes will be delivered through build, acquisition and leasing programmes across the country. Next year this figure will

increase to more than 11,000 new social homes.

While this capacity grows, it is imperative that we also support families using current programmes such as HAP and RAS.

The table below outlines the expenditure on current expenditure programmes such as SHCEP, RAS and HAP over the period 2016 – 2018. In 2019, more than €2.4 billion will be expended across both capital and current programmes meeting the housing needs of more than 27,000 households.

	2016 Expenditure	2017 Expenditure	2018 Expenditure
	€m	€m	€m
SHCEP	54.029	84.051	100.393
RAS	130.998	142.838	143.337
HAP	57.7	152.697	276.604
Total	242.727	379.586	520.334

Over the period 2016-2018, the housing needs of some 90,000 households were supported under current programmes, including the HAP and RAS schemes. If the funding provided for these 90,000 households had been transferred to capital expenditure, to support building or buying homes, it would have secured some 5,500 homes, leaving no resources available to support the other 85,500 households. Looking at it another way, it would take almost €20 billion to provide a new build local authority home for those 90,000 households.

The review of Current and Capital Expenditure on Social Housing Delivery Mechanisms, prepared by the Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service (IGEES) and published earlier this summer, focussed on an examination of the housing supports provided through capital and current funding mechanisms, the trends and cost developments in housing expenditure and also considered broader issues relevant to overall housing policy development.

In examining the overall blend of housing delivery mechanisms, the review recognised that, in addition to cost factors, there are a range of other factors, which need to be considered in terms of housing delivery, including flexibility and speed of delivery to meet immediate housing need.

Addressing increased social housing need and delivering the greatest number of social housing supports at this time has required the development and implementation of a range of flexible and innovative mechanisms, which take account of available resources and market conditions. Harnessing private investment remains an important element in the overall delivery of social housing, including through supporting local authorities in meeting the needs of households on their waiting lists.

Notwithstanding the cost comparisons set out in the review, it remains the case that it would not be possible to deliver the same number of social housing homes in higher value rental areas exclusively through capital funded build and acquisition programmes. This will continue to be an important consideration in the context of the future availability of capital funding and the resourcing and capacity required to escalate local authority build and acquisition programmes to the level required to meet the current level of social housing need.

Indeed of the 50,000 new social housing homes which will be added through Rebuilding Ireland, 33,500 of these will be built with the remainder acquired. A further 10,000 homes will be leased under long term leasing arrangements.

Clearly, it is important at this time that a blended approach to the delivery of social housing

homes is pursued in order to deliver and provide immediate housing supports to those households on local authority waiting lists across the country whilst simultaneously ratcheting up capacity year on year within the housing stock. This approach is supported by the findings of the IGEEES review, which supports the need for a blended approach to delivery.

The housing crisis is complex in nature and requires a flexible, innovative response. In each year of Rebuilding Ireland to date outputs have exceeded targets and in doing so we are, step by step, resolving these issues and putting in foundations of a sustainable housing future for this country.

Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 43.

Proposed Legislation

51. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the marine planning and development management Bill. [41989/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Government approved a General Scheme of the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill in July 2019. Further policy work continues on the development of certain aspects of the proposed regime with a view to incorporating these elements once completed. My Department is engaging intensively with counterparts in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment who are leading the development of the provisions specific to Offshore Renewable Energy, to expedite the finalisation of the General Scheme in the coming weeks.

In addition to the policy development work, my Department is continuing to work with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on the drafting process. The target timeframe for the publication of the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill, as set out in the Climate Action Plan to tackle Climate Breakdown, is Quarter 4 2019. The finalisation of the Bill will be subject to engagement with the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government in relation to pre-legislative scrutiny.

The Marine Planning and Development Management Bill will require further enabling measures post enactment to bring the new regime into operation including the necessary regulations, statutory guidelines and transitional arrangements.

Planning Investigations

52. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for an investigation into alleged planning irregularities at Wicklow County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44791/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am currently considering additional documentation that I received earlier this year from the Deputy on this matter and I will write to him in due course to advise of the outcome and my decision in this matter.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 32.

Building Regulations Compliance

54. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will reconsider his opposition to placing an obligation on platforms and letting agents to ensure all properties are compliant with new planning regulations in view of the low level of compliance with short-term letting regulations. [45236/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am not opposed to there being an obligation on short-term letting platforms and letting agents to ensure all properties are compliant with new planning regulations. However, as the Deputy is well aware, responsibility for tourism rests with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. My responsibility insofar as housing and planning matters are concerned is to ensure that our housing stock is used in the most appropriate manner.

New planning legislative reforms to regulate the short term letting sector - as provided for in the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 and supplementary regulations which I made entitled the Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 - came into effect on 1 July 2019.

The primary objective of the legislative changes is aimed at regulating short-term letting through the planning code in the context of its impact on the supply of private rented accommodation particularly in urban centres of high housing demand i.e. rent pressure zones. The planning system facilitates the regulation of such short-term letting uses undertaken by the individual carrying out the activity, i.e. the owner/occupier of the house or apartment, rather than the online platforms. It is worth pointing out that these new planning laws go further than what was proposed by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government when it considered this matter. In fact, they go further than similar laws in most comparable jurisdictions.

The broader regulation of tourism activity, including the possible development of a new regulatory or licensing/ registration system for commercial platforms and short-term letting agents - as recommended in the final Working Group report on the regulation of short-term lettings - is beyond the scope of the planning code and my remit. However, I have written to my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, outlining the recommendations made by the Working Group and highlighting the measures taken by my Department to act upon these recommendations, specifically the introduction of the short-term letting legislation. I advised the Minister that the remaining recommendations of the Working Group fell under the remit of his Department to action, and assured him of my support, and that of my Department, in addressing these outstanding recommendations.

The new planning related arrangements in relation to short-term letting are in their early stages, having only commenced with effect from 1 July last. It is expected that the level of registrations of home-sharing activity will increase over the coming months as word of the new arrangements spreads and as local authority enforcement of the arrangements is stepped up.

Further detailed information on the new arrangements can be obtained at the following weblink:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/private-rented-housing/new-regulation-short-term-letting>.

Planning Guidelines

55. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the powers invested in local authorities to sanction developers in respect of violations

of hours of work, noise and other related matters; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties faced by residents, particularly in areas such as North Lotts in which there are multiple large-scale developments taking place simultaneously, impacting on quality of life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45085/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My role, as Minister, in relation to the planning system is primarily to provide and update the legislative and policy guidance framework. The legislative framework comprises the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, (the Act) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

With regards to policy guidance, my Department has issued a large number of planning guidelines (available on the Department's website, www.housing.gov.ie) under section 28 of the Act, to which planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are obliged to have regard in the exercise of their planning functions. My Department also issued a Planning Enforcement Policy Directive in 2013 under section 29 of the Act reminding planning authorities of the critical importance of planning enforcement and the need to assign sufficient and appropriate human resources for this purpose. The day-to-day operation of the planning system is, however, a matter for the planning authorities.

Under planning legislation, enforcement of planning control is a matter for the relevant planning authority which can take action if a development does not have the required permission, or where the terms of a permission have not been met. Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case, including an enforcement issue, with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

There are extensive enforcement provisions provided for in Part VIII of the Act, with a view to ensuring that works pertaining to permitted developments are carried out in accordance with the planning permission granted and any associated conditions and that no unauthorised development takes place. If a person is of the view that any development works being undertaken are not in compliance with the permission granted - including any violations of hours of work or related matters specified in a condition attached to a permission - or are unauthorised, s/he may make a written complaint to the relevant planning authority who shall investigate the matter and take any appropriate enforcement action. This includes the issuing of a warning letter and, where necessary, an enforcement notice requiring that the development is carried out in conformity with the planning permission and any condition pertaining to that permission.

If an enforcement notice is not complied with, the planning authority may itself take the specified steps and recover the expense incurred in doing so. A planning authority may also seek a Court order under section 160 of the Act, requiring any particular action to be done or not to be done.

I am satisfied that planning authorities have sufficient enforcement powers at their disposal under the existing legislation. Further to the Policy Directive referred to, it is a matter for planning authorities to ensure that they assign appropriate resources for effective planning enforcement.

Residential Tenancies Board

56. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the concerns raised in two letters to him by a person (details supplied) regarding

a lack of resources available to the Residential Tenancies Board to implement and enforce the new regulations which came into force in July 2019 and the concern that the late fines for landlords that failed to register with the board were not high enough to act as a deterrent. [45237/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department received a revised Workforce Plan from the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) for approval, in anticipation of the new residential tenancy provisions which were in development at the time. As is the practice, my Department has been engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) to agree the proposed organisation structure. This work has progressed well so far, and over the course of 2019 I have sanctioned an additional 29 staff for the Board to support implementation and enforcement of the provisions contained in the 2019 Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act. Further engagement regarding the proposed Executive Management Team is ongoing with DPER, enabled by the provision of increased resourcing of a further €2m to the RTB as part of Budget 2020, and bringing its overall allocation for 2020 to €9m.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 was enacted on the 24 May 2019. My Department engaged with the RTB throughout the legislative process. The penalty in the published Bill for late registration of tenancies was amended by providing a monthly penalty of €10 for each month, indefinitely, until the tenancy is registered. This directly addressed a concern raised in the RTB Chairpersons letter of 28 February this year.

My Department and the RTB continue to engage on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Homelessness Strategy

57. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of children that have no family home in view of the continuing number of persons that are in homeless services; the changes of policy being considered to prevent homelessness before it becomes a reality for persons and families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44982/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities on a regional basis and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The report captures details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. The most recent report is for September 2019 which showed that there were 1,756 families with 3,873 associated dependants in emergency accommodation in that month.

Supporting families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. In 2016, the Government published the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. Rebuilding Ireland is designed to significantly increase the supply of social housing by 50,000 homes in the period to 2021, double the output of overall housing to at least 25,000 homes per annum by 2020, support all tenure types (social, private and rental), and tackle homelessness comprehensively. Over 27,000 households had their housing need met under Rebuilding Ireland in 2018, with the local authority stock of social housing increased by 8,000, including homes built by local authorities and by Approved Housing Bodies. In 2018, 8,000 new social homes were delivered nationally and this year, a further 10,000 new social homes will be delivered.

Budget 2020 has increased funding available to local authorities to provide homeless ac-

accommodation and related services to €166m, an increase of €20m on this year's budget. While the priority is to support families to secure a home, the Government is also committed to ensuring that appropriate emergency accommodation is available until a home can be provided. In this regard, the Government is providing funding to local authorities to develop and operate family hubs. To date, 29 family hubs have been developed nationally, providing almost 680 units of family accommodation.

This funding also supports the delivery of services to prevent families having to enter emergency accommodation and to ensure that those families in emergency accommodation are supported to identify and secure an independent tenancy within the shortest possible time frame. The HAP Placefinder service has been made available to all local authorities to support households experiencing homelessness or at risk of entering into homelessness, to identify and secure a tenancy in the private rented sector. My Department has approved funding for 23 Placefinder officers nationally.

Rebuilding Ireland is delivering significant results in supporting exits from homelessness. In 2018, 5,135 adults exited homelessness into homes, an 8.6% increase on 2017. I expect that the numbers of exits from homelessness will increase again in 2019.

Further work is being done to prevent families from presenting to homeless services. To strengthen further the rights of tenants in the private rented sector, building on initiatives already taken, the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 was signed into law in May 2019. Among the key provisions of the Bill are measures to empower the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to investigate and sanction landlords who engage in improper conduct including non-compliance with rent increase restrictions in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs); the creation of criminal offences for landlords connected with non-compliance with rent increase restrictions in RPZs; and increasing notice periods for tenancy terminations by landlords. In addition, there are now Rent Pressure Zones in 42 areas nationally, in which rent increases are limited to 4 % p.a., and the operation of which has been strengthened further under the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019.

Credit Union Lending

58. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the review group on establishing a special purpose vehicle to enable credit union funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45196/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that credit unions can play in housing finance and supported the efforts of the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing.

Credit Union bodies have set out proposed means by which funding could be provided by Credit Unions to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the development of social housing. This follows on from the amendments introduced by the Central Bank to the regulatory regime within which Credit Unions operate.

Along with my colleague, Minister English, and officials from my Department and the Department of Finance, I have met with the Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU) and the Credit Union Development Association (CUDA) to examine how their sector can assist in the area of financing social housing delivery. Minister English met with CUDA as recently as 23 October 2019.

Throughout the discussions with the Credit Unions' representative bodies, my Department has emphasised that while it has provided technical assistance regarding the mechanisms for funding social housing, it is a matter for the Credit Unions themselves to set up special purpose vehicles to enable them to invest in the sector.

For this reason, my Department referred the Credit Unions' representative bodies to the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) with a view to both sectors sharing, as far as practical, the benefits of their respective work in this area, including the work undertaken by the ICSH on the development of special purpose vehicles for social housing financing purposes. The work of this group was supported by grant funding from my Department.

In parallel with the work undertaken by this group, the ICSH along with six Tier 3 AHBs have worked with financial advisors to establish a funding mechanism/vehicle which would identify suitable sources of non-state finance which could fund the delivery of social housing by AHBs. To date market testing has revealed good interest in lending to the sector from various lenders including Banks, Institutional investors and the Credit Union sector. This work has involved seeking sources of lending based on best value for money.

To date, one AHB has set up a special purpose vehicle; two AHBs have sourced private finance from a private institution and two AHBs are currently examining the possibility of establishing a structure to work collectively.

The Credit Union sector is one potential funder whose terms are assessed as part of the process of market testing to establish best value for money and optimum terms and conditions from lenders. It is now a matter for the relevant parties to agree a workable and mutually acceptable approach.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

59. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider specific measures (details supplied) to address the ongoing housing shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45181/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, fixing the Irish housing market and rebuilding the capacity to deliver social and affordable housing across the country requires a multi-faceted approach, which address both the short term immediate needs of families and individuals whilst simultaneously delivering long term solutions. This flexible and responsive approach is the hallmark of Rebuilding Ireland and it is working.

This year we will deliver more than 10,000 new social housing homes through build, acquisition and leasing mechanisms across the country. Next year this figure will be in excess of 11,000. To put this into context, this would represent an almost 100% increase on the delivery of social homes in just four years, compared with the delivery of 5,714 homes through the same mechanisms in 2016.

In addition, the Government's National Development Plan 2018-2027, sets out the Government's commitment to deliver 112,000 social housing homes out to 2027, supported by capital funding of €11.6 billion.

This progress is having a tangible affect on the lives of thousands of households and the most recently available Summary of Social Housing Assessments indicated that the number of households on the social housing waiting list has decreased by 25%.

However, we must also ensure that we meet the housing needs of families and individuals in the short term. At the end of Quarter 2 of 2019, almost sixty thousand households (59,961) have been supported through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme since the start of Rebuilding Ireland.

These supports are vital and provide security to households and enables them to remain in their homes, under the rights afforded by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended), until such time as they move onto either a social home with a local authority or Approved Housing Body or alternatively into the private market, facilitated by additional measures, such as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan and the Help to Buy Scheme, which have helped address the housing needs of some 15,000 households.

The provision of affordable housing, either to buy or rent, is being facilitated by the €310 million Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) that runs from 2019 to 2021. The fund is to provide facilitating infrastructure on local authority sites so that more affordable discounted homes can be delivered and I envisage that at least 6,200 affordable homes can be provided through this mechanism. Approval in principle has been granted for funding of approximately €127 million, to support almost 3,200 homes. While more focused on urban areas, and building at scale on local authority sites, the fund remains in place for the provision of housing in all locations where there is a proven affordability challenge. It is anticipated that further calls under the Serviced Sites Fund will be made in due course.

Lastly, the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) was designed to activate housing supply by putting in place the enabling public infrastructure necessary to ensure that large scale development could take place on key sites in urban areas of high housing demand. Funding of €200 million was originally made available under LIHAF, of which €150 million would be funded by the Exchequer with local authorities to match fund €50 million. 30 projects received final approval, at a total cost of €195.71 million, of which €146.69 million will be funded by the Exchequer with local authorities funding the balance. These projects will stimulate development of approximately 20,000 housing units across 14 local authorities and approximately 7,800 of these homes will be offered a discount on open market prices. To date, according to information provided by Local Authorities, 1,678 housing units have been delivered including 785 cost reduced units.

Vacant Properties

60. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authorities that have developed and activated vacant homes action plans; the statistical information his Department has on the number of vacant homes in each local authority area; the action that has been advised to local authorities in respect of homes left vacant for long periods of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44981/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Every local authority has prepared a Vacant Homes Action Plan for their administrative area. In August 2017, I requested all local authorities to designate vacant home officers to co-ordinate local actions to address vacancy and also to undertake local vacancy surveys in order to identify, through their Vacant Homes Action Plans, priority “vacancy hot-spot areas” and properties that can be quickly brought back into residential use.

Where local authorities identify a potentially long term vacant residential dwelling, and the owner can be identified, the local authority attempts to engage with the owner on the options available to assist in bringing their properties back into use as liveable housing stock.

Since the launch of Rebuilding Ireland, in the region of 553 vacant homes have been re-introduced to the liveable housing stock, primarily through our Repair and Lease, and Buy and Renew initiatives. Local authorities are also working hard to bring homes back into use by acquiring dwellings in unfinished estates, liaising with financial institutions on their vacant property portfolios and utilising CPO powers to acquire empty properties. These recovered properties aid us in the ongoing effort to meet our commitments under Pillar 5 of Rebuilding Ireland, which sets out a range of measures that try to ensure that Ireland's existing housing stock is used to the greatest extent possible.

In order to more accurately determine the levels of long-term, vacant but recoverable dwellings that can be re-introduced into the liveable housing stock, the Department, in conjunction with the Housing Agency, the CSO and the local government sector, developed a survey methodology in relation to locating vacant housing and a pilot field-based survey was undertaken across six local authorities.

Each participating local authority visually inspected approximately 1,200 homes, recording the location of potentially vacant properties and, where possible, recording apparent reasons for vacancy and categorising each vacant home (with a view to prioritising those which are most likely to be re-introduced into the liveable housing stock). To identify long-term vacancy, the pilot requires two visual inspections, six months apart, with those houses occupied between the two inspections disregarded.

The participating local authorities have completed their work on the pilot vacancy identification survey and my Department is analysing the results of the survey and considering the outcomes to determine whether there would be significant value in rolling out the survey on a national basis.

I believe that the co-ordinated work of the Vacant Homes Unit in my Department and the local authority Vacant Homes Offices has been and continues to be instrumental in acting as a vital source of information and advice to those who may own homes that are suitable for reactivation. This ongoing liaison between the Department and local authorities, who have crucial local knowledge, allows for more rapid action to tackle vacancy and also provides a clear repository at the coalface for owners of vacant homes who want to bring them back into use.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

61. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has met either Cavan County Council or Monaghan County Council to discuss the social housing strategies of his Department; the housing targets for new builds in both counties for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44966/19]

63. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses acquired and-or purchased by Cavan and Monaghan county councils, respectively, in each of the years 2013 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44967/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 63 together.

I meet regularly with the Chief Executives of all the local authorities, including those from Cavan and Monaghan, in relation to the advancement of social housing in line with Rebuilding Ireland. I most recently met the Chief Executives in September 2019, and that followed a Housing Summit I held with them in February 2019.

Further to my meetings with the Chief Executives, follow up meetings have been held between my Department and local authority senior management, which again includes Cavan and Monaghan County Councils. I intend to continue similar contacts in the future.

In March of this year, I wrote to all local authorities setting out their social housing targets for 2019 across all delivery streams. These social housing targets - including for Cavan and Monaghan - are publicly available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-targets-2019/>.

Progress against targets is tracked on a quarterly basis. The most recent report sets out the position at the end of Quarter 2 of 2019 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/housing-statistics>. Details of the number of houses delivered in each local authority area, including Cavan and Monaghan and including construction and acquisition, are also available at this link. Details relating to delivery in Quarter 3 of 2019 will be published as soon as they are validated.

Approved Housing Bodies

62. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of the classification of approved housing bodies as on-balance sheet by EUROSTAT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45195/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently engaging with Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector representative bodies and examining, in detail, proposals which were presented by those bodies, as a possible means to achieve reclassification. In this regard, my Department met with the Irish Council for Social Housing on 16 October 2019 and is scheduled to meet with the Housing Alliance in the coming weeks.

The proposals are complex as they cut across a wide range of social housing policy issues and will require extensive analysis. These engagements are helping to inform a pathway to consider the range of issues involved. As part of this process, my Department is also liaising with the Department of Finance and the CSO to ensure any new or additional information can be brought forward for consideration.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 61.

Seanad Reform

64. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the work of the Seanad reform implementation group and progress on implementing the recommendations. [43187/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The all-party Seanad Reform Implementation Group [SRIG] published a Report and draft Bill in December 2018. The Report which contains recommendations in relation to electoral reform, which is the responsibility of my Department, as well as non-statutory reforms to the way the Seanad conducts its business, was noted by Government at its meeting on 30th April 2019. Government also noted that the Report includes four statements from various groups outlining where their position was not in line with recommendations of the Report.

The Government will reflect on the views of the Houses of the Oireachtas in considering the next steps to be taken, following statements in both Houses of the Oireachtas. Statements on the Report of the SRIG were held in the Seanad on 24 September 2019 and are expected to be held in the Dáil on 7 November 2019.

Local Authority Housing Provision

65. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing units he expects to be built by each local authority in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45009/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The delivery of social housing homes by local authorities across the country, in collaboration with Approved Housing Bodies, is a key priority for this Government.

Since the launch of Rebuilding Ireland in 2016, local authorities have delivered more than 23,000 (23,768) new social housing homes, through a combination of build, acquisition and lease mechanisms, representing more than 47% of the overall target to 2021. Indeed, this year more than 10,000 new social housing homes will be delivered through these methods and my Department are working very closely with all stakeholders to monitor progress and maximize the delivery of all new social housing homes, including the targeted 6,545 build social housing homes in 2019.

It should be noted that the social housing targets, agreed with each local authority for 2019, have been published on my Department's website at (<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-targets-2019/>).

Throughout the year, communication and meetings take place between my Department and senior management at each local authority to resolve blockages and identify opportunities to deliver the maximum amount of homes possible each year. This collaborative and responsive approach has been very successful to date, with outputs exceeding targets each year to date since the launch of Rebuilding Ireland.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

66. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is considering establishing a national or regional social housing planning and construction agency in view of the slow delivery of new homes by the existing 31 local authorities. [44396/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Over the course of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 138,000 households. The implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is well underway and making significant progress.

Annual delivery targets were exceeded in 2017 and again in 2018. By end Quarter 2 2019, over 84,000 additional social housing homes had already been provided under the plan.

The level of progress being made is reflected in social housing waiting lists, which have reduced by 25% nationally, from 91,600 households to just over 68,000 between 2016 and 2018.

Substantial funding is in place to deliver on the targets set in Rebuilding Ireland. The Hous-

ing Budget for 2019 is €2.4 billion rising to €2.63 billion in 2020, representing an increase of €258 million (+11%) compared to 2019.

My Department continues to engage very intensively with all local authorities to keep momentum on new build output as high as possible. When we examine the pipeline for new development, there are reasons to be optimistic in terms of meeting our ambitious delivery plans for 2019 and beyond. The Construction Status Report covering the period to June 2019 shows that there are now over 22,000 homes in the build pipeline, up more than 8% on quarter 1 of this year.

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

In order to support housing authorities deliver on their responsibilities and obligations, a number of dedicated structures have been put in place across the country over the last number of years.

A dedicated Housing Delivery Office (HDO) was also established within my Department in September 2017 to support local authorities, approved housing bodies and all stakeholders involved in the delivery of key elements of the ambitious private and social housing targets in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. The purpose of this office is to accelerate and monitor housing delivery, both private and social, on key sites, identify further mechanisms to accelerate delivery, and support the roll-out of complex construction projects, including identifying and resolving barriers to delivery.

The Land Development Agency (LDA) was also established in September 2018 with an immediate focus on managing the State's own lands to develop new homes, and regenerate under-utilised sites. On establishment, the Agency had access to an initial tranche of 8 sites that have near term delivery potential for 3,000 new homes. The overall objective is for the LDA to be involved in the building of 150,000 new homes over the next 20 years.

Extensive consultation has taken place and is ongoing between the Land Development Agency (LDA) and local authorities. The discussions have centred around how the LDA can assist with the formulation of plans to deliver housing, including social and affordable housing, on local authority owned lands. It is also working with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council in relation to the delivery of housing on the local authority owned site at Shanganagh.

Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are vital for successful delivery of social housing targets and my Department works closely with these bodies on an ongoing basis to support them in the delivery of their social housing programme. The AHB Service Unit was also established within the Housing Agency to provide a centre of excellence and advice for AHBs. This Unit works with local authorities and AHBs to build their capacity and expertise to meet the scale and complexity associated with the ambitious programme of delivery in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

I believe what is critical at this stage is to ensure that all of the structures already in place are aligned, co-ordinated and co-operating towards a shared vision. This includes my own Department, the Housing Agency and the Housing Finance Agency working with local authorities and approved housing bodies across the country. I am satisfied at this time that appropriate arrangements are in place to deliver much needed social and affordable homes across the country.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

67. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homes constructed under the rapid build programme in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the reason the numbers proposed in Rebuilding Ireland are not being delivered; if efforts to provide homes on publicly owned land through rapid build will be renewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44980/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government has committed to adding 50,000 new social housing homes to the social housing stock, by end 2021, through build, acquisition and leasing programmes. This is in addition to supporting 88,000 new families and individuals into homes through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Schemes.

In terms of social housing, the priority in Rebuilding Ireland is to target the delivery of as many social housing homes, as quickly as possible, utilising all the programmes and mechanisms available. This year, €2.4 billion will support the delivery of 10,000 social housing homes and this will increase again in 2020, when over €2.6 billion will support the delivery of over 11,000 homes to the social housing stock.

The rapid delivery programme is one of a suite of delivery programmes and measures in place to support the delivery of social housing homes across the country. At end 2018, 423 social housing homes had been delivered utilising the rapid delivery programme. 22 of these were delivered in 2016, 186 in 2017 and 215 in 2018. A further 215 new social housing homes are expected to be delivered through the rapid delivery programme in 2019. It should be noted that there are now 40 rapid build projects in the pipeline that will deliver some 1,100 homes out to 2021.

My Department continues to work closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of rapid build methodologies. To support rapid delivery housing, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) put in place a framework of Rapid Delivery contractors in 2017. This framework is available for all local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to use in the interest of accelerated delivery.

We have also been working specifically with Dublin City Council on the establishment of a Design Build Contractor Framework to deliver apartments. This framework, which was established recently, has a value of €750 million. It is envisaged that over 1,000 fast-track apartments will be built using this framework, and while the majority of these homes will be advanced across the Dublin area, we are working with other local authorities to advance schemes/projects suitable for volumetric construction.

While the rapid delivery programme represents new challenges to local authorities in relation to forms of contract, design and contract management, the pipeline of rapid delivery projects is continuously strengthening; with more local authorities adopting it as a means of delivery. My Department will continue to encourage, work with and support local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies deliver as many homes utilising this mechanism as possible.

Every effort is being made to provide homes on publicly owned land and the suitability of rapid delivery programme is considered for all social housing projects. Regarding the use public land in general, extensive consultation has taken place and is ongoing between the Land Development Agency (LDA) and local authorities. The discussions have centred around how the LDA can assist with the formulation of plans to deliver housing, including social and affordable housing, on local authority owned lands.

68. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of delivering a one, two, three or four-bed social housing unit nationally and in Dublin, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45199/19]

1121. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of delivering a one, two, three and four bed social housing unit nationally and in Dublin, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45194/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 68 and 1121 together.

There are a number of variables involved in estimating the cost of providing social housing units, such as the form of delivery, size of unit, land, funding, etc. In terms of construction and 'all-in' costs, the averages as sought for the various sized units, based on full capital costs, are set out in the tables below. These are shown in terms of houses and apartments, both for Dublin and nationally.

Houses - Dublin

	1 bed	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	3 bed	4 bed
Construction	€197,850	€207,975	€216,975	€227,275	€243,125
All-in Cost	€258,450	€270,575	€280,675	€292,500	€311,325

Houses - Nationally

	1 bed	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	3 bed	4 bed
Construction	€155,818	€165,132	€174,206	€184,685	€199,491
All-in Cost	€201,359	€212,624	€222,582	€234,571	€252,047

Apartments - Nationally

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed
Construction	€174,159	€189,112	€209,482
All-in Cost	€225,082	€243,476	€267,629

The above figures are based on returned data from tendered social housing schemes over an extended period. 'Construction' cost is reflective of building costs (including VAT) and also includes normal site works and site development. 'All-in Cost' includes cost of construction, land cost, professional fees, utility connections, site investigations/surveys, archaeology where appropriate, VAT and contribution to public art. Abnormal costs are excluded from these figures.

Employment Data

69. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the female participation and employment rates here; and the corresponding EU average rates. [44212/19]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a household survey which provides quarterly statistics on employment

and unemployment and is the official source of labour market estimates in the State. The primary classification used for the LFS results is the ILO (International Labour Organization) labour force classification.

The most recent figures available from the LFS are for the second quarter (Q2) of 2019.

The labour force participation rate (ILO) is the number of persons aged 15 years or over in the labour force expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15 years or over.

The employment rate (ILO) is the number of employed persons aged 15-64 years expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15-64 years.

Table 1 shows the labour force participation rate of females aged 15 years or over for Ireland and the corresponding EU28 rate for Q2 2019.

Table 2 shows the employment rate (ILO) of females aged 15-64 years for Ireland and the corresponding EU28 rate for Q2 2019.

Table 1 Participation rates (ILO) of females aged 15 years and over - Q2 2019

Gender	Age Group	Ireland	EU 28
Females	15 years and over	56.0%	52.2%

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland and EUROSTAT

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: q2=Apr-Jun

Table 2 Employment rates (ILO) of females aged 15-64 years - Q2 2019

Gender	Age Group	Ireland	EU 28
Females	15-64 years	63.7%	64.2%

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland and EUROSTAT.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: q2=Apr-Jun.

Employment Data

70. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the number of self-employed persons by gender here based on the latest national, EUROSTAT and global data; and the corresponding EU rates in tabular form. [44214/19]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a household survey which provides quarterly statistics on employment and unemployment and is the official source of labour market estimates in the State. The primary classification used for the LFS results is the ILO (International Labour Organisation)

labour force classification.

The most recent figures available from the LFS for Ireland and from EUROSTAT for the EU28 are for the second quarter (Q2) of 2019. Global estimates are compiled by the ILO on an annual basis only. Thus, for comparability purposes, data provided in the following tables for Ireland and the EU28 refer to the year 2018.

Table 1 shows the number of self-employed persons aged 15 years and over, classified by gender in Ireland and the corresponding EU28 and Global estimates for 2018.

Table 2 shows self-employed persons as a percentage of total employed persons aged 15 years and over, classified by gender in Ireland and the corresponding EU28 and Global estimates for 2018.

Table 1 Self employed persons aged 15 years and over classified by gender in Ireland, EU28 and Global, 2018

Males	'000
Ireland	251
EU 28	22,297
Global	771,425
Females	'000
Ireland	76
EU 28	10,672
Global	356,214
Total	'000
Ireland	327
EU 28	32,969
Global	1,127,639

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland, EUROSTAT and International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Estimates for Ireland and EU28 taken as the average of the estimates for the four quarters of 2018

Global figures are based on estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Table 2 Self employed persons as a percentage of total persons in employment aged 15 years and over classified by gender in Ireland, EU 28 and Global, 2018

Males	%
Ireland	20.6
EU 28	17.9
Global	38.2

Males	%
Females	%
Ireland	7.3
EU 28	10.1
Global	27.8
Total	%
Ireland	14.5
EU 28	14.3
Global	34.1

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland, EUROSTAT and international labour Organisation (ILO)

Estimates for Ireland and EU28 taken as the average of the estimates for the four quarters of 2018

Global figures are based on estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Enterprise Data

71. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the number of business births, startups, from the business demography statistics with some comparative EU statistics. [44213/19]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): Statistics on enterprise births are compiled by the CSO as part of its annual Business Demography statistics. Corresponding figures are compiled by each EU Member State.

A breakdown by gender of newly birthed enterprises, as requested, is not currently available, but work is under way by the CSO to develop this additional breakdown of the statistics for Ireland.

The most recent period for which Business Demography data is available is 2017. The following table sets out the number of newly birthed enterprises, annually between 2014 and 2017, in each EU Member State.

Number of Enterprise Births in the EU, 2014 to 2017

Member State	2014	2015	2016	2017
EU - 28	2,581,088	2,550,560	2,639,585	:
Belgium	39,070	41,102	41,157	42,745
Bulgaria	39,333	40,358	43,434	41,723
Czech Republic	93,360	85,645	90,436	94,755
Denmark	24,283	23,012	26,183	26,092
Germany	202,984	198,135	188,788	189,464
Estonia	8,631	8,512	9,066	10,594

Member State	2014	2015	2016	2017
Ireland	16,257	18,100	19,249	22,241
Greece	:	39,896	34,527	:
Spain	287,611	274,172	301,042	275,654
France	339,075	328,884	346,804	375,966
Croatia	11,411	12,185	12,856	13,358
Italy	274,489	279,132	296,906	276,889
Cyprus	3,375	4,510	5,386	:
Latvia	15,194	19,003	18,808	14,102
Lithuania	43,543	34,490	37,132	40,336
Luxembourg	3,134	2,989	2,891	3,103
Hungary	52,101	56,799	57,561	71,485
Malta	3,599	2,730	5,925	3,873
Netherlands	108,786	107,946	111,159	111,683
Austria	29,480	28,082	26,759	:
Poland	253,061	249,815	248,389	253,493
Portugal	117,201	130,156	131,651	138,318
Romania	70,912	79,496	74,387	80,251
Slovenia	15,158	15,154	14,884	14,813
Slovakia	86,672	53,899	49,776	65,814
Finland	22,210	18,811	19,153	28,586
Sweden	52,606	53,185	53,005	50,853
United Kingdom	316,540	343,550	371,370	345,445

: denotes that the value is not available

Note: An enterprise birth amounts to the creation of a combination of production factors with the restriction that no other enterprises are involved in the event. Births do not include entries into the population due to mergers, break-ups, split-off or restructuring of a set of enterprises. It does not include entries into a sub-population resulting only from a change of activity.

A birth occurs when an enterprise starts from scratch and actually starts activity. An enterprise creation can be considered an enterprise birth if new production factors in particular, new jobs are created. If a dormant unit is reactivated within two years, this event is not considered a birth.

EU Meetings

72. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if Israel and Palestine was discussed at the most recent EU Council meeting. [45244/19]

The Taoiseach: Israel and Palestine was not discussed at the most recent European Council meeting on 17-18 October.

International matters are generally discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council. The wider Middle East was last discussed at an informal Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Helsinki on 29-30 August 2019.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

73. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Taoiseach the number of financial settlements reached by his Department and statutory bodies within his remit nationally; and the number which included confidentiality clauses in each of the past five years by organisation. [44196/19]

The Taoiseach: There were no financial settlements reached by my Department or any statutory body under my remit in the past five years.

Information and Communications Technology

74. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form. [44717/19]

75. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020. [44733/19]

76. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit. [44749/19]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 to 76, inclusive, together.

There is one computer in the Department of the Taoiseach that uses the Microsoft Windows 7 Operating System. This computer is used for an internal system and is scheduled to be replaced in November 2019 with the supplier of that system.

The provision of modern, appropriately secured and appropriately supported computer operating systems, on all devices used by staff assigned to the Department, is a component of protecting against malware and other attacks insofar as possible.

The Department of the Taoiseach will not be required to pay any additional premium support payments once support for Microsoft Windows 7 ends on 14th January 2020.

Departmental Staff Data

77. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; and the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay. [44853/19]

The Taoiseach: There are currently 221.5 whole time equivalent staff working in my Department. All staff are paid above the current national minimum wage rate of €9.80 per hour.

Departmental Contracts Data

78. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019. [45071/19]

The Taoiseach: Under Department of Finance Circular 40/02, my Department makes an-

nual returns to the Comptroller and Auditor General in respect of contracts above a €25,000 threshold which are awarded without a competitive process. Contracts awarded without a competitive process are not necessarily non-compliant with procurement guidelines.

Details of contracts/purchases of more than €25,000 undertaken by my Department without a competitive process in 2017 and 2018 are set out in the tables below. The National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO), the only body under my Department's aegis, has no contracts that fall within the scope of the question.

While my Department's Finance Unit actively monitors contracts and procurement throughout the year, it is not possible, at this point in the year, to provide accurate details in respect of 2019.

2018

Nature of Contract	Value	Details
Maintenance, support, license expenditure and upgrade related expenditure for eCabinet for users across all Government Departments	€243,182	This relates to a bespoke system developed following an open tender competition. No other economic operator would be in a position to provide the licenses, product maintenance and upgrade services.
Provision of telephonists to operate the Department's switch	€94,144	A detailed interdepartmental cost benefit analysis was performed to ensure this contract represented good value for money.
Provision of a legal secretary to the Moriarty Tribunal legal team	€47,716	The Tribunal approached the provider directly in relation to this engagement when the Tribunal was set up in 1997. Tribunals of Inquiry are independent in their operation.
Provision of stenography services for the Cooke Commission of Investigation	€40,000	The Commission approached the provider directly in relation to this work. Commissions of Investigation are independent in their operation.
Independent expert review of the National Broadband procurement process	€29,843	The terms agreed for this review were the same as the rates payable under the terms of the contract between the provider and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The review was an independent review of the National Broadband Procurement Process carried out by the NBP Process Auditor on behalf of the Department of the Taoiseach.

2017

Nature of Contract	Value	Details
Maintenance, support, license expenditure and upgrade related expenditure for eCabinet for users across all Government Departments	€412,206	This relates to a bespoke system developed following an open tender competition. No other economic operator would be in a position to provide the licenses, product maintenance and upgrade services.
Provision of telephonists to operate the Department's switch	€115,157	A detailed interdepartmental cost benefit analysis was performed to ensure this contract represented good value for money.

Questions - Written Answers

Nature of Contract	Value	Details
Provision of newspapers	€56,087	This relates to a rollover of a previous contract. The Department issued a request for tender and a new contract was in place in Q1 2018.
Provision of a legal secretary to the Moriarty Tribunal legal team	€51,906	The Tribunal approached the provider directly in relation to this engagement when the Tribunal was set up in 1997. Tribunals of Inquiry are independent in their operation.
Provision of ICT services to the IBRC Commission	€36,861	The initial contract with this provider was entered following a tender process however additional expenditure was incurred by the commission as a result of an extension of the existing arrangement. Commissions of Investigation are independent in their operation and their expenditure levels depend on the requirements of their investigation.
Provision of a software system to the Moriarty Tribunal	€26,537	The Tribunal approached the provider directly in relation to this engagement. Tribunals of Inquiry are independent in their operation.

Garda Data

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach if the CSO has a record of the population served by existing Garda divisions nationally. [45125/19]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): Census 2016 figures for the existing Garda boundaries are set out in the following table. The census figures relate to the de facto population, i.e. the population recorded for each area represents the total of all persons present within its boundaries on Census night.

Population by Garda Regions and Garda Divisions, Census 2016.

-	Region	Population
All Regions	All divisions	4,761,865
	Kilkenny/Carlow	153,630
	Wexford	149,941
	DMR West	321,703
	DMR North	351,283
	DMR South	249,252
	DMR South Central	131,349
	DMR North Central	92,662
	Meath	191,919
	DMR East	201,087
	Wicklow	142,970
	Kildare	222,038
	Waterford	121,274
	Laois/Offaly	156,899
	Roscommon/Longford	98,070
	Louth	131,953

-	Region	Population
	Tipperary	159,514
	Westmeath	94,758
	Clare	110,154
	Limerick	204,977
	Galway	258,228
	Cork City	258,877
	Cork North	156,642
	Cork West	132,958
	Kerry	143,664
	Mayo	131,084
	Sligo/Leitrim	98,210
	Cavan/Monaghan	137,577
	Donegal	159,192
South Eastern Region	All divisions	584,359
	Kilkenny/Carlow	153,630
	Wexford	149,941
	Waterford	121,274
	Tipperary	159,514
Dublin Metropolitan Region	All divisions	1,347,336
	DMR West	321,703
	DMR North	351,283
	DMR South	249,252
	DMR South Central	131,349
	DMR North Central	92,662
	DMR East	201,087
Eastern Region	All divisions	808,584
	Meath	191,919
	Wicklow	142,970
	Kildare	222,038
	Laois/Offaly	156,899
	Westmeath	94,758
Western Region	All divisions	597,536
	Roscommon/Longford	98,070
	Clare	110,154
	Galway	258,228
	Mayo	131,084
Northern Region	All divisions	526,932
	Louth	131,953
	Sligo/Leitrim	98,210
	Cavan/Monaghan	137,577
	Donegal	159,192
Southern Region	All divisions	897,118
	Limerick	204,977
	Cork City	258,877

-	Region	Population
	Cork North	156,642
	Cork West	132,958
	Kerry	143,664

Brexit Preparations

80. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for an economic impact assessment of the current withdrawal treaty on trade and other economic metrics under the auspices of his Department and agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44272/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As part of a whole of Government approach, my Department continues to engage in forward planning with the other Departments involved in addressing all issues relevant to the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

While my Department is not planning to carry out an economic impact assessment of the current Withdrawal Treaty, it is however continuing to monitor the ongoing situation to ensure that both it and the Defence Forces are fully prepared to address any potential issues that might arise in the defence area as a consequence of Brexit.

Defence Forces Records

81. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 72 of 17 October 2019, if further assistance will be provided to the person (details supplied) who is continuing to try to obtain documentation from his Department and is under time pressure to obtain same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44427/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department issued a reply in this matter to the State Body referred to by the Deputy on the 23rd day of October 2019 and a copy thereof has also been sent to the individual concerned.

Defence Forces Recruitment

82. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44600/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The application process for entry into the Defence Forces involves a number of stages, some of which have been outlined in the details supplied to the question.

The military authorities advise that the candidate will receive communication shortly to keep him abreast of the process.

Information and Communications Technology

83. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of com-

puters in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44708/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department initiated a project earlier this year to deploy the Windows 10 operating system to all desktop computers and laptops. The project is due to be completed in early 2020. The table below shows the current number of desktop computers and laptops that still use the Windows 7 operating system.

Operating System	Current Number of Desktop Computers and Laptops
Windows 7	480

Information and Communications Technology

84. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44724/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department's policy is to maintain all operating systems in use with the latest available patches and security updates. In line with this policy, the Department will enter into a contract with Microsoft for Extended Security Updates for desktop computers and laptops still using Windows 7 after the End of Support for this operating system on January 14th 2020. The contract will ensure access to patches and security updates until the migration of all of the Department's desktop computers and laptops to Windows 10 which is due to be completed in early 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

85. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44740/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department places a high priority on information security and it is our policy is to maintain all operating systems in use with the latest available patches and security updates. The Department will avail of Extended Security Updates for desktop computers and laptops still using Windows 7 after the End of Support for this operating system on January 14th 2020. This will ensure access to patches and security updates until the migration of all of the Department's desktop computers and laptops to Windows 10 which is due to be completed in early 2020.

Departmental Staff Data

86. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44843/19]

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

employs both civil servants and civilian employees. Civilian employees are employed to support the operational capability of the Defence Forces and work in military installations.

As of 31 October, 2019, there were 371 civil servants employed by my Department, of which 304 are full-time. The remaining 67 work a variety of reduced working patterns. This combination of full time personnel and personnel working reduced patterns equates to my Department having 352 whole time equivalent (WTE) civil servants. At the same date, there were 452 civilian employees attached to military installations, of which 435 were full time employees. Of the remaining 17, 11 have reduced work patterns and 6 are permanent part-time employees.

No civil servant or civilian employee employed by my Department is being paid at the minimum rate of pay.

Defence Forces Medical Services

87. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if consideration will be given to joint appointments of consultants and specialists within the health service to support the medical corps in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44881/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A comprehensive range of Primary and Secondary medical care is provided to members of the Permanent Defence Forces (PDF).

Specialist services provided in-house include a comprehensive physiotherapy service, psychology services delivered by two full-time psychologists, and dedicated laboratory services based in St. Bricin's military hospital. The Deputy will also be aware that my Department is currently in the process of conducting a competition for the role of a full-time consultant psychiatrist for the Defence Forces. These specialist services are delivered in tandem with a dedicated in-house primary care team of Medical Officers, pharmacists, and Dental Officers.

Where there is no in-house expertise available, personnel requiring specialist care are referred externally, as appropriate. I am satisfied that these measures provide comprehensive supports to individuals in the Defence Forces who may require them, however, I can assure you that all areas of medical service are kept under constant review.

Defence Forces Ceremonies

88. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of commissioning ceremonies for the Defence Forces which will occur before year end; and the date of each. [45000/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are two commissioning ceremonies due to occur before the end of the year.

One Direct Entrant will be commissioned as a Naval Service officer on 6 November 2019.

Seven Air Corps cadets are scheduled to be commissioned as officers on 6 December 2019.

Departmental Contracts Data

89. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45061/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): All procurements in the Defence Organisation are carried out in accordance with EU and National law and guidelines. Procurement practices are scrutinised and audited by both the Department's Internal Audit Section and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. Accounting Officers are accountable to the Oireachtas for compliance with all relevant EU and National procurement regulations. Beyond that, the awarding of public contracts is monitored by the EU Commission which may, if it finds that a State has disobeyed the rules, take action in the European Court of Justice. In this context there were no contracts found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019.

Army Barracks

90. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 33 of 24 September 2019, when works will commence on refurbishing the existing accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45158/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that site works on this project have commenced and are expected to be completed by mid 2020. This project involves the upgrading and refurbishment of the existing accommodation in Plunkett Block 7 for 58 personnel to modern standards.

Army Barracks

91. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the civilian positions which are available at Custume Barracks, Athlone; and if there is a vacancy for a painter and decorator at the facility. [45166/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Civilian employees are employed to support the operational capability of the Defence Forces and work in military installations. Recruitment of such employees is an on-going process, with vacancies being identified and filled on a priority basis following engagement with the military authorities.

There is currently a civilian position for a Craftworker (Carpenter) vacant in Custume Barracks. The closing date for receipt of applications has recently passed and interviews for the position are expected to be held in the coming weeks. My Department has not been advised of any vacancy for a painter and decorator in Custume Barracks at this time.

Defence Forces Data

92. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the annual payroll and associated costs allocated to the Defence Forces which remained unspent due to the establishment number not being achieved; and if requests were made by him or the Minister for Finance for same to be reconfigured and ring-fenced for payment of military service allowances or for military capital projects, rather than being returned to the Exchequer. [45168/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government ensures that Vote 36 (Defence) is fully funded to provide for the pay and allowances of the target strength of 9,500 Permanent Defence Force (PDF) personnel, as set out in the White Paper on Defence.

The following table shows the budget allocation and expenditure for pay and allowances for serving members of the Permanent Defence Force for the years 2014-2018, and the savings which arose mainly due to the actual PDF strength falling below the target level.

Year	Budget	Outturn	Savings
2014	€459.0m	€431.1m	€27.9m
2015	€454.0m	€425.3m	€28.7m
2016	€453.0m	€421.9m	€31.1m
2017	€457.0m	€437.0m	€20.0m
2018	€469.1m	€439.7m	€29.4m

Savings arising within the Vote, with the approval of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), have been used to address spending pressures elsewhere in the Vote Group in accordance with Government accounting procedures. Overall, the Defence Sector budget allocation for the years 2014-2018 was €4.6 billion, and the total balance remaining unspent for those five years was €4.2 million, representing less than 0.1% of the total allocation.

Similar to other areas of the Public Sector, Permanent Defence Force pay and allowance rates are determined centrally within National Pay Agreement structures. In that context, I am delighted that the Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on Recruitment and Retention in the Defence Forces contains a broad range of recommendations providing immediate benefits to PDF members. These measures which include a 10% increase in Military Service Allowance have been recently accepted by both Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations. I am pleased to confirm that payment of these increases will be progressed over the coming weeks.

Defence Forces Strength

93. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the strength of each branch of the Defence Forces, including the Naval Service Reserve; and the strength of same in each of the years since 9 March 2011 to date. [45169/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the military authorities that it was not possible to collate the required information within the timeframe available. I shall provide the figures to the Deputy when I receive them from the military authorities.

Army Personnel

94. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the strength of each branch of the Army in 1 and 2 brigades (details supplied); and the strength of each organisational structure in each of the years since October 2012 to date. [45170/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the military authorities that it was not possible to collate the required information within the timeframe available. I shall provide the figures to the Deputy when I receive them from the

military authorities.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

95. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces in the ordnance corps explosive ordnance disposal team; the grade of each; and the number in November 2009. [45171/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): For reasons of operational security, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the disposition and specifics of the Defence Forces' Explosive Ordnance Disposal capabilities.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

96. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number in each branch of the Defence Forces by rank. [45172/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following table shows the number in each branch of the Defence Forces, by rank, as at 30th September 2019, the latest date for which such data is available.

Substantive Strength of the Defence Forces - 30 September 2019

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-05_pq96-05-11-19_en.xlsx] Table 1

Departmental Staff Data

97. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel by grade in his Department in each of the years 2009 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [45173/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following table provides details of the number of civil service posts by grade in my Department in each of the years from 2009 to 31 October, 2019.

The Deputy will note from that the overall staffing numbers in the Department of Defence have decreased by some 14%; from 409 at the end of 2008, to a figure of 352 at 31 October, 2019. As outlined in the table, while the overall numbers have declined the profile of the posts has changed somewhat to reflect the evolving policy based issues for the defence sector, both national and international, increased activity in areas such as HR and procurement, governance and supporting engagement with the Oireachtas. In addition, the transfer of a number of transactional HR and payroll functions, involving predominantly clerical grades, to the National Shared Services Office has also impacted on the required skills and workforce profile of my Department.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department comprises of both a civil and a military element. The civil element is headed by the Secretary General and the military element by the Chief of Staff. Both elements provide support to me as Minister in the management of defence. Defence Forces' Headquarters is the military element of the Department, with an establishment

of over 320 military personnel.

Civil-military collaboration in the Department enables the delivery of defence across the three strategic dimensions set out in the Statement of Strategy; defence policy, ensuring the capacity to deliver and Defence Forces' operational outputs. Also, the White Paper on Defence, which provides the policy framework for defence to 2025, is being implemented through a project management framework built on civil-military collaboration. A number of additional civil servants have been assigned directly to work within military units to provide specialist skills and expertise in key areas such as finance, procurement and analysis.

In addition, the Department of Defence continues to play an important role in the areas of Civil Defence, Emergency Planning, enterprise development and societal supports and I am satisfied that the appropriate resources are in place to discharge the functions of my Department.

Staff numbers in the Department of Defence

GRADE	01.01.09	01.01.10	01.01.11	01.01.12	01.01.13	01.01.14	01.01.15	01.01.16	01.01.17	01.01.18	01.01.19	31.10.19
SECRETARY GENERAL	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
ASSISTANT SECRETARY	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3
DIRECTOR	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PRINCIPAL	14.5	13.7	12.6	14.6	13.8	13.7	14.7	14.7	15.1	15.1	16.1	16.4
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL	37.9	34.9	34.7	33.7	35.7	35.7	37.7	39.7	38.7	41.7	42.85	46.8
ACCOUNTANT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.95
LEGAL ADVISOR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER	60.83	56.93	55.46	55.12	57.36	57.23	57.23	57.5	58.1	59.93	67.3	67.7
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	3	6	5	4.95	4.95
EXECUTIVE OFFICER/STAFF OFFICER	114.68	104.53	99.36	98.56	101.26	99.86	98.29	90.29	95.13	88.75	99.47	100.84
CLERICAL OFFICER	141.6	128.6	120	118.76	117.43	114.54	114.12	106.49	103.09	94.19	84.24	90.9
STOREMAN/STOREKEEPER/PAPERKEEPER/CLEANER	9	8	5	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
HEAD SERVICES OFFICER/SERVICES OFFICER	19.73	18	15.8	13	11	9	10	9.73	10	9.8	9.8	9.8
MINISTER'S STAFF	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	2	4	4	4	4
TOTALS	409.24	375.66	353.92	347.74	349.55	342.03	343.04	331.41	339.12	328.47	338.71	352.34

Defence Forces Personnel Data

98. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of military police by grade in the Defence Forces; and the number in October 2009. [45174/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the military authorities that it was not possible to collate the required information within the timeframe available. I shall provide the figures to the Deputy when I receive them from the

military authorities.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

99. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces prescribed lariam in the past 12 months; the number prescribed the drug in each of the years 2015 to 2018; if members of the Army Ranger Wing have been prescribed the drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45277/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Information is not readily available for the numbers prescribed Lariam. Patient medical records are confidential and access to prescription information is restricted to medical professionals. Collation of information regarding individual prescriptions would require all Medical Officers in the Defence Forces to examine each medical record for patients treated in the periods in question.

As regards the Army Ranger Wing, the use of anti-malarial drugs is a medical matter that is decided by qualified Defence Forces medical professionals having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual.

Brexit Negotiations

100. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken with his French counterpart in relation to his initial comments regarding his reluctance to the flex-tension on the Brexit date. [44490/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I speak regularly with all my EU counterparts.

We have always said that an extension is better than a no deal outcome and we welcome the fact that EU 27 leaders unanimously agreed to extend the deadline of the Article 50 process to 31 January 2020. However, if the Agreement is ratified before then, the UK may exit the EU earlier.

We hope that the extra time provided by the extension will be used to ratify the Agreement, in order to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the UK.

Foreign Birth Registration

101. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason for the delay in processing applications for foreign birth registration certificates for persons (details supplied); the timeline for completion of the processing of the applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44342/19]

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

With regard to the specific applications the Deputy has enquired about, I can confirm that

the Foreign Birth Registration team in my Department has been in direct contact with the applicants and these applications have now been approved.

Brexit Issues

102. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether the transition period allows for sufficient time for a future trading relationship to be agreed between the EU and the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44541/19]

103. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if it is still legally possible for the UK to leave the EU without a deal at the end of the transition period if the withdrawal agreement reached between the EU and the UK is passed in the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44542/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 102 and 103 together.

The Government remains firmly of the view that ratifying the Withdrawal Agreement agreed between the European Union and the United Kingdom on 17 October remains the best way to ensure an orderly withdrawal. A no deal outcome is in no one's interests. Once the Withdrawal Agreement is ratified, the provisions in respect of citizens' rights, financial obligations and the protocol on Northern Ireland remain in place even if no agreement on a future relationship is reached by the end of the transition period. The shared intention of the EU and the UK, as set out in the Political Declaration on the future relationship, is to conclude agreements giving effect to the future relationship by the end of 2020, including an ambitious, wide-ranging and balanced economic partnership. The EU is ready to start negotiations on a future relationship as soon as the Withdrawal Agreement is ratified.

While the goal is to conclude a future relationship agreement by the end of 2020, the Withdrawal Agreement provides that the transition period may be extended by one or two years. Such a decision must be taken jointly by the EU and the UK. At the same time, it should also be noted that the Political Declaration states that the European Commission is ready to propose applying on a provisional basis relevant aspects of the future relationship, in line with the applicable legal framework. We continue work to prepare for Brexit. Even with an agreement, it is still the case that the UK is leaving the EU and this will bring change.

Irish Aid

104. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if it is the policy of Irish Aid to support health services overseas that include the provision of termination of pregnancy services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44572/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Improving maternal and reproductive health is an important focus of Ireland's international development policy with health system strengthening at the heart of Ireland's approach. Ireland works through the World Health Organisation, with organisations such the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria and with civil society partners to ensure access to essential drugs, health services, and best practice, including building more effective health workforces, with an emphasis on better health outcomes for women and children. Ireland recognises that quality health systems must include access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services if

women's health outcomes are to be transformed, including reducing maternal and child mortality.

This is acknowledged in the Sustainable Development Goals: if the ambition of the SDGs is to be achieved, there must be a continued reduction in the millions of women at risk each year of dying from complications in pregnancy and childbirth. These risks are most acute in developing countries. For example, Mozambique, where Ireland has consistently invested in the health sector, achieved a reduction in its maternal mortality ratio from 700 to 318 per 100,000 births over the period 2002-15. While this was a great achievement, it is evident that more needs to be done to strengthen the health system there develop if this ratio is to approach Ireland's maternal mortality ratio of 6 per 100,000 births over the same period. The Government's policy for international development, *A Better World*, published last February continues Ireland's longstanding focus on improving the health of women and girls, as part of Ireland's contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Northern Ireland

105. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed the possibility of increased violence from dissident activity from the loyalist community on the Border or in Northern Ireland due to the latest withdrawal treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44610/19]

106. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed the increased possibility of a violent response from loyalist activists due to the recent withdrawal treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44611/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 105 and 106 together.

The Government takes very seriously any potential threat to the peace and stability on this island, and we have noted with concern the recent comments by the PSNI Chief Constable, Simon Byrne, that, in the context of the UK exit from the European Union, "*there are a small number of people in both the loyalist and nationalist communities that are motivated by their own ideology and that have the potential to bring violence back on to the streets.*"

This assessment by the PSNI is of real concern, as were the statements made by Mr Byrne's predecessor, George Hamilton, warning of potential activity by dissident republican groupings against border infrastructure in the context of a hard Brexit. My cabinet colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr. Charles Flanagan TD, is regularly briefed by the Garda Commissioner on the risks of dissident paramilitary violence and related organised criminality in border regions. In this regard, there are very strong levels of cross border cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI and this will of course continue in all circumstances.

The Government understands the anxiety and concern being felt by communities in Northern Ireland and border areas about Brexit; however, there is also a responsibility on people, on all sides, to be measured in their comments and responsible in their leadership at community level. There is no excuse whatsoever for violence, or the threat of it. The people of this island, North and South, have consistently shown their support for peaceful, political means to resolve problems and their outright rejection of violence.

While there are of course different views, all sincerely held, on the UK approach to exiting the European Union, the agreement that the European Union has now reached with the UK Government does expressly give a real democratic voice for the people of Northern Ireland into

the operation of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement and Protocol.

Any deal, including this one, involves compromise. The Government has consistently tried to listen and respond to the concerns of all those affected by the UK decision to leave the EU, including people from all communities in Northern Ireland and in border regions.

It is vital that these arrangements work for Northern Ireland, and it is important that the voices of all of the political representatives of Northern Ireland, from all communities, are heard, as is provided for under the Withdrawal Agreement.

Ratifying this Withdrawal Agreement remains the best way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the European Union. A no deal outcome is in no one's interests.

In addition to on-going bilateral engagement between myself and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the two Governments discuss Security cooperation through the framework of the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference, with the participation of the Minister for Justice and Equality. Our discussions at the Conference reflect the significant and effective cross-border cooperation in monitoring and combatting the ongoing risk of violent actions and organised crime by dissident paramilitary groups.

Information and Communications Technology

107. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44712/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is in the process of migrating its computer devices from the Windows 7 operating system to Windows 10. Currently there are 1,320 Windows 7 machines in use.

This number will be greatly reduced in the coming months as the process of replacing machines advances.

Information and Communications Technology

108. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44728/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is in the process of migrating computer devices from the Windows 7 operating system to Windows 10. For technical reasons this migration may not be fully complete by January 2020. In this context, Windows 7 machines will continue to receive security updates despite changes in the licensing model. The licensing costs associated with a limited number of security upgrades are not yet finalised but are expected to be modest.

Information and Communications Technology

109. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his

plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44744/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department deploys a comprehensive Security Incident and Event Management system along with a robust incident response plan to deal with malware incidents, regardless of operating system. The Department also works closely with the National Cyber Security Centre to identify and understand risks and to inform effective mitigation.

Passport Data

110. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Departments that have access to data and photographs contained in the Passport Service data sets; the purpose for which each Department is using data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44827/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, holds personal information in respect of passport applicants for the purpose of processing applications for passport by such individuals. The Passport Service's legal basis for processing personal data is provided for by Section 8(1) of the Passports Act 2008, as amended.

As a Data Controller, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade must comply with the provisions of relevant legislation, namely the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and all applicable laws and regulations relating to the processing of personal data and privacy, including, where applicable the guidance and codes of practice issued by the Data Protection Commission.

My Department has confirmed that no other Government Department has access to data or photographs of passport records held by the Passport Service.

However, in line with Section 41 of the Data Protection Act 2018, the Passport Service shares certain information at the request of public authorities solely for the purpose of preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting criminal offences. The data provided cannot be used for any purpose other than that for which it was obtained.

Departmental Staff Data

111. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44847/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): At the end of September 2019, my Department employed 1611 Civil Servants, of whom 1455 were full-time staff and 156 were part-time staff.

I can confirm that no Civil Servant in my Department is paid at or below the minimum wage rate of pay.

Human Rights

112. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the treatment of the Uighur population in the north-western provinces of China by the Chinese Government (details supplied); his plans to raise this at European level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44896/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government remains concerned about the credible reports of the treatment of ethnic Uighurs and other minorities in the Xinjiang region. We and our EU partners take these reports very seriously and have raised our concerns with our Chinese counterparts, in bilateral and multilateral contexts, on a consistent basis.

At the multilateral level, Ireland was among 23 countries that joined a Joint Statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang at the UN Third Committee on 29 October 2019. This statement was delivered by the UK at the Interactive Dialogue with the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Ireland was also one of 22 States to sign a letter which called for China to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Xinjiang, and to allow unrestricted access to independent observers. Ireland also participated in China’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR), held last November. In our intervention we expressed concern at reports of the treatment of ethnic Uighurs, in particular their detention in political re-education camps, and called on China to respect freedom of religion and belief. We also recommended that China allow the OHCHR access to all regions of the country, including Xinjiang. I also raised this issue bilaterally with the Chinese Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Wang Chao, during political consultations in Dublin last year.

At EU level, this issue was raised at both the EU-China Summit and EU-China Human Rights Dialogue in April this year. During the dialogue the EU noted that while actions to counter terrorism are essential, these actions must respect the principle of proportionality, fundamental freedoms, and international laws. The EU has also raised this issue at multilateral level, calling on China to allow meaningful, unrestricted, and unsupervised access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The protection and promotion of universal human rights is one of Ireland’s core foreign policy issues, and Ireland and the EU will continue to raise these issues during both political and official contacts with the Chinese authorities.

Departmental Contracts Data

113. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45065/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) currently operates in a number of locations in Ireland and in over 80 locations overseas.

The policy of the Department is to operate competitive tendering as standard procedure. In order to achieve best value for money, a Central Procurement Section operates to co-ordinate all contracting activity and to promote best practice in procurement through management and monitoring of corporate contracts.

Procurement takes place in the context of Directive 2014/24/EU and supported by Procurement Guidelines published by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). The Department participates fully in on-going initiatives of the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) focusing especially at achieving procurement savings, including the use of shared framework agreements for the provision of different categories of supplies and services.

On occasion, a small number of Department contracts do not undergo a competitive process due to exceptional market or other circumstances. Below are details of non-compliant contracts for 2017 and 2018 only as returns for 2019 are not yet available at this time. However, 2019 tenders are being monitored and managed by the Department on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

To comply with DPER Circular 40/02 the Department prepares an annual statement of contracts awarded without a competitive process where the value of the contract exceeded €25,000 (excluding VAT). This is submitted to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, and to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on an annual basis by 31 March of the following year as part of the appropriation accounts.

In some cases non-compliant contracts arise where the original tender contract period has expired and a new tender process has not yet been completed for whatever reason. The Department actively monitors and seeks to minimise such cases.

Non-Compliant Contracts/Purchases of more than €25,000 (excl. of VAT) undertaken without a competitive process Year ending 2017

Subject of Contract/Purchase	Contract Value
Provision of healthcare insurance for Departmental staff overseas (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€1,489,869
Provision of mobile services (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€184,460
Provision of support and maintenance services for web-based collaborative platform (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€135,165
Provision of leadership development management programme (LDMP) for AP & equivalent grades	€38,224
Provision of services for the supply of passport application forms (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€500,000
Provision of services to facilitate office relocations including fit-out and removals	€87,880
Professional fees relating to the British-Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat Office fit-out in Belfast	€67,790
Development of strategy for regional development plan in Mozambique	€41,634
Provision of security services for Mexico City Mission	€26,499
Provision of security services for New Delhi Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€56,000
Provision of legal services for the Consulate General New York Mission	€67,233

Subject of Contract/Purchase	Contract Value
Provision of catering services for official promotional activities at the Consulate General New York Mission	€59,761
Provision of security services for Pretoria Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€25,690
Provision of cleaning services for the Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€77,000
Provision of security services for the Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€178,000
Provision of grounds maintenance services for the Canberra Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€40,000

Non-Compliant Contracts/Purchases of more than €25,000 (excl. of VAT) undertaken without a competitive process Year ending 2018

Subject of Contract/Purchase	Contract Value
Provision of healthcare insurance for Departmental staff overseas (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€1,527,116
Provision of mobile services (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€173,363
Provision of services to facilitate office relocations including fit-out and removals	€104,827
Provision of security services for the Brasilia Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€107,000
Provision of security services for the Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€211,588
Provision of cleaning services for the bilateral Belgium Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€59,368
Provision of security services for the Jakarta Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€43,097
Provision of security services for the Mexico City Mission	€27,704
Provision of catering services for official promotional activities at the at the Consulate General New York Mission	€64,093
Provision of cleaning services for The Hague Mission (extension of previous contract pending new tender)	€25,143

Human Rights

114. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to recent large public protests in Chile and that there is opposition to the current Government and its alleged dire handling of the economy, which has led to

rampant inequality; his views on the fact the Chilean Government declared a state of emergency and deployed the army; if his attention has been further drawn to the scenes of police and army brutality, which has led to more than 1,000 Chileans being injured and more than 100 partially blinded after being shot in the eye; and his views on these alleged human rights violations against protesters. [45163/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the recent civil unrest in Chile. My Department has been receiving updates on the developing situation from our new Embassy in Santiago.

As the Deputy will be aware, protests about price increases for the metro service in Santiago became increasingly violent over the weekend beginning Friday, 18 October, leading the Government to declare a state of emergency. This was followed by the deployment of the army on the streets to deal with the unrest, and overnight curfews in the capital of Santiago and cities across Chile. The demonstrations have since evolved into larger protests centring on socio-economic inequality in Chile. While most of the protests have been peaceful, there are violent elements among the protesters who have engaged in acts of destruction and violence, including looting and arson.

I am saddened by the reports of violence, destruction, injuries and loss of life that have occurred during the demonstrations. I am aware of the allegations of human rights violations by the authorities against some protesters and I welcome the decision by the UN High Commission for Human Rights to send a verification mission to examine these reports and allegations, and the support of the Government of Chile for this visit.

President Piñera lifted the State of Emergency from Sunday, 27 October; however, protests and accompanying violence have continued. As a result, President Piñera has announced that Chile will no longer host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in November or the COP25 UN Climate Change Conference in December.

We will continue to monitor developments closely, together with other EU Missions and partners in Chile. Ireland enjoys excellent bilateral relations with Chile. We look forward to developing that relationship further in the months and years ahead.

Human Rights

115. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland will take a leadership role against the human rights violations in Bahrain in the United Nations Human Rights Council, particularly in view of the numerous statements by him that Bahrain is one of Ireland's priorities and his own statements that he is following the issue closely and is very concerned; and if he will work to ensure a joint statement on the human rights situation in Bahrain is tabled at the next meeting of the council in March 2020. [45164/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The human rights situation in Bahrain remains a matter of concern. Although Bahrain has repeatedly stated its commitment to improving its human rights record and safeguarding human rights as enshrined in the Bahraini Constitution, there are ongoing instances of violations of fundamental freedoms there, including violations of freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the targeting of human rights defenders. I was alarmed to learn of the executions of three people in July, including two human rights activists. I am also aware of reports of inhumane detention conditions as well as allegations that political prisoners in Bahrain have been tortured. Ireland attaches a high priority to safeguarding human rights defenders, and continually advocates for

freedom for civil society actors to operate in a safe and enabling environment, without repression.

Respect for human rights is an integral part of Ireland's foreign policy and we consistently seek to raise our concerns on human rights issues through the most appropriate and effective channels. Our active participation at the UN Human Rights Council is particularly important in that regard. Ireland regularly raises the case of human rights in Bahrain at that forum, in the form of national statements and its support to EU Statements. For example, in September 2018, Ireland expressed concerns about the ongoing restrictions on civil society space and the treatment of human rights defenders, and called on Bahrain to respect freedom of opinion and expression. In February 2019, Ireland reiterated concern at the ongoing detention of human rights defenders. In our Item 4 statement at the Human Rights Council in July 2019, Ireland called on Bahrain to ensure respect for freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to a fair trial. Ireland also took the opportunity at the most recent Council in September 2019 to reiterate its opposition to the use of the death penalty in all circumstances.

Since 2012, Ireland has signed five Human Rights Council joint statements on the human rights situation in Bahrain, which expressed concern on a number of fronts including the mistreatment of detainees, repression of demonstrations, and the arbitrary deprivation of nationality without due process. When planning for the March 2020 Human Rights Council session, we will consider carefully which priorities to set, with a view to focusing the weight of Ireland's efforts, and the Council's attention, on the most grave and troubling situations globally.

Our principled stance on human rights also feeds into our bilateral dialogue and we raise our human rights concerns directly with the Bahraini authorities at every opportunity. When I met the Bahraini Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly in New York in September, I made a point of raising the human rights situation directly with him, expressing the hope that we can have an open and honest discussion on these issues. In addition, officials from my Department meet regularly with advocacy groups and Bahraini human rights defenders to discuss the situation in Bahrain.

Ireland will continue to monitor developments in Bahrain, and to call on the Bahraini Government to deliver on its stated commitment to make progress in relation to human rights. We shall do so both directly with Bahraini officials, as well as at EU and international level, including at the Human Rights Council, whenever opportunities arise.

VAT Rebates

116. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the introduction of a €175 retail export scheme threshold in view of the warning from Fáilte Ireland that at least 10,000 tourism sector jobs are at risk in a no-deal Brexit scenario; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44670/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Retail Export Scheme allows persons who are resident outside the EU and who make purchases of goods in the EU to avail of a refund of the VAT charged on these goods where the goods are exported from the EU by the tourist or traveller within three months of purchase. The UK will become a 3rd country and UK residents will become eligible for the scheme post Brexit.

The provision concerning the restrictions and conditions that may be applied to the Retail Export Scheme in the event of a no-deal Brexit was included in the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2019, which became law

on March 17 of this year.

The Government's intention is to provide reciprocal protection to the UK if they decide to restrict the introduction of their VAT Retail Scheme, in the event of a no-deal Brexit. However should the UK apply an unrestricted Retail Export Scheme, Ireland will not commence the precautionary sections, and an unrestricted VAT Retail Export Scheme will operate between jurisdictions.

The proposed measures, while precautionary, were influenced by i) the potential for significant Exchequer impacts as a result of the expansion of the scheme to the UK, ii) the potential impacts on Government health and welfare policies and iii) the potential risk of fraud in the application of the VAT Retail scheme.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

117. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44677/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Scheme Regulations (S.I. No. 353 of 1994) provide that where a person receives a repayment or remission of VRT/VAT in respect of a vehicle purchased to transport '*a person with disabilities*', that person shall undertake to use the vehicle for a period of at least two years from the date of purchase. Paragraph 15 of the Regulations provides that where a vehicle is sold, or otherwise disposed of, or ceases to be used to transport '*the person with disabilities*' within two years, a portion of the refund/remission is to be repaid to Revenue.

The Regulations also provide a formula, based on the open market selling price (OMSP) of the vehicle at the time of disposal, which can be used by Revenue to calculate the amount that should be repaid where the vehicle ceases to be used to transport '*the person with disabilities*' within the two-year period. The formula takes account of any depreciation to the vehicle on foot of an accident or damage once supporting insurance or salvage documentation is made available. In situations where the OMSP and relevant supporting documentation is not provided, Revenue seeks repayment at rates of 100% if the vehicle is removed from the Scheme within the first 6 months, 90% if removed between 6 and 12 months and 80% if removed between 13 and 24 months.

I am advised by Revenue that the person in question made an online application to bring a new vehicle onto the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Scheme in July 2019. The previous vehicle was approved on the Scheme on 15 November 2017. When making the new application the person requested an early disposal (repayment) figure in relation to the previous vehicle but did not provide any information regarding its OMSP or as to why it was being disposed of inside the two-year period. This left Revenue with no alternative but to apply the 80% rate (removed from the Scheme between 13 and 24 months) rather than apply the formula-based method of calculation.

Revenue has also advised me that it previously explained to the person why it was obliged to apply the 80% repayment rate in the absence of receiving any supporting documentation confirming the revised OMSP following the damage to the vehicle (e.g. insurance or salvage valuation confirmation) but has still not received any information from the person. I am aware that Revenue also made direct contact with the Deputy's office to clarify the requirements.

To advance matters the person should provide the required information to Revenue's Central Repayments Office, M: TEK II Building, Armagh Road, Monaghan, Co. Monaghan H18

YH59 as soon as possible. Revenue has assured me that it will review the position as soon as the documentation is received.

Tax Incentives

118. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views regarding the provision of tax incentives for persons who provide accommodation for the rental market. [45372/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I assume from the details accompanying his question that the deputy is primarily referring to natural persons acting as landlords and income tax based measures.

The Report of the Working Group on the Tax and Fiscal Treatment of Landlords examined the general issue raised in the Deputy's question. It was submitted to me for consideration in September 2017, in advance of its publication on Budget Day, 10 October 2017. The report put forward options for further consideration, rather than recommendations, and any further consideration would require the participation of several Departments and organisations, including my own Department. The ten options are split into short, medium and long-term options. Five potential short-term options were identified as measures which could potentially be implemented within 18 months, i.e. within Budgets 2018 and 2019.

One short-term option was to increase the mortgage interest deduction available to landlords. In this context, it should be noted that in Budget 2017, a phased unwinding of the restriction on interest deductibility over five years for all residential landlords was initiated. The second step, an increase from 80% to 85% deductibility, took effect from 1 January 2018. Budget 2019 accelerated progress in this area and, from 1 January 2019, the restoration of full mortgage interest deductibility for landlords of residential property has been in place.

A further option was to consider introducing Local Property Tax (LPT) deductibility for landlords. Earlier this year, the report of the interdepartmental review of LPT noted that LPT is a relatively small expense and therefore is unlikely to make a significant difference to the position of any individual landlord in cash terms and so may not be regarded by landlords as a sufficient measure to encourage them to stay in or enter the rental market. The report also found that the measure would also have a deadweight cost in respect of landlords who do not intend to leave the rental market and would create a more favourable position for landlords of property compared to owner-occupiers, as owner-occupiers cannot claim a tax deduction for LPT.

In Budget 2018 I introduced another of the short-term options, deductibility for pre-letting expenditure for previously vacant properties. This measure applies to residential premises which have been vacant for at least 12 months and which are then let after the date of the passing of the Finance Act 2017, i.e. after 25 December 2017. The expenditure is allowed as a deduction against rental income from that premises. It applies to expenses that would be allowable if they had been incurred while the property was let, such as the cost of repairs, insurance, maintenance and management of the property. Certain limitations are in place regarding this measure, for example the expenditure must have been incurred in the 12 months before the premises is let as a residential premises. The total deduction allowed is capped at €5,000 per vacant premises and the deduction will be clawed-back if the property ceases to be let as a residential premises within four years of the first letting. I prioritised this option as it was specifically designed to encourage an overall increase in housing supply by bringing currently vacant property back into residential use.

The final short-term option was to improve the collection and sharing of data on the rental accommodation sector. A significant issue that hampered the progress of the Working Group was a lack of robust data on various elements of the housing market, due to the differing metrics used by the various agencies. The Housing Analytics Group, chaired by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, is currently active and a number of Departments and agencies are involved in its work, including the Residential Tenancies Board, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), Revenue and the Department of Finance.

Five of the options put forward in the report were medium-term and long-term options. Medium-term options are measures which work with the current tax system but might take longer to develop and implement, and as such would require a longer lead-in period. The long-term options look at the potential for more fundamental changes to the tax system, and so would require significantly greater resource commitments to progress. Consideration of these options will continue within the relevant time frames.

As the Deputy will be aware, taxation is only one of the policy levers available to the Government through which to boost rental and overall housing supply and that, in line with the Tax Expenditure Guidelines, consideration of whether a tax measure is the most appropriate policy tool for a given purpose would be required. Ireland's past experience with tax incentives in the housing sector strongly suggests the need for a cautionary stance when considering intervention in the rental sector. There are many competing priorities which must be considered when deciding which policy measures to introduce and the rental sector is just one of many other sectors that may require assistance and intervention.

Brexit Preparations

119. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for an economic impact assessment of the current withdrawal treaty on trade and other economic metrics under the auspices of his Department and agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44275/19]

120. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has met the ESRI recently to discuss the economic impact of the current withdrawal treaty on Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44306/19]

121. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he is assessing independently or otherwise the economic losses that Ireland is exposed to under the current withdrawal treaty if it is accepted in particular its impact on east-west trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44307/19]

129. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide an updated economic impact assessment of Brexit on Ireland based on the most recent withdrawal agreement reached between the EU and the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44540/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 119 to 121, inclusive, and 129 together.

Budget 2020, including the macroeconomic outlook which underpins it, was based on the prudent assumption that the UK would leave the EU on 31 October without an agreement. The macroeconomic outlook is set out in the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* published with Budget 2020. This included, at Box 4, an assessment of the macroeconomic outlook that would apply in the event of an agreed exit by the UK at end October.

The Withdrawal Agreement endorsed by the European Council, will now require ratification by the European Parliament and the UK Parliament. Pending ratification of the deal, it is not possible to say if the outlook will be different to that set out in Budget 2020.

If the Withdrawal Agreement is ratified, the UK will enter a transition period until at least the end of 2020. In this situation the outlook would be broadly similar to that set out in Table 4 (Box 4) in the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2020*. This shows that, in the event of an agreed exit, GDP growth is forecast to be 3.1 per cent in 2020, with employment growth projected at 1.7 per cent next year and the unemployment rate expected to be 5.1 per cent.

The revised Political Declaration envisages an ambitious trading relationship for goods on the basis of a Free Trade Agreement, but until there is greater clarity on the post-transition relationship there is likely to be continued uncertainty, particularly with respect to private sector investment. My Department has been in contact with the ESRI on the economic impact of the revised Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the future relationship. I am satisfied that the existing analysis in the joint research by the Department of Finance and ESRI, published in March this year, broadly captures the range of possible future relationships. The analysis included a free trade agreement (of which there could be many forms), and a trading relationship under World Trade Organisation (WTO) frameworks. The impacts of these were modelled and estimated in the joint research which was published in March this year.

Under these scenarios, over the medium-term (i.e. 5 years) the level of GDP would be of the order of between 1.9 and 3.3 per cent lower, respectively, compared to a situation where the UK remains in the EU. The negative impacts will be most severely felt in those sectors with strong export ties to the UK market – such as the agri-food, manufacturing and tourism sectors and also SMEs generally – along with their suppliers. The impact will be particularly noticeable outside the main cities.

In 2017, my Department published a paper on trade exposures which shows that, relative to other EU Member States, Irish exports are substantially more exposed to the UK in a number of goods sectors. The top five most exposed included the Irish agri-food sub-sectors Cereals, Vegetables and Fruit, and Live Animal products. In services, Ireland is in the upper range of the most exposed EU Member States, particularly in Financial Services.

My Department will continue to monitor developments with respect to the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement, and the future relationship with the UK, and will update the macroeconomic and fiscal projections to take account of any developments in the Spring of next year at the latest.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Data

122. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland external review report 2019; the cost of same; the firm that produced the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44330/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's national promotional institution. The purpose of the SBCI is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs to address gaps and potential failures in the Irish SME finance market as well as encouraging competition and innovation, and facilitating the efficient and effective use of EU resources and financial instruments. The SBCI achieves this through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk-sharing guarantee activities that support the provision of appropriately priced, flexible funding to Irish SMEs.

Following a public procurement process, the SBCI appointed Ernst and Young (EY) on the 9 May 2019 to perform an external strategic review of the SBCI. EY's task is to complete a strategic review of the SBCI as a policy delivery mechanism and national promotional institution within the context of the state's suite of supports for SMEs. The cost of the review is €120,000.

The outcome of the review will inform the SBCI board as it sets the future strategic direction of the SBCI.

Work on this review is still ongoing. Once this review has been completed, it will be provided to the Board of the SBCI.

Haulage Industry

123. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 220 of 16 October 2019, the position regarding the rebate available to hauliers following the recent rise in carbon tax affecting cost of fuel and operating costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44370/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Diesel Rebate Scheme (DRS) was introduced in 2013 offering a partial refund to qualifying road operators on the excise paid on diesel when the retail price reaches €1.00 (Vat exclusive) or above. There is a maximum rebate of 7.5 cents per litre when the retail price is €1.25 (Vat exclusive) or above.

In recognition of the challenges facing the road haulage sector due to the uncertainty surrounding Brexit, I announced in my Budget 2020 speech that the DRS is being enhanced. The detail of this is set out in Finance Bill 2019. In brief, the price floor of €1.00 (Vat exclusive) will remain the same; the marginal rebate rate will double at a price point of €1.07 or above; the maximum rebate amount will remain at 7.5 cents per litre; and the amended DRS will apply to fuel purchased by qualifying operators from 1st January 2020.

This represents a significant enhancement of the terms of the DRS. By way of example, the current average price of a litre of diesel is €1.093 (Vat exclusive), which if used as the average price under the current DRS would entitle qualifying operators to a rebate of 2.8c per litre. Under the enhanced DRS, qualifying operators would be entitled to a rebate of 4.4c if an average per litre price of €1.109 (Vat exclusive) were to be used as the basis for calculating the rebate. In other words, in the example outlined above, an additional 1.6c to the average price of a litre of diesel would be matched by the additional rebate amount. More generally, at a price point of €1.16 (Vat exclusive), the rebate amount under the enhanced DRS is 7.5c per litre which is 2.7c per litre more than the rebate amount that would be paid under the current DRS.

I appreciate that this scheme is a fossil fuel subsidy which the ESRI has found is directly increasing CO₂ emissions (as well as non CO₂ emissions). However, I consider, on balance, that the specific Brexit challenges faced by hauliers justifies this enhancement. This is intended as a temporary support measure, to be reviewed as part of the annual budgetary process.

Fiscal Policy

124. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance when the transfer of funds to the rainy day fund will commence; and when the intended €500 million will be transferred into same in the event of an orderly Brexit. [44415/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I commenced the *National Surplus*

(Exceptional Contingencies) Reserve Fund (the Rainy Day Fund) on Thursday 31 October 2019. On foot of commencement and the necessary Delegation Order to the NTMA regarding the management of the Fund, I am directing the NTMA to transfer €1.5 billion from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) by 30 November 2019.

In preparing Budget 2020, I set out that a disorderly Brexit was the baseline scenario for budget planning purposes, and therefore a budget deficit is in prospect. On that basis, I decided that there would be no transfer of €500 million from the Exchequer in 2019 to the Rainy Day Fund. In terms of any change in this approach, I await developments in the Brexit process.

As I have previously set out, the funds transferred to the Rainy Day Fund can be deployed in the event that the economic impact of a disorderly Brexit is larger than assumed. The €500 million of Exchequer funding not being transferred to the Rainy Day Fund this year will remain as Exchequer cash balances and therefore will be used to meet the Exchequer funding requirement, such as for public spending priorities.

Revenue Commissioners Audits

125. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners are issuing a statement of case to the Tax Appeals Commission in respect of the case of a person (details supplied); if so, when it will be shared with the Tax Appeals Commission in view of the fact the expected dates have been passed; the reason for the month-long delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44451/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the Statement of Case to which the Deputy is referring issued to the Tax Appeals Commission on 30 October 2019. Revenue have also confirmed to me that a copy issued to the person in question on the same date.

Revenue advise that the initial delay in preparing the Statement of Case arose due to the higher than usual volumes of correspondence received by the relevant Unit in recent weeks.

VAT Rate Application

126. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the expected yield from increasing VAT on food supplements from 0% to 13.5%; the reason this policy change was not announced or included on the documentation published on budget day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44509/19]

127. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance if his decision to apply VAT to food supplements will be irreversible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44510/19]

132. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the rate of VAT applied to food supplements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44635/19]

140. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the 13.5% VAT rate for health food supplements (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44822/19]

147. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance if the VAT situation relating to vitamin and mineral food supplements from 1 November 2019 will be clarified; the rationale for proposed changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45279/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126, 127, 132, 140 and 147 together.

As the Deputies are aware, Irish VAT legislation does not provide a zero rate for food supplement products; instead they are subject to the standard rate of VAT (23%). Shortly after the introduction of VAT, Revenue allowed the zero rate to be applied to certain food supplement products (vitamins, minerals and fish oils). This concessionary approach expanded as the market developed over the years and resulted in the zero rating by Revenue of further similar products, including products other than vitamins, minerals and fish oils.

Revenue has acknowledged that the scope of its concessionary approach broadened progressively over time to the point that it had become increasingly difficult to maintain an effective distinction between food supplement products that could benefit from the zero rate and those that were standard rated. Revenue acknowledges that this concessionary approach was unsatisfactory and led to diverging and inconsistent practices, and there were continuous efforts by elements in the industry to expand its scope.

Following complaints from the Irish Health Trade Association (IHTA), Revenue conducted a comprehensive review of the VAT treatment of food supplement products, including getting an expert report on the definition of food for the purposes of the VAT Consolidation Act. The expert prepared a detailed, scientific report that concluded that food supplement products are not conventional food. Based on the expert report and its own legal analysis, Revenue concluded that the status quo was no longer sustainable. Following the review, Revenue engaged with my Department concerning policy options that might be considered in the context of Finance Bill 2018. The relevant legislation was not changed in Finance Bill 2018 and therefore Revenue issued new guidance in December 2018 which removed the concessionary zero rating of various food supplement products with effect from 1 March 2019.

Following representation from Deputies and from the industry, I wrote to Revenue outlining my plans to examine the policy and legislative options for the taxation of food supplement products in the context of Finance Bill 2019. Revenue responded by delaying the withdrawal of its concessionary zero rating of the food supplement products concerned. This allowed time for my Department to carry out a public consultation on the taxation of food supplement products.

The public consultation ran from 18 April to 24 May 2019 and sought input from a wide range of interested parties, including from health and nutrition experts and the Minister for Health. In total, 121 submissions were received. This included submissions from individuals, businesses, lobby groups and a political party. The results of the consultation were included in the recently published Tax Strategy Group paper on VAT. The options set out in the TSG paper are the only options available; either the standard rate is maintained, or the reduced rate is introduced.

I am making provision in Finance Bill 2019 to apply the 13.5% rate of VAT to all food supplement products, which will take effect from 1 January 2020. This measure is expected to be cost neutral. The food supplement industry is relatively small in Ireland (approx. €60 million) and the loss to the Exchequer incurred as a result of the lowering of the rate for products currently liable to the standard rate of VAT (23%), should be offset by the increase to products that previously were concessionally zero rated.

Foods for specific groups such as infant follow-on formulae and infant foods, foods for special medical purposes and specially formulated foods (e.g. total diet replacement for weight control) will remain zero rated. These are well established and defined categories of food that are essential for vulnerable groups of the population. Fortified foods, such as yoghurts and cereals fortified with vitamins and minerals, will also remain zero rated as they are food.

Folic acid, vitamin and mineral products for human oral use which are licensed or authorised as medicines by the Health Products Regulatory Authority ('HPRA') will remain zero rated under a different VAT provision.

Budget Measures

128. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the measures included in the Finance Bill 2019 that will result in additional revenue for the Exchequer in 2020 that were not announced on budget day, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44511/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As usual, there are a number of measures in the Finance Bill 2019 that were not announced on Budget day. However, as far as I am aware, there are no measures included in the Bill that will result in additional revenue for the Exchequer in 2020 that were not announced on Budget day.

Question No. 129 answered with Question No. 119.

Budget Measures

130. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance if research has been carried out on the impact budgetary changes in recent years have had on the tourism sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44544/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A "Review of the 9% VAT rate: Analysis of Economic and Sectoral Developments" was published by my Department in July 2018, in order to better inform any decision in relation to the 9% reduced rate going forward. In addition to assessing the relevance, cost, value-for-money, and impact to date of the 9% VAT rate, the Review also looks at the estimated impact on the relevant sectors were the rate to be increased.

The Review found that tourism expenditure is more sensitive to income growth and the economic cycle than price changes. The economy is currently performing well, with high levels of employment and strong demand in the tourism sector. Growth is also expected to continue in the medium term. This positive economic outlook means that the income channel of demand is likely to ensure that economic activity within the tourism sector remains strong. The Review concludes that the VAT rating applied to the tourism sector should not greatly impact demand or employment in the sector. The Budget decision to increase the VAT rate was made following this analysis.

I am aware that Revenue has published analysis of trends in tax receipts and employment for businesses paying VAT at the 9% rate. This report is available at link <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/vat-9-rate-analysis.pdf>

Given the impact of an increase in the VAT rate on the hospitality sector has only recently been reviewed by my Department and the Revenue Commissioners, there does not seem to currently be a case for reviewing the impact of the increase. All economic activity will be reviewed in the normal way as part of the budgetary cycle.

Tax Credits

131. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that the correct tax free allowance is granted to a person (details supplied) who is on emergency tax basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44599/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the person in question failed to register their employment (with Revenue) until 23 October 2019 and was consequently taxed on the emergency basis. The registration process is required so that Revenue can ensure employees receive the full benefits of their tax credits and rate bands entitlements and should be completed regardless of whether an employment is full-time or temporary.

Revenue has also confirmed that it has now updated the person's tax record and issued a *Revenue Payroll Notification (RPN)* to her employer. An amended tax credit certificate for 2019 also issued to the person. The RPN, which includes the person's correct tax credits and rate bands, will operate on a cumulative basis and any refunds of tax and USC due to them for 2019 will be refunded through their employer's payroll.

Question No. 132 answered with Question No. 126.

Legislative Measures

133. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when legislation will be brought forward to ring-fence the extra funds taken in from the increase in carbon tax; if it will be inserted into the Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44653/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In Budget 2020 I announced that the revenues from the increase in the carbon tax from €20 to €26 per tonne CO₂ would be ring fenced and the funds used to protect the most vulnerable in society, to work towards a Just Transition and to invest in low carbon transition.

On 9 October 2019, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published "The carbon tax increase - what it will be spent on", which sets out specific details in relation to where the ringfenced monies will be going. This can be accessed at: <https://assets.gov.ie/35942/a72c67a62786496686fa9257b3f6fa64.pdf>.

These are increases that would not have taken place in the absence of an increase to the carbon tax and the increased funding is additional to that provided by the National Development Plan. All funds are ring-fenced for these schemes only. Departments will not be allowed to use the carbon tax revenues for any other purpose, other than the specified schemes.

I am satisfied that this approach will enable the continued ringfencing of additional carbon tax revenues to protect the most vulnerable in society, to work towards a just transition and to invest in low carbon transition in future years.

Property Tax Administration

134. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance if the 10% penalty for not paying local property tax that is charged on income tax returns is applied to PAYE workers; the reason for the difference between the treatment of self-employed persons and PAYE workers that have not paid the tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44699/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that, similar

to the position that applies in the case of other taxes and duties, penalties can be imposed for various offences relating to local property tax (LPT), such as failure to submit a return or other documentation or the provision of false information. Failure to submit an LPT return or submission of an incorrect LPT return, are liable to a penalty of the amount of the LPT that would be payable with a correct return, subject to a maximum penalty of €3,000.

In the normal course of events, a self-employed person is penalised for the late submission (or non-submission) of an income tax return by the imposition of a surcharge on his or her income tax liability. However, a self-employed person who has submitted his or her income tax return on time can also be liable to an income tax surcharge in respect of the late submission of his or her LPT return or the failure to pay LPT. Where such a person has not submitted his or her LPT return by the time that he or she submits an income tax return, the income tax liability is increased by 10% up to a maximum increase of €63,485. However, where the LPT return is subsequently submitted and the associated LPT liability is paid, the income tax surcharge is capped at the amount of the LPT liability.

Unlike self-employed taxpayers, PAYE taxpayers are not generally required to submit an annual income tax return. Therefore, it is not possible to impose a similar type surcharge on PAYE taxpayers for failure to submit an LPT return on time. While PAYE taxpayers and self-employed taxpayers are treated the same in terms of the amount of their LPT liability, the same treatment is not necessary, and not always possible, in relation to how Revenue addresses non-compliance by such taxpayers. Revenue's compliance actions are tailored according to the type of taxpayer involved and the most effective way to ensure compliance. This is illustrated by the use of the facility to collect LPT liabilities through mandatory deduction at source from a PAYE taxpayer's salary or pension, which is considered to be a fair approach in the context of the surcharge on income tax that can apply to self-employed taxpayers who fail to meet their LPT liabilities.

Finally, it should be noted that the vast majority of property owners pay their LPT on time. There is no reason for property owners to put themselves in a position where they become liable to a penalty or surcharge. If an individual has particular financial circumstances which cause difficulties in meeting his or her LPT liability, he or she may be entitled to a deferral of the tax or may avail of one of a number of payment methods to discharge the liability evenly over the course of the year.

Information and Communications Technology

135. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44711/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Currently there are 269 personal computing devices running a Microsoft Windows 7 operating system in my Department. Microsoft Windows 7 extended support is available and will be put in place for these 269 personal computing devices while they are being upgraded to Microsoft Windows 10, this upgrade project will be completed by the end of 2020.

-	Nos.
Personal computing devices running Microsoft Windows 7 operating system	269

Information and Communications Technology

136. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44727/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 14th January 2020 the Department of Finance will have 269 personal computing devices running Microsoft Windows 7 operating system. Provisions are being made to put in place Microsoft Windows 7 extended support for these personal computing devices at a cost of €13,049.19 to ensure they continue to receive security updates and patches to protect against malware attack. Plans are in place to upgrade all Microsoft Windows 7 personal computing devices to Microsoft Windows 10 by the end of 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

137. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44743/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Provisions are being made to upgrade all Microsoft Windows 7 personal computing devices to Microsoft Windows 10, this project will be completed by the end of 2020. Microsoft Windows 7 extended support will be put in place for all the Department's personal computing devices running Microsoft Windows 7 while this upgrade project is ongoing. The Department's Windows 7 personal computing devices will continue to receive security updates and patches to protect against malware attack as part of this Microsoft Windows 7 extended support.

There are 17 bodies under the aegis of my Department and it should be noted that none of the bodies share a computer network with my Department.

The Credit Union Advisory Committee is a committee that advises the Minister on credit union issues and uses the department offices for its, usually once a month, meetings and therefore no security issues relating to Windows 7 arise. The Credit Union Restructuring Board has been wound down and legislation formally dissolving the body is currently going through the Houses of the Oireachtas and therefore no security issues relating to Windows 7 arise.

The remaining 15 bodies have provided the following on the measures taken by them to negate any potential malware attacks or security risks:

Body	Plans to protect the Body in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from Windows 7
Office of the Comptroller and Audit General (C&AG)	The devices used by the Office of the C&AG run Windows 10 apart from two devices which host legacy applications. These devices will be discontinued or updated prior to the expiry of support for Windows 7.
Central Bank	While in excess of 95% of the Central Bank's estate is Windows 10, due to 3rd party requirements there remains a small number of Windows 7 users. Compensating controls are in place for these, such as network segregation, and they reside in a closed network with no Internet connectivity. The Central Bank has a strategy in place to upgrade these devices in the coming months.

Questions - Written Answers

Body	Plans to protect the Body in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from Windows 7
Credit Review Office	The Credit Review Office upgraded from Windows 7 to Windows 10 in 2017. All of their security and operating systems are operated through Enterprise Ireland.
Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal	The National Rehabilitation Hospital supplies all of the facilities and infrastructure for the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal.
Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO)	The FSPO has upgraded 80% of its PCs to Windows 10. It plans to upgrade the remaining PCs by the end Q4 2019. The FSPO is aware that Extended Support for Windows 7 will expire in mid-January 2020 and it does not anticipate having any PC operating with Windows 7 at that time.
Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI)	The NTMA assigns staff and provides business and support services and systems to HBFI. This includes primary ICT services. As such, the NTMA maintains a robust cyber security posture to proactively protect against malware attacks and manage security risks. All computers in HBFI currently run the Microsoft Windows 10 Operating System.
Investor Compensation Company DAC	The Investor Compensation Company DAC has upgraded from Windows 7 to Windows 10, with the latter fully operational for some months.
Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (IBRC)	IBRC initiated a project in September of this year to ensure that the upgrade from Windows 7 to Windows 10 is completed before the end of life support date of the 14th of January 2020, ensuring that the user environment is protected from any potential security vulnerabilities.
Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal (IFSAT)	IFSAT is running Windows 10 on an encrypted device so the security risk does not arise in this case.
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC)	IFAC has policies in place in respect of (a) Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery and (b) Information Security Policies and Procedures. It has a Shared Service Agreement in place which includes the provision of IT services and it is provided with regular updates on the assessment of its IT infrastructure. The IT services provided mainly relate to the provision of servers, disk space, backups, internet access, operating system and MS Office software updates/patching, network infrastructure including switches and firewall, and antivirus monitoring. IFAC data is regularly backed up, hosted both on- and off-site, and multiple versions of key files are saved and are periodically tested.
National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)	The NTMA assigns staff and provides business and support services and systems to NAMA. This includes primary ICT services. As such, the NTMA maintains a robust cyber security posture to proactively protect against malware attacks and manage security risks. In relation to the Microsoft Windows 7 Operating System, the NTMA has an active programme of work underway replacing existing Windows 7 computers with Windows 10. Extended Security Updates will be availed of for computers running Windows 7 post January 14 2020 to ensure that the NTMA continues to maintain a robust cyber posture.
National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA)	The NTMA maintains a robust cyber security posture to proactively protect against malware attacks and manage security risks. In relation to the Microsoft Windows 7 Operating System, the NTMA has an active programme of work underway replacing Windows 7 computers with Windows 10. Extended Security Updates will be availed of for computers running Windows 7 post January 14 2020 to ensure that the NTMA continues to maintain a robust cyber security posture.

Body	Plans to protect the Body in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from Windows 7
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	The security of the Revenue Commissioners systems and data are the highest priority for the organisation. Revenue has sophisticated cyber defence mechanisms in place and constantly monitors its systems for any malware or cyber-attacks. Revenue is certified to ISO27001 (information security) and ISO22301 (business continuity) standards and is regularly audited for compliance. Approximately 15% of PCs/laptops in use remain on the Windows 7 operating system. All Windows 7 machines are protected by Symantec Antivirus and receive Windows updates on a frequent basis. These devices have additional security permissions in place by using Microsoft's group policy. All USB access is disabled by default. Additionally, all Revenue laptops are fully encrypted. Revenue are currently upgrading Windows 7 workstations to a Revenue customised Windows 10 image and introducing additional security features using Microsoft's AppLocker. The plan is to have 80% of these workstations upgraded with Windows 10 by the end of December 2019 and the remaining 20% to follow in January 2020. Where workstations are not compatible with Windows 10, these will be destroyed and replaced with new workstations.
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	The NTMA assigns staff and provides business and support services and systems to the SBCI. This includes primary ICT services. As such, the NTMA maintains a robust cyber security posture to proactively protect against malware attacks and manage security risks. In relation to the Microsoft Windows 7 Operating System, the NTMA has an active programme of work underway replacing existing Windows 7 computers with Windows 10. Extended Security Updates will be available for computers running Windows 7 post January 14 2020 to ensure that the NTMA continues to maintain a robust cyber posture.
Tax Appeals Commission	The PCs in the Tax Appeal Commission operate only on Windows 10 and have the latest version of Symantec antivirus, which is updated daily.

Tax Exemptions

138. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance the exemption of exit tax rules on investments secured from compensation payments; the circumstances in which exit tax is charged on withdrawals from investment funds and must be reclaimed from the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44778/19]

139. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance if tax exemptions exist for persons transferring investment moneys between financial companies and whose moneys have been acquired as a result of medical compensation statements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44781/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 139 together.

Exit tax on investments in collective investment undertakings is generally deducted on the occurrence of a chargeable event. Such chargeable events can arise –

- on the making of relevant payments;
- on the redemption of units;
- on the transfer by a unit holder of their entitlement to units;
- on the appropriation or cancellation of units by a fund to discharge tax payable on a gain

arising from a transfer of units by a unit holder; and,

- on the ending of an 8-year period beginning with acquisition and each subsequent 8- year period.

Exit tax must always be deducted from payments to investors with the exception of specific categories of investors such as a pension scheme, a life assurance company or a non-resident individual provided the investment undertaking is in possession of the appropriate declarations in advance of the chargeable event.

The following persons may be entitled to a repayment of the exit tax deducted provided the conditions in the following sections of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 are satisfied -

- a permanently incapacitated individual who is exempt from income tax under section 189 in respect of income arising from the investment of compensation payments in respect of personal injury claims;

- the trustees of a 'qualifying trust' within section 189A where the investment is held as part of the trust fund of the qualifying trust, provided that income from the trust or investment returns from investment of the trust funds is the sole or main income of the incapacitated individual;

- a thalidomide victim who is exempt from income tax under section 192 in respect of income arising from the investment of compensation payments made by the Minister for Health and Children or by the foundation Conterganstiftung für behinderte Menschen;

- income which has arisen to an individual as a result of the investment of a relevant payment within the meaning of such under section 205A, which is generally payments relating to the Magdalen Laundries.

The investment undertaking must deduct the exit tax in the normal manner, but the individual or trust may be entitled to a repayment of the exit tax. The exit tax can be reclaimed, where appropriate, when the annual tax return is submitted to Revenue.

I am advised by Revenue that further detailed information on the operation of exit tax on investments in investment undertakings can be found at the following link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-27/27-01a-02.pdf>.

I am further advised by Revenue that the question of whether transferring investment amounts between financial companies will trigger any tax liability depends on the facts of each case. If the amount is being transferred from one investment undertaking to another, then it will, as outlined above, trigger an exit tax event. However, if the amount is held in some other type of investment product, such as a term deposit account, it may not.

Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 126.

Public Services Card

141. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if persons require a public services card to regularise their tax liability in instances in which they are on emergency tax in a first-time employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44824/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that taxpayers

do not require a Public Services Card in order to regularise their tax affairs.

However, insofar as the operation of the PAYE system in the case of an individual entering employment for the first time is concerned, it is necessary for the individual to be in possession of a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) to enable Revenue to issue the employer concerned a Revenue payroll notification specifying the individual's correct tax credits, tax rate and standard rate cut-off point. The issue of PPSNs, and the conditions attaching to such issue, are matters for the Minister and Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Departmental Staff Data

142. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44846/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that none of the staff in the Department of Finance, either full or part-time are being paid at or less than the National Minimum Wage rate of pay that currently stands at €9.80 per hour.

Consultancy Contracts Data

143. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has issued guidance on the pay structures specifically the maximum consultancy rates per person per day that apply to organisations or persons engaged in departmental consultancy work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44914/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has responsibility for guidance on pay structures. Any such records and subsequent policy development are retained by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, as Ministerial responsibility for the area/topic concerned was transferred under S.I. 10 of 2011 Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 2011.

Universal Social Charge Payments

144. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full year cost of removing USC for earnings up to €18,000. [44999/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated first and full year cost to the Exchequer of increasing the USC threshold from €13,000 to €18,000 is €31 million and €37 million, respectively.

This estimate was generated by reference to 2020 incomes, calculated on the basis of actual data for 2017, the latest year for which returns are available. The data was adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment interim trends and as such are provisional and may be subject to revision.

Departmental Contracts Data

145. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of contracts of

€25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45064/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Public Procurement Policy Framework sets out the procurement procedures to be followed by government departments and state bodies under national and EU rules. In addition, the Department of Finance has its own internal policy and guidance documents to assist staff to comply with all regulations in regard to procurement.

In accordance with Department of Finance Circular 40/02, Departments are required, on an annual basis, to return a report to the Comptroller and Auditor General, in respect of contracts awarded above the €25,000 threshold (exclusive of VAT) that were awarded without a competitive process.

The following table provides all instances of contracts, greater than €25,000, awarded without a competitive process.

Department/Agency	Year(s)	Contractor	Details
Department of Finance	2017-2019	Eurotext	(€28,110 net) This company was engaged for the provision of translation services for the Apple state aid case based on CSSO advice to ensure the necessary quality for such a specialist and technical case. The Department has now entered into a formal agreement with Eurotext to provide translation services on state aid cases only. For all other foreign translations the Department has completed a tender process using an Office of Government Procurement Framework.
Department of Finance	2018	Individual	(€26,543 net) In 2016, the Government decided to arrange for a review of a certain aspect of Ireland's tax code by an independent expert to be appointed by the Minister for Finance. It was decided to engage the expert without a competitive tender given his appointment was made pursuant to a Government decision.

There are 17 bodies under the aegis of my Department, 12 of which have not awarded a contract of €25,000 or more that has been found to be non-compliant in any of the given years. These are the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Credit Review Office, the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Credit Union Restructuring Board, the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, Home Building Finance Ireland, the Investor Compensation Company DAC, the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, the Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, the National Treasury Management Agency and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland.

It was not possible for the Central Bank of Ireland to respond to this information request in the time available and therefore I will make arrangements to provide a response in line with Standing Orders.

The remaining 4 bodies have provided the following details:

Body	Details of Contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in the 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019
Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman	<p>The FSPO ensured that there was an appropriate focus on good practice in procurement and purchasing and that procedures were in place to ensure compliance with all relevant guidelines. The FSPO complied with the guidelines with the exception of the following supply arrangements:</p> <p>2017 Pre-existing contract for ICT support and maintenance was continued pending the completion of an ICT strategy that in turn will involve the procurement of ICT support services - €203,279. One instance with expenditure of €191,972 where temporary agency staff were relied upon to service current demands at a time when the longer term organisational structure was still evolving, and recruitment for established positions had not yet taken place. The use of agency staff had been discontinued prior to year-end.</p> <p>2018 One supply arrangement to the value of €221,284 where a pre-existing contract for ICT support and maintenance was continued pending the completion of an ICT strategy that in turn will involve the procurement of ICT support services. One instance with expenditure of €43,609 where the physical office environment required immediate reconfiguration following changes to the organisational structure and the services of the existing general maintenance contractor were employed.</p> <p>2019 One supply arrangement to the value of €145,856 where a pre-existing contract for ICT support and maintenance was continued pending the completion of an ICT strategy that in turn will involve the procurement of ICT support services. One instance with expenditure of €74,949.27 where the physical office environment required immediate reconfiguration following changes to the organisational structure and the services of the existing general maintenance contractor were employed.</p>
National Assets Management Agency (NAMA)	<p>NAMA publishes, on a quarterly basis, details of its awarded contracts over €25k on its website in accordance with the FOI Publication Scheme as issued by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. Please refer to the NAMA website (https://www.nama.ie/freedom-of-information/publication-scheme) which details the relevant contracts covering the dates requested up to end-September 2019. NAMA will publish any remaining contracts for quarter four 2019 in January 2020. I am advised that NAMA has procured its contracts in accordance with its procurement policies, details of these policies and relevant authorised derogations from procurement guidelines are contained in its Annual Report under Statement on Internal Control (Procurement). Details are on www.nama.ie/publications/annual-reports/ Please note that the use of derogations under NAMA's procurement policies does not amount to non-compliant procurement.</p>

Body	Details of Contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in the 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	<p>2017: The Appropriation Account for 2017 states that the report on procurements in 2017 without competitive tendering amounted to €1,676,644. However, none of these were classed as non-compliant with procurement guidelines by the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General. 2018: Details of procurement determined by the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General as non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2018 are set out below: €527,000 relating to long standing contracts for telephonist services. Revenue has phased out the use of external telephonists with the outstanding contracts having been ceased with effect from September 30th, 2019. The following items were all originally tendered for, but the contracts were rolled over pending new tendering processes: €2.141 million relating to security contracts. The delay in running mini competitions under a new Office of Government Procurement (OGP) framework arose due to the time required to assess requirements on a national basis across multiple locations. New contracts were put in place in December 2018. €1.037 million relating to warehousing contracts. A tender competition was held in 2018 by the OGP for a contract to manage the State Warehouse. The OGP tendering process was unsuccessful in appointing a supplier and a new tender competition, run by Revenue, was successfully concluded and a new contract was in place on May 1st, 2019. €765,000 relating to various services including, inter alia, mobile telephony and fuel cards. Revenue is liaising with OGP with a view to utilising new and existing OGP frameworks and conducting procurement processes where necessary. 2019: The following relate to expenditure in 2019 for rollover contracts identified by the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General in the 2018 report as non-compliant with procurement guidelines. These are the only contracts that can be currently identified as non-compliant for 2019. The definitive 2019 position can only be determined in the New Year following review by the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General. €207K relates to telephonist services. The contracts were terminated on September 30th. €285K relates to the State Warehouse contracted which was replaced on May 1st. €649K relates to various services including mobile telephony and fuel cards running on old contracts (€584k and €65k respectively).</p>
Tax Appeals Commission	<p>2017: Nil 2018: A contract to the value of €33,000 for software and hardware for a voice recognition and dictation system was non-compliant because it was entered into without there first being a competitive process; this took place because there was no comparable product in the market of which the Tax Appeals Commission had previous experience and practical knowledge. The Commission has provided details of this exceptional contract in the annual return in respect of Circular 40/2002 to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. 2019: Nil</p>

Insurance Costs

146. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that companies in the leisure sector are still receiving insurance premium increase demands considerably in excess of insurance inflation, including those with no claim history; if his attention has been further drawn to the damage caused to the sector and to employment in the sector by these premium demands; and the actions he has taken to assist business owners and employers in this regard. [45165/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of the issues facing some

businesses in the leisure sector when it comes to the affordability and availability of insurance. The pricing of insurance products is a commercial matter for insurers and neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, have any function in this matter. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, the Government cannot direct insurance companies to cover certain types of risk, such as those in the leisure sector.

Notwithstanding the above, I wish to emphasise however that the cost of insurance remains a priority issue for the Government. The Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG), which was established in July 2016, and has produced two reports, is continuing to work to implement the recommendations of the *Cost of Motor Insurance Report* and the *Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance Report*. The latter report in particular makes it clear the impact that the cost of insurance is having on the leisure and other sectors and this position has been reinforced by Minister of State D'Arcy's continuing engagement with the sector. Therefore, there is a clear understanding of the impact of this problem on the leisure sector and there is a recognition that the single most essential challenge which must be addressed if we are to overcome it is a sustainable reduction in insurance costs.

In this regard, the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission and the publication of its two reports, which included a benchmarking of award levels between Ireland and other jurisdictions for the first time has been very helpful in identifying the scale of the problem that is faced. This research showed that award levels for soft tissue injuries in Ireland were 4.4 times higher than in England and Wales. The PIC recommended that a Judicial Council be established and that it should compile guidelines for appropriate general damages for various types of personal injury. In carrying out this exercise, the PIC believes that the Judiciary will take account of the jurisprudence of the Court of Appeal, the results of its benchmarking exercise, etc.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government with the support of all parties in the Oireachtas prioritised the passing of the *Judicial Council Act 2019*. This Act provides for the establishment of a Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee upon the formal establishment of the Judicial Council. This Committee is tasked with introducing new guidelines to replace the Book of Quantum. While the Government cannot interfere in their deliberations, I would hope that the Judiciary will recognise the importance of this issue and prioritise it accordingly.

Other steps taken to date to address the cost of insurance include the following:

- The establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance. The CBI is due to make its first report by the end of 2019, and will make recommendations to me regarding potentially expanding its scope to include employer and public liability insurance;

- Reforms to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board through the *Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019* to strengthen the powers of PIAB around compliance with its procedures;

- Commencement of the amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the *Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004* to align the timeframes by which claims should be notified to businesses with GDPR time limits on the keeping of CCTV footage to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;

- The reform of the Insurance Compensation Fund to provide certainty to policyholders and insurers, resulting from the failure of Setanta Insurance;

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

- The commencement and prioritisation by the Law Reform Commission (LRC) of its work to undertake a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries, as part of its Fifth Programme of Law Reform;

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from August 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, particularly those relevant to businesses.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that important reforms are taking place and that I am confident that if the level of awards are reduced as a result of the Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee, then the insurance premium and coverage issues that are being experienced by the leisure sector and many businesses more generally should recede.

Question No. 147 answered with Question No. 126.

Tax Reliefs Data

148. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons eligible for the e-working and home workers tax relief on expenses incurred while working from home; the number of eligible persons that made a claim under the relief in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the value of all valid claims made under this relief annually over the period by county and nationwide; the estimated value for eligible persons that did not make a claim under the relief in each year by county and nationwide in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45290/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Employers may make payments of up to €3.20 per work-day to e-worker or home worker employees to cover expenses such as heating and electricity, which are not subject to deduction of PAYE, PRSI or USC.

I am advised that where employers avail of this facility, they are not required to advise Revenue and therefore the number of employees reimbursed in this manner is not available. Where employers choose to pay more than the €3.20 per work-day rate, any such excess is subject to deduction of PAYE, PRSI and USC.

Where an e-worker or home worker employee has suffered qualifying expenses that are not reimbursed by the employer, or where such reimbursement is treated as taxable income (i.e. above €3.20 per week), the employee may make a claim to Revenue for a deduction from taxable income in respect of these amounts. Qualifying expenses in this context are expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of the employment.

I am advised by Revenue that where a deduction in respect of expenses in relation to e-working or home-working is claimed in a tax return, the amounts are included in a general 'Expenses' field. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the number or value of specific claims

in relation to these expenses.

Carbon Tax Yield

149. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the carbon taxes levied on various fuels under headings (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45326/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The carbon tax has been levied at a rate of €20 per tonne of CO₂ emissions for all fuels subject to the carbon tax since May 2013.

I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to the revenue raised from carbon taxes levied in each of the respective years. This information is provided in the table below. 2019 figures are to date and figures are subject to rounding to the nearest million.

Year	Auto Diesel	Petrol	Kero-sene	Marked Gas Oil	Natural Gas	Solid Fuel	Other Fuels	Total Net Receipts
2010	€98m	€65m	€17m	€27m	€11m	-	€4m	€222m
2011	€98m	€60m	€41m	€49m	€43m	-	€8m	€299m
2012	€131m	€75m	€40m	€55m	€45m	-	€9m	€355m
2013	€137m	€70m	€47m	€60m	€57m	€7m	€10m	€388m
2014	€145m	€66m	€42m	€54m	€52m	€17m	€9m	€385m
2015	€158m	€62m	€53m	€55m	€57m	€23m	€11m	€419m
2016	€171m	€59m	€53m	€56m	€56m	€24.4m	€11m	€430m
2017	€180m	€54m	€52m	€49m	€54m	€19m	€12m	€420m
2018	€183m	€48m	€59m	€54m	€50m	€25m	€12m	€431m
2019	€153m	€38m	€41m	€46m	€43m	€15m	€9m	€345m

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Data

150. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of jobs supported by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland by county and region in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45329/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's national promotional institution. The purpose of the SBCI is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs to address gaps and potential failures in the Irish SME finance market as well as encouraging competition and innovation, and facilitating the efficient and effective use of EU resources and financial instruments. The SBCI achieves this through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk-sharing guarantee activities that support the provision of appropriately priced, flexible funding to Irish SMEs.

Instead of lending directly to SMEs, the SBCI operates through partner finance providers, known as on-lenders. The SBCI has provided funding to a mixture of both banks and non-bank finance providers and currently has 6 on-lenders, 3 bank and 3 non-bank finance providers: AIB, Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank, Finance Ireland Limited, Bibby Financial Services Ireland,

and FEXCO Asset Finance.

During 2018, 91% of SBCI loans went to firms outside Dublin, with 19.5% going to the South West, 10.9% to the South East, 17% to the Mid-West, 11.8% to the West, 12.7% to the Border, 7.4% to the Midlands and 11.7% to the Mid-East.

The table below shows the level of employment in businesses that received SBCI supported loans by county and region from March 2015 to end Q3 2019:

County	No. of Jobs
Carlow	2,200
Cavan	3,200
Clare	3,100
Cork	20,200
Donegal	3,700
Dublin	49,200
Galway	11,100
Kerry	7,000
Kildare	13,300
Kilkenny	2,900
Laois	1,800
Leitrim	800
Limerick	5,500
Longford	800
Louth	3,000
Mayo	5,900
Meath	6,400
Monaghan	2,500
Offaly	1,900
Roscommon	2,300
Sligo	1,900
Tipperary	7,500
Waterford	3,200
Westmeath	2,700
Wexford	6,500
Wicklow	3,500
Total	172,100

Region	No. of Jobs
Border	15,100
Dublin	49,200
Mid-East	23,200
Mid-West	16,100
Midland	7,200
South-East	14,800
South-West	27,200

Region	No. of Jobs
West	19,300

Insurance Costs

151. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance when further measures as proposed by the cost of insurance working group will be implemented due to the widespread concerns across sectors regarding the prohibitive cost of insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45471/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, as the Deputy is aware neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance, which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules, which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the price or the level of cover to be provided either to consumers or to businesses. A further constraint is the fact that for constitutional reasons, I cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied. In summary, therefore there is unfortunately no quick fix solution to this matter.

Notwithstanding the above, I wish to emphasise however that the cost of insurance remains a priority issue for the Government. The Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG), which was established in July 2016, and which produced two reports, is continuing to work to implement the recommendations of the *Cost of Motor Insurance Report* and the *Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance Report*. Its most recent Progress Update, the Ninth, was published in July 2019 and shows that the vast majority of recommendations and actions due by Q2 2019 have been completed. To that end, the key achievements to date from the two reports include the following:

- The establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission and the publication of its two reports, which included a benchmarking of award levels between Ireland and other jurisdictions for the first time. This showed that award levels for soft tissue injuries in Ireland were 4.4 times higher than in England and Wales;

- The enactment of the *Judicial Council Act 2019*;

- The commencement and prioritisation by the Law Reform Commission (LRC) of its work to undertake a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries, as part of its Fifth Programme of Law Reform. It is expected that the LRC will launch a public consultation into the matter shortly;

- The establishment of the National Claims Information Database in the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) to increase transparency around the future cost of private motor insurance. The CBI is due to make its first report by the end of 2019;

- Reforms to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board through the *Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Act 2019* to strengthen the powers of PIAB around compliance with its procedures;

- Commencement of the amendments to Sections 8 and 14 of the *Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004* to align the timeframes by which claims should be notified to businesses with GDPR time limits on the keeping of CCTV footage to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected;

- The reform of the Insurance Compensation Fund to provide certainty to policyholders and insurers, resulting from the failure of Setanta Insurance; and,

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

I believe that these reforms are having a significant impact with regard to private motor insurance (CSO figures from August 2019 show that the price of motor insurance is now 24% lower than the July 2016 peak). The Government is determined to continue working to ensure that these positive pricing trends can be extended to other forms of insurance, particularly those relevant to businesses.

Going forward, some actions which are due in the coming months include the following:

- The establishment of the Judicial Council and the creation of a Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee whose purpose will be to create new guidelines to replace the Book of Quantum;

- The CSO is shortly to make a recommendation related to the feasibility of establishing a price register for insurance costs to businesses;

- The CBI will make a recommendation to me before the end of the year regarding potentially expanding the scope of the National Claims Information Database to include employer and public liability insurance;

- The private member's *Consumer Insurance Contracts Bill* is scheduled to progress through the Oireachtas. The Government proposed committee stage amendments, which, inter alia, included requirements for insurers to inform policy holders, including small businesses, in circumstances where a claim has been made against them;

- Work is continuing on the establishment of a fraud database. However, significant data protection concerns need to be addressed before other issues (such as the governance or location of such a database) can be decided upon; and,

- The CIWG is waiting draft Heads from the Department of Justice in relation to Pre-Action Protocols, which have been shown to reduce legal costs in relation to personal injury claims in the UK.

I believe it is important to emphasise that the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs particularly for small businesses is to bring the levels of personal injury damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions. In this regard, the work of the soon to be created Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee will be essential in achieving that objective. As the Deputy will be aware, this is not an area that the Government can intervene in, however it is hoped that the Judiciary recognise the importance of this work and prioritise it accordingly.

In addition and in light of all of the reforms that have taken place or are soon to take place,

my colleague, Minister of State D'Arcy, has been engaging with insurers in order to seek a commitment that they will reduce premiums and widen their risk appetite to reflect savings made or potential savings in the coming years, in particular if there is a recalibration of award levels downwards. In this regard, I am encouraged by the comments made by a number of insurers at the Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach Oireachtas Committee in July about the passing on of savings arising from a recalibration of award levels downwards.

In conclusion, I am hopeful that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports' recommendations including a reduction in award levels will lead to reductions in pricing in particular for small businesses and a more competitive insurance market.

Garda Stations

152. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for the former Garda station at MacCurtain Street in Cork city. [45133/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The official closure of the Garda station at MacCurtain St Cork was announced in An Garda Síochána's 2013 Policing Plan. I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that, following the examination of a number of possible options for future State use, the property at MacCurtain Street, Cork, has been deemed surplus to requirements. Consequently the property has been identified for disposal in line with the OPW policy on disposal.

The OPW policy with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property, including the former Garda station at MacCurtain Street is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by either Government Departments or the wider public sector.

2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.

3. If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property, the OPW may consider community involvement (subject to a detailed written submission, which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer).

The property is scheduled to be advertised for sale in November 2019 by public auction.

Office of Public Works Projects

153. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date that construction of the wall at the graveyard on the Hill of Tara commenced; and the cost of the construction to date. [45302/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The repair of the collapsed graveyard wall at St. Patrick's Church, Tara was commenced by the direct labour force of the Office of Public Works based at Trim Co. Meath in May 2015 and is scheduled to continue for at least another year. The serious structural problems that gave rise to the collapse have been stabilised and the remaining work is not therefore urgent. Attendance by the works team at the site will continue and is subject to seasonal

weather and the demands of other more urgent needs within the Trim Depot's operational area.

The works programme at Tara is being carried out together with other maintenance and works tasks at the site so the particular costs directly associated with the wall reconstruction are not specifically identifiable.

Garda Stations

154. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has considered a proposal for a rural unused Garda station (details supplied) in County Mayo. [44225/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The former Garda station at Bellacorrick closed on 31st January 2013 as part of An Garda Síochána's 2013 policing plan.

As part of the Programme for a Partnership Government, a review of closed Garda stations identified six closed Garda stations for reopening and a second review, published on the 21st December 2018, did not identify any further closed Garda stations for reopening.

The Office of Public Works is reviewing the former Garda station properties in State ownership that are no longer required by An Garda Síochána with a view to identifying alternative State use in the first instance. If no alternative State use is identified, the OPW will either dispose of the properties or in certain circumstances enter into a licence agreement with a viable community group that meets the necessary criteria.

I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that there is alternative State interest in the former Garda station at Bellacorrick.

Should a decision be taken not to develop the property for alternative State use the Commissioners will give due consideration to the interest of Ballymunnelly Development Group CLG.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

155. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of projects that a person (details supplied) was involved in including cost overruns and other relevant details; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44366/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Government Procurement (OGP), an office within my Department, has responsibility for developing and setting out policy for public procurement in Ireland.

The OGP sets out the procurement procedures to be followed by public bodies, provides procurement solutions, advice, guidance and systems for public bodies and promotes good practice and proactive engagement with the public sector through new governance and oversight structures.

The OGP and its sector partners put in place framework agreements and contracts through which public sector bodies can buy the goods and services that they need. The State buys a wide range of goods and services and, therefore, the sourcing model is broken down into 16 categories. The OGP categories are: ICT & Office Equipment; Professional Services; Marketing, Print & Stationery; Utilities; Fleet & Plant; Managed Services; Travel & HR Services; and

Facilities Management and Maintenance. The OGP's sector partners in Health, Education, Defence and Local Government are responsible for the other eight categories: Medical Professional Services; Medical & Diagnostic Equipment & Supplies; Medical, Surgical & Pharmaceutical Supplies; Minor Building Works & Civils; Plant Hire; Veterinary & Agriculture/Library Book Purchase; Laboratory, Diagnostics & Equipment; and Defence & Security.

The operational procedures of the OGP are managed by the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) and his management team. The CPO was appointed in 2013 and directs the operations of OGP under the terms of his appointment. The Framework Agreements established by the OGP are signed by the CPO on behalf of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The OGP commenced sourcing operations in 2014 and since that time has put a range of framework agreements and contracts in place. To date, the OGP has established in the order of 370 framework agreements and standalone contracts and has conducted over 2,500 mini-competitions under its framework agreements on behalf of our public clients.

It should be noted that contracts following standalone tenders or mini-competitions under OGP framework agreements and the management of same are the responsibility of the Contracting Authority in question.

A full list of all the OGP Frameworks currently in place is available on the OGP website <https://ogp.gov.ie/schedule-of-frameworks-and-contracts/>.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

156. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the public procurement contracts and projects in which a person (details supplied) was involved in; the final value of each project; the original estimates for each contract and project by year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44369/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Government Procurement (OGP), an office within my Department, has responsibility for developing and setting out policy for public procurement in Ireland.

The OGP sets out the procurement procedures to be followed by public bodies, provides procurement solutions, advice, guidance and systems for public bodies and promotes good practice and proactive engagement with the public sector through new governance and oversight structures.

The OGP and its sector partners put in place framework agreements and contracts through which public sector bodies can buy the goods and services that they need. The State buys a wide range of goods and services and, therefore, the sourcing model is broken down into 16 categories. The OGP categories are: ICT & Office Equipment; Professional Services; Marketing, Print & Stationery; Utilities; Fleet & Plant; Managed Services; Travel & HR Services; and Facilities Management, Maintenance. The OGP's sector partners in Health, Education, Defence and Local Government are responsible for the other eight categories: Medical Professional Services; Medical & Diagnostic Equipment & Supplies; Medical, Surgical & Pharmaceutical Supplies; Minor Building Works & Civils; Plant Hire; Veterinary & Agriculture / Library Book Purchase; Laboratory, Diagnostics & Equipment; and Defence & Security.

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It should be noted that contracts following standalone tenders or mini-competitions under OGP frameworks agreements and the management of same are the responsibility of the Contracting Authority in question.

A full list of all the OGP Frameworks currently in place is available on the OGP website <https://ogp.gov.ie/schedule-of-frameworks-and-contracts/> .

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

157. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a structural survey of Carndonagh courthouse, County Donegal, has taken place in order to assess its condition and prioritise the type of work required in order to reopen it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44383/19]

158. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a programme of remedial works for Carndonagh courthouse, Carndonagh, County Donegal, has been put in place; the likely timeframe involved; the steps that have been taken to provide for an alternative to ensure that court sittings continue to be held in Carndonagh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44384/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 158 together.

While the Office of Public Works has no responsibility for Court buildings, it does provide technical and other services on request to the Courts Service in relation to its buildings. The OPW has carried out an inspection of Carndonagh Courthouse and has made recommendations to the Courts Service on the works required to the building.

Tourism Promotion

159. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the conservation management plan for Grianán of Aileach, County Donegal that the OPW had said it would commission in February 2017. [44385/19]

160. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW can recruit a tour guide for Grianán of Aileach in view of the fact it is the most visited site in County Donegal. [44386/19]

161. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there has been collaboration between the OPW, Fáilte Ireland and Donegal Tourism in promoting Grianán of Aileach as a tourist destination; and if so, the details of such work. [44387/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 to 161, inclusive, together.

The Grianán an Aileach National Monument in Co. Donegal is open to visitors daily throughout the year (opening times vary seasonally). A public carpark, owned by Donegal Co. Council,

is available during opening hours and this gives visitors direct access to a universally accessible boardwalk leading to the Monument itself a short distance away. Basic interpretation is provided in the form of information panels located conveniently at the site. OPW employs a local caretaker / keyholder to manage the opening and closing of the carpark and maintains visitor data electronically at the site. The data available indicates that 90,435 visitors were recorded in 2018. This level of usage by the public suggests that there is considerable interest in An Grianán as an attraction and it is popular with both domestic and foreign visitors. However, it is also clear that the volume of footfall and the unregulated and unsupervised nature of the traffic presents significant conservation risks at the site. Currently, OPW staff are being called on regularly during the summer period in particular to repair physical damage done to the Monument and to clean the site from the after effects of antisocial behaviour.

Understanding that the site exhibits considerable tourism potential, OPW has raised with Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht the possibility of some level of visitor infrastructure being provided which would enhance the experience and provide a control mechanism that would assist in the sustainable management of visitors. OPW has also met with interested parties locally, including Donegal Co. Council and Fáilte Ireland and has suggested that collaboration between the various public agencies that focusses particularly on those that own potential development land near the Monument should be explored.

In order to assist with the process of identifying possible ways to improving provision for visitors to the site, OPW early in 2019 commissioned a specialist consultant to develop a Conservation and Management Plan for Grianán an Aileach and this work is currently underway. The OPW has, in the context of the discussions held with public partners, left open the question of the future management and staffing of the site. Without suitable infrastructure currently, there is no suitable location to house staff and to provide a Guide service would not be feasible in advance of any facilities being built and a decision made as to who should operate the facility.

Tourism Data

162. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the most recent visitor numbers at each OPW site in County Donegal that is open to the public. [44388/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The most recent visitor numbers available are for 2018. Visitor numbers are not available for all OPW sites that are open to the public, only those which have either a guide service or a passive pedestrian counter. At Doe Castle and the Grianán of Aileach visitor numbers are recorded by passive counter. There is a guide service at Donegal Castle, the Glebe Gallery and Newmills and visitor numbers at these sites refer to ticketed visitors.

Site	2018 Visitor Numbers
Doe Castle	29,379
Donegal Castle	56,459
Glebe House & Gallery	32,169
Grianán of Aileach	90,435
Newmills Corn & Flax Mills	3,649

Public Sector Pensions

163. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a resolution to the pension entitlements of a person (details supplied) who served in the Defence Forces and the HSE will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44423/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised that the individual in this case had previous pensionable service in the pension scheme of the Permanent Defence Forces, as well as in the health service. Accordingly, their pension entitlements are subject to Section 52 subsections (6) and (7) of the *Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012*. These subsections impose a limit on the total amount of pensionable service which can be taken into account when calculating a public servant's pension entitlements where an individual has been a member of more than one public service pension scheme.

In line with the current interim guidance of my Department, this individual's pension benefits were calculated and paid based on service in the HSE up until 28 July 2012. This was based on the fact that if the individual had total service greater than 40 years across all schemes at that point, the Act provides under Section 52(7) that they are entitled to receive that higher entitlement.

As a result of a number of issues that have arisen in relation to the Section 52 benefit cap, my Department has carried out a review into the operation of the provision. As part of the review, further legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General has been sought. Once that advice has been received, new/revised guidance will be developed and issued as appropriate. At that stage, the HSE will be in a position to consider the implications of the guidance for the pension entitlements of the individual in this case, and to communicate with the individual accordingly.

Question Heading for question(s) 164

164. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW will consider dredging the River Douglas tributary of the River Gale at Derry, Listowel, County Kerry (details supplied). [44650/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Douglas River is a tributary of the Gale River and forms part of an Arterial Drainage Scheme under the auspices of the Office of Public Works. Minor maintenance works were carried out by the OPW in 2013 and in 2016.

The OPW requires the consent of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) to carry out any works on this river and the time frame for carrying such works is the summer. The OPW will consult with IFI with a view to carrying out maintenance works in the Summer of 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

165. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44731/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 14th January 2020 the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will have 398 personal computing devices running Microsoft Windows 7 operating system. Provisions are being made to put in

place Microsoft Windows 7 extended support for these personal computing devices at a cost of €19,306 to ensure they continue to receive security updates and patches to protect against malware attack. Plans are in place to upgrade all Microsoft Windows 7 personal computing devices to Microsoft Windows 10 by the end of 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

166. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44747/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) in my Department has responsibility for the implementation of the Public Service ICT Strategy. The aim of this strategy is to provide a framework for the delivery of greater efficiencies in public service ICT delivery and administration.

In respect of my own Department, provisions are being made to upgrade all Microsoft Windows 7 personal computing devices to Microsoft Windows 10 and this project will be completed by the end of 2020. Microsoft Windows 7 extended support will be put in place for all the personal computers devices running Microsoft Windows 7 while this upgrade project is ongoing. These Windows 7 personal computing devices will continue to receive security updates and patches to protect against malware attack as part of this Microsoft Windows 7 extended support.

The position in respect of the bodies under the aegis of my Department is set out in the table below.

Organisation	Status in respect of this question
Office of Public Works	The OPW is currently migrating its desktop computers from Windows 7 to Windows 10. The project is almost 70% complete and should be largely complete by the end of 2019. Desktop computers in OPW are protected by Palo Alto TRAPS software agents that actively prevent malware from running.
State Laboratory	Microsoft will discontinue extended support of Windows 7 from 14th January 2020. By that time, all computers in the State Lab will be either upgraded to Windows 10 or, for specialist PC's for which it is either not possible or not viable to upgrade to Windows 10, placed behind an existing firewall on a separate network segment. This segmentation is enforced by both a VLAN and a firewall and will remove access to the internet and also limit the computer's ability to communicate with the other computers on other VLANs and network segments. Thereby isolating these machines from the State Lab network.
Public Appointments Service	98% of staff desktop PC's in the Public Appointment Service have been upgraded to the latest version of the Microsoft operating system, Windows 10. All remaining PC's running Windows 7 are scheduled to be upgraded by the end of the first quarter of 2020.
Office of the Ombudsman	The Office of the Ombudsman has no computers which run of this version of the operating system specified. All of its computers have been updated to the latest version of the operating system.

Organisation	Status in respect of this question
National Shared Service Office	Provisions are being made to upgrade all Microsoft Windows 7 personal computing devices to Microsoft Windows 10, this project will be completed by the end of 2020. Microsoft Windows 7 extended support will be put in place for all the Office's personal computing devices running Microsoft Windows 7 while this upgrade project is ongoing. Therefore, the Office's Windows 7 personal computing devices will continue to receive security updates and patches to protect against malware attack.

Information and Communications Technology

167. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44753/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):

-	No. of computers
Personal computing devices running Microsoft Windows 7 operating system	398

Currently there are **524** personal computing devices running a Microsoft Windows 7 operating system, this will be reduced to **398** by the 14th January 2020 when Microsoft Windows 7 standard support will end. Microsoft Windows 7 extended support is available and will be put in place for these **398** personal computing devices while they are being upgraded to Microsoft Windows 10, this upgrade project will be completed by the end of 2020.

Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme

168. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will bring a document to the attention of OPW engineers and officials (details supplied) and return their observations and opinion in due course; if the OPW has given a river its attention in the past; his plans to address the issues regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44760/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Hazelhatch area of Celbridge, County Kildare was assessed as part of the Eastern Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Study. The Flood Risk Management Plans identified the need for a further study of the area to review the flood modelling and mapping in the area and to review potentially viable flood risk management options for the area. This further study has been commissioned by Kildare County Council and the study is underway since September 2019.

The document referred to was received in the OPW on 18 October, 2019. The document has been noted and has been forwarded, for consideration, to the engineering company which has been engaged by Kildare County Council to carry out the further study at Hazelhatch. The scope of the study was initially focussed on the Hazelhatch Stream but has been expanded to address issues highlighted in the adjacent Shinkeen catchment, where the OPW previously completed a flood relief scheme. As per the current programme, the study should be completed in the Spring of 2020.

Legislative Measures

169. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the civil service regulation (amendment) Bill will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44763/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Civil Service Regulation (Amendment) Bill has priority status for publication this session. While this is a relatively short Bill, there are a number of legal matters that need to be resolved before the Bill can be finalised for publication. Officials in my Department and in the Office of the Attorney General are working on the drafting of this Bill. When this drafting process is finalised I will seek Government approval to publish the Bill.

State Bodies Data

170. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount collected by way of dividend from commercial semi-State companies in each of the past five years to date by amount and company in tabular form; the policy in respect of dividend payments to the Exchequer from commercial semi-State bodies; the way in which they are re-distributed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44833/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Historically, there have not been comprehensive central guidelines for State companies regarding dividend policy although, traditionally, dividends of approximately 30% of profits after tax have been sought and expected from most commercial State companies.

NewERA, in conjunction with the relevant Government Departments, has developed a Shareholder Expectations Framework which is intended to provide clarity and guidance for each of the companies within its remit in relation to the Government's strategic priorities, policy objectives, and financial performance and reporting requirements. One of the key areas addressed as part of this shareholder expectations framework is dividend policy.

Dividends, when received, are lodged to the Central Fund from where they are used to fulfill the commitments outlined through the annual Budget and Estimates process. Dividends received for the last five years are set out in the following table.

€'millions

		10 months to 31/10/2019	12 months to 31/12/2018	12 months to 31/12/2017	12 months to 31/12/2016	12 months to 31/12/2015
Bord na Móna	Note 1	0.00	0.00	2.33	3.76	10.14
Coillte	Note 2	0.00	15.00	8.00	7.20	4.00
EirGrid plc		4.00	4.00	4.00	3.50	3.00
Ervia	Note 3	54.40	139.09	148.44	134.66	151.03
ESB	Note 4	4.77	33.06	109.97	82.17	258.72
daa		40.00	37.40	29.10	18.30	0.00
IAA	Note 5	19.52	19.46	9.25	7.43	6.54
Dublin Port	Note 6	0.00	12.17	11.71	10.91	8.80

		10 months to 31/10/2019	12 months to 31/12/2018	12 months to 31/12/2017	12 months to 31/12/2016	12 months to 31/12/2015
Port of Cork		0.25	0.71	0.69	0.67	0.65
Shannon Foynes		0.35	0.30	0.25	0.20	0.10
Port of Waterford		0.33	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Note 1: The Exchequer receives 95% of Bord na Móna dividends paid and Bord na Mona ESOP receives 5% in line with their respective shareholding percentages.

Note 2: Coillte have typically paid dividends to the Exchequer in December of each year.

Note 3: Ervia's dividends are comprised of ordinary and special dividends. Special dividends relate to the proceeds of the disposal of Bord Gáis Energy ("BGÉ"). See the table below for an analysis of Ervia's dividends between ordinary and special:

Ervia Dividends		10 months to 31/10/2019	12 months to 31/12/2018	12 months to 31/12/2017	12 months to 31/12/2016	12 months to 31/12/2015
Ordinary		54.4	49.1	48.4	34.7	51.0
Special (BGÉ)		-	90.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total		54.4	139.1	148.4	134.7	151.0

Note 4: The Exchequer receives c.95% of ESB dividends paid and ESB ESOP receives c.5% in line with their respective shareholding percentages. ESB's 2015 dividends paid was comprised of €58m ordinary dividends and €214m special dividends. Special dividends paid related to the disposal of non-strategic assets.

Note 5: In 2019 IAA paid a normal dividend of €7.5m and special dividend of €12m. Similarly, in 2018 IAA paid a normal dividend of €7.5m and a special dividend of €12m.

Note 6: The Board of Dublin Port Company declared a dividend of 10% of 2018 PAT equating to €4.1m during H2 2019.

Departmental Staff Data

171. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44851/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that none of the staff in my Department are being paid at or less than the National Minimum Wage rate of pay that currently stands at €9.80 per hour.

Office of Public Works Properties

172. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the ac-

tion taken by the OPW in circumstances in which a wall which is its responsibility has fallen into the river Thonogue at Ballylooby, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44964/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): My officials are making inquiries into the issue raised by the Deputy and I will respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory

173. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if construction works on the new Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory at Backweston, County Kildare has commenced; if not, when construction works will commence; and the budget allocated for same. [44995/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory Project at the Backweston campus, the delivery of this project is managed by the Office of Public Works. A preferred Main Contractor has been identified. The reserved specialist tender submissions were received on 27th September 2019. Currently, these tender submissions are being assessed which is expected to be complete in early November 2019. As with the Main Contractor, a Letter of Intent has to be issued with a 14 calendar day standstill period from the date of this letter.

Please note that no contract will be awarded until that process is complete and the necessary pre-contract meeting takes place and required assurances are subsequently received. It is anticipated this process will be complete in Q4 2019. It is anticipated that construction will start by the end of Q4 2019 with a view that construction be complete in late 2021/early 2022.

Office of Public Works Projects

174. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount the OPW has spent on Transaer House, Dublin Airport to date; and the date on which the OPW will and-or has handed this building over to An Garda Síochána. [44996/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The annual expenditure to date on Transaer House, Dublin Airport by the Office of Public Works is approximately €4.4 m and comprises of all project expenditure including design team fees, surveys, opening up works, per cent for art allowance, construction works and VAT. The project reached substantial completion and was handed over to An Garda Síochána on 29th April, 2019.

Garda Stations

175. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a budget was established regarding the new Kevin Street Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45014/19]

176. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there were investigation contracts carried out in relation to the new Kevin Street Garda station; if so, the number of such contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45015/19]

177. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a pre-tender estimate was prepared in relation to the new Kevin Street Garda station; if so, the number of pre-tender estimates assembled; and if the project was fully predesigned. [45016/19]

178. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the value of the accepted tender in relation to the new Kevin Street Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45017/19]

179. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date of tender regarding the new Kevin Street Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45018/19]

180. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the out-turn cost regarding the new Kevin Street Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45019/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 to 180, inclusive, together.

The new Kevin St. Garda Station was procured in two phases. The first phase involved the demolition of existing buildings, deep excavation and piling. In addition to detailed geotechnical site investigations, adjoining building surveys were completed and an extensive programme of archaeological investigations was also carried out as part of that project.

The second phase, which involved the construction of the new station, was tendered on 1 August 2014. A pre-tender cost exercise was carried out in 2014 and it was fully designed prior to tenders issuing. The contract was subsequently awarded on 30 January 2015 in the sum of €27,480,604.70 excluding VAT. The project budget was fully established at that stage.

It is not possible, at this stage, to disclose the final cost of the project as agreement could not be reached with the contractor and the matter has now been referred to conciliation.

During the 2012-2014 period, the project was being procured as part of a Public Private Partnership (PPP) contract. A cost plan exercise was carried out during this period in 2010, however the project did not proceed as a PPP contract. The project was on hold prior to the PPP procurement process.

Departmental Contracts Data

181. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45069/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department has confirmed as part of its Appropriation Accounts for 2017 and 2018 that it has ensured, among other things, that there is an appropriate focus on good practice in purchasing and that procedures are in place to ensure compliance with all relevant guidelines. The Comptroller and Auditor General has carried out reviews of a broad sample of procurements valued over €25,000 in the context of the audits of the Department's Appropriation Accounts in respect of those years and no substantive issues arise.

In respect of 2017 and 2018, the Department noted in its Appropriation Accounts that it

was unable to follow standard public procurement policy with two procurements due to unique circumstances, for which the procurement policy allows. It was required in 2017 to modify an IT system at short notice to safeguard EU funding and, in both 2017 and 2018, it had to use a data centre's own supplier within its secure environment.

The Deputy may also wish to note that my Department updated its Internal Procurement Policy in January 2018 to reflect the OGP procurement guidelines published in July 2017. The revised procurement policy, among other things, provides for the carrying out of randomly chosen internal reviews by my Department's Procurement Officer to ensure that the policy is being complied with. In this context, all procurements processes have been found to be compliant with my Department's procurement policy for 2019.

With regard to the bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am advised that the Office of Public Works will respond directly to the Deputy.

The position on this question in respect of the other bodies under the aegis of my Department is set out in the following table.

Public Appointments Service	-	-
2017	Oracle annual software maintenance	For this contract, no competitive tender process was possible as this is the sole provider of support and maintenance on proprietary database.
2018	Oracle annual software maintenance	For this contract, no competitive tender process was possible as this is the sole provider of support and maintenance on proprietary database.
	Emerald Facility Services	Existing contract extended as tender put on hold pending decision on long term status of premises by OPW.
	Grant Thornton – Consultancy Services	A second extension of €22,250 on this contract was found to be outside the terms of the contract and therefore non-compliant, the total expenditure on the contract for the year was €219,550.
2019	Oracle annual software maintenance	For this contract, no competitive tender process was possible as this is the sole provider of support and maintenance on proprietary database.

Public Appointments Service	-	-
	Emerald Facility Services	Existing contract extended as tender put on hold pending decision on long term status of premises by OPW
National Shared Service Office		
2018	Professional Training and Consulting	RFQ process followed as value was expected to be less than €25,000. However, new recruitment necessitated an additional rollout of the training at short notice, in what was a specialised subject matter. Given the increased value of the contract, an RFT process should have applied.
	Ernst & Young - 'Quality Assurance & Risk'	Contract procured according to procurement guidelines, however, the estimated contract value was exceeded. The NSSO continued the engagement due to the critical nature of the work being done, which was at an advanced stage. Returning to the market would have presented an economic disadvantage due to duplication of costs and resulted in a significant loss in value for money.
State Laboratory		
2017	Gas Suppliers	Supply of laboratory gases following expiry of the contract in March 2017. There was a delay in establishing a Framework Agreement for this requirement.
2018	Gas Suppliers	Supply of laboratory gases following expiry of the contract in March 2017. There was a delay in establishing a Framework Agreement for this requirement.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

182. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of funding issued for flood defence schemes in each county from 2009 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45083/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The following table sets out the level of capital expenditure invested in the flood risk management area from 2009 to date. The figures, which total approximately €434m, include expenditure on major flood relief schemes, contributions to Local Authorities under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection (Minor Works) Scheme and payments to Local Authorities in 2014 and 2015 for the repair of damaged public coastal defence infrastructure following the storm which affected the western seaboard in December 2013 and January 2014. The figures do not include expenditure on non-county specific flood risk management measures and programmes primarily the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme.

County	Level of Expenditure (rounded to nearest €0.5m in most cases)
Carlow	€6.0m
Cavan	€0.5m
Clare	€39.0m
Cork	€148.0m
Donegal	€2.5m
Dublin	€42.0m
Galway	€27.5m
Kerry	€5.5m
Kildare	€6.5m
Kilkenny	€2.0m
Laois	€0.2m
Leitrim	€1.5m
Limerick	€8.5m
Longford	€1.0m
Louth	€1.5m
Mayo	€7.0m
Meath	€9.0m
Monaghan	€1.5m
Offaly	€2.5m
Roscommon	€2.0m
Sligo	€1.0m
Tipperary	€39.0m
Waterford	€21.5m
Westmeath	€4.5m
Wexford	€9.5m
Wicklow	€44.0m

Expenditure on flood risk management by the OPW underpins a comprehensive programme of investment in capital works and other non structural measures which aims to address the most significant areas of flood risk nationally. 44 major flood relief schemes have been completed since 1995, 11 schemes are currently under construction, 80 projects are at active design/planning stage while a further 62 projects will be advanced through design over the coming

years. In addition, over 550 localised projects nationwide have been completed by Local Authorities under the Minor Works Scheme. Overall, the Government's *National Development Plan 2018-2027* provides for investment of up to €1 billion on flood risk management with the aim of providing protection to 95% of properties assessed to be at risk.

Ministerial Meetings

183. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the meetings he has attended since his appointment in relation to the national children's hospital; the date of each meeting; the persons in attendance; the subject matter of each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45102/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since my appointment as Minister in summer 2016, I have had numerous meetings at which the National Children's Hospital may have been discussed. These include meetings with my officials, with officials from the Department of Health, with political colleagues and, of course, with the Minister for Health, with whom I have met at least 50 times in Government Buildings during this time according to my official diary. The National Children's Hospital would have been discussed at some of these meetings.

I am happy to tell the Deputy that work continues to progress on the St. James' hospital site. Once completed, the new National Children's Hospital will provide the highest possible standard of treatment and care to children, young people and their families who require access to national tertiary and quaternary paediatric services.

Ministerial Meetings

184. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of meetings he has attended since his appointment in relation to the national broadband plan; the date of each meeting; the persons in attendance; the subject matter of each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45104/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is a major infrastructural project. It aims to radically change the broadband landscape in this country, will involve State investment of up to €3bn, and will reach over half a million premises covered by the "Intervention Area".

As such, since my appointment as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in May 2016, and particularly over the last 12 months, I have had numerous meetings that would have included a discussion on the topic of the NBP, either formally or informally - such as on the margins of Cabinet or other meetings.

In particular, my Department and I have engaged on an ongoing basis with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and officials of that Department, throughout the process in relation to the economic appraisal of the NBP, as well as the cost and affordability of the project. However, meetings have also taken place with the Taoiseach and his officials, with other Ministerial colleagues, including at Cabinet, and with Oireachtas Committees, amongst others.

Against this background, the Deputy will appreciate that it would be impossible for me to try to provide a comprehensive list of every time I discussed this major project at any meeting

I attended since my appointment as Minister.

Garda Accommodation

185. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if funding will be made available without delay to ensure that remedial works can be carried out at Emyvale Garda station; the timeline for the expected completion of the works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45264/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works is working with the Garda Authorities on the provision of accommodation for Emyvale Garda Station. The existing damaged station has been demolished and works are underway in the former married quarters to provide accommodation for the Garda, as an interim measure. It is expected that these works will be completed in a matter of weeks.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

186. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date he last met officials in relation to the Glanmire flood relief works. [45311/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works, under the provisions of the Arterial Drainage Acts, has submitted the proposal for the Glashaboy Flood Relief Scheme to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for formal Confirmation.

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has made regulations entitled European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Arterial Drainage) Regulations 2019. These were published in Iris Oifigiúil on 27 September 2019. On foot of these Regulations the Minister will undertake an environmental assessment of the proposed scheme in line with required legislative requirements, and this will involve public consultation.

The procurement and appointment of a Contractor will be progressed for this scheme following formal Ministerial Confirmation. The flood relief scheme will be funded from within the allocated €1 billion for flood risk management over the period 2018-2027. Provision for the cost of the Scheme is included in the Office of Public Works’ multi annual capital allocation.

OPW are committed to funding this project and attends monthly steering meetings to offer every assistance to Cork City Council to ensure a speedy progression of the process to engage a contractor and have works commence as soon as possible.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

187. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the provision of flood defences for Athlone town. [45356/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Westmeath County Council (WCC) working in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) is advancing proposals to deal with the flooding issues in Athlone . WCC is the Contracting Authority and the OPW is funding the costs of the flood relief works for the

town in addition to undertaking the construction works using its own direct labour.

Engineering consultants were appointed in April 2017, to identify appropriate flood risk alleviation measures for Athlone. The Options Appraisal Report identified eight discrete cells of flood defence works. These flood cells are each being progressed individually under Part 8 or Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations with works being undertaken by the OPW's own workforce, as a direct managed scheme. The current status of each flood cell is set out in Table 1 below

Table 1:

Flood Cell	Status
FC1 – Deerpark	Part 8 planning granted in September 2018. Works commenced in Q2 2019. Recent works include sheet piling works which are being undertaken in the showgrounds section. Anticipated completion Q4 2021.
FC2 – The Strand	Part 8 planning granted in May, 2018. Construction works commenced in Q2 2019. Ongoing works at Wolfe tone and Burgess park section. Anticipated completion Q3 2021
FC3 – The Quay	Part 8 planning granted September, 2017. Construction works commenced May, 2018 with 95% of the flood wall now complete and flood gate threshold construction works ongoing. Anticipated completion Q4 2020.
FC4 – Brick Island	Part 8 planning granted January, 2018. Construction works commenced in April, 2018 with Priory Park flood wall complete along with associated land drain. Also complete are the Jolly Mariner and Brick Island flood defence wall and gate thresholds. Reinstatement works at Jolly Mariner have commenced. anticipated completion Q2 2020.
FC5 – Marine View	Part 8 planning granted March, 2018. Construction works commenced in Q3 2019 with embankment works at Wansboro field 75% complete; continuation of embankment work is weather dependent. Anticipated completion is Q4 2020.
FC6 – Iona Park	Construction is complete.
FC7 – River AI (Cregan)	Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is currently in hand. Planning approval and subsequent construction commencement dates are dependent on EIA findings.
FC8 – Golden Island	Part 8 planning granted September, 2018. Detailed design is being reviewed prior to the commencement of construction works. It is expected works will commence next year and take 15/16 months to complete.

It is anticipated that all the construction works for the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme will be completed in 2022. When completed, the project will provide flood protection to approximately 560 homes.

State Properties

188. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the case of a person (details supplied) with the Chief State Solicitor's Office regarding the transfer of funds from a liquidated company to the former shareholder will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45400/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Property (including funds in bank accounts) which remains in the ownership of a liquidated company when it is dissolved becomes State property by virtue of Section 28 of the State Property Act, 1954.

If Directors wish to regain property which has become State property in this manner, they are generally advised to restore the company.

The Minister may, in accordance with Section 31 of the Act, waive his entitlement to such property. However the Minister waives his ownership only in exceptional cases; he does not generally waive to former Directors; and he does not do so to rectify mistakes or matters overlooked by Directors, advisors or liquidators in the dissolution of a company.

There was correspondence with my Department in 2015 regarding an application for a waiver for the funds referred to by the Deputy. A Waiver Pack was issued by my Department. Such Waiver Packs are issued to establish if a Waiver is justified. Given the work involved in administering such requests, fees are charged where a Waiver is granted.

Neither my Department nor the CSSO appears to have received a completed Waiver Pack in this case.

Based on the details provided, it seems unlikely that a Waiver would be given in this case. However my Department will consider any additional details which the applicant may wish to provide.

Home Tuition Scheme Provision

189. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if home tuition will be approved for a child (details supplied) in County Donegal from September 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44452/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The matter raised by the Deputy relates to preschool education and childcare. These matters fall within the remit of my colleagues, the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs.

My Department does not provide funding to preschool services other than to early intervention for children with Autism.

Supports for childcare, including preschool education, are provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).

Special Educational Needs Data

190. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special school places available in an area (details supplied); the number of children waiting for a special school place in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44809/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education for

children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels. Nationally, 167 new special classes opened for the 2019/20 school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

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

The Council has well established structures in place to plan and coordinate special education provision throughout the country. This includes identifying the need for and establishing special class placements in various geographical areas where they are required. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Normally, special classes are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the Council has faced challenges in getting schools and their Patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places. I know that this can cause 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 back in April in respect of the Dublin 15 area. We have made significant progress in a relatively short period with the opening 7 new special classes and a new Special School that will provide 88 places for children with special needs. The new places will help these families and ensure that the children concerned have access to education.

The legislation contains a procedure through which the capacity of schools in an area can be tested and through which ultimately a Ministerial direction can be made requiring a school to make additional special education provision available. The initial steps in this procedure are currently being progressed.

The experience of Dublin 15 shows that 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.

To this end, the NCSE is continuing its engagement with schools, patron bodies, parents and others across south Dublin to bring the required additional special class and special school placements on stream.

Public Sector Pensions

191. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason seasonal part-time employment is not recognised for pension purposes in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44941/19]

253. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [44940/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 191 and 253 together.

The person concerned retired from teaching service last year and is currently in receipt of retirement benefits.

Officials from the Pension Unit of my Department have been in contact with the person concerned on a number of occasions to discuss the calculation of her benefits.

The person concerned has also been informed that they may transfer previous public sector pensionable service from another public sector organisation to the teachers' pension scheme. However, in order to have this service included in the calculation of retirement benefits, verification of the service from the previous employer should be forward to my Department for consideration. I have requested my officials to again contact the person concerned and advise her how to progress this matter.

School Libraries

192. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if grants are available for rural schools to provide library books for use by students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45232/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): There is no specific grant funding available in relation to provision of library books to schools from this Department.

Public Sector Pensions

193. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider allowing qualified school teachers that have worked abroad to buy teacher pensions credits for their time spent abroad (details supplied). [45280/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): There is currently no provision to reckon teaching service provided abroad for pension purposes.

However, it is open to serving teachers to purchase additional service known as notional service, in accordance with the rules of the pension scheme of which they are a member.

Schools Building Projects Status

194. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school construction (details supplied) will proceed to tender in quarter 1 of 2020; the date on which construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44191/19]

227. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific reason for the delay in progressing a school capital project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44582/19]

228. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in the opening of a new school (details supplied); the arrangements that will be put

in place to ensure the purpose built ASD units catering for 12 spaces in the school will be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44583/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194, 227 and 228 together.

The building project to provide permanent accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy will provide a 16 classroom primary school with a 2 classroom Special Educational Needs unit.

The project is being delivered under my Department's Design and Build Programme. The current Design & Build framework of contractors is due to expire in January 2020 and a tender exercise to establish a new framework of Contractors is required.

The procurement process for a bundle of projects which includes the building project referred to by the Deputy is due to commence shortly with the publication of a contract notice to determine a shortlist of interested contractors. This procurement process will also establish a new framework of Contractors for the 2020 and 2021 programmes. The new school building for the school referred to by the Deputy is included as part of this tender exercise.

The procurement process (and the associated tendering to short-listed contractors) for this bundle of projects will be ongoing during Q4 2019 and Q1 2020.

It is anticipated that construction of this school building project will commence in Q2 2020. A phased construction programme is planned to facilitate occupation of the new permanent school building as early as possible in the 2020/2021 school year

School Accommodation

195. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when his Department will commence negotiating the extension for the lease for the temporary school accommodation of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44192/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Officials at my Department have made contact with the landlord with regard to seeking an extension of the lease for the temporary school accommodation for the school to which the Deputy refers.

My Department will keep the school authorities fully informed as these discussions progress.

Teaching Council of Ireland

196. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address concerns in relation to a registration issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44203/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015, the Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority and responsibility for the registration of teachers.

It is a function of the Council under the Teaching Council Acts (s7(2)) to act as the competent authority for the recognition of qualifications obtained by a person who has applied

under this Act for registration as a teacher. Teachers whose applications meet all the necessary requirements are registered by the Teaching Council under Section 31 of the Teaching Council Act and the Teaching Council (Registration) Regulations 2016.

Under section 30 of the Teaching Council Acts, a teacher in a recognised school is required to be registered with the Teaching Council in order to be paid from Oireachtas-voted funds.

Where a registered teacher is not available SI 32/2014 enables a school managerial authority to employ a person who is not registered as a teacher for up to five consecutive days.

The person referred to by the Deputy should continue to liaise directly with the Teaching Council and follow their guidance regarding curricular subject requirements for registration.

School Curriculum

197. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to a query by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44204/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I refer to your recent correspondence regarding RSE in schools.

Access to Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is an important right for students. Schools have a responsibility to provide for this vital aspect of education to young people. Importantly, a school's RSE programme should be planned in consultation with parents and having regard to the ethos of the school.

At all times RSE will be based on what is appropriate for a child's age or their development. It is about many things but at its heart will be respect.

Under no circumstances will the Department of Education and Skills impose a curriculum whereby young children are exposed to instruction or information in relation to sexual activity that is inappropriate.

The entire focus of RSE is on preparing young people for life, on emphasising the importance of respect for themselves and each other, developing healthy relationships, understanding the importance of consent and helping young people to develop and mature in a positive light.

In April 2018, a review of RSE in schools was announced by the previous Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton TD. The Minister asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to undertake a review, not just of the content of the curriculum but of how it is taught in schools.

The 2010 World Health Organisation (WHO) document, 'Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe' was referred to in a research paper which fed into the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) review of RSE in schools. The approach taken in this WHO document has not been endorsed by the NCCA.

The bill referred to is the Provision of Objective Sex Education Private Members Bill, initiated by Opposition T.D.s. That Bill has not been passed by the Oireachtas and is not part of the NCCA review of RSE in schools.

As Minister for Education and Skills, I am committed to ensuring that any RSE curriculum will be appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the children in our schools.

Questions - Written Answers
Departmental Programmes

198. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications made through the skillnets stream for funding in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; the number of successful and unsuccessful applicants in respect of funding; the amount allocated to the stream in the context of budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44210/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Skillnet Ireland is funded by my Department through the National Training Fund (NTF) to act as an enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of enterprise training and workforce development. Skillnet Ireland operates a joint funding model where training is funded by combining contributions from employers with Skillnet grants.

Skillnet Ireland has been allocated €36 million in 2020, an additional €8 Million in NTF funding over 2019. This increase was allocated to support 7,000 additional participants on Skillnet Ireland programmes including a new digital skills initiative to assist with ICT shortages across the country and an SME upskilling scheme to assist in addressing productivity issues of indigenous SMEs. Skillnet Ireland will provide training to 69,000 participants in 2020.

During the period 2017-2019, Skillnet Ireland funded the following number of networks: 68 Networks in 2019 , 65 in 2018 and 66 in 2017. The average approval rate for applications for funding was 93% over these three years, as set out in the table below.

The new Skillnet networks established since 2017 are active in industry sectors that include sustainability, design, freight & logistics, retail and technology, along with mixed sector networks in the North East and in Fingal.

Year	Applications for Funding from Established & New Skillnet Networks	Skillnet Networks Approved for Funding	% of applications approved
2017	70	66	94%
2018	68	65	96%
2019	75	68	92%
TOTAL	213	199	93%

Springboard Programme

199. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications made through the Springboard+ stream for funding in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; the number of successful and unsuccessful applicants in respect of funding; the amount allocated to the stream in the context of budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44215/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Springboard+ which incorporates the ICT skills conversion programme, is a targeted initiative which is used to provide funding for higher education courses aimed at meeting the need for in-demand skills in the economy. Springboard+ supports jobseekers to return to employment and those in employment to upskill or reskill.

All courses approved for funding under Springboard+ are selected, following a competitive

call for proposals, to public and private higher education providers across the country.

Decisions on proposals to be approved for funding are made by a panel of experts with industry and educational experience, which is established by the Higher Education Authority. The assessment and selection process is overseen by an independent process auditor.

Courses approved for funding in 2019 are in the following areas, ICT, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Hospitality, and Business, Administration and Law.

Year	Proposals received	Proposals approved for funding	Amount of funding allocated to Springboard+
2017	420	198	€27,438,000
2018	496	227	€30,438,000
2019	517	275	€34,438,000

Under Budget 2020, €34,438,000 has been allocated to Springboard+ 2020.

School Inspection Reports

200. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason he has not made public a copy of a report prepared by his officials in relation to a school (details supplied) following a visit by his officials to the school on 11 June 2019; when he plans to make this report publicly available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44221/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The report to which the Deputy refers follows an inspection visit to the school by a member of my Department's inspectorate on 11th June 2019.

Officials of my Department are due to meet with the school authorities later this month to discuss the recommendations contained the Inspector's report and related matters.

My Department will also engage with other stakeholders involved with the school, including the NCSE, HSE, patron and trustees, to ensure appropriate educational provision is in place for the students in the school.

The report will not be available to the wider public until my Department has completed its work with the school, patron, trustees and HSE in relation to the recommendations of this report.

Digital Strategy for Schools

201. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the processes small schools have to go through to avail of improved information and communications technology equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44234/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, sets out a plan to embed the use of digital technology in teaching, learning and assessment, and affirms that the use of digital technology can enhance the teaching and learning experience. The Strategy recognises that schools require investment in their ICT infrastructure. Funding of some €210m been designated to support the implementation of this strategy with €60m issued to schools over the 2016/17 and 2017/18 school years and a further

€50m issued earlier this year to schools in respect of the 2018/19 school year.

My Department also pays an ICT grant of €5,000 for each new mainstream classroom or SEN Class base approved for a school. The minor works grant can also be used for the purchase of IT equipment.

Decisions regarding the use and deployment of digital technology in schools is a matter for the Board of Management of each school. Where the introduction of digital devices is planned, consultation with members of the school community including parents is advised. Consultation between parents, students and schools is now underpinned through the recently published Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers Technology in Education (PDST-TIE) offers advice to schools and have developed an advice sheets on digital technology in education, including on the adoption of Laptops and tablets in schools.

Sign Language and Deaf Services

202. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be made available to part-time students for Irish Sign Language interpretation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44238/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department allocates funding annually to the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), which supports circa 14,000 students annually. The Fund provides financial support to approved higher education institutions to ensure that they are adequately resourced to cater for the needs of students with disabilities.

In the 2018/19 academic year, the Fund began supporting students on part-time courses on a pilot phased approach and this has continued into the 2019/20 academic year.

Deaf supports, including sign language interpreters, are covered under the Fund where students are attending an approved course in an approved institution. The institution to which the Deputy refers is not an approved institution.

School Transport Eligibility

203. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied) which issued to his office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44241/19]

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

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

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

nearest school.

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

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

Bus Éireann has confirmed that while the pupil referred to by the Deputy did apply to Moore National School which is now deemed to be their closest school, the application was made after the deadline and as such the pupil was not allocated a ticket for the 2019/20 school year. Bus Éireann has also confirmed that the service in question is currently operating to capacity.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

204. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a summer works application by a school (details supplied) in County Mayo has been received; if the fact that the school has not received a reply to the application to date will be acknowledged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44266/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application for (Toilet Facilities) under my Department's multi-annual Summer Works Scheme (SWS) 2020 onwards.

I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the SWS in 2020, applications will be assessed on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the governing Circular Letter for the Scheme. This Circular Letter (0027/2019) is available on my Department's website www.education.ie.

It is my intention to publish a list of successful applicants in Q4, 2019 for works to be carried out in summer 2020.

School Accommodation Provision

205. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide more resources to a school (details supplied) to enable it to meet the clear demand for first year places for the 2020-2021 academic year; the reason a cap of 48 places has been introduced for the 2020-2021 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44311/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school referred to by the Deputy opened in September 2019 in interim accommodation pending delivery of its permanent accommodation as part of my Department's Design and Build Programme.

In an interim situation it is not possible to provide the same level of accommodation which will be delivered as permanent accommodation. This may mean that the schools intake in its first few years of operation will by necessity be less than would be possible in permanent accommodation.

My Department's main priority is to ensure that all pupils have access to a school place, however, this may not always result in a school place of first choice. A range of factors including parental choice, school location and commuting patterns can contribute to oversubscription

of certain schools within an area.

School Transport Data

206. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applicants for the school transport scheme on route from Drogheda, County Louth to a school (details supplied) over the past five years; and the number of applications refused school transport on the route over the past five years. [44314/19]

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

Bus Éireann has confirmed that the detail requested by the Deputy is as set out in the following table.

School Year	No. of applicants (Including rollover applicants)	No. of pupils that did not receive a ticket	No. of eligible pupils that did not receive a ticket (due to late payment)	No. of concessionary pupils that did not receive a ticket
2019/20	82	10	0	10
2018/19	78	23	1	22
2017/18	81	36	1	35
2016/17	74	19	0	19
2015/16	60	39	1	38

Departmental Programmes

207. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a schedule of online and on-street gambling companies that have participated in the skillnets programme in 2018 and to date in 2019; the return amount from learning centres due to underspends in 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44326/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Skillnet Ireland is funded by my Department through the National Training Fund (NTF) to act as an enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of enterprise training and workforce development. The NTF is resourced through a levy on employment collected as part of employer PRSI. The primary role of Skillnet Ireland is to increase participation in enterprise training by companies to upskill the workforce and provide greater access for workers to skills development. Skillnet Ireland operates a joint funding model where training is funded by combining contributions from employers with Skillnet grants.

Skillnet Ireland have indicated that staff from three companies in the online and on-street gambling industry participated in training with Skillnet Ireland funded learning networks in 2018 with staff from two companies undertaking training in 2019 to date. All private sector companies are eligible to participate in Skillnet learning networks in order to access upskilling

opportunities for their staff.

Of the 65 Skillnet Ireland networks that received grants in 2018, nine networks were required to refund grant payments to Skillnet Ireland due to an underspend. These refunds totalled €163,380 which represent 0.9% of the total 2018 grant issued by Skillnet Ireland for 2018. Any potential grant refunds related to the 2019 funding period will be established after year-end.

Schools Property

208. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a schedule of school buildings that are not occupied by county; the duration the buildings have been unoccupied; his plans for the buildings that are not going to be occupied going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44328/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The majority of school buildings are in private ownership.

Where a school relocates or closes, the future use of the old building is a matter for the property owner. In general, where former schools are not required for educational use, such properties may be used for community or other purposes or may be sold. Therefore, the Department does not hold details of current usage of former school buildings in private ownership.

A schedule of unoccupied school buildings in my ownership, all of which have plans for development, is available at the following link:

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-05_pq208-5-11-2019_en.pdf] School Buildings]

School Transport Provision

209. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the withdrawal of the school transport resource from a school (details supplied); if transport to the school is only provided for children with special educational needs as opposed to those attending due to mental health issues; if so, the policy this is based on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44337/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's practice has been to respond to the needs of long term or repeat child patients in hospitals and HSE Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) facilities through the establishment of special schools or through the funding of part-time teaching hours.

The purpose of educational provision in HSE CAMHS Units is a short term intervention designed to provide for some continuity of education during the child/young person's stay as an in-patient. Not all children/young people attending CAMHS are medically fit to avail of education during all of their stay.

Since 2014, my Department's policy is to provide teaching staff in CAMHS facilities at a pupil teacher ratio of 6:1 on the basis of the number of inpatient beds in each CAMHS unit. The school referred to by the deputy is one such school.

Current policy does not provide for an additional teaching allocation for CAMHS facilities for children/young people attending as day or out-patients, as young people attending CAMHS

as day patients can apply for Home Tuition support to provide for compensatory education in respect of time missed from school, due to medical reasons or attendance at a medical unit.

As not all inpatient beds in CAMHS Units may be filled at any given time, in such instances, subject to prior approval by my Department, CAMHS Units may utilise spare teaching capacity from their allocated 6:1 ratio to offer guidance or support for children/young people attending CAMHS facilities as day patients, and to assist in maintaining some continuity of education from their base school or liaison with their base school on days that they attend the CAMHS Unit.

Students in the special school referred to by the Deputy are attending the HSE CAMHS facility, in the first instance, as in-patients, day patients or out-patients for mental health issues rather than special educational needs.

While the special school in question was originally designated as a special school for Severe Emotional Behaviour Disturbance, since the school's re-location with the HSE's CAMHS unit, the teaching staff allocation has been provided on the basis of the policy outlined above for CAMHS facilities.

The CAMHS team may refer patients to the school for short term education intervention, designed to provide for some continuity of education, while a patient of the CAMHS Unit. All students remain enrolled in their base schools while attending the CAMHS unit. Special schools attached to CAMHS Units do not enrol students on a full time basis, as their main education placement. Therefore, their enrolment remains transient.

The purpose of the Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability. Children are eligible when they are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class in mainstream or special school that is or can be resourced to meet their special educational needs. Eligibility is determined in consultation with the NCSE through its network of SENOs.

As students in special schools attached to a CAMHS facility, including the School referred to by the Deputy, are, in the first instance, attending CAMHS as in-patients, day patients or out-patients for mental health issues rather than special educational needs, transport to the HSE CAMHS unit does not come within the remit of my Department's Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs.

Special School Transport was provided in error to a number of students who attended this special school while day patients of CAMHS. This arrangement was allowed to continue for these students until they completed their time in CAMHS. The school has been advised that no new applications can be considered.

School Transport Appeals

210. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if correspondence forwarded to the school transport appeals office by a person (details supplied) on 10 September 2019 will be acknowledged and replied to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44374/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with

special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

Under the terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kms from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service in the context of the Scheme nationally.

Where practicable, and subject to considerations of cost and logistics, routes are planned to avoid an eligible child having to travel more than 2.4 kms to or from a pick-up/set down point or to have travel and waiting times in excess of 1.5 hours per day. Routes are planned on the basis of the locations of children who are eligible for school transport only.

Bus Éireann has advised that the family in question is currently being offered a service within the above guidelines.

Bus Éireann has been requested to report on issues raised by the parent of the child concerned in regard to the pick-up point.

Schools Building Projects Status

211. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the building project for a school (details supplied); the status of the issues in relation to the tendering process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44403/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy has recently completed Stage 2(b) of architectural planning and has been progressed to tender stage.

The Department has recently been in contact with the Design Team and advised it of the need to get the tendering process underway as quickly as possible.

The Design Team Leader has advised that it expects to issue the Invitation to Tender to the shortlisted contractors shortly.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Teachers' Remuneration

212. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the payroll division will be advised of the situation of a person (details supplied); if it will provide the letter regarding the change to be applied to the point scale of the person in December 2019 for the person's application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44432/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that officials of the Payroll Division of my Department are in the process of issuing the information requested directly to the person referred to.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

213. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which a student can be refused a SUSI grant when the student is over the limit by €44 as in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44435/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the terms of the Student Grant Scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students attending an approved course in an approved institution who meet the prescribed conditions of funding including those which relate to nationality, residency, approved course, previous academic attainment and means.

The decision on eligibility for student grant applications is a matter, in the first instance, for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

The assessment of means under the student grant scheme is based on gross income from all sources, with certain social welfare and health service executive payments being exempt.

The terms and conditions of the Student Grant Scheme, including the means test arrangements, are applied impartially on a national basis, and accordingly it is not possible to make an exception in an individual case, regardless of circumstances.

The student in question has appealed the decision on her grant application to the SUSI appeals officer and subsequently to the statutorily independent Student Grants Appeals Board who both upheld the decision of the awarding authority. The student has exhausted the appeals process provided for in the Student Support Act 2011.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the third level institution attended.

In addition, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the applicant's local Tax Office or from the Revenue Commissioners website, www.revenue.ie.

School Transport Data

214. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will provide the Ombudsman for Children with the requested measurement of routes and mileage of the distance between Quin and Ennis, County Clare, and Quin and Tulla, County Clare, in view of the months that have elapsed since the details were sought (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44439/19]

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

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available

resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. In general, children are eligible for school transport where they meet the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Distance eligibility is determined by Bus Éireann by measuring the shortest traversable route from the child's home to the relevant education centre.

In regard to the case referred to by the Deputy, Bus Éireann was requested to carry out a calibrated measurement on the distance from Quin to Ennis and Tulla respectively. The report from Bus Eireann has recently been received and has confirmed that Ennis is the nearest school location. Officials from School Transport Section of my Department will now be in contact with the Ombudsman for Children's Office.

Special Educational Needs Data

215. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils that warrant an EAL teaching support post; if this is known among the primary allocations section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44459/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Since the 2017/18 school year the Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile and also encompasses the Language Support (EAL) allocation that schools were allocated in previous years.

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

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, including language support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

Under this allocation model, schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay.

Further additional temporary Language Support is also provided, as necessary, to schools that have high concentrations of pupils that require language (EAL) support. At primary level, these allocations are made on the basis of appeals by schools to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

The information requested by the Deputy is not collated in my Department.

Special Educational Needs Staff

216. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the discussions he has had with the HSE and the Minister for Health to ensure investigations and tests required for a school to submit an application for a special needs assistant will be provided by the required date of February 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44464/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The consideration of professional reports is an integral part of determining the extent of supports to be provided for pupils

with special educational needs.

However, whereas health reports provide valuable assistance to education providers in identifying a diagnosis or identifying appropriate interventions, health staff have been directed by the HSE not to include references to the specific quantum of educational resources in their reports, but should state the outcome of assessments carried out and the range of needs of the child as clearly as possible.

This is because, while a medical or relevant professional report can indicate the care needs that a child may have, the Health professional will not have knowledge or awareness of the current resources available to a school to cater for these care needs, will not be aware of the layout of the school, or have had an opportunity to observe the child in class or observe their interaction with their teachers and classmates on an ongoing basis.

It is the role of the The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to process applications from schools for SNA support, taking into account the frequency and extent of the care needs as referenced in the professional report, the manner in which they arise in a school setting and in this regard, the evidence the school can provide to support the application. The NCSE can also consult with other professional e.g. NEPS and will allocate a level of SNA support to a school to ensure that the school has sufficient resources to cater for the significant care needs of the relevant children who are enrolled in the school for whom it has been indicated that there is a care requirement.

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

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

It is my Department's policy that every child assessed as requiring SNA support will have access to such support.

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

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

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

217. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) is being forced into a conflict of priorities between maintaining teaching posts and complying with health and safety legislation; the reason developing schools are required to have a higher pupil-teacher ratio than developed schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44492/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30th September. However, the staffing arrangements for primary schools includes the provision whereby schools experiencing rap-

id increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment for the following September, in this case September 2019.

The staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The appeal submitted by the school referred to by the Deputy was considered by the Primary Staffing Appeals Board at its recent meeting. The school has been notified of its staffing allocation for the remainder of the school year.

School Transport Provision

218. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria used to establish if a school can be resourced to meet the special educational needs of a child in view of the fact that, under the eligibility criteria for school transport with special needs, a child is eligible for transport in circumstances in which he or she is attending the nearest school that can be resourced to meet the child’s special educational needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44493/19]

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

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability.

Children are eligible for transport where they have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability and are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class/special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

219. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the list of successful applications for the summer works scheme 2020 will be published. [44495/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department’s multi-annual Summer Works Scheme 2020 onwards is designed to allow schools, on a devolved funding basis, to carry out necessary improvement and refurbishment works that will upgrade existing school facilities.

I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the SWS in 2020, applications will be assessed in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the governing Circular Letter for the Scheme. This Circular Letter (0027/2019) is available on my Department’s website www.education.ie.

It is my intention to publish a list of successful applications in Q4 2019 for works to be carried out in summer 2020.

School Transport Data

220. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of the 52 children that were deemed to have satisfied the eligibility criteria for school transport with special educational needs living nearer to a mainstream school than the schools they are currently attending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44496/19]

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

Under the eligibility criteria for School Transport with Special Educational Needs a child is eligible for transport where they are attending the nearest school that is, or can be resourced to meet their educational needs. Eligibility is determined in consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers.

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

If the Deputy has any queries on an individual application he should contact the School Transport Section of my Department.

School Staff

221. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the recent staffing appeal by a school (details supplied) has been denied. [44508/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30th September.

The staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. This criteria is available on my Department’s website as part of the Primary Teacher Allocation section.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board and, having considered the appeal, the Board has refused the appeal on the basis that it did not satisfy the criteria outlined in the appeals system. The school will be entitled to an additional mainstream class teacher in the 2020/21 school year based on its latest enrolment returns.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

School Services Staff

222. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to

address the situation in which many school secretaries receive no holiday pay, sick pay, occupational pension provision and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44524/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I recognise the very important work done by these staff, and the other support staff in the running of our schools. I have spoken to a number of school secretaries about their employment conditions and understand the issues they have raised.

In Budget 2020 I increased the number of secretaries in certain schools, allowing schools with enrolments of 500-625 to fill secretary vacancies provided they have fewer than 1.5 secretaries, and schools with enrolments of 626-699 will be permitted to fill vacancies provided they have fewer than two posts filled. These measures will take effect from September 2020.

Earlier this year I relaxed the moratorium for those C&C and ETB schools with enrolments of 700 and more which allow them to employ additional school secretaries up to a maximum of two per school. There are 91 schools in the C&C and ETB Sector who meet this criteria, based on the information currently available to this Department. This is an initial step and has taken immediate effect

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of clerical officers and caretakers in schools. The schemes were withdrawn completely in 2008. These schemes have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes. The current grant scheme was agreed in the context of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, published in 1991.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services under these grant schemes. It is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the grant funding for caretaking or secretarial purposes, any staff taken on to support those functions are employees of individual schools. Specific responsibility for terms of employment rests with the school.

On foot of a Chairman's Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. This arbitration agreement covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

The arbitration agreement was designed to be of greatest benefit to lower-paid secretaries and caretakers. For example, a secretary or caretaker who was paid the then minimum wage of €8.65 per hour in 2015 prior to the arbitration has from 1 January 2019, been paid €13 per hour which is a 50% increase in that individual's hourly pay.

Officials from my Department attended a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the 9th of April to discuss the status of non-teaching staff.

In May this year officials from my Department had discussions with FÓRSA trade union representatives as part of a planned meeting. FÓRSA took the opportunity to formally table a pay claim.

This was tabled as a follow-on claim from the current pay agreement for this cohort of staff which lasts until December 2019. The Department issued surveys on the 10th of July to establish the full current cost of the trade union's claim. This is standard practice.

Officials from the Department met with FÓRSA representatives in September. Management Bodies representing the employers of schools impacted by the action were also in attendance at

the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to further explore the details of the pay claim as presented by FÓRSA and the nature of the industrial action.

On 30 September FÓRSA requested the Department to agree to use the services of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to resolve the dispute. As is normal practice the Department has agreed to use the industrial relations machinery of the state in an effort to resolve this matter.

In order to address the various issues within the claim and to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution, the Department is in discussions with FÓRSA under the auspices of the WRC.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

223. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reform the July provision scheme for children with special needs; if the scheme will be extended to cater for children with Down's syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44532/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Departments July Provision Scheme provides funding for an extended school year for students with severe or profound intellectual disabilities and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

The scheme was developed to reduce potential regression in learning associated with these specific categories of special education needs over the summer holidays.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which advises me on these matters published its Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism in July 2016 which included a review of the July Scheme.

The review found that in general parents value July provision because it provides day-time respite for families and a structured day for students. However, the NCSE review found a number of problems with the scheme. These include concerns that the scheme may be inequitable because it is not provided to all students with complex special educational needs.

The Council recommended that the relevant Government Departments consider how an equitable national day activity scheme could be developed for all students with complex special educational needs.

The proposed scheme would provide a structured, safe, social environment for all students with complex special educational needs, which might include some children with Down syndrome.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered.

There has been consultation with a number of other Departments and State agencies regarding the future direction of the July Education Programme.

It is expected that the Group will make recommendations shortly concerning a revised scheme which would be implemented next year at the earliest. Before any changes are made, there will be consultations with stakeholders.

School Accommodation Provision

224. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made regarding an application by a school (details supplied). [44537/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is in receipt of an application for additional school accommodation from the school referred to by the Deputy. Once the application has been assessed the school authority will be informed directly.

Proposed Legislation

225. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the planned provisions of the education (miscellaneous provisions) Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44552/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is intended to make some necessary technical amendments to education legislation. Consideration is on-going in relation to the matters to be included in the Bill.

Schools Building Projects Applications

226. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) to allow it to become a single campus school; if his Department has received applications from this school for funding for emergency works, additional accommodation, summer works and minor works; if the applications will be examined favourably; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44562/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application from the school in question for a project under the multi-annual Summer Works Scheme (SWS) 2020 onwards.

I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the SWS in 2020, applications will be assessed on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the governing Circular Letter for the Scheme. This Circular Letter (0027/2019) is available on my Department’s website www.education.ie.

It is my intention to publish a list of successful applicants in Q4 2019 for works to be carried out in summer 2020.

I can also confirm that my Department has recently received correspondence from the school in relation to the Additional School Accommodation Scheme (ASA). This correspondence is currently under consideration and my Department will be in contact with the school authority shortly.

Questions Nos. 227 and 228 answered with Question No. 194.

National Training Fund

229. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reserve surplus in the national training fund; the projected reserve surplus year-on-year over the next five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44590/19]

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

The accumulated surplus in the provisional accounts of the NTF at the end of 2018 amounts to €473m. The expenditure ceiling for the National Training Fund is set as part of the annual estimates process, having regard to the Government's overall budgetary and fiscal stance, and so the amount available for expenditure in any given year would only be decided as part of the budget process.

While we do not have an overall surplus projection for the next five years, the following table shows the projected surplus up to the end of 2020:

National Training Fund	Surplus for the Year (€m)	End of year Surplus Carried forward (€m)
2018 Provisional NTF Accounts		473.36
2019 REV	258.19	731.55
2020 Budget	231.12	962.67

The operation of the EU Fiscal Rules and the inclusion of the NTF in my Department's overall annual expenditure ceiling mean that, in the absence of an increased rate of contribution or the availability of additional fiscal space, additional expenditure cannot be sourced from the NTF without a corresponding drop in Exchequer expenditure. Substantial additional NTF expenditure has taken place in 2018 and 2019 and is planned for 2020 as a result of increases in the NTF levy.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

230. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason class size ratios vary; his plans to reach a ratio of 20:1 nationally; the measures he is taking to achieve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44634/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In the current school year, the numbers employed in our schools have reached the highest ever level. Teacher numbers at primary level have increased by almost 3,500 when comparing the 2015/16 school year with the current school year. Budget 2018 provided a one point improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools which brings the position to a general average of 26 pupils to every 1 teacher, the lowest ever allocation ratio at primary level.

The Budget 2020 measure of improved teacher staffing levels for schools with four teachers or less will see a more favourable pupil teacher ratio in small schools from September 2020. This improved schedule will apply in two, three and four teacher schools and ensure one less pupil is required to retain/recruit a teacher.

The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. My Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.). School authorities are also requested, where possible, to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes.

The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratio show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 16:1 to 15.2:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2018/19 school year. Average class sizes at primary level improved from 24.9 to 24.3 in the

same period.

Schools Building Projects Data

231. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the school building projects which are delayed; the longest at stage 2b; when a design team was appointed in each case; when a replacement design team was appointed if applicable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44641/19]

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

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

There are currently 75 major school building projects in advanced architectural planning and a continuous throughput of projects moving into Stage 2b and onwards towards Tender Stage and Construction. 10 of these projects have been progressing through the stage for 5 years or more of which one project had a full Design Team replacement and three others had one Design Team member replaced. A table is provided at the following link for the Deputy's convenience.

Where projects take longer than expected to progress through Stage 2b, they have generally experienced planning difficulties due to a complicated or detailed planning application, appeals to An Bord Pleanála, complications around decant arrangements or site issues. In other cases, there have been unavoidable changes to the brief or scope of the project.

Furthermore, in completing Stage 2(b), Design Teams are now required to upgrade design details to ensure that new school buildings are Near Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) in compliance with the 2017 amendment to Part L of the current Building Regulations. In many cases this has involved a second planning application to allow for the installation of photovoltaic panels on the roof following receipt of the initial planning permission.

The status of large scale projects being delivered under my school building programme is regularly updated on my Department's website www.education.ie

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-05_pq231-5-11-2019_en.xlsx "School Building Projects"]

Workplace Relations Commission

232. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in advancing the talks with a union (details supplied) at the Workplace Relations Commission in relation to issues that need to be resolved concerning school secretaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44643/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I recognise the very important work done by these staff, and the other support staff in the running of our schools. I have spoken to a number of school secretaries about their employment conditions and understand the issues they have raised.

In Budget 2020 I increased the number of secretaries in certain schools, allowing schools with enrolments of 500-625 to fill secretary vacancies provided they have fewer than 1.5 secretaries, and schools with enrolments of 626-699 will be permitted to fill vacancies provided they have fewer than two posts filled. These measures will take effect from September 2020.

Earlier this year I relaxed the moratorium for those C&C and ETB schools with enrolments of 700 and more which allow them to employ additional school secretaries up to a maximum of two per school. There are 91 schools in the C&C and ETB Sector who meet this criteria, based on the information currently available to this Department. This is an initial step and has taken immediate effect

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of clerical officers and caretakers in schools. The schemes were withdrawn completely in 2008. These schemes have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes. The current grant scheme was agreed in the context of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, published in 1991.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services under these grant schemes. It is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the grant funding for caretaking or secretarial purposes, any staff taken on to support those functions are employees of individual schools. Specific responsibility for terms of employment rests with the school.

On foot of a Chairman's Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. This arbitration agreement covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

The arbitration agreement was designed to be of greatest benefit to lower-paid secretaries and caretakers. For example, a secretary or caretaker who was paid the then minimum wage of €8.65 per hour in 2015 prior to the arbitration has from 1 January 2019, been paid €13 per hour which is a 50% increase in that individual's hourly pay.

Officials from my Department attended a meeting of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the 9th of April to discuss the status of non-teaching staff.

In May this year officials from my Department had discussions with FÓRSA trade union representatives as part of a planned meeting. FÓRSA took the opportunity to formally table a pay claim.

This was tabled as a follow-on claim from the current pay agreement for this cohort of staff which lasts until December 2019. The Department issued surveys on the 10th of July to establish the full current cost of the trade union's claim. This is standard practice.

Officials from the Department met with FÓRSA representatives in September. Management Bodies representing the employers of schools impacted by the action were also in attendance at the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to further explore the details of the pay claim as presented by FÓRSA and the nature of the industrial action.

On 30 September FÓRSA requested the Department to agree to use the services of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to resolve the dispute. As is normal practice the Department has agreed to use the industrial relations machinery of the state in an effort to resolve this matter.

In order to address the various issues within the claim and to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution, the Department is in discussions with FÓRSA under the auspices of the WRC.

School Accommodation Provision

233. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeline of required actions to facilitate the opening of a new secondary school for the Greystones and Kilcoole area of County Wicklow by the planned date of September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44664/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is currently examining options for interim accommodation to facilitate the opening of this school in September 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

234. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44709/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has been upgrading computers from Windows 7 to Windows 10 and is expecting to complete this task by January 2020. To date approximately 1,000 computers have already been upgraded. The relevant number of computers remaining to be upgraded is contained in the following table.

Operating System	No. of Computers remaining to be upgraded	Estimated Completion Date
Windows 7	450 (approx.)	January 2020

Information and Communications Technology

235. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44725/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is not anticipated that my Department will be forced to pay any additional premium payments in respect of support for the operating system referred to.

Information and Communications Technology

236. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44741/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is anticipated that my Department will complete the upgrade of its computers from the Windows 7 Operating System to

the Windows 10 Operating System by January 2020.

In addition, the Department implements multiple security protocols and measures including User Awareness, Perimeter Security, Anti-virus/Anti-Malware, Email and Web filtering, System Patching, Risk Management, Policies, Regular Vulnerability Assessments/Penetration Testing, Mobile Device Management, Access Management, Incident Management, Event Monitoring, Information Security Governance, GDPR Awareness, Disaster Recovery, Offline Backups, Supplier Management and Encryption.

I will arrange for officials from my Department to request the relevant information from the non-commercial state agencies under my remit that have an annual administrative budget expenditure of €5 million or greater and annual ICT-related expenditure of €100,000 or greater and excluding schools as previously agreed with the Deputy. This information will be compiled and forwarded to you as soon as it is available.

Schools Building Projects Status

237. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there has been progress on the signing of a contract for the site for the new school building for a school (details supplied); and the progress in relation to tendering. [44765/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy has recently completed Stage 2(b) of architectural planning and has been progressed to tender stage.

The Department has recently been in contact with the Design Team and advised it of the need to get the tendering process underway as quickly as possible.

The Design Team Leader has advised that it expects to issue the Invitation to Tender to the shortlisted contractors in the next few weeks.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

In regard to the site acquisition, good progress is being made and it is anticipated that conveyancing will conclude in the very near future. Both legal teams are working on finalising matters. It is not possible to elaborate on specific details due to commercial sensitivities, however, the Department will continue in its commitment to keep the school apprised of progress in the transaction.

Direct Provision System

238. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if extra supports for children residing in direct provision centres attending local schools will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44770/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department engages on an ongoing basis with officials in the Department of Justice & Equality in relation to education issues arising from the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees. For the past number of years, my Department has seconded an official to the Department of Justice and Equality to support the arrangement of education provision for children residing in accommodation centres. This arrangement facilitates close liaison with relevant areas of my Department in relation to education provision. This official is also available to advise schools on specific

queries arising, including on the range of supports available to schools and on how to access supports. Tusla Educational Welfare Service (EWS), which is under the remit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, assists with school enrolment and attendance.

As new Centres are identified, and once the numbers and age ranges of the children are identified, my Department will ensure that where the increase in the numbers of students entitles the school to an additional teaching allocation, this will be provided as soon as possible. Where the enrolment of the children resident in the Direct Provision Centre entitles the school to an additional teaching allocation for English as an Additional Language (EAL), this will be provided as soon as possible.

Where the increased enrolment requires an increase in the school's special educational needs teacher profile, they will receive, as soon as possible, 5 additional Special Education Teaching hours for every 25 additional pupils who are enrolled, or a proportion of five hours if less than 25, where the number of enrolments are material, i.e. 5 pupils or more. Additional Special Needs Assistant provision is currently provided for identified additional care needs which is contingent upon assessments being carried out.

The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on my Department's website. The staffing arrangements as set out in Circular 0019/2019 available on my Department's website operates in a clear and transparent manner. The staffing arrangements also include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an Independent Appeals Board.

Higher Education Institutions

239. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that the continued activities of institutes (details supplied) do not negatively impact on the activities of universities here; the actions he has taken to ensure same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44817/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The institutes referred to work with Government, business and academia to develop stronger educational, cultural and commercial links between Ireland and China. This is of assistance as Ireland continues to develop its internationalisation strategy for the higher education sector. Courses and programmes related to China and teaching Chinese language also enhance mutual cultural understanding and facilitate the expansion of ties between China and Ireland.

Our universities are autonomous institutions within the meaning of the Universities Act 1997, and the management of their day to day functions are matters for the individual institution which would be overseen by appropriate institutional governance arrangements and associated policies.

School Management

240. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 25 September 2019, the date by which his Department will respond to correspondence from a person (details supplied) which remains unanswered after a month. [44818/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has received

and replied to many items of correspondence from this person.

Inquiries are ongoing in relation to issues raised and when these are complete, a final reply will issue.

School Inspection Reports

241. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on whether to conduct a joint review of services with the HSE at a school (details supplied) following a request by the board of management of the school which was outlined in correspondence from the board to parents dated 27 September 2019. [44819/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Following an inspection visit by a member of my Department's inspectorate to the school referred to by the Deputy, officials of my Department are due to meet with the school authorities later this month to discuss the recommendations contained the Inspector's report and related matters.

My Department will also engage with other stakeholders involved with the school, including the NCSE, HSE, patron and trustees, to ensure appropriate educational provision is in place for the students in the school.

Departmental Staff Data

242. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44844/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Presently, there are 1,549 Civil Servants employed at my Department on a full-time basis. There are no staff engaged on a part time employment basis at my Department. The remuneration for staff is subject to pay scales that apply to the various grades which are set by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform.

No staff members are on a pay scale that equates to less than the minimum wage set at €9.80 per hour with effect from the 1st January 2019.

Departmental Circulars

243. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to review the exceptional circumstances under which school managements are free to commence or cease the procedures set out in circular 0071/2014; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in some instances employees deemed to have a disability are being excluded from the procedures outlined in the circular; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44855/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Circular 0059/2009 set out the disciplinary procedures for teachers employed by Vocational Education Committees (VEC). The procedures were negotiated and agreed with the education partners in accordance with Section 24(3) of the Education Act, 1998. Circular 0059/2009 was later superseded by Circular 0071/2014 to account for the merger of VECs into Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The current Circular setting out the disciplinary procedures for teachers employed by ETBs is

Circular 0048/2018.

Where an ETB is dealing with performance or conduct issues in respect of a teacher, the use of Circular 0048/2018 is mandatory. The procedures set out in Circular 0048/2018 may be commenced or ceased at different stages by the employer depending on the circumstances of the individual case concerned. The Circular does not set out exceptional circumstances and I have no plans to review this matter. I am satisfied that the procedures (which were agreed with the education partners) comply with all relevant legislation and codes of practice.

There has been correspondence with my Department relating to a case has been considered and ruled upon before the High Court and the Court of Appeal. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on matters pertaining to a specific case involving an individual employee.

Teaching Contracts

244. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the terms and conditions of employment of teachers in the ETB sector are determined by or require his consent together with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. [44856/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Education Act 1998 as amended states as follows at section 24, subsection 3:

“The terms and conditions of employment of the teachers and other staff of a recognised school, appointed by the board and who are, or who are to be, remunerated out of monies provided by the Oireachtas, shall be determined from time to time by the Minister, with the concurrence of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.”

School Transport Eligibility

245. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a matter with regard to school transport will be addressed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44874/19]

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

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability.

Children are eligible for transport where they have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability and are attending the nearest recognised mainstream school, special class/special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers.

Applications for transport provision, under the terms of this scheme, should only be completed in circumstances where children are not in a position to avail of standard school transport

services.

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

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

246. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for ensuring there are sufficient ASD units in Limerick city, in particularly the northside of the city, in view of the fact that there are no ASD units in mainstream schools for girls in this catchment area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44893/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels. Nationally, 167 new special classes opened for the 2019/20 school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

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

The Council has well established structures in place to plan and coordinate special education provision throughout the country. This includes identifying the need for and establishing special class placements in various geographical areas where they are required. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

As approximately 1% of the school population require the support of a special class, it is not possible or practical that a special class placement would be available in the every school.

Before approaching a particular school to request the establishment of a special class, the NCSE take into account both present and future potential need within the area and must be satisfied that the class is sustainable and appropriately located.

The NCSE has informed the Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are currently sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand in Limerick.

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.

The NCSE team of locally based Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) are available to assist parents to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs and to discuss their child’s special educational needs. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

As the Deputy’s question relates to the NCSE planning for special class provision in a particular area, I have arranged for the question to be forwarded to the NCSE, for their attention and direct reply.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

247. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a SUSI application by a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44895/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter for SUSI to determine.

In assessing an application for the 2019/20 academic year, SUSI will have regard to the following qualifying criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant:

1. The student must qualify for the standard rate of grant;
2. Total reckonable income, after income disregards and Child Dependant Increase(s) are excluded, must not exceed €24,000; and
3. As at 31st December of the previous year, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed in the Student Grant Scheme.

The grant awarding authority has confirmed to my Department that there was no eligible payment in place on 31st December 2018 for the student in question. The Student Grant Scheme is a statutory based scheme and there is no discretion to waive this condition in any circumstances.

Grant eligibility is subject to annual review and applicants must continue to meet all qualifying criteria for the relevant rate of grant in order to continue to receive that particular rate of grant.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. The fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners on www.revenue.ie.

Education Schemes

248. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a case regarding the July provision will be examined (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44897/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Departments July Provision Grant Aid Scheme provides funding for an extended school year for students with a severe or profound general learning disability and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

The terms and conditions of the July Provision Grant Scheme 2019 are set out in the Department's Information Note on the scheme which was published with the application forms.

Parents and Tutors provide a signed undertaking confirming they have carefully read and

understand the terms and conditions of the scheme before the July Provision home tuition grant can be approved.

As tuition takes place outside the usual school structure it is important that home tutors are both qualified to provide an educational programme and vetted in accordance with the regulations set out.

When a child is deemed eligible for Home Based July Provision Grant Aid Scheme a sanction letter issues to the parents/legal guardians, which includes the name(s) of the approved tutor(s), the total hours sanctioned and grant rate per hour.

The Department provides for an appeal process in relation to the payment decisions of the July Provision home tuition grant. Appeals may be submitted in writing outlining the reasons for the appeal, along with supporting documents as appropriate.

In the case referred to by the Deputy an appeal has recently submitted to my Department. My officials will consider the appeal and contact the appellant directly in due course.

Schools Amalgamation

249. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to meet and engage with representative committees (details supplied) which represent stakeholders from schools and wish to engage productively with his Department to avoid the closure of two schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44920/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the recommendation to amalgamate the schools in question has been accepted following detailed consideration of the proposal from Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board, patron of both schools and the submissions received from the groups referred to by the Deputy. The recommendation from the patron to amalgamate the existing schools into a new building, will now proceed.

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. In total, eleven groups were identified and meetings arranged between February and July 2019. The Patron advised that the majority of the meetings proceeded and the majority views taken into consideration. A small number of meetings were cancelled by the group/association concerned and did not proceed.

The two schools 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 (NDP) 2018 to 2027.

School Accommodation Provision

250. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the need for a new secondary school in Midleton, County Cork has been assessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44921/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314

school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. For school planning purposes Midleton is located in the Midleton_Carrigtwohill school planning area.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in that area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date data on significant new residential development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018 the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Midleton_Carrigtwohill school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

I wish to 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 where an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of schools listed on this programme can be found on my Department's website www.education.ie and this information is also updated regularly.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

251. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will have an ASD unit in place for second-level students by the commencement of the 2020-2021 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44922/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels. Nationally, 167 new special classes opened for the 2019/20 school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and

co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The Council has well established structures in place to plan and coordinate special education provision throughout the country. This includes identifying the need for and establishing special class placements in various geographical areas where they are required. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Before approaching a particular school to request the establishment of a special class, the NCSE take into account both present and future potential need within the area and must be satisfied that the class is sustainable and appropriately located.

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.

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

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

The brief for the school building project in the school referred to by the Deputy is to provide a new 1000 pupil post primary school and 4 class Special Educational Needs unit together with all ancillary accommodation on a site off the Ballyogan Road adjacent to Leopardstown Racecourse.

Planning permission was granted by Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council on the 13th June 2019 subject to 18 no. conditions. Two of these conditions relating to the provision of a public greenway were subsequently the subject of a first party appeal to An Bord Pleanála; the decision on which is currently awaited.

It is not possible to give a timeframe for the delivery of this project until the statutory consents are secured.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

252. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a full-time SNA has been allocated to a person (details supplied). [44928/19]

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

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

needed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question No. 253 answered with Question No. 191.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

254. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a full-time SNA will be allocated for a child (details supplied). [44971/19]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Higher Education Institutions

255. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the importance of sufficient canteen facilities being made available to third-level students undertaking courses; his further views on whether the service of food is a vital welfare issue for students; if his attention has been drawn to a situation (details supplied); the steps he will take to help resolve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44977/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Higher education institutions are autonomous institutions and their governance and day-to-day management, including the operation of canteen services are matters for which the Governing Bodies and the management of the relevant institutions are responsible.

Notwithstanding the above, my Department has been advised by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) that a review of the canteen service in St. Angela's College was commissioned by the Audit Committee in early 2019. The review was carried out by a local Auditing Firm/Catering Business Manager. The Audit Committee of the College met on the 26th of April and considered the findings and recommendations from this review. Financial issues in the operation of the service were key factor in the recommendations of the review. Additionally the review identified the need for changes to service for both Staff and Students.

The report included a plan to restructure and implement new services so that it would operate as a viable business operation.

The following actions were subsequently approved by the Board of Directors of the College. The Canteen reopened in September with a revised reduced offering which is being regularly updated. It should be noted that this is Phase 1 of the new plan and is centred on increasing footfall, income generation and future sustainability of the service.

The operation of the Canteen is under weekly review and it is expected that under Phase 2 of the project will be implemented once sufficient footfall and revenue projections suggest that this is a viable and sustainable operation going forward. This phase will provide further enhancements to the offerings, the canteen space itself and the opening hours which will benefit both students and staff.

Additionally, proposals in relation to future capital investment in St Angela's are currently being developed by for consideration by the HEA and the Department of Education and Skills.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

256. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an application for a place in an ASD unit will be processed for a person (details supplied). [44992/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels. Nationally, 167 new special classes opened for the 2019/20 school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

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

The Council has well established structures in place to plan and coordinate special education provision throughout the country. This includes identifying the need for and establishing special class placements in various geographical areas where they are required. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

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

The NCSE team of locally based Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) are available to assist parents/guardians to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs and to discuss their child's special educational needs.

The NCSE works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/> .

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

It should be noted that where a parent/guardian seeks to enrol a child in a school and that school refuses to enrol the child, the school is obliged to inform the parents/guardians of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to the Secretary General of my Department. Only where an appeal under Section 29 is upheld, may the Secretary General of my Department direct a school to enrol a pupil.

As the deputy's question refers to a specific child, the question will be forwarded to the NCSE for direct reply.

School Funding

257. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the level of funding provided through school capital programmes for each county in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45042/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's Capital Programme continues to make progress to increase the infrastructural capacity in the schools sector nationally, in order to meet demographic and other demands.

The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

The School Capital Programme allocation, on a national basis, for the period 2016 to 2019 is set out in the following table. These allocations are not divided on a county basis:

2016	2017	2018	2019
€527m	€496m	€539.6m	€622m

My Department's website shows the current position on all school projects on the Capital Programme, as well as listing the schools that have had large-scale projects completed from 2010 to date. These are listed on a county basis. The information is available at www.education.ie and is updated regularly.

The 2019 School Capital Programme allocation (amounting to €622m) will be expended primarily on the delivery of large scale projects and on the Additional Accommodation Scheme. The balance available in 2019 will be expended on site acquisitions, the Summer Works Scheme, the Emergency Works Scheme, furniture and equipment provision and other smaller programmes.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

258. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of additional special needs assistants provided in each county in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45043/19]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The NCSE publish SNA allocations for individual schools and counties for each school year and this information is available on their website, <https://ncse.ie/set-hours-and-sna-allocations>

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

259. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the level of funding provided for the provision of ASD units in each county in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45044/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The specific information requested by the Deputy is not available within my Department. Building projects by their nature include the provision of accommodation for various purposes including special needs and the overall project cost therefore includes the cost of all accommodation provided as part of an individual school project.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the current status of building projects being delivered by my Department may be viewed on my Department's website, www.education.ie .

Large scale projects, including new schools, being delivered under the school building programme are listed by county along with school name and address. The current status of each school project is also provided.

In addition, a list of large-scale projects completed from 2010 to date, - again broken down by county -, along with school name and address may also be viewed on the website.

Regarding other types of projects, - for example additional accommodation, emergency works etc. - , information on these is also available on my Department's website and includes the school details and the nature of the works.

The status of projects listed on my Department's website is updated on a regular basis to reflect their progress through the various stages of design, tender and construction.

The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government. Currently, we spend almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn on supporting children with special needs.

Departmental Contracts Data

260. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45062/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department reports on non-compliant procurement as part of the Appropriation Account and the Statement of Internal Financial Control provides information on such cases. The information is readily available for 2017 and 2018. Information in relation to 2019 will be compiled during the completion of annual accounts in March 2020 and will be available shortly thereafter.

Non-compliant contracts in 2017

The Department was compliant with all relevant guidelines regarding procurement in 2017, with the exception of procurement totalling €1.76 million. The exceptions occurred for several reasons as set out below:

- Three contracts in the value range €25,000 to €60,000, totalling €122,528, were undertaken without a competitive process – two with a total value of €71,897 related to sole/limited supplier availability reasons and the other with a value of €50,631 related to urgency/business continuity reasons.

- Four contracts in the value range €100,000 to €200,000 per annum, totalling €555,899, were undertaken without a competitive process – three contracts with a total value of €412,772 related to sole/limited supplier availability reasons and the other with a value of €143,127 to urgency/business continuity reasons.

- Two contracts over €500,000 per annum, with a total value of €1,085,660, were undertaken without a competitive process. One with a total value of €520,024 related to business continuity reasons and the other with a value of €565,636 related to urgency/expediency reasons.

Non-compliant contracts in 2018

The Department was compliant with all relevant guidelines regarding procurement in 2018 with the exception of procurement totalling €2.880 million.

The exceptions occurred for several reasons as set out below:

- Nine contracts in the value range €25,000 to €100,000, totalling €499,372, were undertaken without a competitive process – three with a total value of €133,748 related to sole/limited supplier availability reasons and six with a value of €365,624 related to urgency/business continuity reasons.

- One contract with a value of €212,849 related to sole/limited supplier availability reasons.

- Two contracts over €500,000 per annum, with a total value of €2,003,367 were undertaken without a competitive process. One with a total value of €535,624 related to sole/limited supplier availability reasons and the other with a value of €1,467,743 related to urgency/expediency reasons.

The information sought in regard to the contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by the bodies under the aegis of my Department that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines is being collated and I will arrange for my officials to forward it to the

Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Departmental Records

261. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will release information to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in respect of a person (details supplied); and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Department has sought this information on three occasions. [45075/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that officials from my Department have issued the information requested directly to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

262. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that there will be a place for a person (details supplied) in an ASD unit for September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45098/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels. Nationally, 167 new special classes opened for the 2019/20 school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

Opening new special classes and the enrolment of students is a matter for individual schools in the first instance. My Department has no role either in making or deciding on enrolment applications to schools or keeping waiting lists. In these matters, schools are required to adhere to the requirements of relevant legislation and the policies of my Department.

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

The Council has well established structures in place to plan and coordinate special education provision throughout the country. This includes identifying the need for and establishing special class placements in various geographical areas where they are required. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

The NCSE team of locally based Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) are available to assist parents to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs and to discuss their child’s special educational needs. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie .

Normally, special classes are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the Council has faced challenges in getting schools and their Patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class

or school places. I know that this can cause 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 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.

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

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual child, I have arranged for the question to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Schools Establishment

263. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to open an educate together primary school in Dungarvan, County Waterford; if the location is part of his commitment in the reconfiguration process; the timescale envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45127/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The patronage divesting process arises from the recommendations of the 2012 report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, following which the Department undertook surveys of parental preferences in 43 areas of stable population in 2012 and 2013 to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas. Analysis of the parental preferences expressed in each area surveyed indicated that there was sufficient parental demand to support changes in school patronage in 28 areas, including in Dungarvan.

Under the patronage divesting process, a school can be opened where a school building became, or was due to become, available as a result of an amalgamation/closure of an existing school. In some areas, including in the case of Dungarvan, in responding to demand for diversity where existing patrons were unable make school properties available, my Department also included an examination of properties held in public ownership.

To date, it has not been possible to secure a school property to facilitate a new school being established in Dungarvan. However, the Department is continuing its efforts in relation to identifying a suitable solution under the patronage divesting process, which would facilitate a new Educate Together school being established to serve the Dungarvan area. It is not possible at this stage, however, to give a timeframe for the establishment of such a school.

Schools Building Projects Status

264. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 222 of 15 October 2019, when the appointment of a programme manager and design team process commenced; when the process will finish; when the next stage will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45156/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the project to which she refers has been devolved to the National Development Finance Agency

(N DFA) for delivery as part of a programme of school building projects.

The process for the appointment of a multi-disciplinary technical advisory framework for the programme commenced in August 2019, when a request for tenders (RFT) was issued.

There was a very positive response to this RFT. In that respect, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the process of selection of applicants for this framework is almost complete.

The N DFA will proceed immediately to the second phase of the appointment process: a call-off competition for bundles of projects from this framework. While the project to which the Deputy refers will not be included in the first call-off competition in this respect, later call-offs will follow shortly after this initial competition has concluded. Thereafter, the N DFA will ensure that the project progresses to design stage, obtaining the necessary statutory planning permission, and moving the project onward to construction in due course. As the project to which the Deputy refers is at an early stage in the delivery process, it is not possible at this time to give a date for its completion.

Please be assured that the N DFA will be engaging directly with the school authority to keep it informed of progress.

Schools Building Projects Status

265. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new post-primary school on the Curragh is due to commence; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that nothing is happening with a school (details supplied). [45157/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, this project has been devolved to Kildare and Wicklow Education & Training Board (KWETB) for delivery.

As the tender process for the project is nearing completion, the letter of acceptance is expected to issue very shortly. The project will commence construction this month and is expected to be ready for occupation in September 2021.

School Accommodation Provision

266. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for an extension and further accommodation at a college (details supplied). [45176/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is in receipt of an application for additional accommodation from the patron of the school referred to by the Deputy. The application is being considered in the context of current and future demographic demand in the area and my Department will be in contact with the patron in this regard shortly.

In the meantime, my Department has approved additional temporary accommodation consisting of 8 general classrooms and 1 science lab to meet the school's immediate needs.

Schools Establishment

267. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the provision of

a new secondary school in Dunshaughlin, County Meath is being considered. [45177/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools;
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools;
- Provision of a new school or schools.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. Approximately 40% of extra school places are delivered by extending existing schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). The announcement followed nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country.

Dunshaughlin post-primary school planning area is catered for by Dunshaughlin Community College. The school operates under the patronage of Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and has a current enrolment in the region of 1,000 pupils. The school is experiencing demand for additional school places and the LMETB is open to assisting in meeting this demand. The ETB has submitted an application for additional accommodation which my Department is currently considering. The outcome will assist my Department in determining the future need in the area. In the meantime, my Department has approved the provision of additional temporary accommodation - 8 general classrooms and 1 science lab - to LMETB to meet the school's immediate needs.

While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Dunshaughlin school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

Schools Building Projects Status

268. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a construction project at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45178/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A project to provide a new building for the school to which the Deputy refers is on my Department's capital programme. At present, my Department is engaged in identifying and acquiring a suitable site for the school. The acquisition of a suitable site will enable architectural planning to proceed and con-

struction commence. Every effort is being made to advance the project.

School Libraries

269. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a grant is available for a school (details supplied) to provide library books for use by students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45230/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): There is no specific grant funding available in relation to provision of library books to schools from this Department.

Special Educational Needs Data

270. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children in the Dublin 5, 13 and 17 areas that are on a waiting list to access an ASD unit. [45262/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels. Nationally, 167 new special classes opened for the 2019/20 school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

Opening new special classes and the enrolment of students is a matter for individual schools in the first instance. My Department has no role either in making or deciding on enrolment applications to schools or keeping waiting lists. In these matters, schools are required to adhere to the requirements of relevant legislation and the policies of my Department.

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

The Council has well established structures in place to plan and coordinate special education provision throughout the country. This includes identifying the need for and establishing special class placements in various geographical areas where they are required. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Normally, special classes are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the Council has faced challenges in getting schools and their Patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places. I know that this can cause 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 back in April in respect of the Dublin 15 area. We have made significant progress in a relatively short period with the opening 7 new special

classes and a new Special School that will provide 88 places for children with special needs. The new places will help these families and ensure that the children concerned have access to education.

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.

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

As the Deputy's question relates to the identified need for special class placements in a number of specific areas, I have arranged for the question to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Schools Building Projects Status

271. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the capital allocation for building works at a school (details supplied) in County Dublin. [45305/19]

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

This project is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) Detailed Design which includes the application for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

At a recent meeting with the schools, their design team and officials from my Department, the consultant Quantity Surveyor advised the Boards of Management and my Department that the firm is withdrawing from the project.

In early October, the consultant Architect advised that it is also withdrawing from the project as the firm has gone into liquidation.

A tender process to replace both the design team Architect and Quantity Surveyor will commence shortly.

Education and Training Boards Staff

272. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an increment will be allocated to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45320/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The ETB is a statutory body with its own corporate status established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013. Each Educational Training Board (ETB) receives a teaching staffing allocation from my Department and it is the responsibility of each ETB to recruit and manage staffing levels within this allocation.

Terms and conditions of employment for staff employed by ETBs are matters for the ETB concerned. While the recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a mat-

ter for the individual school authority, in this case the ETB, it is subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012).

DEIS Eligibility

273. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 90 of 4 April 2019, the progress regarding the application for DEIS status by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45321/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, my Department is currently undertaking data analysis in the context of resource allocation to match identified need, including the examination of variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage. All schools at both Primary and Post Primary are being assessed using the new identification model.

This analysis is being carried out by members of the DEIS Technical Group which contains representatives of the Department's Statistics and Social Inclusion Units, the Inspectorate and the Educational Research Centre. Work is ongoing by this group and significant progress has been made. I am confident that the culmination of this analysis will facilitate the ultimate aim of matching resources to identified need and will allow us to target extra resources at those schools most in need. Until this analysis is complete, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools.

Schools Building Projects Status

274. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45361/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The delivery of this school building project has been devolved by my Department to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). A Service Level Agreement between my Department and the ETB has been signed and sealed in that respect.

I can confirm that the design team for the project has now been appointed. This appointment is a key first step in the design and construction stages.

The design team will now design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions and move the project onward to construction in due course. As the project is at an early stage in the delivery process, it is not possible at this time to give a date for its completion.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

275. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of additional ASD places for the 2020-21 school year in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45404/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels. Nationally, 167 new special classes opened for the 2019/20 school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

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

The Council has well established structures in place to plan and coordinate special education provision throughout the country. This includes identifying the need for and establishing special class placements in various geographical areas where they are required. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Before approaching a particular school to request the establishment of a special class, the NCSE take into account both present and future potential need within the area and must be satisfied that the class is sustainable and appropriately located.

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.

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

My Department approved the construction of a four classroom SEN Base under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2019 for the school referred to by the Deputy. Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) are currently assisting the school in the appointment of the Design Team for this project.

It is not possible at this early stage to give a timeframe for the delivery of this project.

School Admissions

276. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a lengthy waiting list for secondary school places in a school (details supplied); his plans to make additional places available for the 2020-21 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45405/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In relation to school admissions, parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available, the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. The Deputy will note however that the selection process procedures and enrolment policy are the responsibility of the individual school authorities.

I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application, for additional accommodation, from the school in question. I wish to advise that additional information has

been sought from the patron of the school. As soon as this information is received the assessment process will be progressed.

School Admissions

277. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedures available to parents to have their child enrolled in secondary school for the academic year commencing September 2020, and in which it has been indicated that the child has been placed on a waiting list, which indicates he or she may never be admitted in view of being significantly down the waiting list; the remedies or solutions available to such parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45416/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. However, this may result in some pupils' not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. As schools may not have a place for every applicant, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory, and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act, 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that, as regards that policy, principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department where a Board of Management of a school, refuses to enrol a student in a school. My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on my Department's website at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/>.

The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is the statutory body which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school placement for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-7718815 or 01-7718500.

Child Abuse

278. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the compensation scheme established four years ago for persons abused as children in day schools; the number of applications made; the number that have received compensation to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45446/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Since the *ex gratia* scheme was established in July 2015, a total of 50 applications were received.

Payments are being made to a number of victims of child sexual abuse in day schools on foot of the assessments made by the Independent Assessor to the *ex gratia* scheme, Mr. Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill.

The current position is that sixteen offers of payment have been made and, to date, eight have been accepted.

In response to the assessor's determinations my Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, is examining the *ex gratia* scheme.

The review is progressing but is not yet complete.

Immigration Controls

279. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a single point of contact on migrant smuggling has been appointed as per the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling 2015-2020. [44467/19]

303. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a single point of contact on migrant smuggling has been appointed as per the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling 2015-2020. [44470/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 279 and 303 together.

On 27 May 2015, the European Commission issued the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020). This sets out a structured policy framework identifying a set of concrete measures in four priority areas:

- enhanced police and judicial response;
- improved gathering and sharing of information
- stronger prevention; and
- increased cooperation with third countries.

An aspect of the enhanced police response was the suggested establishment of a single point of contact on migrant smuggling in each member state to enhance operational cooperation, coordination and the sharing of information with each other and with EU agencies.

The facilitation of illegal immigration is one of the priorities is one of Europol's priority crime areas under the EMPACT programme (European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats) in the 2018-2021 EU Policy Cycle. The stated aim of this policy area is to disrupt Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) who facilitate illegal immigration by providing facilitation services to irregular migrants along the main migratory routes crossing the external border of the EU and within the EU.

The Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) play a key role in relation to these matters and I am informed that insofar as my Department is concerned, following the recent restructuring, migrant smuggling policy will now be led by the Criminal Justice Policy team.

Human Trafficking

280. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the preventative measures in place at ports here to detect instances of migrant smuggling; and the planned changes or enhancements in view of the recent tragic death of 39 persons who travelled in a container from Bulgaria to the UK. [44473/19]

281. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of

staff employed to provide security checks on ships and lorries entering at each port in tabular form. [44474/19]

282. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff employed to detect possible human smuggling at ports here in tabular form. [44475/19]

283. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if staff members at ports and airports here have received training and guidance on the detection of possible migrant smuggling. [44478/19]

284. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or representatives of his Department have met with Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to discuss measures to prevent migrant smuggling. [44479/19]

301. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the preventative measures in place at the main points of entry and exit to detect instances of migrant smuggling; and the planned changes or enhancements to same in view of the recent tragic death of 39 persons who travelled in a container from Bulgaria to the UK. [44468/19]

313. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the actions being taken at each port and airport by location to detect, prevent and combat human trafficking; the funding provided for such measures in each of the past three years; if further funding has been requested; if trafficking has been detected; if so, the actions taken; the outcomes of such actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44606/19]

315. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on migrant routes across the EU and the UK; his further views on whether there is a need to increase security to prevent containers being used for human trafficking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44614/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280 to 284, inclusive, 301, 313 and 315 together.

While both human trafficking and migrant smuggling are criminal activities frequently involving criminal networks seeking to make a profit, there are important distinctions and it is important to differentiate between them.

I can assure the Deputies that the Government is fully committed to addressing the challenges of human trafficking and migrant smuggling under Irish and EU legislation and the principal international conventions and we are active domestically and at the international level on these matters.

A range of Departments are relevant to these matters.

An Garda Síochána also plays a key role in relation to the prevention and detection of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. As such, I have requested a report from the Garda authorities on the matters raised and once I receive it, I will write directly to the Deputies with that and additional information.

Paramilitary Groups

285. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has discussed the increased paramilitary activity with his UK counterpart. [45241/19]

370. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the outcome of his recent discussions with the Garda Commissioner regarding the policing needs of the Border region in view of a range of recent deplorable incidents across the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45492/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 285 and 370 together.

As the Deputies will appreciate, policing in the border region has always presented particular challenges. These necessitate a collaborative approach to policing with law enforcement agencies north and south of the border and there is close ongoing cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI.

The importance of this ongoing high level of cooperation has been emphatically demonstrated again in recent times, in particular by the abhorrent attack in Co. Fermanagh in September. I have visited the area and was briefed by the Commissioner and the investigation team. It is clear that elements of that horrific crime took place on both sides of the border and a joint investigation is ongoing, including continuing sharing of information and evidence, between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI.

In November 2015, the British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive agreed a series of measures in the agreement *A Fresh Start, The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan*, as part of a concerted and enhanced effort to tackle organised and cross jurisdictional crime. These measures included the creation of the Joint Agency Task Force, which is led by senior officers from An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Revenue Commissioners and UK (HM) Revenue and Customs.

Both Governments are determined that, regardless of the political outcome of Brexit, the excellent ongoing cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland must and will continue to combat the threat posed by dissidents and criminals that seek to exploit the policing challenges posed by the border.

I have spoken recently to the UK Home Secretary and have also met the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I can assure the Deputy that I took these opportunities to reaffirm our deep commitment to continuing the close working relationship that we have with our colleagues in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom on such matters as security and risks in the Border region. The Deputy will also be aware of An Taoiseach's discussions with Prime Minister Johnson, as detailed in his responses to Parliamentary Questions on the matter.

As Deputies may recall, in September, I attended the 17th Annual Cross Border Conference on Organised Crime in Co. Cavan, aimed at enhancing cooperation between law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, particularly in relation to cross border organised criminality and related issues. This provided an additional opportunity for all those attending, including the Commissioner, the PSNI Chief Constable and the Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Justice, to discuss issues arising.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner recently made an operational decision to establish an additional Armed Support Unit (ASU) in Cavan which became operational last month. It will complement the work of the Units nationwide, including those in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal and Dundalk, Co. Louth in the Northern Region.

I also want to assure the Deputies that An Garda Síochána has the full support of the Government in its ongoing work in addressing cross-border criminality and we are providing record resources to enable it to perform this critical role. The Northern region continues to benefit from

the accelerated recruitment to An Garda Síochána as part of the Government's plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, supported by the unprecedented level of Government funding to the organisation. Garda strength in the Northern Region has increased to approximately 1,500, an increase of 150 Gardaí since the end of 2017. These Gardaí are supported by approximately 160 Garda staff in the region, which represents an increase of almost 35% over the past 3 years, with the result that additional Gardaí can be redeployed from administrative to operational policing duties where their training and policing expertise can be used to best effect.

I am assured that requirements in the region will in the usual way be kept under ongoing review by Garda management. In the event that a "no deal" Brexit gives rise to additional requirements in border areas, I understand from the Commissioner that further resources can and will be provided through redeployment.

Courts Service Data

286. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the necessary steps for a person to access the digital audio recording of a court proceeding regarding themselves; the average wait time between application and receipt of a recording for a person; and the longest wait time from the moment of application for a request by a person in a case regarding themselves in the past five years. [44193/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts and of court buildings is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions. In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, however, I have had enquiries made with the Courts Service.

The Courts Service have informed me that any party to a court case can bring an application to the presiding judge to access the digital audio record of proceedings. The procedure for bringing an application in each jurisdiction is set out in the following Rules of Court:-

- District Court Rules- Order 35
- Circuit Court Rules- Order 67A
- Superior Court Rules- Order 123

These rules also set out the terms on which such access may be granted. While a party to a case may apply to the court to access the recording, the granting of access and the terms under which such access is granted is a matter for the court.

The Courts Service does not record the length of time between an application being lodged, the date of the Court application and the release of a record of proceedings. However, in general, once a court grants such an application, the copy record is produced on a priority basis and sent to the person who has applied for it within a matter of days.

In some courts, the digital audio recording system does not record precisely when witnesses speak. Consequently, where parties apply to access recordings in these courts, it will require a staff member to listen back to a recording of hours of court proceedings. In this event, there can be a slight delay in the preparation of the copy of the record.

Illegal Fireworks

287. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider strengthening the law to prevent the illegal or reckless use of fireworks and deal with the rise in the dangerous use of fireworks during the Halloween period. [44194/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The law is clear on the use of fireworks in Ireland. Fireworks are regulated and can only be imported into Ireland under licence. Licences for the import of fireworks are issued by my Department only for the importation of fireworks which are to be used in organised displays conducted by professional and competent operators.

Under Part 6 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006:

- It is an offence for any person to possess a firework with intent to sell or supply, without a licence;

- It is an offence to throw an ignited firework at any person or property, and;

- It is an offence to light unlicensed fireworks in a public place.

Part 6 of the 2006 Act also gives An Garda Síochána the power to make arrests in relation to the possession of unlicensed fireworks.

The penalties for these offences are very severe. Having unlicensed fireworks in your possession with intent to sell or supply can result in a fine of up to €10,000 and up to five years imprisonment. Igniting the fireworks or throwing an ignited firework at a person or property is also liable to the same severe penalties.

Finally, I would point out that each year, as Halloween approaches, my Department runs an advertising campaign highlighting both the public safety aspects as well as the illegality of using fireworks. I launched the most recent campaign on 21 October 2019, in cooperation with An Garda Síochána and the Fire Service. The campaign ran in print and online media in the lead up to Halloween 2019.

Garda Deployment

288. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff assigned to the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau in each year since its establishment in 2015, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44205/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the managing An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

As the Deputy will be aware, all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences, crime or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction.

In 2015 the Commissioner, established a new national Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau

(GDOCB), which brought together the Organised Crime Unit and the Garda National Drug Unit so as to create a robust entity to effectively tackle drugs and organised crime, as it currently exists in this country.

The GDOCB leads out the policing strategy for tackling drugs by demand reduction and supply reduction strategies. In this regard the Bureau continues its policy of working with Garda Divisional Drug Units nationwide in tackling supply reduction at local level. This work is further supported by other national units, including the Criminal Assets Bureau, in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs. I am informed that this approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide.

We have also seen unprecedented international cooperation between An Garda Síochána and policing services in other jurisdictions leading to important arrests and drug seizures.

Underpinning all these measures is this Government's commitment 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. To achieve this the Government has put in place a plan for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021. We are making real, tangible progress on achieving this goal.

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda Training College in 2014, approximately 2,800 new Garda members have attested and been assigned to frontline policing duties in communities throughout the country. Another 200 probationer Gardaí are due to attest by the end of this year. Further, the Garda Commissioner's decision to recruit a net 600 Garda staff in 2019 will allow for the redeployment of approximately 500 experienced Gardaí to frontline and visible policing duties by the end of this year.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical and I am pleased that funding is in place for the recruitment of up to 700 Gardaí and additional Garda staff in 2020, depending on the Commissioner's operational decision on the balance required.

For the Deputy's information, the attached table, as supplied by the Commissioner, sets out the latest figures as requested. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 30 September 2019, the total Garda strength of the GDOCB is 105. There are also 13 Garda staff assigned to the Bureau as of the same date.

Drugs Unit Personnel 2015-2019*

Year	Total
2015	258
2016	256
2017	236
2018	222
*2019	232

* As of 30 September 2019

Garda members assigned to the Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau 2015-2019*

Year	Total
2015	107
2016	105
2017	114

Year	Total
2018	112
*2019	105

* As of 30 September 2019

Garda Data

289. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times support has been sought from and provided under the drug-related intimidation reporting programme since it was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44206/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Drug-related intimidation is an extremely serious issue which involves the targeting of persons who use drugs, or their family or friends in relation to a drug debt. It involves insidious and coercive behaviour directed at forcing compliance of another person against their will. The intimidation can be either explicit or implicit, involving actual, threatened or perceived threats of violence to a person or damage to property.

The threat of violence to enforce drug debt impacts people’s lives greatly and can create an atmosphere of fear within communities, particularly those where there is a concentration of illicit drug markets. In many instances, such communities are already marginalised and are also having to contend with social and public disorder and other forms of criminality associated with the illicit drugs trade.

I understand from the Garda authorities that whether or not a family or loved one has paid these debts, this should not be a deterrent to seeking help, advice and support from An Garda Síochána.

As the Deputy will be aware, An Garda Síochána, in partnership with the National Family Support Network (NFSN), have developed a framework, ‘the Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme’, which is now been implemented on a National level since 2013, to assist persons who may be subject to the threat of drug related intimidation.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently 28 Inspectors nominated in this regard. They liaise directly with the local Superintendent in relation to each individual case, as required. I am further informed that there are 6 such inspectors in the Dublin Metropolitan Region; 7 in the North-Western Region; 8 in the Eastern Region; and 7 in the Southern Region.

I am informed that, in dealing with any complaint of drug related intimidation, or advice sought in relation to this issue, An Garda Síochána have the utmost regard to the safety and most effective means to afford the person or family subject to the threat, the best level of security, advice and support. I am further informed that confidentiality and security of the persons concerned are paramount for An Garda Síochána when dealing with reports under the Programme.

I consulted with An Garda Síochána in relation to the Deputy’s query on the number of times support has been sought from and provided under the drug related intimidation reporting programme since it was established. I am informed by the Garda authorities that this information is highly sensitive and not suitable for release into the public domain.

Asylum Applications Data

290. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the breakdown of the nationality of those seeking asylum being accommodated in Mosney; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44222/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): My Department is responsible for offering accommodation and related services to international protection applicants while their claim for protection is being examined. Due to an unexpected rise in applications (figures are up 53% in the first nine months of this year), existing Direct Provision Centres, which offer accommodation, food, utilities and a suite of State services, have reached capacity.

I am advised that as of 20th October 2019, 7,537 persons were being provided with accommodation by the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS, formerly the Reception and Integration Agency) of my Department. Currently, there are 6,091 persons residing in the 38 accommodation centres located nationwide across 18 counties. As these centres are currently operating at full capacity, there are also a further 1,478 people being accommodated in emergency accommodation in hotels and guest houses. My Department does not disclose the location of emergency accommodation centres in order to protect the identity of international protection applicants.

There are currently over 700 people being accommodated in Mosney Accommodation Centre. Please see table below given breakdown of nationality of those seeking asylum being accommodated in Mosney.

Nationality of Mosney Residents as of 20th October 2019

Country Of Origin	Number of applicants
Albania	111
Nigeria	102
Pakistan	90
Zimbabwe	80
South Africa	56
Malawi	32
Congo DR	27
Syria	24
Iraq	18
Kosovo	13
Other	150

My Department has introduced a number of measures aimed at reducing the time taken to determine applications. The International Protection Act, 2015, introduced the single procedure process for the determination of protection applications. Under the single procedure all elements of a person's protection claim (refugee status, subsidiary protection status and permission to remain) are considered together rather than sequentially. The aim of the single procedure is to help reduce waiting times significantly.

An applicant who applies for international protection today can expect to receive a first instance recommendation/decision within approximately 15 months, provided that no complications arise. Prioritised cases are being processed in just under 9 months. Prioritised applications include those from countries such as Syria and Eritrea and from especially vulnerable groups of applicants, such as unaccompanied minors. My Department is aiming to reduce processing times for all first instance decisions to 9 months by the end of this year.

Youth Services Expenditure

291. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the breakdown of spending under the Irish Youth Justice Service community programmes budget for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44223/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The statutory framework relating to young offenders and the Garda Diversion Programme is set out in the Children Act 2001. The nationwide network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) is supported by my Department.

GYDPs are community based, multi-agency, crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people who have become involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour. They aim to support young people to develop and mature through positive interventions and interactions with a local project. GYDPs provide a range of education and training programmes e.g. academic support, IT, employment preparation and specific job training.

Since 2015, GYDPs have been co-funded under the Programme for Employability Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) of the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020.

My Department is pursuing an ambitious programme for the future development of GYDP services, working closely with community organisations and with expert support from the Research Evidence into Policy Programmes and Practice project in the University of Limerick.

The budget and breakdown of expenditure on GYDPs to date in 2019 is set out in the table below.

PROGRAMME	NUMBER OF PROJECTS	BUDGET 2019	EXPENDITURE 2019
GYDPs	106	€14,810,632	€13,592,030
LDTFs	4	€252,032	€245,502
Work to Learn	20	€137,869	€137,869
8-11	9	€248,958	€248,958
Family Support	11	€310,690	€310,690
TOTAL		€15,760,181	€14,535,049

Immigration Status

292. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to address the needs of undocumented children and young persons living here; if he is considering a pathway to residency for them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44236/19]

295. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a pathway to residency will be introduced for children and young persons who are undocumented here and wish to secure residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44397/19]

299. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider regularising the status of undocumented children and young persons here with a view to granting them residency and the right to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44430/19]

308. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [44530/19]

351. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if changes will be made to legislation to ensure that there is a clear and quick pathway to residency for up to 3,000 children and young persons growing up here undocumented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45091/19]

362. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter regarding undocumented persons here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45281/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 292, 295, 299, 308, 351 and 362 together.

Entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. The Act distinguishes between the entitlement to citizenship by birth and descent and to the acquisition of citizenship through the naturalisation process. Following a referendum of the Irish people, the 27th amendment to the Constitution changed the situation in relation to entitlement to Irish Citizenship. As a result, Section 6 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 was amended by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 2004. The changes came into effect on 1st January 2005. As of that date a person born in the island of Ireland is not entitled to be an Irish citizen, unless that person's parents have been resident in the island of Ireland for a total of three years during the four years preceding that person's birth. Periods of unlawful residence, periods of residence which were for the sole purpose of having an application for refugee status determined or periods of residence where permission was granted for the purposes of study are excluded from the determination of periods of reckonable residence.

Where a child born in the State did not, at birth, have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, the parent or guardian or person who is in loco parentis to the child may lodge an application for naturalisation on behalf of the child if and when the conditions for naturalisation are satisfied, including a requirement to have a total of 5 years residence in the State. This ensures that, even where a child born in the State did not have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, there is a path to obtaining Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

I recognise that there are some cases of young people who have grown up here but who, as a result of their parents' illegal status, find themselves in a difficult situation. However, it is important to emphasise, that when it comes to people living here illegally, the only option for regularisation is on a case by case basis. Inevitably, granting permission to children and young people who reside in Ireland in an undocumented capacity will require that other family members must also be allowed to remain in order to care for and support the children. However, where people who have had an application for residence refused or who simply overstay their permission to reside in this country and do not apply for an extension to their permission, the State must be allowed to exercise its legal right to remove them from the State. It would be unwise to permit people to simply ignore our immigration laws and allow them and their families to remain here merely on the basis of the length of time that they have resided here without permission.

I am, however, open to exploring all legal solutions to the issue of children who have grown up here in circumstances where they or their family are undocumented. I met with the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) in June to discuss the situation and my Department has on-going engagement with MRCI and other NGOs on this matter.

In all cases, people must engage with the authorities if they wish to be permitted to remain

here legally. I would encourage any person who is resident in the State without permission to contact the Immigration Service of my Department or their local immigration office and to take all appropriate steps to regularise their family's status.

Public Inquiries

293. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a scoping exercise in a case (details supplied); if terms of reference regarding an inquiry have been changed; his views on the terms of reference as they were put to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44332/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Shane O'Farrell have previously been addressed by me in both the Dáil and the Seanad and I have met with the O'Farrell family.

Following the Dáil motion calling for a public inquiry last year, I sought the advice of the Attorney General on how best to proceed, given the fact that the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission was still investigating certain matters in relation to the case. Following the conclusion of the GSOC investigation, I appointed retired District Court Judge Gerard Haughton to conduct a scoping exercise into the circumstances leading to Shane's tragic death.

I am grateful to Judge Haughton for agreeing to undertake this sensitive and important work.

Judge Haughton subsequently met with the O'Farrell family to discuss the terms of reference and to seek their views. Following his engagement with the family, I received a proposal from Judge Haughton for some changes to the terms of reference for the scoping exercise.

This necessitated further consultation with the Office of the Attorney General. Subsequent legal advices were provided which, in particular, emphasised the requirement to abide by the jurisprudence set down in the decision of the Supreme Court in *Shatter v. Guerin* which was delivered in 2019.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the terms of reference of the scoping exercise have been finalised. My Department wrote to Judge Haughton on 23 September to ask him to begin his scoping exercise and to make an initial report by mid-November.

Judge Haughton is of course free to make any recommendation he sees fit, including the establishment of any form of statutory or non-statutory inquiry. Should he consider it necessary to recommend an inquiry, of whatever type, I have asked him to provide me with draft terms of reference.

While I regret that this process has taken some time, I am sure the Deputy will appreciate the importance of ensuring that the scoping exercise was framed and conducted in accordance with that decision. All of us in these Houses must operate within the new legal landscape of sensitive matters of this type, which are subject to the supervision of the Courts. I look forward to receipt of the initial report of Judge Haughton later this month.

Criminal Assets Bureau

294. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of legal professionals seconded to the Criminal Assets Bureau in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44389/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) is a multi-agency statutory body established under the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996. The Bureau's remit is to target a person's assets, wherever situated, which derive, or are suspected to derive, directly or indirectly, from criminal conduct. Since its inception, the Bureau has been at the forefront of fighting organised crime in this jurisdiction and disrupting the activities of criminal gangs by depriving them of ill-gotten assets.

The Bureau is widely regarded as a best practice model in the context of combating organised crime. It works closely with law enforcement bodies at national and international levels and continues to relentlessly pursue the illicit proceeds of organised crime activity. The actions of the Bureau send a strong message to criminals and to local communities that profiting from crime will not be tolerated.

Reflecting the Government's commitment to ensure that the Bureau is adequately resourced, the CAB's staffing and budgetary allocation has increased significantly in recent years. Since 2016, the Bureau's staffing resources have increased from 71 to its current level of 85, with staff numbers due to rise to 91 during this year.

Similarly, the Bureau's budgetary allocation has gone up from €7.042 million in 2016 to €8.603m in 2019. The Bureau's budget for 2020 has been increased by a further €0.5 million, to a total of €9.1 million.

A Bureau Legal Officer is appointed to the Bureau by the Minister to assist the Bureau with its objectives and functions. Other than this statutory post, I am advised that there are no legal professionals formally seconded to the Criminal Assets Bureau and rather that the Chief State Solicitor's Office provides the necessary legal services to the Bureau in the operation of its role.

Question No. 295 answered with Question No. 292.

Garda Data

296. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of inspectors appointed under the drug-related intimidation reporting programme to respond to the issue of drug related intimidation; the status of the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44402/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the managing An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

As the Deputy will be aware, all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences, crime or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to proactively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction.

An Garda Síochána, in partnership with the National Family Support Network (NFSN), have developed a framework, 'the Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme', which is now been implemented on a national level since 2013, to assist persons who may be subject to the threat of drug related intimidation.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently 28 Inspectors nominated in this regard. They liaise directly with the local Superintendent in relation to each individual case, as required. I am further informed that there are 6 such inspectors in the Dublin Metropolitan Region; 7 in the North-Western Region; 8 in the Eastern Region; and 7 in the Southern Region.

Direct Provision Expenditure

297. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of the direct provision system in each of the years 2014 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44428/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The International Protection Accommodation Service of my Department (IPAS) is provided with an annual budget under the vote of the Department of Justice to provide applicants for protection with accommodation for the duration of the application process. IPAS seeks to have accommodation and ancillary services provided under contract at centres located throughout the state.

As of 27 October 2019, 6,090 people are being accommodated in the 39 IPAS accommodation centres. There is a further 1,439 people being accommodated in emergency accommodation, namely in rooms in commercial hotels and guest houses on a room and full-board basis.

There are also an additional 347 people accommodated in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROC). The persons accommodated in these centres entered the State under the Resettlement Programme and Relocation Programme of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) operated by my Department.

The following table provides a breakdown of the IPAS expenditure on the 'direct provision' system in the years 2014 to 2018.

Expenditure Type	2014	2015	2016	2017*	2018*
Accommodation (includes commercial, State-owned and self-catering) Emergency accommodation costs are included from September 2018 when such accommodation was first utilised.	€51.071m	€54.895m	€60.327m	€65.407m	€76.057
Pre-school (contributions towards some costs)	€0.101m	€0.127m	€0.112m	€0.095m	€0.107m
Additional costs at State-owned centres (incl. gas, oil, water, sewage, etc.)	€1.972m	€1.879m	€3.558m	€1.742m	€1.512m
Transport costs (under dispersal policy)	€0.046m	€0.103m	€0.129m	€0.093m	€0.182m
Miscellaneous (payments for nappies, grants to organisations and miscellaneous costs)	€0.027m	€0.021m	€0.011m	€0.022m	€0.135
Total Expenditure	€53.217m	€57.025m	€64.137m	€67.359m	€77.993m

The 2017 and 2018 figures include an amount of €7.728m and €7.550m respectively for designated Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROC).

Asylum Applications Data

298. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of asylum seekers granted refugee status in each of the years 2014 to 2018; the success rate in percentage terms relative to the overall number of applications in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44429/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, applications for international protection are now processed at first instance, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC). The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) considers appeals against IPO refusals of international protection and the Tribunal is also independent in the performance of its functions

The IPO was established on 31 December 2016 following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 providing for the introduction of a single application procedure for people seeking international protection. The 2015 Act replaced the previous sequential application system with a single application process, for asylum, subsidiary protection and permission to remain in the State, bringing Ireland into line with the processing arrangements applicable in other EU Member States.

The number of asylum seekers granted refugee status in each of the years 2014 to 2018 are set out in the table below. However, the Deputy may wish to note that grants made in a particular year do not necessarily correspond with applications made in the same year.

Refugee Status Granted in the Years 2014 to 2018

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
International Protection Applications Received in the IPO	1448	3276	2244	2926	3673
Total Grants of Refugee Status/Subsidiary Protection by Ministerial Decisions Unit	478	562	727	768	1034
Grants Decisions Per Applications Received	33%	17%	32%	26%	28%

Question No. 299 answered with Question No. 292.

State Bodies Establishment

300. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Mediation Council of Ireland will be established under the relevant mediation legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44463/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that the Mediation Act 2017 came into operation on 1 January 2018. Section 12 of the Act provides that, subject to certain conditions, the Minister for Justice and Equality may, by order, declare

that a body as is specified in the order shall be recognised for the purposes of the Act as the Mediation Council of Ireland. The Schedule to the Act sets out the minimum requirements in relation to the Council including the functions of the Council – which include promotion of the mediation sector, the establishment of a register of mediators and the development of codes of practice – and its membership.

I understand that the Legal Aid Board has brought together an informal group to examine if consensus could be reached in relation to the possibility of putting together a proposal for the establishment of the Mediation Council. Following a number of meetings, a proposal from the informal group for the establishment of the Council has now been submitted and is under consideration in my Department. I expect that further discussions on the matter will be held in due course.

Question No. 301 answered with Question No. 280.

Human Trafficking

302. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has met the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to discuss migrant smuggling and the preventative measures needed to detect same. [44469/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The incident referred to by the Deputy is a tragedy for all concerned and I have previously expressed my deepest sympathies and condolences to them in this House.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government is fully committed to addressing the challenges of human trafficking and migrant smuggling under Irish and EU legislation and the principal international conventions. We are active domestically and at the international level on these matters.

A range of Departments are relevant to these matters and An Garda Síochána also plays a key role in relation to the prevention and detection of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. As such, I discuss these matters with my Ministerial colleagues, including the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, as required.

Question No. 303 answered with Question No. 279.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

304. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons brought here under the EU relocation and the UNHCR-led refugee resettlement programmes who are living in emergency reception and orientation centres; the length of time they have been living in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44471/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Refugee and asylum seekers arriving in Ireland under the resettlement and relocation strands of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) are initially accommodated in Emergency Reception and Accommodation Centres (EROCs).

Two EROCs are currently in operation:

- The Abbeyfield Hotel, Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon

- The Clonea Strand Hotel, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford

In addition, there are dedicated EROC places within the Mosney Accommodation Centre, due to its particular suitability for families. The table below sets out the current numbers and the average length of stay for each of the centres as of 4 November 2019.

EROC	CURRENT OCCUPANCY	AVG. LENGTH OF STAY
Abbeyfield Hotel EROC Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon	203	174 days
Clonea Strand Hotel EROC Dungarvan, Co. Waterford	114	175 days
Mosney EROC Julianstown, Co. Meath	67	322 days
TOTAL	384	

Of the 2,440 people who have arrived to date under the resettlement and relocation strands of the IRPP, more than 86% have been resettled in communities across Ireland.

Direct Provision Data

305. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons residing in direct accommodation who have been granted an international protection status or a permission to remain; the efforts his Department is taking to find alternative accommodation for these persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44488/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I can inform the Deputy that there were, as of 31 October 2019, 778 people with status residing in Direct Provision. 'Status' means either those with an International Protection status, a Subsidiary Protection Status or Permission to Remain.

These people are no longer applicants and are no longer in the international protection process. They have the same right to housing assistance and supports as Irish nationals and EEA citizens.

People with status or permission to remain seeking accommodation in the wider community may apply for Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) from their local authority or they may wish to use other means to pay for their accommodation. My Department has engaged DePaul Ireland, the Jesuit Refugee Service and the Peter McVerry Trust to provide assistance to them to find accommodation. Information supplied to us by these organisations indicates that most people who find accommodation are availing of the HAP. In addition, my Department is working with other Government Departments, local authorities and the City and County Managers' Association to help these people transition to longer-term accommodation in the community.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

306. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the overall budget allocated for the project regarding fees paid to a consultancy in respect of the reorganisation of his Department; the sums paid to date on all aspects of same; the estimated projected costs to the conclusion of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44514/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In January 2019, my Department commenced work on a major Transformation Programme. This programme was established on foot of the recommendations of the independent Effectiveness and Renewal Group (ERG) for a radical restructuring of the Department.

Given the scale and ambition of the programme, which involved moving from a conceptual design to a fully implemented new operating model within nine months, the ERG recommended the procurement of an external resource to assist the internal team in the Department to implement the transformation.

Following a competitive procurement process (supported by the Office of Government Procurement), EY were appointed to partner with the Department on the project.

The total cost that the Department will incur in respect to the consultancy fees regarding the reorganisation of the Department is €3,513,114. To date, the Department has paid €2,970,450 with the remaining balance of €542,664 to be paid in due course. Information on costs related to external consultant support is also available as a matter of public record on the Department website at <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/WP15000153> under the ‘Timeline and key facts & figures’ heading. All costs quoted are inclusive of VAT.

Garda Data

307. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank that have been subject to disciplinary proceedings in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44519/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, disciplinary matters within An Garda Síochána are governed by the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (Discipline) Regulations 2007 and are a matter for the Garda Commissioner.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the below tables set out the number of Garda members by rank that were subject to disciplinary proceedings in each of the years in question.

Rank	2017	2018	2019*
Reserve Garda	1	1	0
Garda	174	152	122
Sergeants and above	15	14	14
TOTAL	190	167	136

* Figures for 2019 are based on information available to date, subject to change and do not represent a return for the year as a whole.

More generally and as the Deputy may know a review of Garda disciplinary arrangements, including the complaints process, is in line with the recommendations of the report on the Commission on the Future of Policing, and an action in relation to revision of the discipline system is included in “A Policing Service for the Future”, the implementation plan for that report. A Discipline Review Steering Committee has been set up to oversee the process, and Terms of Reference have been agreed.

Question No. 308 answered with Question No. 292.

Garda College

309. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an investigation was commenced in 2017 by OLAF, the European Anti-Fraud Office, into spending at the Garda Training College, Templemore; if so, if the investigation has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44533/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 it is the Garda Commissioner who is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and is in law responsible for ensuring that the appropriate controls apply to expenditure within the organisation.

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) is an organ of the European Union and is independent in the performance of its functions.

I will write directly to the Deputy in relation to this matter, when I am provided with information by An Garda Síochána in relation to the matter he has raised.

Court Judgments

310. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the impact a Court of Appeal decision (details supplied) will have on applicants whose applications were refused by him without him stating the reason the applications were insufficiently strong; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44559/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In conjunction with the Attorney General’s Office, careful consideration is being given to the judgment in the case referred to by the Deputy and any implications it may have for Ministerial policy. As such it would be premature and inappropriate to comment pending the conclusion of such consideration.

There is no appeals process provided under the relevant legislation, the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Each applicant may re-apply for the grant of a certificate of naturalisation at any time. When considering making such a re-application they should provide the full range of available and relevant information in order to support the application. All applications will be considered taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

Direct Provision Data

311. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons being accommodated in direct provision; the length of time they have been in direct provision in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44565/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The following table details the lengths of stay of persons who have availed of accommodation provided by the Immigration Service of my Department (as of 1 November 2019)

Number of Months	Total
0 <3	1,053
3 <6	833

Number of Months	Total
6 <9	625
9 <12	802
12 <18	800
18 <24	802
24 <36	1,016
36 <48	762
48 <60	519
60 <72	178
72 <84	78
84+	114
Total	7,582

In relation to the length of time applicants spend in the international protection process, I can inform the Deputy that, while some individuals may live for many years in direct provision centres, these include applicants who have received previous negative decisions and are exercising their right to appeal through the various avenues open to them.

The numbers above include over 770 people who were granted protection status or a permission to remain in the State but remain in international protection accommodation centres. The Immigration Service of my Department is working with organisations like the Peter McVerry Trust, the Jesuit Refugee Service and DePaul Ireland, to assist these people to transition to mainstream housing services but that is proving challenging in the current housing environment.

My Department has also introduced a number of measures aimed at reducing the time taken to determine applications. The International Protection Act, 2015, introduced the single procedure process for the determination of protection applications. Under the single procedure all elements of a person's protection claim (refugee status, subsidiary protection status and permission to remain) are considered together rather than sequentially. The aim of the single procedure is to help reduce waiting times significantly.

An applicant who applies for international protection today can expect to receive a first instance recommendation/decision within approximately 15 months, provided that no complications arise. Prioritised cases are being processed in just under 9 months. Prioritised applications include those from countries such as Syria and Eritrea and from especially vulnerable groups of applicants, such as unaccompanied minors. My Department is aiming to reduce processing times for all first instance decisions to 9 months by the end of this year.

Direct Provision Data

312. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the location of each direct provision centre. [44605/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I am advised by the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) of my Department that as of 29 October 2019, there are 39 accommodation centres in the State, the locations of which are set out in the following table.

As these centres are currently operating at full capacity, there are 36 emergency accommodation premises currently being used to accommodate international protection applicants. My

Department does not generally disclose the location of emergency accommodation centres in order to protect the identity of international protection applicants.

IPAS Accommodation (as of 29 October 2019)

COUNTY	LOCATION	ADDRESS
	RECEPTION CENTRE	
Dublin	Balseskin	St. Margarets, Finglas, Dublin 11
	ACCOMMODATION CENTRES	
Clare	Knockalisheen	Meelick
	King Thomond	The Bog Road, Lisdoonvarna
Cork	Ashbourne House	Glounthaune
	Davis Lane	73-75 Davis Street, Mallow, Co. Cork
	Kinsale Road	Cork
	Glenvera	Wellington Road
	Millstreet	Millstreet
	Clonakilty Lodge	Clonakilty, Co. Cork
Dublin	The Towers	The Ninth Lock, Clondalkin, Dublin 22
Galway	Eglington	The Proms, Salthill
	Great Western House	Eyre Square
Kerry	Atlas House (Killarney)	Killarney
	Atlas House (Tralee)	Tralee
	Atlantic Lodge	Kenmare
	Johnston Marina	Tralee
	Linden House	New Road, Kilarney
	Park Lodge	Killarney
Kildare	Hazel	Dublin Road, Monasterevin
	Eyrepowell	Newbridge
Laois	Hibernian Hotel	Main Street, Abbeyleixm, Co. Laois
	Montague	Emo, Portlaoise
Limerick	Hanratty's	Glentwirth Street, Limerick
	Mount Trenchard	Foynes, Co. Limerick
Longford	Richmond Court	Richmond Street, Longford
Louth	Carroll Village	Dundalk
Mayo	The Old Convent	Ballyhaunis
Meath	Mosney	Mosney
Monaghan	St. Patricks	Monaghan
Sligo	Globe House	Chapel Hill
Tipperary	Bridgewater House	Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary
	Borrisokane	Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary
Waterford	Atlantic House	Tramore, Co. Waterford
	Ocean View	Tramore, Co. Waterford
	Birchwood	Ballytruckle Road
	Viking House	Coffee House Lane

COUNTY	LOCATION	ADDRESS
	RECEPTION CENTRE	
Wicklow	The Grand Hotel	Abbey Street, Wicklow
Westmeath	Temple Accommodation	Horseleap, Moate, Westmeath
	Athlone	Athlone

Question No. 313 answered with Question No. 280.

Human Trafficking

314. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he discussed the 39 deaths in Essex with his counterpart in the UK; if they discussed port security on both sides of the Irish Sea; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44613/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The incident referred to by the Deputy is a tragedy for all concerned and I have previously expressed my deepest sympathies and condolences to them in this House.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government is fully committed to addressing the challenges of human trafficking and migrant smuggling under Irish and EU legislation and the principal international conventions. We are active domestically, including by ensuring immigration control at Irish airports and ports, and at the international level on these matters.

Of course I maintain a positive relationship with my UK counterpart and we are in contact to discuss various matters of security as required.

Further and as the Deputy will appreciate, crimes such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling are transnational by nature and accordingly necessitate a collaborative approach to policing with law enforcement agencies across jurisdictions. An Garda Síochána utilises all available international mechanisms for police cooperation and training including CEPOL, Interpol, and Europol.

In relation to the specific incident referred to by the Deputy, I understand that criminal investigations are ongoing and An Garda Síochána are providing assistance to the UK authorities in this matter as appropriate.

Question No. 315 answered with Question No. 280.

Human Trafficking

316. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if legislation needs to be amended to prevent Ireland from being a target for human trafficking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44615/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland is fully committed to addressing the challenges of human trafficking under Irish and EU legislation and the principal international conventions. Co-ordination of national efforts in this area is the responsibility of my Department.

Ireland has ratified the principal international Human Trafficking treaties:

- The Palermo Protocol (2000) to the UN Convention against Organised Crime
- The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005)

In the EU and Ireland, the following legislation is relevant:

- EU Anti Trafficking Directive (2011/36/EU)
- Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 and Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) (Amendment) Act 2013

In February this year, Ireland ratified the ILO Forced Labour Protocol, which reinforces the international legal framework for combating all forms of forced labour, including trafficking in persons. This initiative, by my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, puts Ireland among the group known as “50 for Freedom”, which stems from an ILO initiative to encourage member countries to ratify the Protocol by the end of 2019.

I would also note that An Garda Síochána has committed significant resources to the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking. A specialised Garda Unit, the Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit (HTICU), has been established to coordinate delivery of national strategy.

Finally, I would point out that action is also being taken to raise public awareness in Ireland and help members of the public identify the signs of human trafficking. More information is available on the “Blue Blindfold” website, <http://www.blueblindfold.gov.ie>, maintained by my Department.

Legislative Reviews

317. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of each review of the incitement to hatred legislation that has been carried out or commissioned by his Department in each year since 1989; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44623/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 has been the subject of ongoing Departmental review for some time and in a number of different contexts since its enactment.

In 2008, a specific external review of the 1989 Act was carried out by the Centre for Criminal Justice, University of Limerick, in conjunction with the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism. This review was published in September 2008. The review concluded that “the complex nature of the offences in the 1989 Act arises primarily from the overriding need to balance fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, privacy and basic principles of criminal liability, with the need to protect individuals and groups against vicious racist abuse”.

The 2008 review recommended that legislative change alone would be insufficient and that measures to address racism should be included as part of an overall integration and anti-racism strategy, including education and public awareness programmes and a wide range of measures to ensure migrant and minority communities are more included in Irish society.

The review of the 1989 Act being conducted at present by my Department is designed to identify how our legislation on hate speech, including incitement to hatred, can be made fit for purpose in a modern democracy. This review is one part of a suite of measures which will in-

clude the development of new legislation on both hate speech and hate crime.

As part of the review, I launched a public consultation process on 24 October which is open and inviting submissions until 13 December 2019 and will gather the views of communities, experts and all interested persons on how our incitement legislation should be changed to make it fit for purpose. Details of the consultation are available on my Department's website.

Some of the questions in the consultation include: what limits it is appropriate to place on freedom of expression when it comes to hate speech; what forms of hate speech are serious enough that they should be a criminal offence; whether the list of protected characteristics included in the legislation should be changed; whether the existing legislation is adequate to deal with online communications, and whether the need to prove the intent or likelihood or stirring up hatred should be altered.

Separately to the work on incitement, my Department is finalising research on the effectiveness of the different legislative approaches to tackling hate crime in other countries, in order to learn from experience elsewhere and use this information to identify the approach that will be most suitable for Ireland. When this research has concluded I will bring forward proposals for new hate crime legislation. These will be published and the views of experts, communities and the public will be taken into account to ensure that the legislation we develop will deliver a safer, fairer and more inclusive Ireland for everyone.

Legal Aid Service Data

318. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which funds for the free legal aid service are distributed nationally by law centre in each of the past four years; the criteria in place to determine the distribution of funding; the precise weighting given to each criteria; the plan in place to target resources at areas with the longest waiting times or other measures of need; and the waiting times and numbers for first and second consultations by each law centre. [44644/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Legal Aid Board is the statutory independent body responsible for the provision of civil legal aid and advice to persons of modest means in the State. The Board also has responsibility to provide a family mediation service.

I have had enquiries made with the Legal Aid Board on behalf of the Deputy and they have provided the following information.

Civil legal aid and advice is provided primarily by solicitors employed by the Board through a network of law centres . There are 30 full time and 12 part-time law centres. Specific law centres in Dublin, Cork and Galway include an international protection speciality and there are also dedicated units in Dublin dealing with personal injury and/or medical negligence cases and cases involving children at risk. Family mediation services are provided through 8 full time offices and 9 part time offices.

The Board also engages private solicitors to supplement the services provided by Board solicitors in certain areas of law on a case by case basis, those areas of law being; District Court family law matters, Circuit Court judicial separation and divorce cases, international protection cases, and cases on foot of the Abhaile scheme.

I am advised that the Board does not have to hand a breakdown of the total cost of civil legal aid in any one office/county in a given year. It should be borne in mind that applicants are

free to apply for legal services to any law centre and are not bound to apply in their county of residence. Furthermore, in a case where two parties to a dispute seek the services of the Board at one law centre, one party will be required to engage with a different law centre, which may be in a neighbouring county.

The majority of the Board's income consists of a grant received from my Department. This funding is used to provide the Board's services in all its offices across the country, as well as the support services provided to law centres centrally from the Board's head office. The Board's other main sources of income are financial contributions from applicants and costs recovered.

The grant funding provided to the Legal Aid Board by my Department in 2019 is €40.796 million. The largest cost of operating the law centre network is staff salaries. Solicitors employed by the Legal Aid Board are civil servants of the State and are subject to the standard civil service terms and conditions of employment and are employed on standard civil service pay scales. The allocation of staffing resources in the Legal Aid Board is a matter for the Chief Executive and senior management, within its budgetary parameters.

The Board seeks to ensure that a person who qualifies for civil legal aid (legal services) will be offered an appointment with a solicitor within a maximum period of four months from the time the application is completed or will be offered earlier legal advice if it is not possible to provide full legal services within four months. A priority service is provided in certain cases including cases involving domestic violence, child abduction, applications by the State (Tusla) to take children into care or under supervision, and cases that have statutory time limits close to expiry.

The waiting times and numbers for first and second consultation appointments are published on a regular basis on the website of the Legal Aid Board (www.legalaidboard.ie).

As of the 31st December 2016, there were 1,864 persons waiting for legal services which was a reduction from the figure of 2,319 at the start of the year. At the end of 2017 the number of persons waiting for legal services stood at 1,776. At the end of 2018 the number of persons waiting for legal services stood at 1,754 (see Table 1). This was the sixth successive year in which there was a decrease (from over 5,000 in 2013). The number of persons waiting for a first consultation with a Legal Aid Board solicitor stands at 1,933 at the end of October, 2019.

Table 1 - The number of persons waiting on the 31st December 2018

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number Waiting	5,067	3,412	2,319	1,864	1,776	1,754

The maximum waiting time in weeks, for non prioritised matters, as of the 30th September, 2019 is set out for the various law centres in Table 2. It must be emphasised that this table gives a snapshot of waiting times at a particular point in time. Waiting times will go up and down depending on demand and on the capacity of each law centre to offer appointments to new clients. A number of law centres that currently have long waiting lists are being affected by solicitor turnover and other staff movement or absence which the Board is seeking to address. Where capacity permits, applications in Dublin are transferred between law centres to allow earlier first consultation appointments for applicants. The distribution of resources is similarly kept under constant review. I am advised for example that with some redistribution it is expected that the waiting time at the Law Centre in Finglas will drop significantly in the next couple of months.

Table 2: Waiting times - 30th September 2019 (in weeks)

Questions - Written Answers

	Waiting for 1st Consultation		Waiting for 2nd Consultation		Combined waiting time	
Law Centre	Longest person waiting	No. Waiting	Longest person waiting	No. Waiting	Combined waiting time	No. Waiting
Finglas	56	104	0	0	56	104
Jervis Street*	41	181	0	0	41	181
Smithfield	31	109	0	0	31	109
Cork South Mall	28	153	0	0	28	153
Kilkenny*	28	75	0	0	28	75
Athlone	26	94	0	0	26	94
Blanchardstown	26	57	0	0	26	57
Sligo	26	62	0	0	26	62
Navan	25	81	0	0	25	81
Galway Seville House*	11	28	12	12	23	40
Ennis	7	21	15	24	22	45
Longford	19	54	0	0	19	54
Tallaght	19	57	0	0	19	57
Waterford	19	60	0	0	19	60
Nenagh	18	85	0	0	18	85
Newbridge	18	40	0	0	18	40
Cavan	15	42	0	0	15	42
Wexford	15	53	0	0	15	53
Tralee	14	41	0	0	14	41
Monaghan	13	31	0	0	13	31
Cork Popes Quay	12	80	0	0	12	80
Castlebar	11	42	0	0	11	42
Letterkenney*	11	53	0	0	11	53
Dundalk	10	33	0	0	10	33
Portlaoise*	10	35	0	0	10	35
Wicklow	10	58	0	0	10	58
Limerick	9	30	0	0	9	30
Galway Francis St	8	12	0	0	8	12
Clondalkin	5	31	0	0	5	31
Tullamore	4	26	0	0	4	26

* Co-located law centre and mediation offices

Speedy access to the Board's services and to the justice system generally, has always been

a priority for the Board.

It is important to clarify that in most cases the legal advice and/or aid provided by the Legal Aid Board is not free nor is the word ‘Free’ part of the Board’s title. There are financial eligibility criteria which the majority of civil legal aid applicants must meet in order to be eligible for legal services. In most cases an applicant for legal aid will have to make a payment which is called a contribution. While the majority of persons granted civil legal services pay the minimum contribution, the contribution a person is liable for will depend on their disposable income and capital assets. In the event that a person recovers money or property arising from the case, the Board may seek to recover the cost to the Board of providing legal services to the client.

Crime Data

319. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which crime statistics and figures are published; if he will consider a more localised system of statistics based on postcode areas within the Dublin Metropolitan Region for crime statistics and reports in view of the number of community and residential organisations that are organised in small local communities in which specific crime figures would be of benefit to them and for community vigilance in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44658/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of the official recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

As the Deputy will be aware, crime figures of the Central Statistics Office currently remain “Under Reservation”. However, it is clear that progress is being made by An Garda Síochána and the CSO in improving the quality of the crime statistics.

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

While this is encouraging, it is also clear that there is more work to be done in this area, My Department, in conjunction with the Policing Authority, will continue to monitor the progress of An Garda Síochána in ensuring that the national crime statistics are returned to the higher standard required by the CSO. The Policing Authority will continue to assess policing performance across the remainder of the year and will publish a full year assessment in early 2020.

I have attached a link to the latest crime statistics as published by the Central Statistics Office on the 27 September 2019.

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rc/recordedcrimeq22019/>

The Deputy may also be interested to note the CSO Crime Counting Rules document, available at this link *<https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CJA07&PLanguage=0>*

That document sets out the approach to recording of criminal offences as being against the Garda sub-district in which the particular offence was committed.

“A.6

A criminal offence should be recorded (and counted) against the Garda Sub-district in which the particular offence was committed. Where the place of commission cannot be determined the offence should be recorded against the Garda Sub-district in which it was reported. Criminal offences under Irish law that are committed abroad (such as those under the Sexual Offences (Jurisdiction) Act, 1996) should be recorded against the Garda Sub-district in which it was reported."

I understand that it is possible to search CSO Table CJA07, which breaks down data by offence group and Garda station, by post code of the relevant Garda station or indeed by place-name.

Any changes to the methodology used to publish the statistics would be a matter for the Central Statistics Office, under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach.

Information and Communications Technology

320. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44715/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are approximately 3,700 desktop computers supported by the ICT Shared Service within my Department which currently run on the Microsoft Windows 7 Operating System. A project to upgrade this operating system is underway and is scheduled for completion prior to Windows 7 going out of support in January 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

321. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44730/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is not envisaged that my Department will pay additional premium payments to Microsoft after the Windows 7 Operating System goes out of support, as it is intended that the operating system on the ICT Shared Service will be upgraded in advance of this.

In the event that a small number of devices have not been upgraded by then, the situation will be reviewed to ensure that the best available support and security is provided for those devices until they are fully upgraded. If necessary, extended support from Microsoft may be provided, which would be at minimal cost and connected to the existing licensing agreement with the company.

Information and Communications Technology

322. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies un-

der his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44746/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are approximately 3,700 desktop computers supported by the ICT Shared Service within my Department which currently run on the Microsoft Windows 7 Operating System. The ICT Shared Service also supports 34 other bodies.

A project to upgrade all computers supported by the ICT Shared Service is underway and is scheduled for completion prior to Windows 7 going out of support in January 2020. Accordingly, it is not envisaged that malware or security threats will arise due to the ending of support. In the event that it is not possible to complete upgrades prior to the ending of support, any necessary measures will be put in place to ensure ICT security.

The operation of the individual desktop computers on the shared service is already controlled within a virtualized and secure network environment. The shared service deploys a number of different layers of security to deal with internal and external threats, including firewalls, malware and virus detection and spam filtering on email and web traffic, as well as threat emulation.

I have set out further information with respect to An Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service and the Courts Service below.

An Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána currently operates an estate of over 9,500 desktop PCs and has security measures in place in order to reduce potential risks posed by devices and ensure data security and integrity.

Over 95% of the standard desktops are currently running the latest patched operating system Windows 10, with an additional 3% planned to be upgraded before year end. There are a small number of specific purpose devices that are unable to be upgraded, due in the majority of cases to bespoke software applications in use on them not supporting newer operating systems. These computers have a specific security and threat mitigation plan assigned to them, which limits the usage, services and communication on these devices. All devices are subject to the standard security regime and benefit from threat detection as well as organisation-wide security monitoring and filtering.

The Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission and the Criminal Assets Bureau have completed upgrade projects and no computers in those bodies run Windows 7.

Irish Prison Service

The Irish Prison Service currently uses Windows 7 widely and is putting a plan in place to upgrade to the Windows 10 to prevent and mitigate the risk of malware attacks or other security risks. Various threat detection and security systems are in place to mitigate against risks to data security and integrity.

Courts Service

The large majority of Courts Service users use thin client devices and virtualized applications which do not use Windows desktop operating systems. Where Windows 7 had previously been deployed, many instances have been upgraded to newer operating systems and work is continuing on upgrading or migrating the remainder.

There is limited exposure to the risk of malware attack or security risks from the failure to

upgrade computers from Windows 7. The computers deployed in the Courts Service have a locked down configuration which provides an additional layer of security and measures are in place at our firewalls which make it difficult for malware to enter the Courts network. These include mail scanning, link filtering and blocking of suspect websites. A patching policy ensures appropriate security patching is applied. A detailed user security policy ensures that permissions are restricted and the potential for security breaches is limited. End user security awareness is provided through periodic general security advice and notifications in relation to specific threats.

Garda Transport Data

323. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda cars in use in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44766/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. I am pleased to have secured an overall increase of €122 million to increase An Garda Síochána's budget for 2020 to an unprecedented €1.882 billion for next year.

Very significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána, including a total of €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021. €10 million capital funding has been made for the purchase and fit-out of Garda vehicles in 2019. I understand from the Garda authorities that this allocation is being used for purchase and fit-out of over 300 new vehicles for operational use this year. A further €9 million capital funding has been allocated for the Garda fleet in Budget 2020.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter.

The strength of the Kildare Divisional Fleet as of 25 October 2019 is set out in the following table, as provided to me by the Garda authorities.

Fleet as of 25 October 2019	Cars	Vans	Mbikes	4 x 4	Others	Total
Kildare District	19	6	0	0	0	25
Leixlip District	8	2	0	0	0	10
Naas District	15	5	1	1	0	22
Total - Kildare Division	42	12	1	1	0	56

Garda Data

324. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda attached to the human trafficking investigation and co-ordination unit in each year since 2014, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44784/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for managing An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. This includes

responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel across the various Garda Divisions. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter. I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps this distribution under review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure optimum use is made of resources.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit (HTICU) forms part of the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) and falls under the remit of Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations, Harcourt Square, Dublin 2.

I am further informed that the unit is staffed by Garda members of various ranks, up to Detective Superintendent, as well as Garda staff. I am informed that the following table, provided to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the staffing levels of the Unit since 2014 and as at 5 November.

YEAR	TOTAL	Garda Members	Garda Staff
2014	11	9	2
2015	11	9	2
2016	9	7	2
2017	15	13	2
2018	14	12	2
2019	13	11	2

More generally, the Deputy may wish to be aware of training in this area. A 3-day training course entitled ‘Tackling Trafficking in Human Beings, Prevention, Protection, Prosecution & Partnership’ has been developed and delivered jointly between An Garda Síochána and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). This training is delivered to frontline Gardaí, investigators, immigration officers, border management (Dublin Airport), who are most likely to identify potential victims of human trafficking.

The Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-Ordination Unit deliver this three-day human trafficking course twice annually. Human rights issues as they pertain to human trafficking are a fundamental component of the course and international experts on human trafficking also make presentations. I understand that as at year end 2018, over 1,400 Garda members had been trained in this course.

Naturalisation Certificates

325. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to review applications (details supplied) in view of a ruling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44796/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy may be aware that Section 16 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister for Justice and Equality may waive any or all of the statutory provisions for naturalisation as provided in Section 15 of the Act, where the applicant is of Irish descent or Irish associations.

Having considered the application concerned, I am not satisfied that the person concerned meets the statutory residency criterion and have decided not to exercise my absolute discretion to waive said requirement. The person concerned was informed on 27 May 2019 by the Immigration Service of my Department that a certificate of naturalisation would not be granted in

respect of this application.

In conjunction with the Attorney General's Office, careful consideration is being given to the judgment in the case referred to by the Deputy and any implications it may have for Ministerial policy. As such it would be premature and inappropriate to comment pending the conclusion of such consideration.

While it is the case that there is no appeals process provided for under the relevant legislation, the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, an applicant may re-apply for the grant of a certificate of naturalisation at any time. When considering making such an application they should provide the full range of available and relevant information in order to support the application. All applications will be considered, taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

Garda Data

326. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda in the Clondalkin division; the number of vacancies that exist in the division; the rank or level of the vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44802/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is important to be clear that under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel across the various Garda Divisions. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

As the Deputy will be aware, a record €1.76 billion was allocated to the Garda Vote for 2019, as well as capital investment amounting to €92 million this year. I am pleased to have secured an additional €122 million to increase An Garda Síochána's budget for 2020 to an unprecedented €1.882 billion for next year.

The Garda strength of the Clondalkin District as at 30 September 2019, the latest date for which figures are available, is available on my Department's website through the following link.

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_September_2019.xlsx

/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_September_2019.xlsx.

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

For more general information on Garda facts and figures, please see the following link:

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

Departmental Staff Data

327. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of

full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44850/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that as of 21 October 2019 there are 2,480 staff employed in my Department. Of those, 2,128 work full-time, and 352 work part-time (i.e. any work pattern less than full time).

These totals include permanent and non-permanent staff employed by or through the Department, and include, among others, staff in the Probation Service, Forensic Science Ireland, the Insolvency Service of Ireland and headquarters staff in the Irish Prison Service.

As the Deputy will be aware, the statutory National Minimum Wage an employer can pay an adult worker is €9.80 an hour. This rate saw an increase from the previous rate of €9.55 per hour on 1 January 2019.

All of the staff within my Department are paid at a rate exceeding the National Minimum Wage rate.

Departmental Budgets

328. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of the €265 million identified in budget 2020 as selected capital measures to be allocated to the Military Road, Dublin 8 development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44867/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that out of the €265 million provided for capital measures in Budget 2020, a total capital allocation of €116.5 million will be made available to the Garda Vote.

This will provide for continuing ICT investment, upgrade and expansion of the Transport Fleet and various building construction and maintenance works.

The precise amount to be allocated to the Military Road, Dublin 8 project in 2020 will only be determined when detailed timescales and cash flow arrangements are finalised between the successful tenderer, OPW and An Garda Síochána.

Garda Expenditure

329. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost incurred by An Garda Síochána to pay for storage of seized vehicles in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44868/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that as the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote, the Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of the organisation.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the costs incurred by An Garda Síochána for the storage of seized vehicles are set out in the following table.

Year	Spend
2016	€4,481,934
2017	€5,757,420
2018	€6,171,075

Year	Spend
2019*	€4,643,497

*figures as of 25/10/2019

Road Traffic Offences Data

330. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drivers that have been caught driving while holding a mobile phone in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44869/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters raised by the Deputy. I will write directly to the Deputy once I receive it.

Fines Data

331. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the value of fines collected for driving while holding a mobile phone in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44870/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, and this includes the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided the following Report:

Report on the value of fines recovered for driving while holding a mobile phone in each of the years 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and to 30th September 2019.

Year	Value of Fines Recovered in full	Value of Fines Part Recovered	Total Fines Recovered
Jan - Dec 2015	€288,876		€288,876
Jan - Dec 2016	€230,475	€2,500	€232,975
Jan - Dec 2017	€151,350	€1,106	€152,456
Jan - Dec 2018	€122,831	€1,197	€124,028
Jan - 30 Sep 2019	€67,634	€1,979	€69,613

Direct Provision System

332. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a social support worker has been assigned to the temporary direct provision centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44907/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy will appreciate, my Department, has a legal duty to protect the identities of persons in the international protection process and must be mindful of the right to privacy of applicants when responding to any specific queries.

As of 27 October 2019, there were 139 people residing in emergency accommodation in Co. Wicklow. This includes family units and single people seeking international protection.

As our existing 38 accommodation centres are currently operating at full capacity, my Department sought expressions of interest seeking bed and board in hotels and guesthouses on a 12-26 week basis for emergency temporary accommodation for international protection applications. Premises in County Wicklow were sourced on that basis. Our aim is to ensure that residents in emergency accommodation are re-accommodated in a dedicated accommodation centre as quickly as possible.

The International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS - formerly known as RIA) of my Department liaises with the relevant partner agencies such as the HSE, Tusla, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding the local roll-out of required services to residents in all emergency accommodation locations. The HSE and Tusla, where applicable, continue to engage with any issues raised relating to health care provision such as access to GPs and access to social workers.

Asylum Seekers

333. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of asylum seekers returned to Zimbabwe in each of the years 2012 to 2015. [44917/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Firstly, I wish to advise the Deputy that the State cannot and does not deport people who are in the process of seeking asylum or international protection applicants, who have applied under the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) or under the International Protection Act 2015. Such persons may remain in the State while their application is examined. If, after these procedures, an applicant has been found not to be in need of international protection, that person is no longer considered to be an asylum seeker or to be in need of international protection.

Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) gives the Minister for Justice and Equality powers to make a Deportation Order. Section 3(2) of that Act sets out the nature of persons in respect of whom such an Order can be made. This includes, among other categories of person, a person who has served or is serving a term of imprisonment imposed on him or her by a court in the State, a person whose deportation has been recommended by a court in the State before which such person was indicted for or charged with any crime or offence, a person whose application for asylum, based on the provisions of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended), has been refused by the Minister and a person whose deportation would, in the opinion of the Minister, be conducive to the common good.

Section 3(3) of the Act provides the procedure to be followed before any such Order can be made while section 3(4) sets out the three options open to any person put on notice of a proposal to make a Deportation Order in respect of them. These options are to leave the State voluntarily, to consent to deportation or to submit written representations against the making of such an Order.

A refoulement consideration must also be carried out prior to any deportation consideration. This involves consideration of whether returning the person would result in the life or freedom of that person being threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or whether the person would be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. No person is returned to their country of origin, or their place of former habitual residence, where there is a credible risk to

their life or freedom.

The data available to the Immigration Service of my Department suggests that the State did not return any individual to Zimbabwe in the years mentioned in the Deputy's query.

Garda Data

334. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda assigned to the drugs and organised crime unit in County Louth in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [44951/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the managing An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

As the Deputy will be aware, all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences, crime or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction.

In 2015 the Commissioner, established a new national Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau (GDOCB), which brought together the Organised Crime Unit and the Garda National Drug Unit so as to create a robust entity to effectively tackle drugs and organised crime, as it currently exists in this country.

The GDOCB leads out the policing strategy for tackling drugs by demand reduction and supply reduction strategies. In this regard the Bureau continues its policy of working with Garda Divisional Drug Units nationwide in tackling supply reduction at local level. This work is further supported by other national units, including the Criminal Assets Bureau, in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs. I am informed that this approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide.

We have also seen unprecedented international cooperation between An Garda Síochána and policing services in other jurisdictions leading to important arrests and drug seizures.

Underpinning all these measures is this Government's commitment 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. To achieve this the Government has put in place a plan for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021. We are making real, tangible progress on achieving this goal.

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda Training College in 2014, approximately 2,800 new Garda members have attested and been assigned to frontline policing duties in communities throughout the country. Another 200 probationer Gardaí are due to attest by the end of this year. Further, the Garda Commissioner's decision to recruit a net 600 Garda staff in 2019 will allow for the redeployment of approximately 500 experienced Gardaí to frontline and visible policing duties by the end of this year.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical and I am pleased that funding is in place

for the recruitment of up to 700 Gardaí and additional Garda staff in 2020, depending on the Commissioner’s operational decision on the balance required.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 30 September 2019, the total Garda strength of the GDOCB is 105. There are also 13 Garda staff assigned to the Bureau as of the same date.

I further understand from the Garda authorities that, in addition to the GDOCB, the Garda strength of the Louth Divisional Drugs Unit in the years 2016 to 2019 was as follows:

2016: following table (provided to me by the Garda authorities) sets out the Garda strength of the Louth Garda Division Drugs unit from the years 2016 to 30 September 2019, as requested by the Deputy.

Year	Garda members
2016	6
2017	5
2018	2
2019 (as at 30 September)	3

National Drugs Strategy Implementation

335. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the manner in which the national drugs strategy will be implemented across the State and in County Louth; and the agencies involved in same. [44952/19]

336. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funding allocated to implementing the national drugs strategy in County Louth. [44953/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 335 and 336 together.

Government policy in relation to drug and alcohol misuse is set out in Ireland’s National Drug Strategy, ‘Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery’, a health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025. This represents a whole-of-Government response to the problem of drug and alcohol use in Ireland.

My Department and associated agencies continue to work closely with statutory, community and voluntary partners in tackling the problem of drug misuse under the drug policy framework established under the Strategy. However my Department does not allocate funding for specific actions in the strategy on a county basis.

As the Deputy will appreciate, Minister for Health Simon Harris TD and Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy Catherine Byrne TD have primary responsibility in relation to the strategy and that Department provides most of the funding to local and regional drugs task forces nationwide.

I am consulting with that Department on this matter further and I will write to the Deputy directly when the relevant information is available.

Domestic Violence

337. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding allocated to agencies in County Louth which work with survivors of domestic abuse in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [44954/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, Tusla has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual or gender based violence. As such, the relevant Minister in terms of the core funding of domestic violence services is the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, by virtue of her responsibility for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, which funds those services.

I understand that Tusla has provided €25.3 million for services for victims of domestic, sexual or gender based violence in 2019.

In addition, my Department has provided funding to promote and assist the development of support services to victims of crime.

Such services continue to provide important information and support to victims of crime, including emotional support, court accompaniment, accompaniment to Garda interviews, accompaniment to sexual assault treatment units, counselling and referral to other services.

The funding allocated under this scheme to relevant agencies in County Louth working with victims of domestic abuse for each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, is provided in the following table.

Organisation	2016	2017	2018	2019
Women's Aid Dundalk	€18,000	€17,500	€17,500	€17,500
Drogheda Women's Refuge and Children's Refuge Centre	€10,000	€11,500	€11,500	€11,500

Garda Training

338. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the training given to probationary and fully qualified members of An Garda Síochána to deal with incidences of domestic abuse. [44955/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing An Garda Síochána, including the training of its members and civilian staff. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that there are a range of training programmes in place to enable Gardaí to learn how to deal with incidences of domestic abuse.

For trainee Gardaí, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following training is provided:

- While in Phase I training, trainee Gardaí cover Domestic Violence as part of the B.A. in Applied Policing Programme, under the "Policing with Communities" module. In this module, trainees are introduced to the relevant legislation and policy, and also receive related PULSE training. In addition, the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) deliver a seminar to trainee Gardaí on Domestic Abuse.

- While in Phase 3 training, trainee Gardaí receive further training in Domestic Abuse, with training delivered in Case Studies, Domestic Dispute Pulse Creation, Procedures for Obtaining Orders, Step by Step for First Responders and Domestic Abuse Guidance in Garda College. Adapt / Women's Aid also deliver a workshop on Domestic Abuse Awareness in Phase 3 training for An Garda Síochána

I am further informed that the Continuous Professional Development section of Garda College has also developed a core programme for 2019, addressing issues including domestic violence and coercive control.

Finally, and as the Deputy is aware, An Garda Síochána is rolling out Protective Services Units nationwide, with specially trained members to specifically deal with victims of certain crimes, including domestic violence.

Garda Training

339. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the training budget allocated to members of An Garda Síochána in relation to domestic abuse. [44956/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by An Garda Síochána that it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the annual funding for specialist training in the area of domestic violence in the past five years.

The training plan costs the delivery of overall programmes and the provision of funding for niche training. Unit costs of courses which are delivered as part of longer running courses such as the B.A. in Applied Policing, or delivered as part of the Phase III probationary period and the associated costs in the development of these training programmes is not available, as individual unit module costs of long recurring course, are not quantified.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that, I am informed by the Garda authorities, that the budget for training and development expenditure is now included under the Garda College sub-head. I am further informed by the Garda authorities that the budget for training and development in 2019 is €37.6 million, which is an increase of €5.8 million on 2018.

Domestic Violence Policy

340. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the locations of perpetrator programmes for persons convicted of domestic abuse crimes; and the funding allocated to these programmes in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [44957/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department is currently supporting and overseeing the implementation of a uniform national domestic violence intervention programme under the Second National Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender- based Violence, 2016-2021. The roll out of this programme, entitled the Choices Programme, began in 2017.

The Choices Programme is now being delivered across the State by the following three organisations working with men who engage in domestic abuse and in providing support to their partners/ex-partners: MOVE Ireland, Men's Development Network and the North East Domestic Violence Intervention Programme (NEDVIP).

Prior to establishment of the Choices programme, these organisations were running separate

types of domestic abuse intervention programmes locally with funding support provided by my Department.

I understand that NEDVIP, the programme managed by the Probation Service in Louth takes referrals from the criminal courts or from Tulsa, the Child and Family Agency. MOVE and MEND - a programme run by the Men's Development Network - are also open to taking referrals from the Probation Service and Tusla but also accept men who self-refer or are referred by other agencies.

I understand that the current programme locations are as follows.

Choices Programme Location	Service Provider	Contact details
Galway	MOVE	085-8748108 www.moveireland.ie/
Sligo	MOVE	085-8748108 www.moveireland.ie/
Midlands (Athlone)	MOVE	085-8748108 www.moveireland.ie/
Cork	MOVE	086-6044047 www.moveireland.ie/
Dublin city centre	MOVE	086-4149591 www.moveireland.ie/
Dublin Tallaght	MOVE	086-4149591 www.moveireland.ie/
Dublin Swords	MOVE	086-4149591 www.moveireland.ie/
Meath	MOVE	086-4149591 www.moveireland.ie/
Limerick/Clare	MOVE	086-4149613 www.moveireland.ie/
North Tipperary	MOVE	086-4149613 www.moveireland.ie/
Kerry	MOVE	086-4149613 www.moveireland.ie/
Carlow/ Kilkenny	MEND	086-8751131 http://mend.ie/
South Tipperary	MEND	087-9156632 http://mend.ie/
Waterford	MEND	086-8167798 http://mend.ie/
Wexford	MEND	086-1075449 http://mend.ie/
Laois/Offaly	MEND	087- 4597626 http://mend.ie/
Kildare	MEND	051-878866 http://mend.ie/
Louth	NEDVIP	042 9359755

Details of the funding provided by my Department to the relevant service providers in delivering intervention programmes over the period requested by the Deputy is in the following table.

Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme Organisation Funding	2016	2017	2018	2019 to date –as at September 30 2019
MOVE Ireland	€402,000	€395,000	€500,000	€387,500
Mens Development Network	€278,000	€272,215	€297,537	€289,620
North East Domestic Violence Intervention Programme	€24,000	€23,494	€36,134	€18,633.50

Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme Organisation Funding	2016	2017	2018	2019 to date –as at September 30 2019
Total Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes	€704,000	€690,709	€833.671	€695,753.50 to date

Commencement of Legislation

341. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the sections of the Judicial Council Act 2019 in relation to the establishment of a judicial council and a personal injuries committee will be commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44976/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Judicial Council Bill was enacted on 23 July 2019. This is a major landmark piece of reforming legislation which provides for the establishment, for the first time, of a Judicial Council comprising all members of the judiciary. The primary function of the Council will be to promote and maintain excellence in the exercise by judges of their judicial functions and high standards of conduct among judges. The Board of the Council will be responsible for carrying out the functions of the Council on a day-to-day basis.

I envisage that the Judicial Council will be established by the end of this year and a great deal of work is underway to facilitate establishment within that time frame. As I am sure the Deputy will appreciate, it is important to establish the Council and its committees in a legally robust manner. These timelines are challenging but are on track to be met.

Committees of the Judicial Council will be established by the Council having regard to the timelines set out in the Judicial Council Act 2019. The Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee is to be established no later than 3 months after the first meeting of the Judicial Council itself, and that Committee is to meet no later than one month after its establishment. The Personal Injuries Guidelines Committee will be responsible for drawing up personal injuries guidelines for adoption by the Council.

Immigration Status

342. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44984/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy continues to be processed by my officials and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

I am aware that the recent judgment of the High Court relating to continuous residency under Section 15(1)(c) of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956 (as amended) has given cause for concern. The matter remains before the courts, with the Court of Appeal reserving judgement on the appeal on 8 October, and the matter, therefore, remains sub-judice. The outcome of the appeal will have a bearing on whether or not legislation is required. Should it be necessary, I intend to introduce a Bill in the Oireachtas as soon as possible this term.

My Department is doing everything possible to put a solution in place on an urgent basis. At the end of July, I obtained Cabinet approval for a proposed Bill to address the matter and intensive work is taking place in my Department where officials are working with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel in the Attorney General's Office to finalise the draft Bill.

The advice to those who are planning to apply for citizenship is to continue to collect all of the necessary proofs that support their application and to submit a comprehensive application form. Once a solution is in place, if any additional information is required, applicants will be contacted as part of the processing of their application.

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

Garda Data

343. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda, by rank, attached to each divisional roads policing unit as of 29 October 2019, in tabular form. [44997/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and control of An Garda Síochána, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended. The Commissioner is also responsible for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources including the deployment of personnel. As Minister, I have no direct role in those matters. I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

It is also important to note that road traffic legislation is enforced as part of the day-to-day duties of all members of An Garda Síochána, as well as through specific enforcement operations.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the strength of Roads Policing Units on the 30 September 2019, the latest date for which figures are available, stood at 680. There is one Chief Superintendent and two Superintendents attached to the DMR Roads Policing Units and a Superintendent attached to each of the other five Regions. In addition, there is one Chief Superintendent, two Superintendents, one Inspector, one Sergeant and one Garda attached to Garda National Roads Policing Bureau (GNRPB) in Garda HQ.

I understand that the Commissioner established the GNRPB to ensure a consistent approach to road safety and enforcement of road traffic legislation across the country. This is achieved through coordination of enforcement and development of policy based on research and analysis of statistics and by engaging in campaigns in partnership with other State Agencies.

I understand that in addition to the Roads Policing Units focusing on the lifesaver offences of speeding, seatbelts, mobile phones and driving under the influence, they also focus on crime prevention and crime detection. Divisional Roads Policing units work closely with other Divisional units to target known criminals and to disrupt their activities through strict enforcement of road traffic legislation.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the following table sets out the number of Gardaí assigned to the Roads Policing Units as at 30 September 2019, the latest date for which figures are available.

	Inspector	Sergeant	Garda	Total
Cavan/ Monaghan		3	20	23
Clare		2	16	18
Cork City	1	4	27	32
Cork North		6	20	26
Cork West		4	19	23
D.M.R. Traffic	3	9	94	106
D.M.R.E.	1	2	6	9
D.M.R.N.		3	12	15
D.M.R.N.C	1	2	13	16
D.M.R.S.	1	2	9	12
D.M.R.S.C.	1	2	10	13
D.M.R.W.		2	12	14
Donegal	1	2	20	23
Galway		4	32	36
Kerry		2	17	19
Kildare		2	21	23
Kilkenny/ Carlow		2	21	23
Laois/Offaly		3	22	25
Limerick		1	27	28
Louth		2	18	20
Mayo		3	21	24
Meath		1	14	15
Roscommon/ Longford		1	17	18
Sligo/Leitrim		4	19	23
Tipperary		2	24	26
Waterford		1	10	11
Westmeath		2	16	18
Wexford		3	17	20
Wicklow	1	3	17	21

	Inspector	Sergeant	Garda	Total
Total	10	79	591	680

Garda Transport Data

344. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles attached to each Garda collision forensic investigation unit as of 29 October 2019. [44998/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. I am also pleased to have secured a further €122 million to increase An Garda Síochána's budget to an unprecedented €1.882 billion for next year.

Very significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána, including a total of €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021. This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

€10 million capital funding was made available for the purchase and fit-out of Garda vehicles in 2019. I understand from the Garda authorities that this allocation is being used for purchase and fit-out of over 300 new vehicles for operational use this year. A further €9 million has been allocated for the Garda fleet in Budget 2020.

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

I am informed by the Garda authorities that as at 30 October 2019, there are 10 vans assigned to the Forensic Collision Investigation Duty.

Garda Data

345. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the members of An Garda Síochána currently on sick leave; if a breakdown will be provided of the details of sworn members and civilians by county and-or divisions by rank of officer and grade of civilian; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45048/19]

346. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the members of An Garda Síochána currently on sick leave due to injury and-or illness that is directly attributed to the day-to-day work of An Garda Síochána; the rank of each garda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45049/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 345 and 346 together.

The Garda Commissioner has responsibility for managing An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for personnel matters. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters raised by the Deputy. I will write directly to the Deputy once I receive it.

Garda Compensation

347. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of outstanding cases of workplace compensation claims with An Garda Síochána by year in the past five years to date in 2019; the sum paid by way of compensation for cases settled over the same period; if the budget of his Department or An Garda Síochána incurs the settlement amount; and the contingent liability of An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45050/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Síochána (Compensation) Acts, 1941 and 1945 provide for a scheme of compensation for members of An Garda Síochána who are maliciously injured in the course of their duty or in relation to the performance of their duties as members of An Garda Síochána and for the dependants of members who have died from injuries maliciously inflicted on them.

Under the Acts, as Minister I have the responsibility to approve or refuse applications for compensation to be put forward to the High Court, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the legislation. This assessment is discharged by officials of my Department. Before deciding if an applicant should be authorised to apply to the High Court for compensation in respect of the injury, all medical reports submitted by the applicant, together with a report on the incident by An Garda Síochána and a report on the injury by the Garda Chief Medical Officer must be considered. The process of progressing an application for compensation from the date of its receipt to the date it is authorised, may take a considerable period of time. Once an application is approved, it is for the individual concerned to apply to the High Court for compensation.

The Deputy will appreciate that for these reasons, cases relating to which awards are made in a given year do not correspond to applications for compensation received in the same year.

I can inform the Deputy however that the number of applications received under the Garda Síochána Compensation Acts 1941 and 1945 in the last five years are as follows:

Year	No of Applications received under the Garda Síochána Compensation Acts 1941 and 1945
2015	191
2016	204
2017	181
2018	161
2019 (to 30 October)	124

I can confirm to the Deputy that compensation awards are paid from the Garda Vote.

I am informed that the amounts paid under the Scheme and legal costs arising in the period 2015- September 2019 are set out in the table below:

Year	Number of cases Completed	Awards paid (€m)	Costs Paid (€m)*
2015	93	€3.60	€1.30
2016	66	€4.70	€1.60
2017	111	€5.80	€2.00
2018	126	€4.60	€1.80
to September 2019	68	€5.60	€0.81

*Legal costs paid in any particular year do not necessarily correspond to the awards made in that year.

Separately from Garda Compensation cases under the 1941 and 1945 Acts, as set out in the above, certain claims are managed by the State Claims Agency. I am informed by the State Claims Agency that active claims identified on the State Claims Agency National Incident Management System (NIMS) for Garda personnel for the years 2015 to 2019 are as follows.

Year End/Period End	Number of Active Claims
2015	123
2016	133
2017	138
2018	151
2019 (at 30 September 2019)	159

I am further informed by the State Claims Agency that the following table sets out the total amount paid in damages in relation to claims by Garda personnel for the years 2015 to 2019.

Year of Transaction	Total Paid
2015	€864,034
2016	€834,376
2017	€726,982
2018	€1,013,957
2019 (at 30 September 2019)	€237,431
Total	€3,676,781

Garda Station Refurbishment

348. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of Emyvale Garda station further to a fire which caused extensive damage at the station ; if funding will be ring-fenced for the refurbishment of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45051/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): First, I must note that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As a result, all works to the Garda estate involve close cooperation between the OPW and the Garda authorities. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the Emyvale Station was largely destroyed following a fire which occurred in the early hours of 28 October 2019.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that it is engaging with the OPW in relation to works

at a separate property at Emyvale to facilitate the continuation of a Garda presence there. This is being taken forward by the OPW and An Garda Síochána.

Pending completion of that process, I am informed that An Garda Síochána continues to provide community policing services in the town of Emyvale working from a local building on a temporary basis.

I am happy to confirm to the Deputy that An Garda Síochána has said that the community of Emyvale can be assured that there will be no depletion in Garda resources in the area during this period.

Consultancy Contracts Data

349. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45068/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Public procurement is governed by both EU and national rules and my Department ensures that appropriate procedures are followed for procurement activity. Individual Accounting Officers are responsible for ensuring that public procurement is discharged in line with the standard accounting and procurement rules and procedures and that contract prices are fair and reasonable and represent best value for money. Procurement activity is subject to both internal audit within the Department and review by the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General.

The aim of procurement rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

In general, competitive tendering is used unless exceptional circumstances exist which justify an alternative approach. Situations where competitive tendering may not be appropriate, feasible or cost-effective include where due to the proprietary nature of goods or services there is a sole supplier of these goods or services, where annual licensing renewals arise, where specific specialist knowledge is required, where urgency is a factor, or where it has been necessary to extend a pre-existing contract for a period of time pending a tender competition being completed.

The Department must also balance situations where the process of establishing a procurement framework by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is ongoing. As the Deputy will be aware, Government policy is to make use of such central arrangements where possible. Where the establishment of a framework is pending, the Department may roll over existing arrangements without a competitive tender process to avoid entering a long-term contract with relatively disadvantageous terms.

Department of Finance Circular 40/02 requires Government Departments and Offices to submit an annual report to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General for contracts above €25,000 (exclusive of VAT) awarded without a competitive process by 31 March of the following year.

It is important to note that procurement reported under Circular 40/02 is not inherently non-compliant. Rather, it is the subset of procurement activity for which competitive tendering is not considered appropriate under the circumstances.

Details of contracts awarded by my Department without the use of a competitive process are outlined in the Department's Appropriation Accounts for 2017 and 2018. Work is continuing on compiling similar information for 2019 and this will be published in the 2019 Appropriation Account.

In 2018 a determination was made by the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General that the procurement with respect to eighteen contracts reported under Circular 40/02 was non-compliant. As set out in the Appropriation Accounts in 2018, these contracts were extended without a competitive process primarily while revised long-term arrangements or OGP frameworks were put in place.

The Department has reviewed these contracts and is satisfied that while delays in establishing long-term arrangements were regrettable, the consequent decisions to roll over existing contracts were necessary and justified due to the continuing need to maintain the supply of goods or services to clients.

I have requested that relevant agencies under the remit of my Department, and operating under a separate Vote structure (An Garda Síochána, Irish Prison Service and Courts Service) respond directly to the Deputy.

Commencement of Legislation

350. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the sections and subsections of the Disability Act 2005 that remain uncommenced; and the reason in each case they have not been commenced to date. [45084/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Disability Act 2005 has been fully commenced with the exception of Part 2 in so far as it relates to persons aged over 5. There were 2 commencement orders made for the remainder of the Act (SI No 234/2005 and SI No 474/2005), and sections 25 to 29 had commencement dates in the sections.

I have been informed by my colleague the Minister for Health that Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 was partly commenced in 2007 in respect of children up to the age of five. In 2008, the Government at the time decided to defer further commencement. Arising from a High Court ruling in 2009, all children born on or after 1st June 2002 have been deemed as being eligible to apply for an assessment of need under the Act.

Although the Department of Justice and Equality has overall responsibility for the Disability Act 2005, the commencement of Part 2 of the Act, which deals with the provision of Assessment of Need, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

Question No. 351 answered with Question No. 292.

Personal Insolvency Act

352. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to change the date of 1 January 2015 in section 115A(18)(b)(i) of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012, as inserted by the Personal Insolvency (Amendment) Act 2015, in view of the fact that many borrowers have since come off long-term interest-only solutions and only entered into arrears since; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45092/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, section 115A(18)(b)(i) of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 as inserted by the Personal Insolvency (Amendment) Act 2015, refers to the scope of the provision for a debtor to seek review by a Court, if his or her debts include mortgage arrears on their home (‘principal private residence’) and their creditors have refused the debtor’s proposal for a Personal Insolvency Arrangement which includes those home mortgage arrears.

Section 115A addresses, in particular, the so-called ‘bank veto’, where the mortgage lender does not engage with a debtor who is trying to restructure their debts in a way which is fair and reasonable to all parties concerned, in accordance with the carefully-balanced requirements of the Personal Insolvency Acts. In such a situation, the debtor’s Personal Insolvency Practitioner can apply to Court under section 115A. The Court will carefully scrutinise the proposal, and the refusal by creditors, in the light of the statutory criteria set out in section 115A. If the Court is satisfied that those criteria are met, it has power to impose the rejected proposal on creditors, allowing the debtor to return to solvency and, wherever possible, to remain in their home.

Abhaile, the national Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, provides expert financial and legal advice and help to a borrower in this situation, including legal aid for an application made under section 115A. Over the past 3 years, the Courts have built up an important body of case law on the application of section 115A. This has greatly clarified the rights and responsibilities of debtors and creditors regarding the resolution of home mortgage arrears - both in section 115A proceedings, and more broadly for those borrowers seeking to negotiate restructure arrangements directly with their lenders with the help of MABS and other agencies.

Subsection section 115A(18)(b) effectively provides that to avail of section 115A, the borrower must have been in arrears on their home mortgage before 1 January 2015, *or* have entered into an alternative repayment arrangement with their mortgage lender (or other secured creditor) before that date. Thus, the section is not limited to persons actually in arrears on 1 January 2015, and also covers a borrower who prior to that date had entered into a long-term interest only alternative repayment arrangement to resolve their arrears.

However, I can assure the Deputy that this is among the provisions of the Personal Insolvency Acts which are under review by my Department: that review is near completion, taking careful account of the submissions made during the public consultation held earlier and of the changing profile of home mortgage arrears since the enactment of the 2015 Act. I expect to receive the report early in the New Year and to bring proposals for further legislative reform to Government in early course.

Direct Provision Expenditure

353. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the contract and refurbishment costs incurred to date on providing direct provision accommodation at a location (details supplied) in County Tipperary; the estimated future costs to maintain the services there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45113/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The International Protection Procurement Services (IPPS) unit of my Department is responsible for the procurement of accommodation and ancillary services for persons in the protection process.

All accommodation centres for people seeking international protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 39 ac-

commodation centres being operated under the direct provision system.

IPPS contracts for an all-inclusive service, which includes catering services, as well as cleaning, security, maintenance and laundry services. Extensive and detailed information on the amount paid by my Department to each company contracted to provide direct provision accommodation every year up to and including 2015 can be found on the IPAS website www.ria.gov.ie under the 'Contract Values' section of the website. This is in accordance with the IPAS' policy on the disclosure of financial information, which was agreed with the Office of the Information Commissioner.

The Deputy will appreciate that it is not appropriate to provide the current contract value entered into by my Department at the location supplied. Negotiations take place with a number of commercial entities on an ongoing basis with a clear focus on achieving the best value for money in respect of each contract. It is not in the interests of yielding best value for the taxpayer that details of current individual contracts are made available to other commercial bodies who are, or may be in the future, engaged in these negotiations.

On 15 August 2019, the Spending Review on Direct Provision 2019 was published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Review was prepared by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) unit of my Department with key input from the IPAS. For the Deputy's further information, I attach a link to the published Review.

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Spending_Review.pdf/Files/Spending_Review.pdf.

As set out in the Review, it is estimated that the current average daily cost is €44.15 per person for independent centres. The details supplied refer to a centre which comes under the 'independent living model' but as already stated the specific contract value is subject to commercial sensitivity. The refurbishment costs incurred are the responsibility of the contractor.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

354. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of compensation awarded to families and relatives of the victims of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings; the process by which awards can be appealed in instances in which the beneficiary deems the amount paid out to be inadequate and-or unsatisfactory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45139/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is not appropriate for me to comment on individual cases, however the Deputy will be aware that a Remembrance Commission was established by the Government in 2003 and operated a Scheme of Acknowledgement, Remembrance and Assistance for Victims of the Troubles in this jurisdiction. The Commission's term of appointment formally came to an end on 31 October 2008 and the Commission disbursed over €6.5m to victims and their families in this time. On the conclusion of the Commission's term of appointment, special arrangements were made to ensure that victims resident in the jurisdiction who require on-going medical treatment for injuries sustained in bombings and other incidents arising from the Troubles may have certain costs reimbursed through the Department of Justice and Equality.

The payments made by the Remembrance Commission to victims were as follows -

1. An acknowledgement payment of €15,000 to the surviving spouse or, if there is no surviving spouse, to the surviving child or children of a victim who was either fatally injured in this jurisdiction or was normally resident in this jurisdiction.

2. An economic hardship payment of up to €15,000 to: a) the surviving spouse and dependent children of a victim fatally injured in this jurisdiction or whose normal residence at the time the fatal injury was sustained was in this jurisdiction; b) to any victim rendered permanently incapable of working as a result of an injury or injuries sustained in this jurisdiction; c) to a victim or surviving family member who had to move from Northern Ireland to this jurisdiction as a direct consequence of the conflict and who now wishes to return to Northern Ireland; and d) of up to €7,500 to a victim or surviving family member who had to move from this jurisdiction as a direct consequence of the conflict and who now wishes to return.

3. Medical Payments to cover the vouched continuing medical expenses of any victim who was injured in this jurisdiction. The Commission also had the discretion to make exceptional payments of up to €25,000 in cases where the applicant may have accumulated considerable debts for medical treatment prior to the establishment of the Scheme of Remembrance.

As stated, the Remembrance Commission completed its work in 2008 and its term of appointment came to an end so appeals are no longer possible.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted. This scheme was originally established in 1974 following the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. Under the terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of individual decisions on applications for compensation under the Scheme. The terms of the Scheme are available on my Department's website at www.justice.ie. An individual dissatisfied with a decision of first instance made by a single Tribunal Member may have his claim heard before a panel of three Tribunal Members. No appeal against or review of a final decision of the Tribunal is permitted. The Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual cases. If the Deputy or an applicant contact Tribunal staff directly with further details, they will be able to provide any information required.

Legislative Measures

355. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied that there is sufficient legislation to deal with the use of drones to observe properties for the purposes of carrying out criminal activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45143/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, officials in my Department are currently working on the Garda Síochána (Recording of Images) Bill. However I would point out that this will relate to recording of images by An Garda Síochána and does not relate to the use of drones or other devices by members of the public.

Rather, the regulation of drones is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Shane Ross T.D.

In that regard, I understand that the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is the competent Authority for aviation safety regulation in Ireland, including drones. The safe operation of drones in Ireland is currently regulated by the Irish Aviation Authority (Small Unmanned Aircraft (Drones) and Rockets) Order, 2015 (S.I. No. 563 of 2015). I understand that since the introduction of the order in December 2015, the IAA has registered over 12,500 drones and model aircraft. Guidance concerning the current regulatory framework by the IAA is provided on the IAA website.

The Deputy may also wish to note that EU Aviation Safety Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 sets out common rules for the regulation of drones and drone operators, including licensing

and registration. This Regulation lays down detailed standards for all aspects of the design and operation of drones. Earlier this year, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/945 and the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/947 in relation to drones, were also published.

Naturalisation Applications

356. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of naturalisation applications on hand; the number of applications by the country of each applicant; the number of applications received in respect of each country from the oldest application to 2018 and to date in 2019, by country; the length of time applications have remained in the system without a resolution; his plans to follow-up on old applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45160/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Decisions on the grant or otherwise of certificates of naturalisation are made at my discretion as Minister for Justice and Equality strictly in accordance with the legislative provisions and criteria contained in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

While every effort is made to process applications in a timely manner, it is the case that some applications can take considerably longer to process than others. This is due to a number of reasons, primarily the necessity for security checks to establish the good character of the applicant, time taken for appropriate checks to ensure applicants satisfy the relevant legislative criteria and deficiencies in supporting documentation supplied by applicants at the time of application.

It is recognised that an application for a certificate of naturalisation is a complex process requiring a considerable amount of supporting documentation. This is necessitated by the need to protect the integrity of the immigration system and also to ensure that I as Minister have all available information available to me to facilitate making a fully informed decision.

There are just over 20,000 applications for certificates of naturalisation on hand in respect of both adults and minors. These applications are at various stages of processing. The range encompassed by the naturalisation process includes applications recently received by Citizenship Division and those which have been fully concluded and await an invitation to a citizenship ceremony. It should be noted that once a decision has been communicated to an applicant, there may be a delay of some months before the applicant is issued an invite to the next available citizenship ceremony, which every adult applicant must attend and where the oath of fealty to the State is taken.

While the information is not currently available in the format requested by the Deputy I can inform him that applications have been received from 190 nationalities. The top 20 nationalities, which are listed in the table below, make up almost three quarters of all applications.

The greatest number of applications have been received by UK and Polish nationals (over 10% of all applications each) followed by Pakistan and Romania.

Percentage of total applications by Country

Country	Percentage
United Kingdom	11%
Poland	11%

Country	Percentage
Pakistan	8%
Romania	8%
Nigeria	7%
India	6%
Brazil	3%
Latvia	2%
Philippines	2%
China (Including Hong Kong)	2%
United States Of America	2%
South Africa	2%
Syrian Arab Republic	2%
Somalia	1%
Ukraine	1%
Bangladesh	1%
The Democratic Republic Of The Congo,	1%
Hungary	1%
Lithuania	1%
Afghanistan	1%

With regard to the number of applications received in respect of each country from the oldest application to 2018 and to date in 2019, by country, I must inform the Deputy that my Department does not maintain the information in that format.

Of the applications on hand, 31% were received in the last 6 months, 31% are on hand for between 6 and 12 months, 25% are on hand for between 12 and 24 months, while 12% are more than 2 years old. In general, it takes around 6 months for a standard application to be processed from the date it is received to the date a decision is made. The average processing time from the date an application was received to the date a decision was made was 6.7 months in 2016, 7.2 months in 2017 and 6.5 months in 2018. However, I can assure the Deputy that all applications are followed through to a decision.

For applications decided in 2019, the average time from application to decision has been 10 months. It is important to state that the average 6 months processing timeline, as it pertains to applications processed during 2019 has been negatively impacted as a result of the recent High Court Judgment, of which we await an outcome from the Court of Appeal. The exact impact cannot be quantified at this remove, pending a successful resolution of same.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union as well as international level. It is therefore important that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that the integrity of the regime for granting Irish citizenship through the naturalisation process is held in high regard both at home and internationally. These procedures are continually evolving such as reflecting the need to respond to changing international circumstances and also to ongoing service improvements due to the introduction of new technology and work practices.

Each citizenship application is unique and is assessed on its merits according to the administrative and legislative conditions in place at the time of application. The Immigration Service of my Department devotes considerable resources to the processing of these applications. It also operates a dedicated phone helpline and email helpdesk available for all applicants interested

in the progress of their application, details of which are available on the Immigration Service website at www.inis.gov.ie.

Proposed Legislation

357. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the stage of legislation promised by his predecessor regulating the sale for cash of scrap and precious metals; the steps he will take to deal with the growth in the theft of catalytic converters from cars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45188/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001 provides for offences of theft (which would, based on the broad nature of the offence, include ‘scrap metal’ and ‘catalytic converter’ theft), handling of stolen property and possession of stolen property. Maximum sentences of 10 years are provided for in the case of offences of theft and handling of stolen property; while maximum sentences of 5 years are provided for the offence of possession of stolen property.

Irish law relating to the sale and purchase of scrap metal is a matter for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and arises under the Waste Management Act 1996. The Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (SI No 320 of 2014) apply to the sale and purchase of scrap metals and were designed to improve the traceability of such scrap metal sales. The regulations impose an obligation on businesses to apply due diligence measures to ensure the traceability of any waste purchased.

My Department is currently drafting a Bill in relation to the purchase of precious metals by registered outlets from the public. The Bill will create a licensing system for any dealers in ‘cash for gold’ or other precious metals and will require verification of the identity and so on of those selling precious metals second hand. Breaches of the requirements under the Bill will be a criminal offence. It is also intended that the Bill will also provide additional powers to An Garda Síochána in respect of premises where ‘cash for gold’ transactions take place.

Officials from my Department are also actively involved in the Metal Theft Forum, which is a collaborative working group between State stakeholders and industry representatives to improve information sharing around the issue of metal theft. The Forum is chaired by An Garda Síochána and includes representatives from my Department, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the EPA, An Post and a wide range of non-State representatives including telecoms companies, the ESB and others.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

358. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the level of funding provided to each county for youth diversion programmes in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45211/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The statutory framework relating to young offenders and the Garda Diversion Programme is set out in the Children Act 2001. The nationwide network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) is supported by my Department.

GYDPs are community based, multi-agency, crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people who have become involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour.

They aim to support young people to develop and mature through positive interventions and interactions with a local project. GYDPs provide a range of education and training programmes e.g. academic support, IT, employment preparation and specific job training.

Since 2015, GYDPs have been co-funded under the Programme for Employability Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) of the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020.

My Department is pursuing an ambitious programme for the future development of GYDP services, working closely with community organisations and with expert support from the Research Evidence into Policy Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project in the University of Limerick.

Funding provided to each county for youth diversion programmes in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019 is set out in the table below:

COUNTY	2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL
CARLOW	€110,000.00	€112,212.50	€121,942.00	€127,388.00	€471,542.50
CAVAN	€114,131.00	€120,037.00	€127,962.00	€183,081.37	€545,211.37
CLARE	€265,946.00	€219,843.24	€269,118.50	€253,853.29	€1,008,761.03
CORK	€1,446,551.00	€1,426,160.72	€1,470,152.67	€1,844,837.74	€6,187,702.13
DONEGAL	€298,091.00	€307,976.00	€314,239.00	€342,916.03	€1,263,222.03
DUBLIN	€4,167,288.38	€4,393,766.78	€4,434,133.21	€4,528,264.39	€17,523,452.76
GALWAY	€436,699.00	€493,206.77	€468,065.50	€484,138.78	€1,882,110.05
KERRY	€683,261.00	€704,045.00	€716,278.00	€752,630.39	€2,856,214.39
KILDARE	€408,278.50	€513,267.91	€508,142.50	€440,477.94	€1,870,166.85
KILKENNY	€128,500.00	€130,699.00	€127,450.00	€137,230.00	€523,879.00
LAOIS	€225,592.00	€199,002.31	€229,605.00	€332,808.00	€987,007.31
LIMERICK	€997,436.00	€1,056,329.00	€1,036,456.00	€1,082,140.47	€4,172,361.47
LONGFORD	€109,500.00	€113,248.00	€112,761.00	€124,884.26	€460,393.26
LOUTH	€429,968.00	€516,531.76	€496,207.00	€571,115.63	€2,013,822.39
MAYO	€227,000.00	€203,798.85	€213,015.38	€222,823.00	€866,637.23
MEATH	€368,624.00	€354,425.00	€383,132.00	€463,085.00	€1,569,266.00
MONAGHAN	€108,901.00	€113,815.00	€126,279.00	€134,809.00	€483,804.00
OFFALY	€354,234.00	€344,777.89	€356,051.00	€364,800.00	€1,419,862.89
ROSCOMMON	€107,500.00	€115,020.00	€118,784.00	€118,483.28	€459,787.28
SLIGO	€116,500.00	€102,891.22	€115,695.00	€154,409.00	€489,495.22
TIPPERARY	€516,142.00	€554,129.38	€556,184.26	€592,887.05	€2,219,342.69
WATERFORD	€450,984.00	€544,387.34	€553,276.67	€536,232.51	€2,084,880.52
WESTMEATH	€226,657.00	€228,639.41	€227,040.00	€209,257.25	€891,593.66
WEXFORD	€319,968.00	€322,176.14	€310,518.00	€333,727.50	€1,286,389.64
WICKLOW	€236,500.00	€249,871.77	€250,238.00	€198,769.09	€935,378.86
TOTAL	€12,854,251.88	€13,440,257.98	€13,642,725.68	€14,535,048.97	€54,472,284.53

Garda Resources

359. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí attached to the Garda commercial vehicle unit; and the number of Garda vehicles attached to the unit in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019. [45257/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. I am also pleased to have secured an overall increase of €122 million to in-

crease An Garda Síochána's budget for 2020 to an unprecedented €1.882 billion for next year.

Very significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána, including a total of €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021. €10 million capital funding has been made for the purchase and fit-out of Garda vehicles in 2019. I understand from the Garda authorities that this allocation is being used for purchase and fit-out of over 300 new vehicles for operational use this year. A further €9 million capital funding has been allocated for the Garda fleet in Budget 2020.

This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime. As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the deployment of personnel and the allocation of resources, including Garda vehicles. As Minister, I have no role in these matters. I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently six Gardaí assigned to the Commercial Vehicle Unit, which forms part of the DMR Roads Policing Unit. This figure has remained the same over the years 2017-2018.

I am further informed that there are no official vehicles permanently assigned to the Commercial Vehicle Unit. Garda members have access to the entire fleet assigned to the DMR Roads Policing Division, currently consisting of 19 Garda Cars/SUVs and three 4x4 jeeps.

Garda Deployment

360. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of additional gardaí attached to DMR north that have been trained as divisional asset profilers during 2018 and to date in 2019. [45258/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) is a multi-agency statutory body established under the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996. Its primary objective is to identify the proceeds of criminal activities and deprive people of the benefits of such criminal proceeds. The CAB operates nationally and is supported in its work by a network of over 425 trained asset profilers. These asset profilers work hand-in-hand with local Garda management and communities and I am pleased to say this has proved extremely effective.

I am informed that the Criminal Assets Bureau conducts training courses for Asset Profilers twice per year.

For the most part Asset Profilers are members of An Garda Síochána from local divisions and from special units. In addition, a small number have been trained from Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that a total of 14 Garda members in the DMR North Division have been trained as Asset Profilers from 1 January 2018 to date. I am further informed that there are currently 22 Asset Profilers in the DMR North Division.

Visa Applications

361. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of short stay C visa applications awaiting a decision; and the expected waiting period from submitting an application to the decision date. [45259/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Decisions regarding the granting or refusal of short stay C visas, primarily tourist or visit visas, are made in a number of Visa Offices overseas, in the Immigration Service Visa Office in Dublin, and at Embassies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which process certain visa applications under delegated sanction from my Department.

The processing times for visa decisions are published on the Visa pages of each Visa Office and Embassy website. As of 25 October 2019, the Dublin Visa Office was processing tourist/visit visa applications received in Dublin on 1 October 2019. Processing times for other Visa Offices overseas and for Embassies will vary but are generally between 3 and 6 weeks at this time, with many applications processed inside those timeframes, depending on travel dates.

I am informed that there has been an increase in the number of visa applications across most categories, in line with increased economic activity generally. Notwithstanding this, processing times are on a par with, and in many cases, are better than the same time last year.

The business target for processing ‘short-stay C’ visas is within eight weeks (current processing time in Dublin for most categories is within four weeks). However, the processing time at each office and location worldwide is determined by a number of factors such as the volume and complexity of applications, whether investigation is required or not, individual circumstances, peak application periods, seasonal factors, and the resources available. While every effort is made to process applications as quickly as possible, processing times inevitably vary as a result.

It has not been possible in the time available to ascertain the number of applications awaiting a decision in every processing centre.

The Deputy can be assured that every effort is made to keep processing times to a minimum, and a number of measures have been put in place to deal with the increased demand for visas to come to Ireland. This has included the assignment of additional staff to deal with applications, and more generally the streamlining of visa processes where possible. The position in this regard is being kept under review.

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

Question No. 362 answered with Question No. 292.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

363. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda stations not connected to the PULSE system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45322/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There has been an unprecedented level of investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. An allocation of €1.76 billion was provided to An Garda Síochána for 2019. I am also pleased to have secured a further €122 million to increase An Garda Síochána's budget to an unprecedented €1.882 billion for next year. Very significant capital investment is also being made, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. Furthermore, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources, including ICT resources and the networking of Garda stations, are matters for the Commissioner in light of availability of resources and identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that broadband networks and services are used to connect stations to the Garda network for official purposes. All of the connections to the Garda stations are managed in the telecommunications branch of An Garda Síochána to ensure the speed of the network connection meets the requirements of the particular location.

As at the 24 October 2019 there were 565 Garda stations in the State. I am informed by An Garda Síochána that the number which are networked can vary but that as at 24 October, 519 of these stations are fully networked.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that any member attached to a currently unconnected station can access PULSE at their local district station. Members in non-networked locations can also contact the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) or an associated networked station if required.

I am further advised by the Garda authorities that options for providing members attached to those remaining stations not yet networked with local access to Garda ICT services are actively being explored. This includes an assessment of the availability or otherwise of local broadband services and/or the provision of mobile technology.

Gambling Legislation

364. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress of the gambling control Bill; the stage it is now at; when the Bill will be enacted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45323/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Government has indicated on a number of occasions that it recognises the need to proceed with comprehensive reform of our outdated gambling licensing and regulation.

On 10 January, 2018, the Government approved the updating of the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill. The proposed updating follows on from the review work undertaken in the Department of Justice and Equality and from the consultations held with interested stakeholders. The Government also approved the concept of the establishment of a new gambling regulatory authority as an independent statutory body operating under the auspices of the Department of Justice and Equality.

The proposals in the General Scheme were reviewed by the Inter-Departmental Working Group on the Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling. The Group's Report was approved and published by the Government on 20 March 2019. The Report contained a number of sig-

nificant recommendations concerning all aspects of gambling activity. In particular, it recommended that future responsibility for licensing and regulation of all forms of gambling, including online gambling, rest with a proposed new gambling regulatory authority.

I hosted a major seminar on the future licensing and regulation of gambling at Farmleigh House on 15 May 2019, bringing together a large number of interested and concerned stakeholders to discuss the Report of the Working Group and further developments.

Work on revising the revised General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill is underway in my Department. This is a complex area and we must be certain that any reforms will be achievable and effective. At the time of publication of the Working Group Report, An Taoiseach indicated that work on revising legislation, taking account of the Working Group's recommendations, would likely take a period of about 18 months to bring to completion.

Separately, I have brought forward the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2019, an interim reform measure to amend the 1956 Gaming and Lotteries Act. I hope that Report Stage of the Bill can be scheduled in the House as soon as possible.

Legal Aid Service Data

365. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that have received civil legal aid from the Legal Aid Board since 1 October 2018 in order to proceed with claims of discrimination under equality legislation against licensed premises; the number of cases that were successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45341/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The provision of civil legal aid in the State is delivered by the Legal Aid Board pursuant to the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2017.

I have had enquiries made with the Legal Aid Board on behalf of the Deputy. They have informed me that a small number of such applications for legal services were received during the time period in question but were not pursued by the applicants and the files were subsequently closed.

It follows therefore that, from 1 October, 2018 to 4 November, 2019 no persons received civil legal aid from the Legal Aid Board in order to proceed with claims of discrimination under equality legislation against licensed premises.

Drug Treatment Programmes Data

366. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners on methadone treatment in each prison nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45384/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that it provides a health care service for prisoners with addictions in a structured, safe and professional basis in line with international best practice. The Irish Prison Service continues to be committed to and predominantly involved with the National Drugs Strategy in partnership with community colleagues and organisations.

I am further informed that as of 31 October 2019, the following is a breakdown of prisoners

in receipt of methadone across the prison estate.

Prison	31 Oct 2019	% of population
Castlerea	18	6.25%
Limerick	32	13.1%
Cork	41	13.7%
Cloverhill	119	31.5%
Wheatfield	111	22.2%
Midlands	80	9.4%
Portlaoise	9	3.9%
Dochas	69	46.3%
Mountjoy	190	27.6%
Total	669	16.7%

Finally I am informed that whilst prescribing levels for methadone have fluctuated over the past 3 years, the profile of the numbers of prisoners availing of the different treatment options - i.e. detoxification, maintenance or stabilisation - has remained consistent, with 35% availing of detoxification, 64% availing of maintenance and 1% availing of the stabilisation programme.

Garda Vetting

367. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average waiting time for a person going through the Garda vetting process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45386/19]

368. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí assigned to the administrative duties of Garda vetting within An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45387/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 and 368 together.

My Department has no role in the processing of individual vetting applications. The Garda National Vetting Bureau is led by the Chief Bureau Officer (Superintendent). There are also five Sergeants attached to the Bureau, in addition to its complement of Garda Staff personnel. The Garda authorities have informed me, as of 30 September 2019, there are 145 Garda staff working in the Garda National Vetting Bureau.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the average turnaround time is five working days for 80% of applications received from organisations utilising the eVetting system.

I am further informed that all Garda vetting applications are processed on a first come, first served basis in chronological order from date of receipt. This is with a view to observing equity and fairness in respect of all vetting subjects. I understand that the Vetting Bureau works to ensure that the processing time for vetting applications is kept to the minimum necessary in order to ensure that the statutory obligation to receive a vetting disclosure prior to permitting any person to undertake relevant work or activities on behalf of an organisation can be facilitated without undue delay.

I am informed that in respect of certain applications, it is necessary for the Vetting Bureau to conduct further enquiries; for example to confirm information provided by the applicant with external bodies. The time required to receive such information may be outside of the control

of the Vetting Bureau. In such instances, processing times may be significantly longer than the average.

Individual applicants can track the process of their application online using the e-vetting tracking system, details of which are contained in the email received by applicants when completing their application online.

Legal Services Regulation

369. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to tackle the lack of regulation of immigration consultants that purport to provide legal advice to persons seeking asylum or residency here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45470/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Immigration Service of my Department has no role in the regulation of immigration consultants in what is a private arrangement between an applicant and any person they wish to engage to advise them. There are no current plans to introduce a system of regulation; however, the matter will be kept under review.

I understand that a significant number of such consultants operate outside of the jurisdiction. Accordingly, the policy of the Immigration Service is that it only deals with the applicant or their legal representative who has written authority to act on the applicant’s behalf. The Immigration Service does, of course, receive applications or representations made by immigration consultants on behalf of applicants, but treats them as if they had been received directly from the applicant and accordingly corresponds directly with the applicant concerned and in accordance with Data Protection Regulations.

It should also be noted that the provision of legal services by legal practitioners in the State is regulated by the relevant provisions of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 and the Solicitors’ Acts, respectively. It is an offence for unqualified persons to provide such legal services or to pretend to be legal practitioners under the provisions concerned.

Question No. 370 answered with Question No. 285.

Insurance Fraud

371. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a Garda unit will be established to tackle fraudulent insurance claims arising from the report by the Cost of Insurance Working Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45570/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. The Deputy will appreciate that the Commissioner is solely responsible for the allocation of personnel as well as organisational matters including the nature/number of Garda units involved in investigating any given criminal matter, including insurance fraud, and the resourcing of criminal investigations.

I am informed that the Commissioner is of the view that a Divisional focus on insurance fraud is preferable to the establishment of a centralised investigation unit. This approach is aligned with the Divisional-focused Garda model. It is the intention of the Commissioner that the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) will guide Divisions and provide train-

ing in the investigation of insurance fraud.

The Deputy will be aware that the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) specifically called for An Garda Síochána to explore the potential for further cooperation between it and the insurance sector in relation to insurance fraud investigation. An industry-funded Garda insurance fraud unit was one option considered in this regard. While the Commissioner has indicated that he does not support industry funding of Garda units, he is open to considering other industry-funded proposals to combat insurance fraud.

More recently, each Garda Síochána Division has been requested to provide information regarding the extent of insurance-related fraud. This information is being examined at the GNECB and will be utilised to determine investigative activity, which will be undertaken under *Operation Coatee*.

Operation Coatee was launched in April 2019, its focus being the prevention of insurance-related fraud and associated crimes on a coordinated basis throughout Ireland. In circumstances where insurance fraud has already occurred, *Operation Coatee* is designed to maximise the prospect of identifying suspected culprits, and, where possible and appropriate, to initiate criminal proceedings.

A 'day of action' was undertaken at the commencement of *Operation Coatee* on 24 April 2019. The Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) engaged in operational activity associated with an investigation relating to over 20 insurance claims which have been made and which, in some cases, have already involved payment being made to claimants. Arising from the 'day of action', 6 high-value cars and jewellery with a value in excess of €300,000 were seized, along with a substantial amount of documentation and financial records. The evidence seized continues to be analysed. I understand that on 15 October, Gardaí arrested 5 individuals by way of follow-up to searches conducted on 24 April and investigations are ongoing.

Enterprise Data

372. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new business start-ups by gender based on the latest EUROSTAT and global data here; the corresponding EU rates in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44213/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have a longstanding focus on seeing an increase in the numbers of women in business and women becoming entrepreneurs. As recognised in Future Jobs, increasing female participation is a vital way to grow the diversity and strength of our indigenous business sector.

My Department is leading the way in providing a variety of programmes through its agencies to increase the number of women starting businesses and assisting them at every stage, from potential business leaders to women growing their businesses. My Department published the first National Entrepreneurship Policy Statement in 2014. Action 19 of the policy statement is to promote female entrepreneurship through identification and promotion of female role models, targeted events and awards, support for female entrepreneur networks and promotion of a dedicated area on corporate websites.

Enterprise Ireland have been at the forefront of examining the variance in the female to male ratio of start-ups and have put in place measures to address the imbalance. The Competitive Start Fund (CSF) for Female Entrepreneurs aims to support early stage start-ups. The establishment of this programme has resulted in a spill-over effect with increased female participation in

other EI programmes. In 2012, just eight percent of the 97 High-Potential Start Ups (HPSUs) were female-led. However, 22 per cent of HPSU approvals went to female-led companies in 2018 and 22% of CSF approvals were for companies led by female entrepreneurs.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are actively engaged in encouraging and inspiring an increase in female-led businesses through initiatives such as the annual National Women's Enterprise Day and the Women in Business Networks. An important aspect of the networking programme is the promotion of successful female entrepreneurs as role models and the use of mentoring and networking opportunities which aims to build confidence of newly emerging female entrepreneurs and women operating established businesses. In 2018 the network of Local Enterprise Offices across the country provided training to 21,859 female entrepreneurs (an 18% increase on 2017 figures) and mentoring to 4,565 female entrepreneurs (an increase of 19% on 2017 figures).

I am aware that the GEM Report for 2018 notes the rate of early stage entrepreneurial activity increased among women in Ireland in 2018 and remained stable for men. The rate of early stage entrepreneurial activity is well above European norm for both men and women in Ireland. In most countries more men than women are early stage entrepreneurs. The ratio in Ireland continues to narrow as more women become entrepreneurs (1.6:1). Ireland is now ranked 6th across Europe in this regard. The rate at which women aspire to start a business in Ireland also increased in 2018. The ratio of male to female owner-managers of established businesses is higher (1.8:1) than it is among early stage entrepreneurs (1.6:1), but the gap is narrowing as the female rate is increasing.

To ensure we do everything to narrow this gap further, my Department and its Agencies continue to shine a light on the promotion of female entrepreneurship. I have asked Enterprise Ireland to review and bring forward a new Female Entrepreneurship Strategy by the end of this year.

Over the past number of months there has been wide ranging consultation undertaken with key stakeholders. An in-depth review of current research has been carried out through meeting female entrepreneurs at all stages of development via focus groups and one to one interview.

The main challenges identified can be broadly categorised into three areas:

- Pipeline (of future female entrepreneurs)
- Female founded Start Ups (High Potential Start Ups)
- Scaling of female led enterprises.

In developing this new strategy, consideration is also being given to encompassing the broader entrepreneurship agenda, to target ambitious female led companies to scale in international markets as well as continuing to focus on increasing female founded HPSUs.

Across Government, my Department is supporting the newly formed "Balance for Better Business" initiative, led by my colleague Minister Staunton. This initiative was launched in July this year and will examine the gender mix at the governance and senior management levels in companies, as well as the issues that arise in connection with the appointment of directors and senior management.

Dr Orlaigh Quinn, Secretary General of my Department, is one of the leaders on this group alongside Martin Shanahan, chief executive of IDA Ireland and Julie Sinnamon, chief executive of Enterprise Ireland. It will engage with companies to make the case for change and will report annually on its progress.

I and my Department and its Agencies will continue to advocate and promote the importance of increasing representation of our female entrepreneurs amongst Ireland's business ecosystem.

Brexit Preparations

373. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans for an economic impact assessment of the current withdrawal treaty on trade and other economic metrics under the auspices of her Department and agencies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44268/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In 2018 my Department published a comprehensive, independent expert study undertaken by Copenhagen Economics.

This report examines the implications of Brexit for the Irish economy and trade and quantifies the impact of possible new barriers to trade which might emerge as a result of Brexit. The study also provides analysis of the likely impact of Brexit on key sectors of the Irish economy and considers a range of possible Brexit scenarios.

This analysis was undertaken on the basis of no policy action being taken – this of course, is not the case given the extent of mitigation actions being taken by Government and firms across all sectors of the economy.

All of the scenarios examined produce a result that is less favourable than a non-Brexit scenario. The scenarios considered reflected 4 of the possible outcomes from the future relationship – an EEA scenario, a Free Trade Agreement, a Customs Union, or a worst-case WTO scenario.

Regardless of the scenario modelled, the Irish economy is still expected to record strong, positive growth out to 2030. Brexit has a dampening impact, however, resulting in a lower growth rate than would otherwise have occurred.

The WTO scenario would have the most negative impact on the Irish economy. However, the economy is still projected to grow even under such a scenario, by 2030 GDP is expected to be 7 per cent lower than would otherwise have been the case.

An EEA-like scenario would be least harmful – GDP in 2030 being 2.8 per cent lower than if Brexit had not happened.

The Customs Union scenario is more damaging than the EEA scenario (with GDP estimated to be 4.3 per cent lower in 2030 than would otherwise be the case). This scenario would not remove all tariffs/quotas (i.e. some tariffs on agri-food products would remain) and does not make any provision for services access or ensure regulatory convergence.

The FTA scenario used in the model reflects the average of all existing EU FTAs. Resulting in GDP being 4.3 per cent below baseline in 2030. The more comprehensive an FTA that might be agreed between the EU and UK, the lower the loss in GDP.

Since the Copenhagen Report was finalised, negotiations have progressed. The Withdrawal Agreement and the Declaration on the Future Relationship texts agreed between the EU and UK, and which are before the UK Parliament at present, anticipate the conclusion of an ambitious Free Trade Agreement.

Based on the type of relationship envisaged, my Department is currently working with Co-

penhagen Economics to update the previous modelling exercise, to take account of the parameters the Declaration sets out.

Of course, all of the specific provisions of an FTA will be a matter for detailed and complex negotiations between the Union and the UK, and we cannot be certain of the time this will take.

What we know is that while the Declaration aims to minimise the increase in trade costs resulting from Brexit, it acknowledges that there are constraints regarding how low this cost minimisation can go.

I expect the results of the current economic modelling work to be available early next year.

Visa Applications

374. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of a work visa for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44372/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that a Critical Skills Employment Permit issued for the person concerned (details supplied) on 1st November 2019.

Job Losses

375. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the actions she has taken to protect jobs at a company (details supplied); the supports which will be put in place for employees that will be made redundant; if she has spoken with the management of the company regarding the job losses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44398/19]

382. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the date on which her attention was first drawn to potential job losses at a company (details supplied); when the attention of her officials and the IDA were first drawn to job losses; the dates on which the company informed the IDA, her Department or her office of potential job losses being considered; the dates on which the early warning system in her Department first flagged that jobs were under threat at the company; the date of all meetings held in 2018 and to date in 2019 with either the IDA, her officials or company representatives regarding potential job losses at the company in tabular form; the actions taken from the first time the attention of her Department and the IDA was first drawn to job losses; the actions taken to mitigate this from occurring; and if the company cited global competitiveness concerns as a factor in considering the job losses. [44586/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 375 and 382 together.

The announcement by Molex that it will close its facility in Shannon is a source of significant regret and disappointment. I understand fully how important an employer this company has been to the area and the role it has played in supporting jobs and enterprise in the Mid-West.

The IDA first learnt of the decision by the firm to cease operating in Shannon on 21 October. My Department was informed immediately afterwards by the Agency through the Early Warning System. We unfortunately had no other prior notice of the company's intentions.

Our immediate concern was of course for the workers and families who stood to be impacted. We were therefore determined to act as swiftly as possible to address the closure and help mitigate, as much as possible, its consequences for the employees and the Shannon region. I also spoke with the CEO of the company on 22 October, who explained that the company's decision was irreversible.

On 23 October I travelled to Shannon, together with Minister of State Breen, to convene a meeting of key stakeholders. This included representatives from the State's principal enterprise agencies, Government Departments, Clare County Council, Third Level institutions and the local business community. Our collective focus was to determine how best to respond and to assist those employees who would be impacted by the closure.

Following that meeting, an action plan was agreed with Molex to support the skill development needs of its workers and to help them find alternative employment. Many of those impacted have valuable skills and experience and the IDA, together with other stakeholders, will be drawing the attention of potential employers to their availability. The IDA will also be working separately to market the facility to prospective investors and to find new investment for the area.

Looking further ahead, we will need – as was collectively agreed at the stakeholder meeting – to ensure we create new opportunities across the wider Mid-West region that can help offset many of these job losses. The Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan – which was launched earlier this year – will be a critical tool in that respect.

While the Molex closure undeniably represents a significant blow for Shannon and the wider area, it remains the case that the Mid-West is performing well in economic terms. The region has seen significant investment in the last three years and key employers include many large-scale manufacturing employers such as Beckton Dickinson, Edwards Lifesciences, Analog Devices, Johnson and Johnson, Regeneron, Stryker and Zimmer. We are therefore optimistic that further new opportunities can be created for the area in the time ahead.

It is also important to acknowledge, in this context, that the Molex closure is purely the result of a decision by the company to discontinue certain product lines that are manufactured in Ireland. It has nothing to do with the competitiveness of our economy or the skills of our workforce. The company has made that fully clear itself.

Company Registration

376. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the process and details of the requirement for new companies to register with the Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of companies and industrial and provident societies; if companies must register with the latter in addition to the Companies Registration Office. [44399/19]

377. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the administrative burden associated with SMEs having to register twice with two company registers as per correspondence (details supplied); and her further views on the proposals set out with respect to registration and a direct helpline for support on the matter. [44400/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 376 and 377 together.

From November 2016, companies have been obliged to obtain and hold adequate, accurate and current information in respect of the natural persons who are their beneficial owners/controllers.

Under S.I. No. 110 of 2019, as made by the Minister for Finance, the Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies (RBO) is the central repository of such information held by companies and industrial and provident societies.

The RBO is a requirement of the EU's Fourth Anti-Money Laundering Directive (4AMLD) and is designed to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing. The purpose of collecting data on the beneficial owners of companies is to identify the natural persons who are the real owners/controllers of a company and make this data available to Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs), state competent authorities, obliged entities and the general public in order to prevent the use of the European Union's financial system for the purposes of money laundering and terrorist financing. It is an EU requirement and part of larger efforts by Ireland internationally to combat money laundering, organised crime and terrorism.

The Department of Finance takes a lead role in the forming of national policy regarding negotiations at EU level on the introduction of Anti-Money Laundering legislation. Irish policy is informed and assisted by the Private Sector Consultative Forum (PSCF), which provides an information-sharing framework for private sector stakeholders and designated persons to regularly engage with public agencies on all anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism issues.

Filing with the RBO is free and is a fully electronic process. Full details on registration are provided on the RBO website at www.rbo.gov.ie, including "how to" guides and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. Enquiries can be submitted by e-mail, although I understand that 90% of enquiries received to date are already answered on the FAQ section.

Newly incorporated companies have a period of five months after the date of incorporation to file their beneficial ownership information.

In order to comply with the EU's Fourth Anti-Money Laundering Directive, the Registrar of Beneficial Ownership is required to validate the data entered in the RBO in respect of each beneficial owner. This is to ensure that the natural person exists, is still alive and to avoid duplication on the Register. As part of the validation process, the Registrar compares the data filed with the RBO against the data registered with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) for that person, using an electronic interface.

Under Data Protection Regulations, the RBO does not have access to the personal details entered by the presenter and as such is not in a position to share personal information on potential beneficial owners and reasons for rejection of submissions. Nevertheless, common reasons for RBO submission rejection are listed on the RBO FAQ section and a contact point in DEASP is provided where companies can check the data held by DEASP for each beneficial owner so that they can enter matching data in the RBO.

The information that is required to be filed with the RBO in respect of each beneficial owner (who must be a natural person) is as follows:

- Forename and Surname;
- Date of birth;
- Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) except where a beneficial owner does not have a PPSN, in which case a Declaration as to Verification of Identity can be uploaded;
- Nationality;
- Residential address;

- A statement of the nature of the interest held by each beneficial owner (e.g. controlling shareholder);

- A statement of the extent of the interest held by each beneficial owner (e.g. controller of 26% of shares in company);

- The date on which each natural person was entered in the company's own register as a beneficial owner;

- The date of cessation as beneficial owner.

If, having exhausted all possible means, no natural persons are identified as beneficial owners, there shall be entered in the RBO the names and details of the natural person(s) who hold the position(s) of senior managing official(s) of the company/industrial and provident society. Relevant entities shall keep records of the actions taken to identify their beneficial owners.

The following details of the presenter making the entry in the RBO on behalf of the company are required, i.e. name, contact details and capacity in which they are filing.

Obligations under S.I. No. 110 of 2019 on anti-money laundering and terrorist financing are legally separate to company law requirements under the Companies Act 2014.

The 2014 Act consolidated all existing company law in Ireland providing a corporate legislative framework that reflects international best practice. The Act recognises the 'Think Small First' principle by placing less onerous compliance and reporting requirements on SMEs facilitating the growth of new companies and associated employment. Nevertheless, limited liability itself is a concession by the State to business, and must therefore be tempered by robust regulation to protect creditors' interests and to ensure this concession is not abused.

Information on incorporation and filing requirements with the Companies Registration Office is available on the CRO website at <https://www.cro.ie/> .

Redundancy Data

378. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on the recent announcement by a company (details supplied) in County Cork; if she has met the company or the IDA to discuss same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44498/19]

379. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when she was informed of the job reductions in a company (details supplied) in County Cork; if there was an early warning system in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44499/19]

380. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she had meetings with the IDA since a company (details supplied) announced a global review of its company in 2016; if the IDA was in contact with the company regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44500/19]

381. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the actions she has taken to protect jobs at a company (details supplied); the supports that will be put in place for employees that will be made redundant; if she has spoken with management of the company regarding the job losses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44585/19]

384. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the date on which her attention was first drawn to potential job losses at a company (details supplied); when her officials and the IDA were first made aware of job losses; the dates on which the company informed the IDA, her Department or her office of potential job losses being considered; the dates on which the early warning system in her Department first flagged that jobs were under threat at the company; the date of all meetings held in 2018 and to date in 2019 with either the IDA, her officials or company representatives regarding potential job losses at the company; the actions taken from the first time her attention and the IDA was drawn to job losses; the actions taken to mitigate this from occurring; and if the company cited global competitiveness concerns as a factor in considering the job losses. [44588/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 to 381, inclusive, and 384 together.

The decision by Novartis to make a large number of redundancies across two of its Cork sites over the coming years is deeply disappointing. Our primary concern remains supporting those who will be directly impacted by the job losses. That is why every form of state assistance will be made available to the firm's employees.

Whilst it does not change the fact that valuable jobs will be lost, it's important to note that the redundancies at the Novartis firms will take place over the next three years: 60 in 2020, 80 in 2021 and 180 in 2022. That does at least provide time in which intensive efforts will be made to offset some of these future job losses through the creation of new employment opportunities in the Ringaskiddy and Carrigaline areas. It is also the case that the employees affected have highly sought-after skills and experience in the competitive pharmaceutical industry. Given the industry's significant presence in Ireland, and its particular footprint in the wider Cork area, we can be hopeful that many of those who will be made redundant should be able to quickly find similar high-quality jobs in the same industry.

As regards State engagement with Novartis itself, IDA Ireland has a close working relationship with the firm, as it does with the vast majority of its client companies. I understand that officials from the Agency had several meetings this year, both in Cork and abroad, with Novartis management. The IDA was therefore both aware that the company was examining the efficiency of its global manufacturing network and that its facility in Ringaskiddy was operating below capacity. Accordingly, the Agency engaged with Novartis to support and safeguard its future presence here, in a similar way to how it regularly works with its clients all over Ireland to help grow their business and employment numbers in the country.

However, whilst there was an awareness of under-capacity at the facility in Ringaskiddy, the first the IDA learnt of the company's intention to make any employees redundant was on 22 October. Once that information was provided by the company to the IDA that evening, the Agency relayed it to myself and my Department through an early warning report. We unfortunately did not have any other prior notice of potential job losses at the company.

I subsequently spoke directly with the company's management. I made it clear that the Irish Government very much regretted its decision. IDA officials also held separate meetings with Novartis since the announcement, with both its management in Ringaskiddy and in Basel, Switzerland.

As I have said, our focus now is supporting the impacted employees and their families. Key State supports include the Intreo service, operated by the Department of Employment Affairs Social Protection. That will help advise employees on entitlements and protections, as well as on re-training and education options. The IDA will be working hard, with both its existing clients in the area but also with prospective investors, to create new jobs in the area.

While it is difficult to be positive so soon after an announcement of redundancies, the reality is that Cork – including the strong biopharmaceutical industry there – has performed strongly in foreign direct investment terms in recent years. Nearly 15,000 net new jobs have been created by IDA clients there over the last nine years. That trend looks set to continue and therefore provides grounds for optimism that new jobs can soon be created to replace those that will be unfortunately lost at Novartis.

Question No. 382 answered with Question No. 375.

Foreign Direct Investment

383. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the actions that she and the IDA are taking to safeguard FDI jobs here and to combat the decline of Ireland in global competitiveness following recent multinational jobs losses in counties Clare and Cork. [44587/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The recent job losses announced in Counties and Cork are very disappointing. However, these announcements are not a reflection of the strength or competitiveness of our economy. It is important to recognise that the overall trend of employment and investment continues to be very positive – in Clare, in Cork, in Munster and in Ireland as a whole – and there have been a number of significant investments in 2019 across all regions. In fact, there are now over 230,000 people employed in IDA Ireland client companies – the highest-ever figure – and last year alone IDA Ireland won 265 projects, compared with 237 in 2017.

Retaining and strengthening Ireland’s reputation as a first-class destination for foreign direct investment (FDI) remains fundamentally important to our economic model. That is why IDA Ireland continues to work closely with international clients, from a range of sectors, to attract job-rich investment from overseas firms, often in the face of increasing international competition for high-value investment projects.

In doing so, the IDA has targeted both new-name investors and increased investment from companies already located here. The Agency has also restructured its global footprint in response to Brexit and other global challenges. This expansion of the IDA’s presence overseas has allowed IDA’s staff to secure new investment opportunities from non-traditional target markets and to further diversify our sources of investment.

The Government is working to ensure that Ireland’s economy is as competitive as possible. We are conscious of the areas in which we need to improve, including increasing the availability of certain labour market skills and investing further in infrastructure through Project Ireland 2040. We have also introduced Future Jobs Ireland, a cross-government initiative with a strong focus on improving productivity. One of the key features of Future Jobs is developing an awareness of the importance of lifelong learning and continuous training and upskilling. That means when economic patterns shift, businesses and workers alike are better able to adapt and evolve.

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

Question No. 384 answered with Question No. 378.

Retail Sector

385. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if in her capacity as chair of the Retail Consultation Forum, she consulted with the membership of the forum in relation to the impact the €175 retail export scheme threshold will have on the Irish retail sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44669/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the largest private sector employer in the country that supports jobs in every city, town and village in the country I understand the importance of the retail sector.

The Retail Consultation Forum (RCF), which I chair, was established in 2014 to provide a platform for engagement between retail representative bodies, retailers and the public sector on key concerns for the retail sector.

The Retail Consultation Forum enables key issues affecting the retail sector to be discussed, with a view to identifying practical actions which could be taken by Government, or by industry itself, to support sustainable jobs growth in the sector.

Brexit has been a standing item on the agenda for the Retail Consultation Forum (RCF) since 2016.

The Government's suite of Brexit supports include preparedness vouchers, consultancy and mentoring supports, tariff advisory services, research on new markets and innovation supports through Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices and InterTrade Ireland. Support and advice is also available from the National Standards Authority of Ireland, the Health and Safety Authority, Revenue, Skillnet Ireland, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, Bord Bia and Failte Ireland.

As set out in the Government's Contingency Action Plan Update (July 2019), the Government has made provision on a precautionary basis for two changes to the operation of the Vat Retail Export Scheme in the Brexit Omnibus Act. This is a contingency measure as it is anticipated that a solution to such matters will form part of a future relationship agreement between the EU and the UK.

The Retail Export Scheme is under the aegis of the Department of Finance, and to date has not been discussed at the Retail Consultation Forum.

I will continue to engage with the retail sector in their preparation for Brexit through the Retail Consultation Forum.

Information and Communications Technology

386. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of computers in her Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44704/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department does not have any computers that still use the Windows 7 operating system and has not had any for quite some time. My Department has a number of procedures in place to ensure that operating systems are kept up to date.

Information and Communications Technology

387. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44720/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As my Department does not have any computers that use the Windows 7 operating system no additional premium payments are required.

Information and Communications Technology

388. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to protect her Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in her Department and the agencies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44736/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department does not have any computers that still use the Windows 7 operating system and has not had any for quite some time. While the use of this operating system does not present a risk to my Department, it has, in line with best practice adopted a defence in depth approach to cybersecurity protection with a combination of technological controls and processes in place.

The computer operating systems in use in agencies under the remit of my Department, and their support and maintenance, is a day to day operational matter for those agencies and not one in which I have a direct function.

Departmental Staff Data

389. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of full and part-time staff employed in her Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44839/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Remuneration of all staff of the Department is as sanctioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for various individual grades in line with Government pay policy.

The minimum entry point of all incremental payscales relevant to staff recruited to my Department, reflect an hourly rate above the current national minimum wage of €9.80 per hour. Therefore, there are no staff, either full-time or part-time, employed in my Department being paid at or below the minimum wage rate of pay.

In relation to the first part of the Deputy's question, there are a total of 917 (872.30 FTEs) staff in my Department, of which 766 are full-time and a further 151 (106.3 FTEs) have opted to avail of the terms of the Civil Service Work-Sharing Scheme.

Departmental Projects

390. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which her Department is conducting its review of the right to disconnect; the stakeholders she has met as part of the process; the person or bodies she has engaged to carry out research on the project; when the report will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44878/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation I understand the importance of promoting a good work-life balance for employees. This is addressed under Pillar 4 of the Government's Future Jobs Ireland strategy. Pillar 4 is focussed on increasing participation in the labour force as this will lead to the more equitable, balanced and sustainable development of Ireland's workforce.

Pillar 4 of Future Jobs Ireland outlines a number of key ambitions and deliverables to help to increase participation in the labour force. A number of these ambitions are centred on flexible working solutions which can offer benefits for employers, employees and wider society in general. Flexible working encompasses a wide range of practices including part-time, compressed hours, job sharing, home-working and remote working. Such solutions allow for tangible benefits for employees including improving their work-life balance. It also provides solutions for those who would otherwise take unpaid parental leave but cannot afford to do so.

There are a number of key deliverables under Pillar 4 with the objective of fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions. These include deliverables such as holding a national consultation on flexible working options, the development of guidance for employers on family-friendly working options, and the extension of unpaid Parental Leave.

A further deliverable under this Pillar is the completion of research on remote working. My Department is currently leading on this research which focusses on understanding the prevalence and types of remote working arrangements within the Irish workforce and the attitudes towards such arrangements. The research will identify the influencing factors for both employers and employees partaking in remote working. The research will also include an international policy review which will consider related policies abroad, such as the 'right to disconnect' in France, in order to understand the impacts of this on remote working.

This research will include desk research, a national employee survey, and key stakeholder engagement. In order to aid this engagement, I held a Remote Working Stakeholder Forum in Cavan Digital Hub on July 18th. The results arising from this event will be included in the final research.

The research will be completed in Q4 of this year and will be published shortly thereafter.

Enterprise Support Services Provision

391. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the support avenues available to a start-up business that will be located in rural County Westmeath and will immediately create five to ten permanent positions. [44926/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) provide a range of supports for the micro and small business sector. The LEOs act as the "first-stop-shop" for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business.

The LEOs can help new enterprises provided the enterprise can become commercially vi-

able. There are three grants available to a start-up business and the LEO can also support a Loan application to Microfinance Ireland (all detailed below).

1. Feasibility Study Grants

- Feasibility Study Grants are designed to assist the promoter with researching market demand for a product or service and examining its sustainability. It includes assistance with innovation, including specific consultancy requirements, hiring of expertise from third-level colleges, private specialists, design costs and prototype development costs; and,

- the maximum levels payable in the BMW Region is 60% or €15,000, whichever is the lesser.

2. Priming Grants

- a Priming Grant is a business start-up grant available to micro enterprises within the first 18 months of start-up;

- Micro enterprises (Limited Companies, Designated Activity Companies, sole traders, co-operatives and partnerships) can apply for a Priming Grant to help them get the business started within the first 18 months of startup; and

- the maximum Priming Grant payable is 50% of the investment or €150,000 whichever is less.

3. Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters Grant

- Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters grants are a support to enable clients to take the first steps in new product, service development or in developing and exploring new market opportunities.

- the maximum grant allowable under a Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters Grant is €2,500. Funding is by way of Grant and the maximum support level is 50% of eligible costs.

The eligibility criteria for these grants is as follows: The enterprise:

- must not employ more than ten people (including the promoter);
- must be established, registered, and operate within the geographic location of the LEO;
- must operate commercially;
- must demonstrate a market for the product/service;
- must have potential for growth in domestic and/or export markets and also potential for new job creation;
- can be a manufacturing or internationally-traded services business;
- can be a domestically-traded business with the potential to trade internationally; and
- must be a business which, on growth, may or may not fit the Enterprise Ireland portfolio.

The eligibility criteria listed above are subject to certain priorities and restrictions:

- priority must be given to enterprises in the manufacturing or internationally-traded services sectors which, over time, can develop into strong export entities and graduate to the Enterprise Ireland portfolio;

- salary support may be offered to unique tourism services projects that are focused predominantly on generating revenues from overseas visitors and which do not give rise to deadweight and/or displacement in the local economy; and,

- with regard to restrictions, retail enterprises, personal services, professional services or construction and local building services are not eligible for grant aid.

Microfinance Loans (through Microfinance Ireland)

- Local Enterprise Offices can work with businesses employing 9 or less employees on their applications to Microfinance Ireland (MFI) for small business loans of between €2,000 and €25,000 (unsecured). Loans for commercially viable proposals can be used to help fund start-up costs, working capital or business expansion. By applying for an MFI small business loan through a Local Enterprise Office, clients can avail of a 1% reduction in the interest rate charged.

Training

The Local Enterprise Office is the first stop shop for information, advice and training regarding starting a business. The training supports are available for all business sectors i.e. local service and retail businesses can avail of this training. LEOs provide a wide range of high-quality training supports which are tailored to meet specific business requirements, please see the LEO Westmeath website for further information regarding training: <https://www.localenterprise.ie/Westmeath/Training-Events/Training/>.

IDA Ireland Site Visits

392. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA visits conducted in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and in each quarter to date in 2019, by county; the number of visits to Galway city and county, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45028/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Regional development is a key priority for my Department. We understand the importance of achieving the best possible spread of employment and investment across the country and we have been working hard towards that goal. Significant progress has already been made, with 58% of all IDA client-supported employment now located outside of Dublin. This figure represents the highest such figure in the history of the Agency. Our aim remains to increase this percentage further by the end of this year.

When it comes to foreign direct investment (FDI), site visits do represent a valuable tool through which investors can be encouraged to invest in regional areas. However, as I have said before, site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as a significant percentage of all new FDI comes from existing IDA client companies. Site visit data is collated on a county by county basis and information on site visits to specific cities and towns is unavailable.

County Galway has hosted a total of 35 site visits as of the third quarter of this year and continues to be a strong performer in attracting FDI. The county has seen an increase in employment numbers with almost 1,500 net new jobs created by IDA Ireland client companies in 2018. The enterprise agencies under my remit will continue to engage with their clients and with one another to secure further investment and job creation for Galway and the West region.

Questions - Written Answers

The table below details the number of IDA site visits per county from 2016 until the third quarter of 2019.

County	2016	2017	2018	Q1 2019	Q2 2019	Q3 2019
Carlow	9	8	7	3	3	1
Cavan	2	2	2	1	3	2
Clare	18	22	13	5	12	3
Cork	49	51	61	17	23	15
Donegal	7	2	8	1	1	4
Dublin	284	327	269	56	90	70
Galway	42	62	54	9	17	9
Kerry	3	9	10	0	2	2
Kildare	8	10	8	3	1	4
Kilkenny	10	6	5	5	2	5
Laois	6	4	10	2	1	2
Leitrim	8	5	6	0	1	1
Limerick	49	42	35	12	22	9
Longford	6	7	5	0	1	1
Louth	24	22	20	10	9	13
Mayo	5	7	10	2	0	1
Meath	8	3	6	1	1	1
Monaghan	2	1	3	1	1	2
Offaly	4	5	5	1	1	2
Roscommon	1	3	3	0	1	1
Sligo	20	18	15	8	9	7
Tipperary	8	8	5	3	2	1
Waterford	17	11	21	8	3	5
Westmeath	36	42	22	6	5	5
Wexford	7	3	3	1	1	2
Wicklow	5	2	1	4	1	1
Total	638	682	607	159	213	169

Public Procurement Contracts Data

393. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by her Department or bodies under her aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45057/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Public procurement undertaken by my Department and its Offices is governed by an extensive range of national and EU rules and regulations, which are encapsulated in the National Public Procurement Policy Framework. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is charged with overseeing and standardising procurement processes and procedures throughout the public service.

My Department has a dedicated Procurement Co-ordination Unit, headed at Principal Of-

ficer level, which provides an advisory service and advocates best practice on public procurement matters internally to all business units. Each business unit is responsible for its own procurement of goods and services. A significant proportion of the Department's procurement is undertaken via centralised framework arrangements put in place by the OGP.

Procurement also features prominently as part of the Comptroller and Auditor General's (C&AG) annual audit of my Department's Vote. In addition, the Department's own Internal Audit Unit, also periodically conduct procurement audits, the most recent one being completed this summer.

In any given year there will always be certain circumstances where a full procurement process cannot be conducted. Typically, such instances are where:

- The provision of the required service can only be sourced from a sole supplier e.g. ICT software licenses and/or support;
- Specialist expertise is needed e.g. certain legal or translation services;
- A timing issue arises as the Department or its Offices await new OGP framework agreement(s) to be finalised for certain goods or services. In such cases, the Department or its Offices, typically have no option but to undertake a short-term extension to an existing contract until the OGP framework is in place.

All such instances are brought to the attention of the C&AG in line with Department of Finance Circular 40/2002 and as part of the Department's annual Appropriation Account. This process involves signoff by the Principal Officer responsible for the Procurement Co-Ordination Unit and also the Secretary General in her role as Accounting Officer. The 2017 and 2018 Appropriation Accounts have been certified by the C&AG. Preparations for the 2019 Appropriation Account have recently commenced.

The C&AG noted that in 2017 there were 8 instances of short-term contract extensions where it was not possible to undertake a full procurement process. The related in-year expenditure totalled €365,000. The services contracted for included cleaning, offsite file storage, office stationery, translation costs, specialist consultancy and legal expertise. In addition, services were provided by six sole suppliers covering ICT licenses and support, telephony services and specialist publications. The related in-year expenditure to sole suppliers totalled €661,000.

In 2018 there were four instances of short-term contract extensions where it was not possible to conduct a full procurement process and these involved in-year expenditure of €310,00. The services procured covered security, translation and specialist consultancy services. In addition, services were provided by six sole suppliers covering ICT licenses and support, telephony, room hire and specialist publications. The related in-year expenditure to sole suppliers totalled €615,000.

Brexit Supports

394. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of market discovery fund grants approved. [45094/19]

395. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Be Prepared grants awarded to date. [45095/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I pro-

pose to take Questions Nos. 394 and 395 together.

Brexit presents the most significant economic challenge of the past 50 years, and it is important that we prepare for any long-term structural and disruptive change that may emerge.

To promote awareness, and supported by a national *Prepare For Brexit* campaign, Enterprise Ireland designed and launched the *Be Prepared Grant* that offers up to €5,000 in support for the costs of SME clients in preparing a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit. As of 25 October 2019, 223 Be Prepared Grants have been approved by Enterprise Ireland to its clients.

A key strategy for Irish companies to withstand current global economic challenges is to diversify their export footprint. Enterprise Ireland launched the Market Discovery Fund with the aim of encouraging companies to expand into new markets by helping with the costs of researching viable and sustainable market entry strategies. As of 25 October 2019, 221 market discovery grants have been approved by Enterprise Ireland to businesses under this initiative.

Brexit Supports

396. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Brexit start planning vouchers awarded to date. [45096/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The “Planning Voucher” is offered by InterTradeIreland (ITI) to companies across Ireland that are preparing for Brexit. Valued at €2,250, it enables recipient firms to obtain expert advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services. There has been strong demand for this scheme, with over 1,727 vouchers approved to date.

ITI expanded its range of Brexit supports in 2019 to include a new “Brexit Implementation Voucher”. Valued at €5,625, with ITI paying 50%, it allows businesses to implement critical changes, thereby making them better prepared to deal with the new trading relationship ahead.

In addition to its voucher schemes, ITI provides a range of Brexit supports and advice through its special Brexit Advisory Service.

To support ITI’s important work in helping businesses prepare for the challenges associated with Brexit, my Department is providing an additional €1 million in capital funding to ITI in 2019. This funding will enable the body to engage with even more firms through its Brexit Advisory Service, as well as meeting demand for other programmes that support cross-border trade.

Brexit Supports

397. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of grants awarded under the Brexit loan scheme to date. [45097/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and which meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged

to provide a fund of up to €300 million over the lifetime of the scheme.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. Businesses can use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet their Brexit challenges. The SBCI assesses the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers using their eligibility reference number. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

As at 28 October 2019, there have been 869 applications for eligibility under the scheme, of which 779 have been approved. There have been 156 repeat applications, as eligibility under the scheme expires after six months. To date, 207 applications have progressed to sanction at finance provider level, to a total value of €45.5 million.

IDA Ireland Data

398. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed by businesses that received support from the IDA in 2018 and to date in 2019. [45116/19]

405. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created due to supports provided by the IDA 2018 and to date in 2019. [45123/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 398 and 405 together.

As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, a central objective of mine has been to create the best possible environment for enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation. Attracting more foreign direct investment (FDI), and supporting the growth and expansion of overseas firms already located here, is an important part of that. There are currently over 230,000 people employed in companies that are supported by IDA Ireland, a number which we are working hard to increase further.

In addition to the general support that it provides to client firms through advice and expertise on investing in Ireland, the IDA is authorised by my Department to provide a range of particular financial supports in the form of employment, capital, research and development, environmental and training grants. These grants represent an important means of encouraging companies to invest in Ireland, particularly in regional locations.

In 2018, IDA Ireland paid a total of €91,046,527 in grants to its client companies. Grant payments however, are not necessarily linked to either the investments won, or the jobs created in a 12-month period. Grants are generally drawn down over the lifetime of a project which is normally over a period of three to five years. Some investments which result in job creation may not be grant aided and some well-established companies may no longer be receiving grant payments. It is therefore very difficult to determine the precise number of jobs created in 2018 and to date in 2019 that are attribute to grant payments.

Enterprise Ireland Data

399. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed by businesses that received support from Enterprise Ireland in 2018 and to date in 2019. [45117/19]

402. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created due to supports provided by Enterprise Ireland in 2018 and to date in 2019. [45120/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 399 and 402 together.

In January, I announced Enterprise Ireland's End of Year Statement for 2018 which saw Enterprise Ireland (EI) client companies creating 18,896 new jobs in 2018. The fact that almost two thirds of these new jobs were created outside Dublin is particularly encouraging. 2018 also resulted in the highest client employment in the history of the agency with a total of 217,186 people employed in companies supported by EI.

Enterprise Ireland collects employment figures annually via the Annual Employment Survey. Therefore, year to date employment figures for 2019 are not available.

Support to client companies is tailored to meet the individual needs of each client company in order to equip them to succeed in global markets. Every EI client company is assigned a developmental adviser who works with them to identify areas that can be optimised and improved. These areas are addressed, not only through direct financial assistance, but also through a wide range of soft supports, such as mentoring and management development programmes.

Local Enterprise Offices Data

400. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed by businesses that received support from local enterprise offices in 2018 and to date in 2019. [45118/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have been making a hugely important contribution to our economy since their inception in 2014. Year on year they have grown their client numbers and increased the job creation in communities across the country. The LEOs are central to the continued growth of small businesses and the success of budding and future entrepreneurs.

The Local Enterprise Offices are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business. The 31 LEOs nationwide are operated in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities. They provide expert training, mentoring and financial assistance to entrepreneurs and small businesses who may want to start, develop or grow their company.

In 2018, the LEOs supported 36,666 people employed in 7,164 LEO client companies throughout the country. There were 3,656 new jobs created by LEO-supported companies in 2018, with an 11 per cent increase in employment in companies in the LEO portfolio last year. The 2019 LEO performance outcomes will not be known until completion of the annual employment survey of LEO clients in Q1 2020.

The LEOs publish an impact report annually, which includes details of employment perfor-

mance and other key metrics and the LEO Impact Report 2018 can be found through the link below.

https://www.localenterprise.ie/Portal/Documents-and-Publications/Impact-Report-2018-/LEO_Impact_Report_2018.pdf

Údarás na Gaeltachta Data

401. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed by businesses that received support from Údarás na Gaeltachta in 2018 and to date in 2019. [45119/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): According to the DBEI Annual Employment Survey, total employment in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in 2018 was 8,326 as shown in the table below. Data for 2019 is not yet available.

Table 1: Employment in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in 2018

	Permanent Full Time Jobs	Part-time, Temporary and Short-term Contract Employment	Total Jobs
Údarás na Gaeltachta	7,625	701	8,326

Question No. 402 answered with Question No. 399.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Data

403. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created due to supports provided by Údarás na Gaeltachta in 2018 and to date in 2019. [45121/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): According to the DBEI Annual Employment Survey and as set out in table below, there were 8,326 employed in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in 2018, an increase of 76 on the previous year. Data for 2019 is not yet available.

Table 1: Employment in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in 2017 and 2018

	Permanent Full Time Jobs	Part-time, Temporary and Short-term Contract Employment	Total Jobs
2017	7,503	747	8,250
2018	7,625	701	8,326

Local Enterprise Offices Data

404. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created due to supports provided by local enterprise offices in 2018 and to date in 2019. [45122/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Offices are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business. Each LEO is a hub of expert advice, information and practical supports.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories;

- Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea)
- Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up)
- Business Development grants for existing businesses that want to expand.

This is the 5th year for employment growth for the Local Enterprise Offices, with a gross figure of 8,007 jobs (net 3,656) created nationwide in 2018 as a result of supports provided by the Local Enterprise Offices.

Please note that the 2019 LEO performance outcomes will not be known until completion of the annual employment survey of LEO clients in Q1 2020.

Further detail on the LEO performance in 2018 can be found through the link below.

https://www.localenterprise.ie/Portal/Documents-and-Publications/Impact-Report-2018-/LEO_Impact_Report_2018.pdf

Question No. 405 answered with Question No. 398.

Job Retention

406. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps being taken by her Department and the IDA to source replacement industries further to significant recent job losses in Cork and Shannon. [45255/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The announcement of redundancies at both Novartis in Ringaskiddy and Molex in Shannon was very disappointing.

My Department, IDA Ireland and the other enterprise agencies under my remit are determined to source new investment and employment opportunities for Cork and Clare that will help offset many of these job losses. The meeting I convened in Shannon with representatives of the State’s enterprise agencies and other key stakeholders was an important first step in responding to the Molex announcement. I will also be working closely with regional stakeholders in Cork through the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the South-West to ensure that we can help the workers affected by the announcement from Novartis.

Our main priority, in both cases, is assisting those impacted find new employment opportunities. The Mid-West and South-West Regional Enterprise Plans – which I launched earlier this year – will be critical tools in that respect. These are designed to support the growth of business in the regions and their implementation will help to create quality new jobs.

Similarly, the IDA is already working hard to identify potential new investors for Clare and

Cork. With respect to the former, the Agency will be marketing the Molex building to overseas firms for when the company ceases operating there. As for the latter, the planned redundancies do not take full effect until 2022 so there is at least time for intensive efforts to be taken to identify potential new investment for the area.

It is worth emphasising that the overall trend of employment and investment continues to be positive for both regions. The Mid-West region saw 1,000 net new jobs added by IDA Ireland client companies in 2018. The region has witnessed significant investment as well over the last three years and key employers in the region include many large-scale manufacturing employers such as Beckton Dickinson, Edwards Lifesciences, Analog Devices, Johnson and Johnson, Regeneron, Stryker and Zimmer. The South-West region also continues to be a very strong performer in attracting foreign direct investment, with almost 2,200 net new jobs added by multinational companies in 2018.

Youth Enterprise Initiatives

407. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the budget allocation and the number of participants for Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur in 2017 and 2018. [45338/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 and 2018 Budget allocations and the 2017 participant data for Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur competition organised and promoted by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in every county are set out in the Tables below. There are no IBYE participants for 2018 as the competition was postponed until 2019 and the associated funding was reallocated to the LEOs.

2017 Participants

LEO	Numbers
Carlow	41
Cavan	31
Clare	36
Cork City Cork N/W Cork South	95
Donegal	51
Dublin City	110
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	34
Dublin Fingal	106
Dublin South	57
Galway	107
Kerry	52
Kildare	60
Kilkenny	31
Laois	71
Leitrim	18
Limerick	62
Longford	27
Louth	41
Mayo	65
Meath	27

Questions - Written Answers

LEO	Numbers
Monaghan	32
Offaly	33
Roscommon	34
Sligo	25
Tipperary	32
Waterford	43
Westmeath	44
Wexford	54
Wicklow	52
TOTALS	1,471

Individual LEO IBYE allocations:

LEO Name	2017	2018
Carlow	73,000.00	73,000.00
Cavan	73,000.00	73,000.00
Clare	73,000.00	73,000.00
Cork City	73,000.00	73,000.00
Cork North/ West	73,000.00	73,000.00
Cork South	73,000.00	73,000.00
Donegal	73,000.00	73,000.00
Dublin City	73,000.00	73,000.00
Dublin South	73,000.00	73,000.00
Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown	73,000.00	73,000.00
Fingal	73,000.00	73,000.00
Galway	73,000.00	73,000.00
Kerry	73,000.00	73,000.00
Kildare	73,000.00	73,000.00
Kilkenny	73,000.00	73,000.00
Laois	73,000.00	73,000.00
Leitrim	73,000.00	73,000.00
Limerick	73,000.00	73,000.00
Longford	73,000.00	73,000.00
Louth	73,000.00	73,000.00
Mayo	73,000.00	73,000.00
Meath	73,000.00	73,000.00
Monaghan	73,000.00	73,000.00
Offaly	73,000.00	73,000.00
Roscommon	73,000.00	73,000.00
Sligo	73,000.00	73,000.00
Tipperary	73,000.00	73,000.00
Waterford	73,000.00	73,000.00
Westmeath	73,000.00	73,000.00
Wexford	73,000.00	73,000.00

LEO Name	2017	2018
Wicklow	73,000.00	73,000.00
National Investment Fund	100,000.00	100,000.00
Administrative Allocation	242,224.99	174,955.25
TOTAL	€2,605,224.99	€2,537,955.25

Departmental Expenditure

408. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 173 of 22 October 2019, the amount of this change that stems from increased pay and allowances; the amount owing to maintaining existing levels of service; the amount for demographic changes; the amount for the provision of new and expanded services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44595/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The current government has maintained its commitment to investment in health services since 2016. Each year the Health Service Executive sets out in its National Service Plan the allocation of the funding received from government for the delivery of health services for the year.

From the following table the Deputy will see the majority of the funding has been allocated to pay cost pressures and maintaining existing levels of service, taking account of demographic changes. These allocations are balanced with new developments seeking to continuously improve the Irish health system and the growing costs arising from pensions and the state claims agency.

2017 saw the commencement of the unwinding of the savings delivered under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009, this combined with other national pay agreements since 2016 has had a significant impact on the funding required to address pay cost pressures annually.

Significant funding is also allocated towards maintaining existing levels of service, however dealing with a growing and ageing population, more acute health and social care requirements, increased demand for new and existing drugs and the rising costs of health technology, continues to pose a financial challenge in maintaining levels of services within the funding available.

Description	Increase in 2016	Increase in 2017	Increase in 2018	Increase in 2019	Increase in 2020
HSE	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Pay Cost Pressures	59	174	278	287	Will be set
ELS/Demographics	401	244	491	254	out in the HSE
New Developments	137	81	196	199	2020 NSP
State Claims and Pensions	139	154	96	107	
HSE Total	736	653	1,061	847	998
DoH	(1)	(2)	58	55	56
Capital	32	40	59	229	112
Total Health Vote	767	691	1,178	1,131	1,166

The increases provided in the Department of Health are predominantly attributable to the

National Treatment Purchase Fund, the Sláintecare Integration Fund and a 2019 anticipated shortfall in Appropriations in Aid.

State Claims Agency Data

409. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid in legal costs to each of the top ten named legal firms representing plaintiffs in medical negligence cases in 2018; the number of cases that payments relate to in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44813/19]

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

I have been informed by the State Claims Agency that the information in the report provided at the following link has been extracted from the National Incident Management System. The report shows the top 10 named Legal firms representing plaintiff legal costs made in relation to Clinical Care claims in 2018 with highest paid totals.

[Report - Legal Firms]

State Claims Agency Data

410. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of claims ongoing by the State Claims Agency in relation to late diagnosis and missed diagnosis in relation to failings in the CervicalCheck screening programme; the number of cases settled; the amount paid out in claims to date; and the legal costs of the cases to date. [44814/19]

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

On a point of clarity, while the Deputy's question does reference late diagnosis and missed diagnosis, it is important to note that a screening test is not a diagnostic test. Cervical screening aims to prevent cervical cancer through the early detection and treatment of pre-cancerous changes on the cervix. Earlier detection can often increase treatment options, as well as reduce the invasiveness of that treatment. It is estimated that regular cervical screening can prevent 75% (or 3 out of 4) of cervical cancer cases. Since 2008, 1,200 invasive cancers have been detected by CervicalCheck. More than 50,000 women with high grade abnormalities (CIN 2 & 3) have been diagnosed and treated, considerably reducing their risk of developing cervical cancer. CervicalCheck has been successful in reducing cervical cancer rates in Ireland - these dropped from around 14 per 100,000 in the period 2009-2011 to 10 per 100,000 in the period 2013-2015. Cervical screening will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer, and some women will still develop cervical cancer despite regular screening.

Also, to clarify the Deputy's reference to failings in the cervical cancer screening programme, it should be noted that the Report of the Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme, conducted by Dr Gabriel Scally, is unequivocal in stating that the widespread non-disclosure of the results of historical screening audits was a substantial breach of trust for the women and families concerned. It caused significant distress and additional suffer-

ing to those affected. However, Dr Scally was clear in his Final Report, published September 2018, that the Inquiry was satisfied with the quality management processes in the labs contracted by CervicalCheck.

His report presented no evidence that either the rates of discordant smear reporting or the performance of the programme fell below what is expected in a cervical screening programme. He confirmed that he found no reason why the existing contracts for laboratory services should not continue until the new HPV regime is introduced.

The SCA has provided me with the information set out below in relation to the Deputy's question. This information is correct as at 30 October 2019.

Response from State Claims Agency:

The information contained within this report has been extracted from the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and is as at 30th October 2019.

1. Number of Claims on hand

There are currently 125 claims relating to allegations of misinterpretation by the National Screening Service under active management by the State Claims Agency.

2. Number of Claims Settled

To date the SCA has settled 8 of these claims.

3. Amount paid out in claims to date

Due to the low number of claims, this figure is not published as it could lead to the identification of an individual.

4. Legal costs of the cases

In respect of all associated National Screening Services cases, legal costs amounting to €1,498,426 have been paid. These legal costs include fees paid to mediation services, which is consistent with the SCA's policy of using mediation wherever possible to resolve these claims in a non-adversarial manner. These legal fees also include matters not relating to the areas in which the State has already accepted liability. It is anticipated that much of the work carried out in respect of these initial cases, and by extension the fees incurred, will be applied in resolving future cases that have been notified to the SCA and that this work will not need to be repeated in managing these future cases.

State Claims Agency Data

411. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid out by the State Claims Agency in respect of medical negligence claims for the first nine months of 2019; and the amount the agency has paid out in legal costs in respect of the pay-outs. [44815/19]

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

I have been informed by the State Claims Agency that the information in the report provided at the following link has been extracted from the National Incident Management System. The report shows the total amount paid on all Clinical Care cases from 01/01/2019 to 30/09/2019

and a breakdown setting out the amounts paid in respect of Damages, Expert Costs, Plaintiff Legal Costs, and Agency Legal Costs.

[Report - Medical Negligence]

National Children's Hospital

412. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the carbon emissions specifications of the designs of the new national children's hospital and the new national maternity hospital. [45314/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital. I have referred your question to the NPHDB for direct reply. The National Maternity Hospital query will similarly be referred to HSE Estates for direct reply.

Health Strategies

413. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the commencement of the HSE genetics programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45590/19]

414. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when the review on personalised medicine will be completed; the date on which this will be available to the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45589/19]

415. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his plans to undertake a public consultation with stakeholders on the development of the genetic healthcare strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45587/19]

556. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide training for HSE staff on genetic screening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44667/19]

557. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the estimated number of patients that will benefit from whole genome sequencing; the steps he will take to ensure the adequacy of trained professionals to provide such a service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44668/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 413 to 415, inclusive, 556 and 557 together.

Genomic medicine refers to the use of DNA analysis for the purposes of identifying genetic susceptibility to disease, differentiated drug responses based on genetic profiles, and is likely to increasingly include the application of gene editing. The implementation of genomic medicine in routine clinical care – often referred to as ‘personalised’, ‘precision’ or ‘stratified’ medicine – requires careful and comprehensive planning due to a range of scientific and social challenges. These include issues such as test reliability and validity, cost-effectiveness, health system and workforce readiness, and regulatory and ethical concerns. The application of genomic medicine is a relatively new and cutting-edge field; there are already some therapies in place, and considerable research being undertaken globally, to fully explore its potential applications.

Ireland is well placed for use of genomic medicine; with a relatively homogenous population, this provides opportunities to combine genetic information and health data. Ireland has a strong tradition of investing in genetic and genomic research through the Health Research Board, the Higher Education Authority and Science Foundation Ireland.

The 2014 Donnai and Newman Report commissioned by the HSE, recommended improvements in the governance, management and future development of genetic services. The 2016 Smith Report (Report of the National Genetic and Genomic Medicine Network Strategy Group) reviewed the Donnai and Newman Report and made recommendations for the next steps. On foot of these, in 2018 Acute Operations received new service development funding to begin the process of establishing a National Genetics and Genomics Medicine Network (NGGMN); to bring together all parties within the field of genomic medicine for multi-disciplinary working in a national clinical and research centre. The NGGMN will build the effective governance arrangements that recognises the interdependence between corporate, financial and clinical governance across the service and integrate them to deliver high quality, safe and reliable health-care. Development of this NGGMN will be a joint initiative between Acute Operations and the Office of the Chief Clinical Officer and the recruitment process for a clinical lead is at an advanced stage.

As genomics is a new area of medicine, it is not possible to calculate how many patients might benefit, however it is likely that the specialisms of cancer, and rare diseases will be the among the first fields to benefit from advancements in genomics medicine. However, the demand for genetic assessment and testing is growing rapidly, due primarily to an increased awareness among the public and among health care professionals.

Many rare diseases are genetic in origin and, as such, effective genetic services can have an important role to play in relation to diagnosis and possible treatment. The medical genetics service in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin provides services for patients and families affected by, or at risk of, a genetic disorder. It comprises three integrated units: a clinical genetics service; a cytogenetics laboratory and a molecular genetics laboratory. Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, provided additional resources last year to support the hospital's Department of Clinical Genetics. Investments in staff and equipment to further develop the service is continuing.

The National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 highlighted the growing role of cancer genetics in cancer prevention and cancer care. The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme is working closely with clinical genetics and cancer genetics services in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin and St James's Hospital to develop the services to meet the growing need. Under the strategy, investments have been made in genetic counsellor, consultant and support positions, as well as cancer genetic testing.

I am aware of the significant opportunities and benefits afforded by genetic and genomic research, and in this regard, there are currently discussions underway with my officials. A key objective is to ensure that Ireland develops a comprehensive national policy/strategy, in consultation with stakeholders, which ensures that we both respond to these opportunities and overcome the not insignificant challenges of implementing a genomic medicine programme in a health service delivery context.

Regarding the provision of training for genetic services, as this is a service matter and I have asked the HSE to consider and respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

416. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a heart bypass operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44187/19]

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

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

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

General Practitioner Services

417. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that the north east doctor on-call is not removed from Navan, County Meath even on a temporary basis in view of the fact there are a number of alternative sites within the town that could house the unit. [44188/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Beds Data

418. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the opening of additional beds at Kenmare Community Hospital; the timeframe for the process leading to and including the opening of the beds; the planned staffing measures; the number of beds to be opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44190/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

419. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a surgical procedure; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44197/19]

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

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Hospital Beds Data

420. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the opening of additional beds at a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44198/19]

427. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if additional staff will be recruited at a community hospital (details supplied) in County Kerry to cover annual leave and short and long-term sick leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44217/19]

429. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the reason bed capacity at a community hospital (details supplied) in County Kerry has reduced from 43 to 39; if additional resources will be deployed immediately to return bed capacity to 43; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44220/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 420, 427 and 429 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Strategies

421. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the progress made in establishing a health and social care advisory unit to provide him with the expert advice and support amid planned changes in public health services, including Sláintecare. [44199/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This matter is under active consideration, in terms of the Department's overall priorities and staffing needs across all of its functions.

Hospital Appointments Status

422. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if an outpatient appointment provided to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal at Letterkenny University Hospital will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44200/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Health Services Access

423. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health the reason women in their 50s that are in perimenopause would be refused an x-ray; the reason the 10 day rule would apply in such cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44208/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

424. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reimburse the drug opvido for the treatment of stage 3 melanoma cancer (details supplied); the process and associated timelines for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44209/19]

606. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will enable the provision of a specific medication to patients diagnosed with stage 3 melanoma cancer (details supplied) [44904/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 424 and 606 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

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

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

As outlined in the Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

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

I am advised by the HSE that it has received a number of applications for the reimbursement of Nivolumab (Opdivo). Some of these have already been approved for reimbursement, including applications for the following indications:

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

- In combination with ipilimumab, indicated for the treatment of advanced (unresectable or metastatic) melanoma in adults

The HSE has received an application for the reimbursement of Nivolumab as monotherapy for the adjuvant treatment of adults with melanoma with involvement of lymph nodes or metastatic disease who have undergone complete resection.

In respect of this indication, a health technology assessment was completed on 13 October 2019 with the NCPE recommending that Nivolumab be considered for reimbursement if cost-effectiveness can be improved relative to existing treatments. The HSE will assess this application for reimbursement in line with the 2013 Health Act.

In March 2019, the VHI sent a circular to Oncologists advising them that it was extending cover to a number of new cancer medicines. The decision by the VHI applies only to private care to private VHI patients in private hospitals. It has no impact on the availability and use of medicines in public hospitals, where there is no distinction between public and private patients.

The effect of the VHI decision is that VHI private patients in private hospitals may have access to a medicine that is not yet available in the public hospital system. However, a number of the medicines, or indications, which the VHI has now decided to cover, are at various stages of the HSE assessment and reimbursement process with a view to making them available in the public hospital system.

Psychological Assessments Waiting Times

425. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to see a child psychologist in County Limerick by the number of months waiting. [44211/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Health Services Staff

426. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the embargo on the recruitment of healthcare assistants at a community hospital (details supplied) in County Kerry will be lifted to fill vacant posts and allow the return of staff on career breaks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44216/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the HSE that while there is no national recruitment embargo or moratorium, there is a priority requirement for all HSE

services to maintain, or get to, an affordable staffing level that is sustainable in 2019 and 2020, while also prioritising the delivery of safe services.

In light of this, the HSE have introduced control measures relating to staffing and recruitment (including the return of employees on career breaks) to ensure that they live within the available resources provided to them.

In relation to the specific location of West Kerry Community Hospital, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 427 answered with Question No. 420.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

428. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the status of and the steps he is taking towards the legalisation of access to cannabis oil under consultant prescription; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44218/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that I have recently signed legislation which will allow for the operation of the Medical Cannabis Access Programme (MCAP) on a pilot basis for five years.

Commercial medical cannabis suppliers whose cannabis products meet the specified requirements set out in the legislation, and which have been listed in Schedule 1 of the Misuse of Drugs (Prescription and Control of Supply of Cannabis for Medical Use) Regulations, will be able to supply these products into Ireland.

As yet no medical cannabis products are available for use under the MCAP and it is expected that it will take some time for suppliers to put arrangements in place to have their products made available on the Irish market.

I am pleased to say that there are a number of suppliers have expressed an interest in supplying the Irish market, however it is not possible to give a specific date on which this products will be available for patients.

Pending full operation of the MCAP, and for medical indications not included in the MCAP, doctors may continue to utilise the Ministerial licensing route to prescribe medical cannabis for their patients, should they wish to do so. In line with the Chief Medical Officer's advice, the granting of a licence for cannabis for medical purposes must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

Full information on how to apply for a Ministerial Licence is available on the Department's website.

Question No. 429 answered with Question No. 420.

Palliative Care for Children

430. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health the availability of palliative care for children by the HSE local health office in south and north County Tipperary; the recom-

mended locations for such palliative care for children in south and north County Tipperary in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44224/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

431. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the length of time means are taken into account when applying for the fair deal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44226/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as *Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home/residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. The applicant can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. The home must have availability and be able to cater for the applicant's particular needs.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held. In the case of a couple, the applicant's means are assessed as 50% of the couple's combined income and assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is not counted at all in the financial assessment. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap.

The Financial assessment takes into account any income or assets transferred by the person whose means are being assessed if the transfer occurred within 5 years of the date of first application for State support.

Disability Services Funding

432. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount provided to a company (details supplied) in funding for 2019 in respect of the provision of services and care; if the allocation of the funding is subject to a contract between the HSE and the provider in the context of service level agreements and value for money in respect of service provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44227/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): There was no funding provided directly by the Department of Health. This is a matter for the HSE.

Disability Services Funding

433. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding not spent and-or excess funding remaining at the end of the financial year in respect of a company (details supplied); if funds are refunded back to the HSE or retained by the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44228/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As this is an operational matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

Disability Services Funding

434. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a service agreement between the HSE and a service provider exists or existed in respect of a person (details supplied); if the person is fully or partially funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44229/19]

435. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a case regarding the HSE and a service provider (details supplied); the status of the funding that was provided for a service user in 2018 and to date in 2019; if he will direct the HSE to further review the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44230/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 434 and 435 together.

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

436. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44242/19]

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

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

Occupational Therapy Provision

437. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44244/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Smoking Ban

438. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the annual cost of ensuring compliance with the smoking ban; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44248/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is an operational matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

439. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 542 of 11 June 2019, when a cataract operation will be arranged for a person (details supplied). [44249/19]

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

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

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

Eating Disorders

440. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the amount allocated for the clinical programme on eating disorders in 2018 and 2019; if the funds have been released to the HSE; and the amount spent in 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form [44250/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

441. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of new drugs that have received HSE reimbursement to date in 2019 by the anticipated budget impact of each in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44251/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has operational responsibility for medicines expenditure, thus the matter has been referred to the HSE for their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Generic Drugs Substitution

442. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the volume of uptake of biosimilar prescribing under the best value biologic process by the HSE to date in 2019; the number of patients prescribed biosimilars by treatment type to date in 2019; the average savings per patient compared to the originator drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44252/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is an operational matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Generic Drugs Substitution

443. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has under the best value biologic process set targets for biosimilar uptake across the designated treatment areas; if so, the targets for 2019 and 2020 in terms of both volume of prescriptions and the share of biosimilar prescriptions versus originator subscriptions for the designated treatment areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44253/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is an operational matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disease Management

444. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the key performance indicators that have been set for the hepatitis C treatment programme; the way in which the programme evaluates its work towards the stated goal of elimination of the disease by 2026; the reporting requirements the programme adheres to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44254/19]

445. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the data the HSE has in terms of estimating the number of persons here with hepatitis C; the overall prevalence of hepatitis C here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44255/19]

446. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the spending by the HSE under the hepatitis C treatment programme in 2018 to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44256/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 444 to 446, inclusive, together.

As the HSE has responsibility for these matters, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on these issues.

Patient Safety

447. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the funding that will be made

available to the patient safety advocacy service in 2020; the number of staff that will be employed; and the expected level of demand for the services it will offer. [44258/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Independent Patient Advocacy Service (PAS) was commissioned by the Department of Health arising from approval given by the Government and from recommendations contained in HIQA's Portlaoise Report (2015), and the Ombudsman's report, "Learning to Get Better" (2015). This service will provide free and independent support and empowerment advocacy for anyone wishing to make a formal complaint about the care or treatment they received in the health service and for anyone who has been involved in a patient safety incident. The service will initially be provided for the public acute hospital sector and will extend to the community in 2020.

The funding allocated to the Patient Advocacy Service in 2020 is approximately €1.6 million. The Service, which will be formally launched later this month, currently employs 8 staff including a Service Manager, a Team Lead and 6 Advocacy Officers. A second Team Lead will commence in November 2019. In 2020 the service will expand to approximately 20 Advocacy Officers, 4 Team Leads, a Service Manager as well as corporate supports.

As this is a new service, the service level activity will be monitored closely over the coming months to inform the expected level of demand, and the service delivery model.

Hospital Services

448. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place to enhance multiple sclerosis services at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44260/19]

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

Palliative Care for Children

449. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if there are palliative care beds for children in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44263/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

HSE Staff Recruitment

450. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the recruitment plans of the HSE in 2020, particularly for healthcare assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44284/19]

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

Nursing Staff Data

451. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the number of public health nursing positions being left unfilled in Limerick due to the HSE not releasing the successful and appointed nurses from other roles in order to fill the vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44285/19]

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

Abortion Legislation

452. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that sections 9, 11 and 13 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 are being adhered to in full in all maternity hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44287/19]

453. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to breaches of section 20 notifications under the Health (Regulation of Pregnancy) Act 2018 in maternity hospitals here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44288/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 452 and 453 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, section 9 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 sets out the provisions for termination of pregnancy in cases where there is a risk to the life or health of a pregnant woman, while section 11 sets out the provisions where there is a condition present which is likely to lead to the death of the foetus either before or within 28 days of birth. Section 13 of the Act deals with applications for review of a medical opinion, and provides that where a medical practitioner has not given an opinion or has not given an opinion which would certify a procedure being carried out under section 9 or 11, he/she must inform the pregnant woman in writing that she or a person acting on her behalf may apply for a review of this decision.

Section 23 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 sets out the offences under the legislation. The investigation or prosecution of offences under the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 are criminal matters for An Garda Síochána and, if prosecution is warranted, the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Minister for Health has no role in the investigation or prosecution of offences under the Act.

Hospital Appointments Status

454. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44300/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Medical Card Eligibility

455. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when the new income thresholds for the over 70s medical card will come into force; the application process in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44304/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As announced in Budget 2020, medical card gross income limits for those over 70 will be increased to €550 per week for a single person aged over 70 (currently €500 per week) and to €1050 for a couple aged over 70 (currently €900 per week), and will apply from July 2020.

Determination of an individual's eligibility status is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE) and is made in accordance with the Health Act 1970 (as amended). Applications can be submitted to the HSE either by post or online at <https://www2.hse.ie/services/medical-cards/medical-card-for-over-70s.html>.

Hospital Services

456. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the walk-in chest x-ray service and its recent cessation at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44305/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible

Hospital Waiting Lists

457. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an urgent appointment with the surgical team will be scheduled in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44315/19]

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

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

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

Ambulance Service

458. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE has spent €7 million on private ambulance services in the first eight months of 2019; and the expected expenditure on private ambulance services for 2019. [44333/19]

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

459. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a shortage of general practitioner availability in mid-County Louth; when a review of the contractual terms for the GMS and other publicly funded general practitioner services will be complete; the measures which will be put in place to attract general practitioners to rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44334/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is aware of workforce issues facing general practice, including the influence of demographic factors, and has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice.

These include changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS/GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday. Enhanced supports for rural GP practices have also been introduced. There has also been a huge expansion in the number of training places on GP training programmes in recent years; up from 120 places in 2009 to 192 filled in 2019.

In addition, the recent Agreement on GP contractual reforms will benefit patients and GPs. In return for cooperation with a range of service developments and reforms, the Government will increase investment in general practice by approximately 40% (€210 million) over the next four years. This will see significant increases in capitation fees for GPs who participate in the reform programme and the introduction of new fees and subsidies for additional services such as the chronic disease programme.

There will be increased support for GPs working in rural practices and for those in disadvantaged urban areas. Improvements in the maternity and paternity leave arrangements have also been agreed, in recognition of the need to ensure that general practice is compatible with doctors' family friendly commitments. I am confident that these measures help make general practice more sustainable and a more attractive career option for doctors.

There is also a need, in the Government's view, for a longer-term strategic review of how general practice should operate within the health service, well into the future. Therefore, during the lifetime of this Agreement my Department will lead a strategic review of general practice with a view to developing a new contractual framework which best supports patients and encourages innovation in primary care. This will be a wide-ranging task and it will, I hope, enable further innovative measures to be developed for the benefit of citizens and of course for GPs.

In relation to GP availability in mid-County Louth, as this is a service issue I have asked the

HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to this matter.

Services for People with Disabilities

460. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if travel passes are accepted on LocalLink transport services for persons attending HSE day services; his views on whether it is acceptable for persons with disabilities to pay €4 daily for transport in counties Sligo and Leitrim when the free travel pass is accepted on all LocalLink services in County Donegal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44335/19]

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

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

Primary Care Centres Data

461. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health when the primary health centre for Navan, County Meath will open; the towns still waiting for a primary healthcare centre to be provided; and the estimated dates for the opening of the centres. [44339/19]

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

Medicinal Products

462. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot obtain the repatha injection they have been receiving since 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44340/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this refers to an individual case, I have referred this matter to the HSE for their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Pharmacy Services

463. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the services available at community pharmacies with specific reference to a minor ailment scheme, new medicine service and the expansion of the free contraceptive scheme to be accessed via pharmacies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44341/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I value the role pharmacists play in the Irish health service. As you are aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government and the

Sláintecare implementation strategy contain commitments to expanding the role of community pharmacy in managing patient health in the community.

Work has been done in recent years on wider healthcare roles for pharmacies, including the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland's Future Pharmacy report, on the expansion of professional pharmacy practice. It is clear from this and other work that there is potential to increase the range of both private and publicly funded health services delivered through community pharmacy. Important new services, such as influenza vaccination and emergency contraception, have already been introduced.

To be funded by the taxpayer, new public health services in community pharmacy, as elsewhere, should improve health outcomes and provide value for money and benefits for patients. Any new or transferred services should be based on sound evidence, with matching improvements in governance and administration.

I have discussed these and other issues with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU). My officials will be engaging with the IPU on new fee regulations before the end of the year and the intention is to broaden the discussions to contractual and service arrangements during 2020.

Hospital Waiting Lists

464. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when a procedure will take place for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44343/19]

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

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

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

HSE Staff Remuneration

465. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the status of salaries in the public health service (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44345/19]

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

Ambulance Service Data

466. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances in operation nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44347/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

467. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has to wait 18 months for an operation in view of the fact their condition was diagnosed over three years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44348/19]

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

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

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

Data Protection

468. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the decision on the archive of blood spot screening cards retained without consent from 1984 to June 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44367/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following a complaint made to the Data Protection Commissioner in 2009, the State was found to be in breach of both EU and national data protection legislation in relation to the retention of newborn screening cards without consent.

A policy was developed to review and address the legal and ethical requirements arising for the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme. This came into operation in July 2011.

This policy now incorporates parental consent for the primary use of screening (a baby) for 8 rare conditions. The policy also allows the card to be retained for a specific period of 10 years before disposal. Any secondary use (including research) requires additional and explicit parental consent for that specific secondary use.

A decision in relation to the archive of blood spot screening cards retained without consent (1984-June 2011) is well advanced. There are a number of component parts to be factored in when coming to a reasonable, fair and balanced decision. Firstly we must acknowledge the significant initiatives that have been completed including the public information campaign in 2013 offering individuals the opportunity to request and have their card returned to them and

secondly the deliberations and report of the Forum held in 2016.

We have all learned a lot about the complexities of screening programmes over the last 18 months and the importance of public trust. That is now, for me, the most important influencing factor and as such the decision in relation to the archive must be one that protects the future uptake, integrity and confidence in the national newborn bloodspot screening programme, a screening programme with a 99.9% uptake. The decision must also balance the right to privacy with the principle of consent and ensure we seal the breach of national and EU Data Protection Regulations.

Pharmacy Services

469. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some pharmacies, including a pharmacy (details supplied), have started to charge patients for the use of blister packs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44373/19]

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

Health Services Staff Recruitment

470. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the reason County Waterford with a population of 120,000 is the only county in the south east that does not have a primary care diabetes nurse specialist; his plans to recruit one; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44377/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Ambulance Service Provision

471. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health his plans for an ambulance service centre to be based in south County Meath. [44380/19]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

472. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been waiting a long time for an appointment with a service; when an appointment will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44381/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the servic-

es they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

473. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when the appointment of a permanent general practitioner post will be made to serve the patients of the Cappoquin health centre, County Waterford; the arrangements in place until a permanent position is facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44391/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Cancer Screening Programmes

474. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to support women who are in need of a smear test but cannot avail of the service in their local health centre (details supplied); when a more permanent and reliable service will be implemented at the health centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44392/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Dental Services Staff

475. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to demonstrate that special dentist training is of a high priority during the implementation of the new national oral health policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44394/19]

476. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding that will be released for training in special care dentistry under the new national oral health policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44395/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 475 and 476 together.

Smile agus Sláinte, the new National Oral Health Policy provides the groundwork to transform oral health services over the next eight years. The community oral healthcare services will centre on vulnerable and special care support services, as well as on needs assessment for people in residential settings and others who require additional supports.

The Policy recognises the need for a suitably skilled workforce to provide appropriate oral healthcare across all settings. This workforce will include oral healthcare professionals providing the highest level of care in advanced oral healthcare centres or in secondary/tertiary care centres, as well as oral healthcare professionals providing oral healthcare advice and preventive

care directly to the public in primary oral healthcare settings. A protected educational, training and research environment will be a priority for the implementation of the Policy.

The detail of resource requirements will be agreed as part of the implementation process. The progressing of any measures with resource implications, contained in Smile agus Sláinte, will be dependent on the outcome of the normal budgetary process in any given year.

Dental Services Provision

477. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the avenues of treatment assistance available for a person (details supplied). [44401/19]

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

Autism Support Services

478. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 440 of 5 February 2019, his plans to address a waiting list for the autism services concerned; his further plans to appoint additional staff to the service; his further plans for budget increases for the services; the alternatives available for those awaiting the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44414/19]

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

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

Traveller Community

479. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he sought an allocation within budget 2020 in order to address the crisis in Traveller mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44417/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Budget 2020 announced €39 million additional funding for mental health services bringing its budget to €1.026 billion in 2020. The additional €39m increase to the includes €13m for the continued rollout of new developments in 2020 and €26m has been allocated for other costs, including pay, which will be used to maintain funding and enhance existing services.

New Developments programmes and funding will be agreed as part of the HSE National Service Plan 2020 discussions.

Health Services Data

480. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the ethnic identifier will be implemented across all health and mental health services and collection points and within strategy monitors and research strata; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44418/19]

630. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement the universal ethnic identifier across all health and mental health services and collection points and within strategy monitors and research strata; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45003/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 480 and 630 together.

The ethnic identifier is a code to identify ethnic and minority groups when recording information on a death certificate. This identifier would enable the Central Statistics Office to identify ethnic and minority groups, including Travellers, when collating statistics, including those in relation to deaths due to suicide and could be utilised in the statistics produced by the Central Statistics Office.

The requirements for the registration of particulars of a death are set down on the Civil Registration Acts 2004 and 2019.

Section 41 of the 2004 Act, as amended, states that a coroner must furnish a certificate containing particulars of death to a registrar. These particulars include name and place of birth of deceased, country of citizenship. However, there is no current requirement to enter particulars in regard to ethnicity.

The Department of Justice and Equality published the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021 in June 2017. This Inclusion Strategy is a cross-Departmental initiative to improve the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland.

One of the key initiatives from the Strategy’s themes and objectives is the introduction of a new system of ethnic identifiers to be developed across the public sector to help track progress and/or challenges for the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland.

The Department of Justice and Equality chair a cross-Departmental working group, with involvement from Traveller and Roma representatives, with a view to developing a methodology for the introduction of an ethnic identifier on all data sets to facilitate the monitoring of access, participation and outcomes to services for Travellers and Roma.

The Integration Data Mapping Study commissioned by the working group has now been completed by the ESRI. Many of the findings and recommendations, while focused on integration of migrants, are relevant to the Strategy’s commitment. The report was published in March and is available on the ESRI website. The Integration Data working group has yet to meet again and it is hoped to reconvene the Ethnic Identifier subgroup next year.

When the methodology has been progressed, the HSE and other relevant bodies, in consultation with Traveller organisations and other stakeholders, will work towards a phased, incremental implementation of the standardised ethnic identifier across all health administrative systems to monitor access, participation and outcomes of all groups, including Travellers and Roma, and to inform the development of evidenced-based policies and services.

As part of this wider health initiative, the HSE will review the access and barriers to primary and secondary mental health services for Travellers and Roma, in the context of the implementation of the ethnic identifier, and in partnership with Traveller and Roma service users, carers

and families in order to develop and implement appropriate steps to ensure greater inclusion and continued use of these services by Travellers and Roma.

Traveller Community

481. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to commission a national audit of Traveller suicide and develop a national targeted suicide prevention campaign for Travellers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44419/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Office for Suicide Prevention in the HSE has responsibility for the implementation of *Connecting for Life*, Ireland’s National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Members of the Traveller community are considered as a priority group under the strategy and feature across many objectives and actions in the strategy.

I have asked the National Office for Suicide Prevention to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to these specific requests.

Traveller Community

482. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement a national Traveller mental health strategy with a ring-fenced budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44420/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): National mental health policies, such as *A Vision for Change* and *Connecting for Life*, support a whole-of-population approach to mental health service delivery. The Traveller community is among a number of priority groups identified in these strategies, acknowledging that, while Travellers are eligible to avail of all mainstream public health services, they also have specific needs and mental health services should be delivered in a culturally-appropriate way.

For this reason, in 2017 the HSE committed to the recruitment of nine Mental Health Coordinators for Travellers, eight of whom are currently in post. The focus of these roles is to work within the CHOs to support improved access, consistency and integration of mental health services to meet the mental health needs of Travellers.

The Department of Health also provides funding in the region of €10m per annum, through the HSE, for targeted measures to improve the health status of the Travelling community. These include:

- primary healthcare projects, counselling services, family support programmes and men’s health projects; dedicated public health nurses and related staff; and
- mental health promotion and suicide prevention services in a culturally sensitive manner, to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

In addition, the Department of Justice and Equality’s National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy also details HSE-specific actions. Of particular note is the commitment by the HSE to develop a National Traveller Health Action Plan.

The HSE circulated a first draft of the action plan in March 2019 for consultation with stakeholders, including the Department of Health. The draft is currently being revised to take

account of feedback and is expected to be finalised in quarter 4 2019.

Disability Support Services Provision

483. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if the provision of home support hours for a child (details supplied) in County Cork will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44424/19]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

484. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44440/19]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

485. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44441/19]

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

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

Health Services Staff

486. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether there is a shortage of healthcare assistants in the health sector; if he has met or written to the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation to discuss same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44442/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE advise that they have no difficulty in recruiting this cohort of staff in the public sector, and they further state that many of their services have completed successful recruitment campaigns for Health Care Assistants (HCAs). The number of HCA staff employed in the public system, has risen by +342 WTEs this year to date, and has risen overall by +584 WTEs when compared to the same period last year. Publicly employed HCA staffing levels at end September 2019 stand at 17,433 WTEs.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovations (DBEI) have responsibility for the employment permits list for in-demand occupations (the highly skilled list) and the list for those for whom a ready source of labour is available (the ineligible list). Care workers, including Health Care Assistants (HCAs) are currently included on the ineligible list of employments.

DBEI review this ineligible list on a twice-yearly basis taking into consideration the National Skills Bulletin, and the vacancy review reports, and submissions made to them on the matter. Removal of occupations from the list involves an evidenced based review by the Expert Group on Future Skills Need. The parent Department, in this case the Department of Health, must support any submission for it to be considered during this review. Officials from my Department have assessed submissions in relation to the removal of Health Care Assistants from this list but did not find that recruitment difficulties are solely due to shortages but rather that other factors such as salary and/or working conditions were a factor. As such, the removal of care workers from the ineligible list has not been supported by the my Department up to now.

Disability Services Funding

487. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of a HSE capital bid to redevelop adult day services formerly housed at a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44444/19]

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

Vaccination Programme

488. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reconsider introducing a catch-up provision in the HPV vaccine programme for boys (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44446/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The com-

mittee's recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. It makes recommendations on vaccination policy to my Department. NIAC continues to revise recommendations to allow for the introduction of new vaccines in Ireland and to keep abreast of changes in the patterns of disease. Therefore, the immunisation schedule will continue to be amended over time.

In 2009 the NIAC recommended HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination for all 12-13 year old girls to reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer when they are adults. In September 2010 the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of secondary school. Gardasil is the vaccine used by the HSE in the School Immunisation Programme and is provided free of charge to girls in first year of secondary school.

During the 2019/20 school year, girls attending secondary school can still join the HPV girls only programme with appointments offered in HSE mop up clinics. It must be noted that vaccinated women and girls may still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests.

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

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

- Vaccinating boys in the first year of secondary school provides the best possible protection against HPV infection;

- Boys are already benefitting from the indirect herd protection provided by the girls' HPV-vaccination programme which started in 2010.

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

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

Psychological Assessments

489. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if he will direct the HSE to carry out the tests and investigations necessary before the end of January 2020 in the case of a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that this will be necessary if a school is to make an application for a special needs assistant in February 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44465/19]

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

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

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

490. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a speech and language appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44472/19]

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

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

Health Services Funding

491. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) will receive funding under Sláintecare in 2020. [44480/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 457 applications were made to the Sláintecare Integration Fund, and 122 projects were successful. I am advised that the organisation referred to was not awarded funding. Feedback on applications made to the Fund is available from the Sláintecare Programme Implementation Office.

Health Services Funding

492. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the projects which have received funding under Sláintecare to date. [44481/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Sláintecare Integration Fund provides €20 million to test and scale how services can best be delivered. The Integration Fund sought submissions with a focus on community care and integration of care across all health and social care settings. 477 projects applied for the Integration Fund and 122 projects from across the country were successful.

Details of the successful projects are available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/>

Diabetes Strategy

493. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the diabetes education programme run by an organisation (details supplied) will be rolled out through the HSE as a nationwide diabetes education programme. [44482/19]

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

Diabetes Strategy

494. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the diabetes smart online programme run by an organisation (details supplied) will be rolled out through the HSE as a nationwide online diabetes programme. [44483/19]

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

Health Reports

495. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the report by the contraception working group will be published. [44484/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, the Report of the Working Group on Access to Contraception was published after the submission of her question on 29th October 2019 and is available for download from my Department's website.

Abortion Legislation

496. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a general scheme of a Bill will be prepared to legislate for safe access zones around health facilities which provide access to termination of pregnancies. [44485/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is my absolute intention that people can access termination of pregnancy services safely. I wish to assure women and healthcare staff that there is existing legislation in place to protect them and to protect patients.

My Department and An Garda Síochána have been closely monitoring the situation since termination of pregnancy services commenced in January this year, and I have met with the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána on this issue.

As the Deputy is aware, I also met with Oireachtas members to discuss safe access as a matter of priority. A targeted consultation of health service providers is under way, following which I will meet with a representative group of service providers from the HSE. I plan to meet with the Oireachtas members again to provide a further update.

The result of the referendum last year gave the Government a strong mandate to introduce

termination of pregnancy services and it remains my priority that the legislation is fully implemented so that all women in Ireland can access these services quickly and easily, without bias or judgment.

Services for People with Disabilities

497. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if an ASD service will be offered in County Roscommon in order that children in need of the service can avail of it close to home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44486/19]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

498. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44487/19]

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

Home Help Service Provision

499. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be put on a priority list for adequate home help hours. [44502/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Defibrillators Provision

500. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if emergency funding is available through his Department or the HSE for communities to purchase or replace defibrillators in their respective areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44503/19]

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

Prescriptions Charges

501. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 205 of 4 May 2017 and 777 of 6 September 2019, the consideration being given to the issue raised (details supplied); his views on whether urgent action is required to address the issue; the timeframe for recommendations to be made in relation to the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44505/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware of the issue arising where a prescribed dosage requiring different medication strengths results in separate prescription charges. I am advised by the HSE that this is due to technical issues in relation to the pharmacy claiming process and that a solution will be considered in the context of IT developments in this area.

Dental Services

502. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when free dental care for children under six years of age as announced in budget 2020 will come into effect; the application process in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44506/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The introduction of packages of oral health-care for children under 6 years of age is a priority action of Smile agus Sláinte, the National Oral Health Policy. My Department is currently in the early stages of planning for its introduction in 2020. I will announce further details in due course.

General Practitioner Services

503. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when free general practitioner care for children under eight years of age as announced in budget 2020 will come into effect; the application process in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44507/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the earlier introduction of free GP care for children aged under 6, Budget 2020 allows for the beginning of the phased introduction of free GP care for children aged from 6 to 12, with the introduction of free GP care for children aged 6 and 7 from autumn 2020.

Introduction of this measure is dependent on the drafting and enactment of legislation, and will be the subject of negotiation with the IMO, representing general practitioners.

The application process will involve granting GP visit card eligibility to all children aged 6 and 7 who do not already hold a medical card or GP visit card.

Ambulance Service Staff

504. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that authorised the cessation of deductions from the salaries of ambulance staff for unions (details supplied) which was in place for a number of years; the reason the decision was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44515/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

505. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in the South Infirmarary Victoria University Hospital, Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44518/19]

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

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

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

506. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the status of building projects (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44520/19]

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

Palliative Care for Children

507. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the palliative care available in County Tipperary for children and young adults under 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44523/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Equipment

508. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the fact that the only CT scanner at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar has been broken since 20 October 2019 and no definite date can be given as to when it will be operational; his plans to ensure that an operational CT scanner is on-site and that the second CT scanner which has been approved for the hospital is made available without further delay; and his views on whether it is acceptable that critically ill patients have to be transferred to other hospitals in order to have a CT scan carried out [44529/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Transfers

509. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a patient (details supplied) will be transferred immediately to a suitable hospital due to the fact that the CT scanner has been inoperative at the Midlands Regional Hospital for five days. [44531/19]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

510. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be given a suitable residential placement by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44536/19]

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

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

Rare Diseases Strategy Implementation

511. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the consultation he has had in 2019 with an organisation (details supplied); his views on the importance of investment in clinical research as a key priority to help achieve better outcomes for patients; his further views on the need for a public information campaign to inform persons regarding the value of health research; his further views on the role of genomics in developing personalised therapies for patients with rare or ultra-rare diseases; his policy plans in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44545/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In order to discuss the continued implementation of the National Rare Disease Plan and agree prioritization of tasks, both myself and officials of the Department of Health have met with the Rare Disease Task Force (comprising Rare Disease Ireland, Medical Research Charities Group (MRCGP), The Irish Platform for Patient Organisations, Science and Industry (IPPPSI)). Meetings took place in February, May and

September of this year. Quarterly meetings with this important stakeholder will continue, to take place to ensure that their input and the voice of the patient is represented. The Department of Health also meets regularly with the HSE National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases and the National Rare Disease Office to monitor progress.

Many rare diseases are genetic in origin and, as such, effective genetic services can have an important role to play in relation to diagnosis and possible treatment. The medical genetics service in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin provides services for patients and families affected by, or at risk of, a genetic disorder. It comprises three integrated units: a clinical genetics service; a cytogenetics laboratory and a molecular genetics laboratory. Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, provided additional resources last year to support the hospital's Department of Clinical Genetics. An external multi professional team, led by an experienced NHS UK Health Manager, has been assisting in the improvement of the service. Investments in staff and equipment to further develop the service is continuing.

The Minister, and the 10-year strategy for transforming healthcare in Ireland, *Sláintecare*, acknowledges the fundamental importance of research in delivering high quality and informed services based on robust data and rigorous research. Clinical trials, in particular, are at the heart of improved prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases. International evidence clearly shows that standards of care are higher in research-active healthcare organisations, and this results in greater access to innovative treatments and improved outcomes for patients. In addition, this improves the recruitment and retention of high calibre staff into the health service and attracts industrial collaboration and jobs. For this reason, the Department of Health, via the Health Research Board, has invested over €150m in clinical research infrastructure and supports over the last decade. This has resulted in the establishment of state-of-the-art clinical research facilities on the campuses of hospitals, clinical trials networks to support the conduct of multi-centre trials, a Trials Methodology Research Network (HRB-TMRN) to support the development of methodological skills in trials and intervention research and Clinical Research Coordination Ireland (HRB-CRCI) to act as a one-stop-shop for all those interested in the conduct of multi-site clinical trials in Ireland.

As a further sign of his commitment to clinical research and his ambition to increase the trial footprint in Ireland, the Minister recently secured government approval to become a member of the European Clinical Research Infrastructure Network (ECRIN). By managing and supporting trials across borders, connecting networks, and advising and implementing policy, it advances knowledge flow, competitiveness and integration in European clinical research. As a member, Ireland's clinical trial researchers will now have access to a wider patient base and diversity, expertise from across Europe and potential cost savings through resource sharing with other member states. Membership of ECRIN will also increase the ability of people in Ireland to be part of research on rare conditions and to benefit from breakthroughs as ECRIN represents a population of 300 million, giving access to much larger trials than could be delivered in Ireland alone.

There are currently over 330 clinical investigators in Ireland leading and undertaking trials across the clinical trials infrastructure mentioned above. To ensure that we are pro-actively and constantly developing the future cadre of clinician and non-clinician clinical research investigators, the HRB has an expansive portfolio of early-, mid- and senior career investigator awards and fellowships. The HRB has also introduced a dedicated funding stream in recent years to fund clinical trials and intervention studies.

Finally, one of the most long-standing barriers to the conduct of seamless and efficient clinical trials in Ireland is our current system of Research Ethics approval. In July this year, the Minister secured approval for a National Research Ethics Committee Bill. The establishment of

a National Office for Research Ethics Committees, and the urgent establishment of a National Research Ethics Committee in the area of Clinical Trials (of Medicinal Products), will deliver an effective and coherent national model which will benefit those conducting and participating in trials.

The Minister is aware of the significant opportunities and benefits afforded by genetic and genomic research. The key objective for the Department, and the Minister, is to ensure that Ireland develops a comprehensive national policy/strategy which ensures that we both respond to these opportunities and overcome the not insignificant challenges of implementing a genomic medicine programme in a health service delivery context.

The ultimate goal is for genomic medicine to benefit individuals, the healthcare system and society. In 2016 Professor Owen Smith authored the 'Report of the National Genetic and Genomic Medicine Network Strategy Group'. On foot of the recommendations outlined in this report, in 2018 the HSE received new service development funding to begin the process of establishing a National Genetics and Genomics Medicine Network. The aim of this Network, once established, is that it would build the effective governance arrangements that recognises the interdependence between corporate, financial and clinical governance across the service and integrate them to deliver high quality, safe and reliable healthcare. Discussions are at an advanced stage to initiate the recruitment of a National Director of this Network.

Air Quality

512. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his views on the health consequences arising from the delay in implementing a nationwide smoky coal ban; when he last raised the issue directly with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment; when he is scheduled to meet the Minister or his officials to discuss the issue; if his attention has been drawn to the recent report by the EPA on air quality here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44546/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Air Quality is an important environmental determinant of health. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report *Air Quality in Ireland 2018*, which was published in September, has estimated that poor air quality causes up to 1,180 premature deaths per annum in Ireland.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has a priority to identify and advise the general public on strategies to reduce their risk of adverse effects during episodes of poor air quality. To this end, the HSE and the EPA established a collaboration to look at the relationship between short-term changes in ambient air quality and hospital admissions due to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases in Dublin city and county between 2014 and 2018. The Air Quality Index for Health (AQIH) was the measure used for ambient air quality (Available URL: <http://www.epa.ie/air/quality/index/>). The preliminary findings from this work have highlighted that the ambient air quality in Dublin is predominantly good (i.e. Good: 96%; Fair: 3%; Poor: 1%; and Very poor: < 1%). Other findings are comparable to reports within the literature, but uniquely show the Irish experience. The report is currently being finalised for publication.

Extending the ban on the use of smoky coal would have a positive impact on air quality, particularly in built up areas. However, my Department has been advised by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment that a number of coal firms have indicated that they would challenge the proposal to expand the smoky coal ban nationally. This is particularly disappointing, given the impact poor air quality can have on human health and the environment and the emphasis the Government is putting on transitioning to a low carbon

society. I understand that my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, is in contact with the Attorney General on this matter.

The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and I engage on a regular basis.

Hospitals Funding

513. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the budget received by each hospital and CHO to provide non-emergency hospital transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44549/19]

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

Hospital Services

514. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the hospitals and CHOs which could provide non-emergency hospital transport to outpatient appointments for those that cannot fund transport from their own resources; the amount spent by each hospital and CHO on providing such non-emergency hospital transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44550/19]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

515. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the allocation for transport implemented to date under the national learning network in County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44556/19]

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

516. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the initiatives being undertaken at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore to reduce ENT outpatient waiting times; the current waiting time for an outpatient appointment at the hospital; if a reduction in waiting times has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44557/19]

517. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients awaiting outpatient ENT appointments in each Saolta group hospital; the length of time those patients have been waiting; the initiatives being undertaken to reduce waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44558/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 516 and 517 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by officials in my Department and will be provided to the Deputy directly as soon as it becomes available.

General Practitioner Services

518. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the reason general practitioners have had the electronic referral pathway for CT and MRI tests removed from them; his views on whether it is appropriate that patients requiring urgent scans are being referred to emergency departments; his plans to reverse this policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44560/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

519. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review correspondence (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the valuable supports being provided on the ground; if funding to the service will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44561/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The correspondence provided by the Deputy identifies two key issues:

- Delays in the transfer of funding from the HSE.
- Communication difficulties between the HSE and the North Eastern Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force.

Officials in my Department have requested a report from the HSE in relation to these issues. The Deputy is advised that the Department of Health is providing an additional €190,000 over a three year period (2019-2022) for Young People's Substance Use Support Services in Cavan and Monaghan. This strategic health initiative will improve access to health services for young people whose lives are affected by problematic use alcohol and substance use in the two counties. I would encourage the organisation referred to by the Deputy to engage with the North Eastern Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force and the HSE as to how it can participate in the Young People's Substance Use Support Services.

Hospital Equipment

520. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if all the MRI scanners at Tallaght Hospital are operational; if not, the number out of operation; and the length of time it will

take for the hospital to be back at full capacity. [44566/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

521. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults with an intellectual disability in County Wexford that are on the waiting list for residential care; the average waiting time for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44567/19]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

522. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health if the necessary funds will be made available to an organisation in order that it can provide full-time residential care to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44568/19]

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

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

Health Services Staff Remuneration

523. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if pay will be restored to section 39 workers in an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44569/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The WRC agreement reached in October 2018 in relation to pay restoration for section 39 organisations provided for pay restoration in relation to 50 'pilot organisations' in the first instance. Pay restoration for these bodies commenced in April of this year with further payments due in 2020 and 2021 as appropriate.

The WRC agreement also states:

“It is recognised that some of the remaining Section 39 organisations (estimated 250 approximately) are likely to have pay restoration issues and a process to address these will be agreed and the parties will commence engagement on this issue during 2019”

L’Arche Ireland Kilkenny is one of these remaining organisations. There have been initial engagements in recent months between the parties on this matter under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission. It has been acknowledged by management that the resources available to deliver on this initiative will be a significant challenge for the HSE. It is also recognised that significant preparatory work will be required to determine the exact costs for pay restoration to this wider group.

The parties are currently reflecting on their positions following the most recent WRC engagement.

Hospital Appointments Status

524. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for an MRI at Waterford University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44573/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

525. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be given a date for an operation. [44574/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

526. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE is refusing to cover circadin 2mg for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44575/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the particular issue raised relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

527. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44576/19]

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

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

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

Brexit Preparations

528. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his mitigation plans will be confirmed to ensure the continuity of timely supply of radioisotopes for use in diagnosis and treatment of childhood cancer in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44584/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of the whole-of-government response to Brexit, the Department of Health has established dedicated structures to manage the approach to preparing for the UK's exit from the EU. The Department, the Health Products Regulatory Authority and the HSE, with the full support of stakeholders, are implementing a comprehensive and coordinated set of preparations to ensure continuity of health services and

continued supply of medicines and medical devices in the event of a ‘no deal’ Brexit.

Preparations included the establishment of a Radiopharmaceutical Resilience Advisory Group in the HSE’s National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP). This Group has devised plans, in the event of a ‘no deal’ Brexit, to mitigate against the potential issues in relation to the supply of radioisotopes and the resulting impact on patient services in the 23 hospitals involved.

The Radiopharmaceutical Resilience Advisory Group issued advice in ‘*Guidance for Nuclear Medicine Facilities and Nuclear Medicine Services in the event of Brexit*’. The document includes advice on contingency plans for hospitals, including hospitals that provide care for children. The advice includes avoiding the delivery of technetium generators in the period immediately following Brexit, ordering larger generators, and sharing generators between hospitals in the event of supply issues.

Hospitals are also advised to consider the clinical urgency of investigations or treatments on a patient by patient basis, and to prioritise their radioisotope supply accordingly.

Along with the guidance document, there is an escalation pathway set up in the event of supply issues. Each nuclear medicine department has been requested to contact the NCCP on a daily basis during the Brexit period to inform on how their service is running and to highlight any Brexit-related issues. Any issue will be followed up immediately through a centralised approach.

HSE Correspondence

529. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 135 of 18 September 2019, the steps he will take to examine the reason the HSE has still not replied to urgent correspondence (details supplied); if same will be dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44591/19]

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

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

As the Deputy’s specific query is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Card Eligibility

530. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the clinical data outcomes being collected for the type 2 diabetes cycle of care programme; if the data has been audited; when a report will be made available; the cost of the programme to date; if it is providing value for money; his plans to extend same to patients with type 2 diabetes that do not have a medical card or general practitioner only visit card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44593/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be

entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

People who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations.

Diabetes is currently listed on the Long Term Illness Scheme which means that patients can get a range of medicines from their community pharmacy free.

As the PQ also refers to the Diabetes cycle of care which is run by the HSE, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

531. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 376 of 22 October 2019, if he has evaluated the full costings over the ten-year timeframe provided in the Sláintecare report; his views on whether the costings (details supplied) are accurate for the purposes of implementing the recommendations in the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44594/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Sláintecare report was produced by the all-party Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare, which was established to devise cross party agreement on a single long term vision for health care and direction of health policy in Ireland. The Committee engaged the Centre for Health Policy in Trinity College Dublin to assist with its deliberations. As part of this process, the Centre provided indicative costings for a range of recommended actions. The Committee acknowledge in the report that these costings are only indicative, and that further work will be required by the Implementation Office in my Department and the HSE to ensure effective investment in change. The cost of implementing Sláintecare will depend on the prioritisation, sequencing and timing of actions, including key decisions on eligibility and entitlements, and the role of private health care in public hospitals. External factors such as general and medical inflation and changes in demand for services will also influence the cost of implementation. A significant budget of €45.5 million for 2020, rising to €95.5 million in 2021 has been committed to progress the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

Pension Provisions

532. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44596/19]

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

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

533. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if the risk assessment by CORU regarding the regulation of play therapists has been completed; the stage the regulation of play therapists is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44604/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): CORU is Ireland's multi-profession health regulator. It was established under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. CORU is responsible for the regulation of the 17 professions designated by the Act.

Section 4 of the Act provides that, following a consultation process and with the approval of the Houses of the Oireachtas, regulations may be made designating a health or social care profession not already contained in the Act.

As the Deputy is aware, I asked CORU to facilitate a risk assessment of the principal health and social care professionals seeking regulation and this includes play therapists. Officials from my Department are currently considering the appropriate next steps to be taken in relation to the risk assessment.

Legislative Programme

534. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the legislative timeline for the advancement of the human tissues Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44617/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Work is progressing on the drafting of the Human Tissue (Transplantation, Post-Mortem, Anatomical Examination and Public Display) Bill in collaboration with the Office of Parliamentary Council.

Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme was undertaken by the Joint Committee on Health on 16 October 2019 and the Committee's report is awaited.

It is envisaged that the drafting process will be complete, and Government approval secured to publish the Bill, by the end of Quarter 1 2020. It is hoped that the Bill will then be progressed through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Hospitals Expenditure

535. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the cost per bed night for each hospital, including critical care and ward beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44619/19]

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

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

536. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the price paid for each procedure from the NTPF; if different prices are paid for the same procedures, for example, to different hospitals; if so, the prices in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44620/19]

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

Departmental Strategies

537. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix in General and Specialist Medical and Surgical Care Settings in Adult Hospitals in Ireland 2018; when it will be implemented in all hospitals; if there are costs to implementing the plan; the savings which can be realised as a result of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44621/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The principle objective of the Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix in General and Specialist Medical and Surgical Care Settings in Adult Hospitals in Ireland was to develop an evidence-based methodology to determine the staffing and skill mix range required in our hospitals.

The Framework was developed in the Department and piloted in three sites before I formally launched it in April 2018. Results from the pilot were positive for both patients and staff. Showing evidence of improvements in the quality of care and patient outcomes, and a reduction in length of stay. The Framework also stabilised the workforce, improving staff moral and a leading to a reduction in agency spend.

The national rollout of the Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix in General and Specialist Medical and Surgical Care Settings is now the responsibility of the HSE and a National Implementation structure has been agreed. Full rollout is dependent on the introduction of a new ICT system which is now in the final stages of procurement.

I have asked the HSE to write to the Deputy directly to provide to provide further information on its implementation plan, together with the costs and benefits of same.

Hospital Consultant Contracts

538. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the action he has taken on foot of issues raised in a programme (details supplied) to ensure compliance; and the findings of the formal investigations of the HSE launched in the wake of the programme. [44624/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In April 2018 my Department and HSE management agreed monitoring arrangements, including the development and implementation of a comprehensive framework by the HSE to operate at both national and local levels, to monitor and ensure consultant compliance with the public/private provisions of their contracts. It was agreed that:-

- The HSE would incorporate within the framework a process map allocating individual responsibilities at local, Hospital Group and national levels;

- The revised framework should specify processes for monthly reporting of compliance from Hospital Group CEO to the National Director for Acute Hospitals with quarterly escalation to the Deputy Director General;

- Annual compliance would form part of the HSE's internal control assurance process. The HSE Audit Committee would be asked to include consultant contract compliance on its work programme and will, in particular, consider compliance as part of its review of the annual internal control assurance process; and that

- The HSE would submit reports to the Department of the position at end September 2018 and end December 2018 and annually thereafter.

The HSE submitted an initial report in the autumn of 2018 and earlier this year submitted

the report to the year end 2018. This included the Framework developed to give effect to the agreed arrangements - with specific responsibilities assigned to the Hospital Clinical Director, the Hospital CEO/GM, the Hospital Group CEO/Clinical Director and the National Director Acute Operations. It also included a summary of compliance at Hospital Group level, details concerning work being undertaken to improve monitoring arrangements in the acute sector and measures in train to ensure the completeness of monitoring arrangements within Community Operations.

HSE Staff

539. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be granted permission for a career break to work abroad in accordance with HSE guidelines and practice. [44627/19]

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

Psychological Assessments Waiting Times

540. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number on the waiting list for assessments of need for children by CHO; and the average length of time between the date of referral and date of assessment by CHO. [44628/19]

541. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number on the waiting list for initial meetings with early intervention teams for children by CHO; and the average length of time between the date of referral and date of assessment by CHO. [44629/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 540 and 541 together.

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

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

National Adult Safeguarding Policy

542. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when the national policy on adult safeguarding will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44631/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government has approved the development of a national adult safeguarding policy for the health sector, together with such underpinning legislation as may be required. The policy, when developed, will cover the entire health and social care sector, including statutory health agencies and public, voluntary and private service providers.

The development of policy and associated underpinning legislation in this area is a complex undertaking, and I have previously emphasised the importance of developing a clear, coherent, carefully-considered and implementable policy framework as a basis for any required underpinning legislation. The Department's approach therefore is, before formulating legislation, to undertake the required detailed policy and evidence base development work including appropriate legal research, policy research, public and stakeholder consultation and resource implications analysis.

Evidence base development and policy drafting is progressing well. A high-level Steering Group established to assist my Department in its development of the policy, has held five meetings to date and there has been ongoing stakeholder consultation. Updates and related papers such as discussion papers on the policy content are published regularly on my Department's website. Focus group consultation is being undertaken to ensure that voices of the most directly affected service users are heard and a research evidence project to inform the policy is in train. Major project milestones to date include:

- Government approval to develop the national health sector policy;
- a stakeholder survey on the themes and questions to be covered in the policy;
- formation of the Steering Group assisting in my Department's development of the policy;
- commissioning of a research evidence project to inform the policy;
- commencement of service user focus group consultation (in partnership with the Institute of Public Health) to ensure the voices of those most directly affected are heard;
- further ongoing stakeholder consultation, for example meetings with key stakeholders including the HSE National Safeguarding Office, HIQA, the Mental Health Commission, Safeguarding Ireland, Sage Advocacy and others; frontline site visits and fact-finding visits by Departmental officials; and a major stakeholder consultation workshop on policy content;
- detailed drafting throughout 2019.

Related major milestones in relation to adult safeguarding in the health and social care sector include:

- my recent approval of national standards for adult safeguarding submitted to me jointly by the Health Information and Quality Authority and the Mental Health Commission;
- the anticipated early finalisation of a major revision by the Health Service Executive of its national operational adult safeguarding policy.

Arrangements for the early launch and publication of the new adult safeguarding standards are being finalised. Both the standards and the revised operational policy will be very important in informing the Department's development of the national health sector policy and identifying possible policy or legislative gaps.

A further significant initiative across all sectors was the Law Reform Commission's commencement in June 2019 of a legal research project on "A Regulatory Framework for Adult Safeguarding", on foot of submissions from various bodies, including from my Department.

It is hoped that a first draft health sector policy will be completed during the first quarter of 2020, and that a public consultation on a published draft policy will be undertaken as soon as possible thereafter. Following analysis and consideration of the feedback obtained through the consultation process the draft policy will be further developed and proposals on the policy will

be submitted to Government thereafter.

Paediatric Services

543. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting for a paediatrician appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44632/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Voluntary Sector Funding

544. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the progress on an application by a centre (details supplied) for section 39 funding; when the funding will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44633/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The funding of voluntary organisations through Section 39 is administered by the HSE. As such, I have referred your question to the HSE for direct reply.

Ambulance Service Response Times

545. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that nine times to date in 2019 it took at least an hour for an ambulance to arrive at a life-threatening emergency in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44636/19]

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

Ambulance Service Response Times

546. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the HIQA recommended response time for an ambulance to arrive on scene; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44637/19]

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

Ambulance Service Response Times

547. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that County Mayo had the worst response time in the country for an ambulance to arrive at a life-threatening emergency (details supplied); the steps he is taking to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44638/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, it has been referred

to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service Response Times

548. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the response times for an ambulance to arrive at a life threatening emergency in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44639/19]

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

Hospital Car Parks

549. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national guidelines for hospital parking charges. [44648/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Hospitals which charge parking fees are cognisant of the financial implications parking costs can have on patients and their families, particularly those with long-term illnesses. Some hospitals have introduced a maximum daily fixed parking charge, thus capping this expense. I understand that some hospitals also provide reduced rate parking for long-term patients and visitors for whom the payment of the full rate would cause hardship.

I have made it clear I want to see progress made in this area and I am working with my Department and the HSE in this regard. In March 2018, I requested the HSE to conduct a review of hospital car parking charges with a view to establishing clear national guidelines in the area. My Department and the HSE are currently engaging on a draft implementation plan to accompany the review report.

Orthodontic Services

550. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied) regarding children who were harmed by HSE orthodontic services in the Dublin mid-Leinster region over a period of time; if he will request the HSE to engage with Tusla to publish the report immediately; if he will examine the matters contained in the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44652/19]

651. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 449 of 15 October 2019, if a report (details supplied) by the HSE will be published and investigated in view of the fact an audit of 7,500 minors has now been completed; if Tusla is investigating this matter; the number of litigations active against the State in relation to the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45153/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 550 and 651 together.

The report to which the Deputy refers was commissioned by the HSE and is not a matter for Tusla. I have asked the HSE to reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Availability

551. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in providing Spinraza to children suffering with SMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44655/19]

552. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health when children waiting for Spinraza can expect to receive the drug (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44656/19]

598. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the status of access to Spinraza for children that have spinal muscular dystrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44865/19]

683. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in accessing Spinraza in view of the fact the HSE approved the drug four months ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45327/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 551, 552, 598 and 683 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The 2013 Health Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. I have no role in this statutory process.

On 11 June 2019, the HSE Leadership Team approved access to the drug Spinraza for children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type I, II or III on an exceptional and individualised basis.

The HSE has indicated that since July, 11 children have been approved for Spinraza treatment in Temple Street Hospital. Application for approval is based on clearly defined criteria and clinical guidelines being followed in each case. All patients who have been recommended clinically have been approved to date.

The actual delivery of this drug to approved patients in a safe and sustainable way requires very specific and quite complex service arrangements, which requires a considerable amount of service planning and assessment of patients at an individual level.

I have been advised by the HSE that Children's Health Ireland is currently engaging on an individual basis with the families involved regarding each child's treatment plan.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

553. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided to local drugs and alcohol forums in each of the years 2017 to 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44660/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): A table outlining the combined total funding allocations from the Department of Health and the HSE to local drug and alcohol task forces in each of the years 2017 to 2019 is attached. The funding for 2019 includes an additional €20,000 to each task force, of which €10,000 is recurring.

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

tion/2019-11-05_pq553-5-11-2019_en.xlsx “>PQ 553 Table]

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

554. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided to regional drugs and alcohol forums in each of the years 2017 to 2019 in tabular; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44661/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): A table outlining the combined total funding allocations from the Department of Health and the HSE to the regional drug and alcohol task forces in each of the years 2017 to 2019 is attached. The funding for 2019 includes an additional €20,000 to each task force, of which €10,000 is recurring.

[PQ 554 Table]

Pharmacy Regulations

555. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of legislation regarding pharmaceutical assistants further to recent recommendations made by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44662/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Pharmacy Act 2007, my role in relation to the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules is limited to their consideration once submitted to me for my consent.

In this case, the Rules in question are currently subject to legal challenge. As a result, they are not currently under consideration.

I am not in a position to comment any further due to the legal challenge.

Questions Nos. 556 and 557 answered with Question No. 413.

Hospital Appointments Status

558. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44675/19]

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

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

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

Ambulance Service Response Times

559. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his views on a report (details supplied) relating to ambulance response times in counties Cavan and Monaghan and nationwide; his views on whether this is adequate in 2019; the steps he is taking to assist ambulance services and personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44679/19]

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

Ambulance Service Response Times

560. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the way in which response times have improved in counties Cavan and Monaghan as regards A Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to increase ambulances, EMTs and paramedics each year to improve response times; and the increase achieved in each year [44681/19]

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

Neuro-Rehabilitation Services Provision

561. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the lack of rehabilitation services for persons with a brain injury and the negative effect that this is having on the lives of persons with such injuries. [44683/19]

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

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

Substance Misuse

562. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if urgent consideration will be given to a request regarding the delivery of services by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44689/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The correspondence provided by the Deputy identifies two key issues:

- Delays in the transfer of funding from the HSE.

- Communication difficulties between the HSE and the North Eastern Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force.

Officials in my Department have requested a report from the HSE in relation to these issues.

The Deputy is advised that the Department of Health is providing an additional €190,000 over a three year period (2019-2022) for Young People's Substance Use Support Services in Cavan and Monaghan. This strategic health initiative will improve access to health services for young people whose lives are affected by problematic use alcohol and substance use in the two counties.

I would encourage the organisation referred to by the Deputy to engage with the North Eastern Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force and the HSE as to how it can participate in the Young People's Substance Use Support Services.

Medicinal Products Regulation

563. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health when the final report on valproate will be published; the reason for the delay in finalising same to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44692/19]

564. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet representative bodies to discuss progress on recommendations in a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44693/19]

565. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the apparent lack of availability of official documentation regarding the licensing of a drug (details supplied) within the public sphere; his views on the need for total transparency in respect of same and the need for a possible investigation in respect of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44694/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 563 to 565, inclusive, together.

I am due to receive a briefing on the HSE's Valproate Response Project report shortly. No decision has been taken regarding potential publication of the report.

I am advised that some documentation regarding the licensing of Epilim has previously been shared with the representative body referred to by the Deputy. I will ask Department and Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) officials to consider whether additional documents could be released. I am also happy to consider a meeting with the representative bodies referred to by the Deputy if a request is submitted to my office in the Department.

Information and Communications Technology

566. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of computers in the HSE that still use an operating system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44700/19]

567. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will not be forced to

make additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44701/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 566 and 567 together.

As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Information and Communications Technology

568. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if his Department and the HSE have a plan in place to protect themselves in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44702/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of our HQ move in 2018, my Department updated its standard operating system to Windows 10.

There are currently only 4 devices using the Windows 7 operating system. Two of these are virtual machines running within Windows 10 devices. The other two devices, required for our telephony switch, are not connected to my Department's network.

My Department is actively engaging to replace the Windows 7 clients in question before the operating system reaches end of support.

In addition to this, my Department implements a multi-layered approach to cyber security and to protecting our ICT systems, data and infrastructure. This includes preventative controls like firewalls, anti-virus and endpoint protection alongside an advanced network intrusion detection system. Software vulnerabilities are managed by maintaining up-to-date versions.

As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

Information and Communications Technology

569. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44713/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department uses Windows 10 as its standard operating system.

There are currently only 4 devices using the Windows 7 operating system. Two of these are virtual machines running within Windows 10 devices. The other two devices, required for our telephony switch, are not connected to my Department's network.

Device	Purpose	Comment
2 Windows 7 clients	Software required for Telephony Switch	The application currently only runs on Windows 7. This is a shared service provided by another Government Department. My Department is engaging with our colleagues to address this situation before Windows 7 reaches end of support.
2 Windows 7 clients	Virtual Machines used to access bespoke software	The application in question currently only runs on Windows 7. My Department is actively engaging to address this issue before Windows 7 reaches end of support

Hospital Staff

570. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no dedicated dietician for the adult diabetes service in the UL group hospitals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44756/19]

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

Diabetes Strategy

571. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no diabetes self-management education for adults with type 1 diabetes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44757/19]

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

Diabetes Strategy

572. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no insulin pump therapy for adults with type 1 diabetes in the mid-west (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44758/19]

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

Diabetes Strategy

573. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a four-year wait-

ing list to be seen in a consultant-led type 2 diabetes clinic (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44759/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Autism Support Services

574. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will receive an appointment with the ASD services for counties Roscommon and Galway, in particular Athenry, County Galway; and if the appointment will be expedited [44764/19]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

575. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44769/19]

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

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

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

576. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if support will be given to a school (details supplied) that has children suffering from trauma and developmental disorders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44771/19]

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

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

577. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44775/19]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

578. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the Central Remedial Clinic services for children in University Hospital Waterford to the adult population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44777/19]

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

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

Mobility Allowance Data

579. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of new entrants to the mobility allowance scheme in each of the three years preceding its suspension; the average number of recipients in each year; the number of persons exiting the scheme in each year; the cost of the scheme in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44782/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Availability

580. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; the reason for the delay for the person not receiving Spinraza; if the person's parent will be liaised with regarding the issue in view of the circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44785/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this refers to an individual case, I have referred this matter to the HSE for their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

581. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health if transport will be provided for a child (details supplied) transitioning to adult services at a centre in County Carlow. [44786/19]

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

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

Health Services Expenditure

582. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 284 of 22 October 2019, the breakdown of time related saving of €73 million available on a once-off basis within the Health vote in 2019 [44789/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The annual health gross current allocation for 2019 is €16.4bn. The level of once off time related savings estimated as arising by year end is 0.4% of this total budget. Each year funding is allocated to new developments, as part of the annual budget process based on estimated commencement dates.

Once off time related savings can arise for any number of reasons.

- facilities opening later than the timing assumed when planning the operational funding levels in the Budget due to delays in construction timetable.

- Procurement/negotiation timelines extending longer than originally planned for when setting funding levels.

- Recruitment into designated roles, including notice period requirements resulting in actual

start dates later than estimated.

The specific detail on this aspect of the supplementary budget will not be finalised until closer to the year end. Detail on the supplementary budget will be available following approval by the Select Committee on Health.

Services for People with Disabilities

583. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new building for a centre (details supplied) for children with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44790/19]

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

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement, before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established.

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

Rare Diseases Strategy

584. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the person or body within the HSE rheumatology model of care document that has expertise in treating patients with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44793/19]

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

Rare Diseases Strategy

585. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the specific pathways for Ehlers-Danlos syndrome patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44794/19]

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

Rare Diseases Strategy

586. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that has the expertise to co-ordinate the other relevant consultant specialists needed for the care of persons with

Ehlers-Danlos syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44795/19]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

587. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a three-year waiting list for persons approved for aids and appliances in the mid-west region; when funding will be provided to accommodate such persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44801/19]

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

Hospital Beds Data

588. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed spaces available at Cherry Orchard Hospital; the number of patients that have been admitted on trolleys awaiting a bed in each month over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44803/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Beds Data

589. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed spaces available at St. James’s Hospital; the number of patients that have been admitted on trolleys awaiting a bed in each month over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44804/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): According to HSE TrolleyGAR data, there was a 9.9% increase in patients counted waiting on trolleys at 8am in St James’ Hospital ED for the year to date as of the end of September 2019 compared to the same period last year. In the month of September 2019, there were 187 patients counted on trolleys in St James’ Hospital, which was a 76.4% increase compared to the previous month.

My Department is engaging extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions across the health service to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED in the face of growing demand.

The HSE Winter Plan 2019/2020 will address the preparedness of individual sites and the entire health system to deal with the increase in demand on services over the winter months. Additional funding has been agreed to support the delivery of the Winter Plan this year. This funding will support the availability of home care, transitional care, nursing home placements and other local actions to both reduce congestion in EDs and facilitate timely hospital discharge over the winter period. The Department is currently working with the HSE to finalise the Winter Plan.

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

According to provisional data received from the HSE Acute Business Information Unit, there were on average 11,008 inpatient beds and 2,268 day case beds/places available nationally in July 2019. There was an average of 707 available inpatient beds and 112 available day case beds in St James' Hospital year to date in July 2019.

The Health Service Capacity Review published last year highlighted the need for a major investment in additional capacity. An additional 23 beds have opened in St James' Hospital since 2017.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

Hospital Staff Data

590. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies that are open for recruitment in Cherry Orchard Hospital; the breakdown of posts available by medical profession and clinical speciality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44805/19]

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

Hospital Staff Data

591. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies that are open for recruitment in St. James's Hospital; the breakdown of posts available by medical profession and clinical speciality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44806/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

592. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed spaces available at the Linn Dara CAMHS unit in Cherry Orchard Hospital; the number of admissions and average length of stay per patient in the past five years; the waiting list for services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44810/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Dental Services

593. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the amount dentists charge medical card patients for extractions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44836/19]

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

Departmental Staff Data

594. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44848/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are 518 people between full and part-time staff employed in the Department of Health.

The staff of my Department are paid on the basis of centrally negotiated Civil Service pay scales, in line with Government policy and as sanctioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

There are no staff in my Department who are currently being paid at or below the minimum wage rate of pay.

Hospital Consultant Data

595. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the grade of consultant in public health medicine will be established here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44857/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the current structures for public health in Ireland, Public Health Specialists and Directors of Public Health Medicine are not recognised as consultants, though they are on the Medical Council's Specialist Register. Their counterparts in other countries, as the Deputy notes, are recognised as consultants. This anomaly was also raised with me in the course of a meeting with the Medical Council earlier this year.

A new service model for public health is being developed at present. My Department is engaged with the HSE in developing this model in the context of Sláintecare; and also taking into account the recommendations of Dr Gabriel Scally in his Report into CervicalCheck concerning the future role and status of public health medicine and public health specialists. The recommendations in the Crowe Horwath Report concerning the role, training and career structures of Public Health Physicians are also being taken into account.

Consultant status is being addressed as part of this process. It is intended that Public Health Specialists will to be given consultant status when the new framework has been settled and is being implemented in 2020 and beyond. The issue is also being progressed in parallel engagement between my Department, the HSE and the IMO, in the context of the development of the new framework. It is intended that the agreed Consultant Contract will encompass the key roles and functions referred to by the Deputy.

Health Research Board Expenditure

596. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent to date on MS research here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44858/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Addressing the specific funding provided by the Department of Health; my Department is committed to providing resources and capacity for Multiple Sclerosis (MS) research that may benefit the 9,000 people in Ireland living with MS, and for others with an MS diagnosis beyond Ireland. Since 2010, the Health Research Board (HRB), the primary agency for disbursement of research funding from my Department, has invested €1.78 million in research related to MS. This has included research on potential treatments, supports for carers of people with MS, causes of MS, enhancement of physical activity and prevention of falls among people with MS, and improving cognition and daily function for people with MS. Currently, the HRB have commitments of €760,000 for MS-specific research. One of these awards includes a co-funded award with MS Ireland through the Medical Research Charities Group with a total value of €166,000. Since 2010, a further €4 million has been invested on research into the aetiology of neurodegeneration more broadly and the most appropriate approach to services.

HRB funding schemes are open calls that are internationally peer-reviewed; funding is not hypothecated for specific conditions, rather to ensure value for public monies it is the quality of the application that is the primary focus of review.

Vaccination Programme

597. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure an increase in the rate of children presenting for the MMR vaccination; his further plans to ensure that same is increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44859/19]

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

The ages at which vaccines are recommended in the primary childhood immunisation schedule are chosen by NIAC in order to give each child the best possible protection against disease. Measles is an acute and serious infection caused by the measles virus and is highly infectious. It is a notifiable disease (under Infectious Disease legislation) and all cases are reported to Departments of Public Health within the HSE. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are recommended by NIAC – one dose at 12 months of age and a second booster dose when your child is 4/5 years of age.

It is important to note that vaccine hesitancy is not unique to Ireland. It is a global issue and has been identified by the World Health Organisation as one of the ten leading threats to global health in 2019.

One of my priorities as Minister for Health is to increase vaccination rates across the country and several options in this area are being explored. In this regard, I launched the Vaccine Alliance in September. Its aim is to increase the uptake of childhood vaccines and reduce vaccine hesitancy. The group includes a wide range of organisations and further organisations will be added once the terms of reference, key target audiences, and priorities for the Vaccine Alliance

have been agreed.

Question No. 598 answered with Question No. 551.

Home Care Packages Provision

599. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a homecare package will commence for a person (details supplied). [44873/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Admissions

600. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an admission to hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44877/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

601. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to locate improved day services for children and adults with disabilities in Finglas and Ballymun, Dublin 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44879/19]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

602. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding plans to provide day services for children and adults with disabilities in a location (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44880/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and

plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Defence Forces Medical Services

603. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to joint appointments of consultants and specialists within the health service to support the medical corps in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44882/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to advise that I have made enquiries with the HSE and I understand that there are no plans to make joint appointments of this nature between the HSE and the Defence Forces.

Hospital Appointments Status

604. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44884/19]

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

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

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

National Drugs Strategy

605. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to roll out new localised grant funding schemes through Pobal aimed at tackling and preventing drug and alcohol addiction in local communities which can and will operate and develop outside the governance of the local or regional drug and alcohol task forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44901/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Task forces play a central role in the delivery of the national drugs strategy at local level, with funding of €28 million per annum. The task forces ensure that a coordinated approach is taken across the statutory, community and voluntary sectors and that the voice of service users is heard in devel-

oping measures to address substance misuse priorities in their areas based on locally identified need.

There are no plans under consideration by the Department of Health to roll out grant funding schemes to tackle and prevent drug and alcohol addiction outside the governance of either task forces or the HSE.

Question No. 606 answered with Question No. 424.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

607. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be approved for a specialised bed as recommended on medical grounds for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44906/19]

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

Information and Communications Technology

608. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the person or body responsible for the provision of Wi-Fi at HSE facilities, in particular in step-down facilities and district hospitals. [44908/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OoCIO) is the HSE office responsible for the delivery of technology to support my Departments *eHealth Strategy for Ireland* and the *Sláintecare Implementation Strategy*. Contact details are as follows:

Ph: 01 635 2732 email: questions@ehealthireland.ie<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/oocio/>

Disability Support Services Provision

609. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if home support hours will be increased for a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that the provision of four hours per week is inadequate for the person's needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44910/19]

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

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

Hospitals Building Programme

610. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the company contracted to provide the 40-bed modular unit for South Tipperary General Hospital; the fees paid to date for the delivery of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44911/19]

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

Hospital Consultant Data

611. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if concerns that approximately 133 public consultant posts are being filled by doctors who are not on the specialist register will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44913/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department, in conjunction with the Medical Council, and the HSE are currently addressing this issue.

The Report of the National Doctor Training and Planning Project Team (HSE) on the Employment of Consultants not Registered in the Specialist Division of the Register of Medical Practitioners was progressed to final draft stage in September and provided to my Department on that basis last month. The Report provides an analysis of the current situation and outlines the work undertaken by the project team to date. It identified 153 consultants employed in the HSE who were not on the Specialist Division of the Register (February 2019 data), 46 of whom were employed prior to the introduction of the requirement for specialist registration in 2008; and 107 employed after the introduction of this requirement. Of those appointed prior to the 2008 policy change 40 were properly appointed under the eligibility criteria for consultant posts that applied at the time.

I am currently bringing legislation through the Oireachtas, the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill 2019, that will enable the Medical Council to place those who were properly appointed under the criteria that applied prior to the introduction of the specialist registration requirement in 2008; where it is satisfied that it would be in order to do so. Report Stage is scheduled for tomorrow, 6th November.

The objective of the overall project is to progress to having all consultants employed by the HSE on the Specialist Division of the Register. In this context, the Report identifies the impact of the ongoing challenges in the recruitment of consultants, including reduced numbers of applicants for consultant posts and the recruitment process itself, as significant factors at present and proposes a number of key recommendations. The analysis identifies particular problems in certain specialties including Community Mental Health services and certain acute hospital specialties including Medicine, Surgery, Emergency Medicine, Anaesthesia/Intensive Care Medicine and Obstetrics/Gynaecology.

Medicinal Products Availability

612. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that pharmacies are experiencing a shortage of certain types of medication, particularly Micardis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44923/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Unfortunately, medicine shortages are a feature of modern health systems worldwide, but Ireland has a multi-stakeholder system in place to prevent and manage shortages when they occur.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has worked with other stakeholders, including the pharmaceutical industry and the HSE, to develop an effective approach to the management of medicine shortages in Ireland. In 2018, the HPRA launched the “Medicine Shortages Framework”, which is built on a pragmatic and collaborative approach involving the wide range of stakeholders within the medicine supply chain. The HPRA coordinates all stakeholders to share information in order to prevent or mitigate the impact of medicine shortages when they occur.

The marketing authorisation holder for the specific product referred to by the Deputy has confirmed to the HPRA that there is no shortage and that there are sufficient supplies of this medicine for patients in Ireland. There was a recent technical difficulty at the wholesaler which may have resulted in a temporary delay in supplying stock to pharmacies; the wholesaler in question has indicated that this issue is now resolved.

Brexit Preparations

613. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to prevent medicine shortages in the event of a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44924/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of the whole-of-government response to Brexit, the Department of Health has established dedicated structures to manage the approach to preparing for the UK’s exit from the EU. The Department, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and the Health Service Executive (HSE), with the full support of stakeholders, are implementing a comprehensive and coordinated set of preparations to ensure continuity of health services and continued supply of medicines and medical devices in the event of a ‘no deal’ Brexit. Chapter 24 of the Government’s Brexit Contingency Action Plan Update, published in July 2019, details work which has been undertaken in relation to the supply of medicines and medical devices. <https://www.dfa.ie/brexit/getting-ireland-brexit-ready/governmentcontingencyactionplan/>.

Ireland is unlikely to face general medicine shortages in the period immediately after the UK’s exit from the European Union. Any emerging supply issues will, in the first instance, be dealt with from existing supplies held within the domestic distribution chain, which already has additional stocks of medicines routinely built into it.

There is no need for hospitals, pharmacists or patients to order extra quantities of medicines, or for doctors to issue additional prescriptions, as doing so could disrupt existing stock levels and hamper the supply of medicines for other patients. Patients should continue to fill their prescriptions and take their medications as they normally would.

The Department, the HSE and the HPRA have facilitated ongoing engagements with manufacturers and suppliers of medicines and medical devices, to ensure that they are Brexit-ready, to discuss any potential issues that could affect supply to Ireland and to identify solutions to maintain supply to the market.

Unfortunately, medicine shortages are a feature of modern health systems, but Ireland has a multi-stakeholder system in place to prevent and manage shortages when they occur. The health system is therefore well placed to anticipate and respond to any additional shortages, should they arise because of Brexit. Any shortages currently affecting the Irish market are not directly

attributable to Brexit.

Significant work has been undertaken to mitigate potential vulnerabilities and risks and to provide a high level of assurance around continuity of care and treatment for patients in Ireland. Work on this will continue, including ongoing monitoring of supplies in Ireland and engagement with industry to adapt supply chains, where necessary, to minimise any potential disruption.

Disability Support Services Provision

614. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be made available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44925/19]

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

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

Disability Support Services Provision

615. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a full-time placement will be arranged for a person (details supplied). [44931/19]

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

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

Health Services Staff Training

616. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the critical lack of training posts for higher specialist training in psychiatry; the steps being taken to address same and the critical shortage of consultants in psychiatry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44933/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff Training

617. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding will be made available to a body (details supplied) through the national doctors training and planning unit to help increase the number of training places for higher specialist training for psychiatry. [44934/19]

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

Health Services Staff Training

618. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if additional places for higher specialist training in psychiatry will be made available for trainee graduates in order to increase the number of consultant psychiatrists. [44935/19]

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

HSE Staff Recruitment

619. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the national clinical lead for the HSE national clinical programme for early intervention in psychosis will be appointed; and when the early intervention program will be rolled out. [44938/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disability Support Services Provision

620. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the reason a child (details supplied) will have to wait three years before gaining access to support services to aid in education; the position of the child on the waiting list for support services; the estimated date for the provision of supports; the interim supports that can be provided to the child's parents and school in order that the child can continue in education in a primary school setting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44939/19]

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

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

Home Help Service Data

621. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for home help and-or support in County Longford; and the number of home help hours cut per week due to staff illness or shortages in the county. [44942/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

622. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [44948/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

623. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [44949/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

624. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [44950/19]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

625. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the status of the two-year wait for a person (details supplied) to see the school age team the person has been referred to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44970/19]

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

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

Health Services Staff Recruitment

626. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he has instructed the HSE to implement an embargo on home help recruitment and new home care hours and extend this embargo until January 2020; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this is causing the waiting lists for those approved for home help to grow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44972/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Home Support Service is a core service which assists older people to live independently in their own homes for longer and enables large numbers of people to return home following acute hospital admission, who otherwise would remain in hospital or would be admitted to long stay residential care.

In line with Programme for Government commitments, the Government has made improved access to home support services a priority. In 2019 almost €30 million extra was added to the budget, with a target of delivering 18.26 million hours to over 53,000 people. This represented about 800,000 more hours of support than the 2018 target.

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

To achieve a balanced budget in 2019 the HSE must ensure that the cost of the home support hours being provided does not exceed the available budget. This is in line with normal prudent management of the budget. It is not correct to say that there is an embargo on home support hours. The allocation of new hours continues to be based on clients' needs and the resources available.

In the context of planning and preparing for the challenges of the winter period, an additional €26m has been made available for the last quarter of 2019 to support the hospital and community system to improve patient egress. The investment is supporting home support and transitional care as well as keeping the waiting time for access to support under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) at 4 weeks to the end of the year.

While the existing home support service is delivering crucial support to many people across the country, it needs to be improved to better meet the changing needs of our citizens.

We have committed to an additional investment of €52 million in Budget 2020 to bring the total funding for home supports to €487 million in 2020. In 2020 the HSE will deliver over 19.2 million hours of home support, a substantial increase of 1 million hours more than this year's target.

This investment is focused on enabling older people to remain at home and as appropriate, provision of hours will also be targeted at times of peak demand in Winter 2020, at the beginning and end of the year, to ensure more timely egress from hospital for our older citizens.

The core principles of Healthy Ireland, Positive Ageing, prevention and early intervention will underpin this approach.

In relation to recruitment, I am advised by the HSE that while there is no national recruitment embargo or moratorium, there is a priority requirement for all HSE services to maintain, or get to, an affordable staffing level that is sustainable in 2019 and 2020, while also prioritising the delivery of safe services.

In light of this, the HSE have introduced control measures relating to staffing and recruitment to ensure that they live within the available resources provided to them. This does mean that in some Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations non-critical replacement posts will be paused, however, the HSE report that there is on-going capacity for replacement of critical clinical posts within frontline services throughout this period.

Orthodontic Services Provision

627. Deputy Timmy Dooley asked the Minister for Health when a student (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an appointment for orthodontic treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44993/19]

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

628. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when general practitioner services will be reinstated to full service at a centre (details supplied). [44994/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Traveller Community

629. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he has sought an allocation within budget 2020 in order to address the crisis in Traveller mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45002/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Budget 2020 announced €39 million additional funding for mental health services bringing its budget to €1.026 billion in 2020. The additional €39m increase to the includes €13m for the continued rollout of new developments in 2020 and €26m has been allocated for other costs, including pay, which will be used to maintain funding and enhance existing services.

New Developments programmes and funding will be agreed as part of the HSE National Service Plan 2020 discussions.

Question No. 630 answered with Question No. 480.

Traveller Community

631. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to commission a national audit of Traveller suicide and develop a national targeted suicide prevention campaign for Travellers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45004/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Office for Suicide Prevention in the HSE has responsibility for the implementation of *Connecting for Life*, Ireland's National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Members of the Traveller community are considered as a priority group under the strategy and feature across many objectives and actions in the strategy.

I have asked the National Office for Suicide Prevention to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to these specific requests.

Traveller Community

632. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement a national Traveller mental health strategy with a ring-fenced budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45005/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): National mental health policies, such as *A Vision for Change* and *Connecting for Life*, support a whole-of-population approach to mental health service delivery. The Traveller community is among a number of priority groups identified in these strategies, acknowledging that, while Travellers are eligible to avail of all mainstream public health services, they also have specific needs and mental health services should be delivered in a culturally-appropriate way.

For this reason, in 2017 the HSE committed to the recruitment of nine Mental Health Coordinators for Travellers, eight of whom are currently in post. The focus of these roles is to work within the CHOs to support improved access, consistency and integration of mental health services to meet the mental health needs of Travellers.

The Department of Health also provides funding in the region of €10m per annum, through the HSE, for targeted measures to improve the health status of the Travelling community. These include:

- primary healthcare projects, counselling services, family support programmes and men's health projects; dedicated public health nurses and related staff; and
- mental health promotion and suicide prevention services in a culturally sensitive manner, to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

In addition, the Department of Justice and Equality's National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy also details HSE-specific actions. Of particular note is the commitment by the HSE to develop a National Traveller Health Action Plan.

The HSE circulated a first draft of the action plan in March 2019 for consultation with stakeholders, including the Department of Health. The draft is currently being revised to take account of feedback and is expected to be finalised in quarter 4 2019.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

633. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of equipment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45024/19]

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

Ministerial Meetings

634. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the meeting requested with him by a municipal district (details supplied) regarding the home help crisis; if he will provide a date for same as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45026/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Requests to meet my colleague Minister Harris are normally arranged through his office. As a request has been made, I have no doubt that the Minister's Office will reply in due course.

National Children's Hospital

635. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a budget was established regarding the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45036/19]

636. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if there were investigation contracts carried out regarding the new national children's hospital; if so, the number of such contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45037/19]

637. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a pre-tender estimate was prepared in respect of the new national children's hospital; if so, the number of pre-tender estimates that were assembled; and if the project was fully pre-designed. [45038/19]

638. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the value of the accepted tender relating to the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45039/19]

639. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the date of tender regarding the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45040/19]

640. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the out-turn cost regarding the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45041/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 635 to 640, inclusive, together.

The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital. I have referred your question to the NPHDB for direct reply.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

641. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to remove age restrictions associated with the provision of the FreeStyle Libre device; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45053/19]

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

Public Procurement Contracts Data

642. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45066/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2017, there were two contracts to the value of €288,737 included the Department's annual return in respect of Circular 40/2002 that were not in compliance with procurement guidelines. One contract for €229,375 related to office maintenance where tendering for a new contract was deferred until 2018 pending relocation to new premises. Another contract for €59,362 related to mobile and telephony services where

the Office for Government Procurement (OGP) advised continuing with a current supplier until a new framework was in place in January 2018.

In 2018, there were two contracts to the value of €106,085 that were not in compliance with procurement guidelines. The contract for €74,322 related to mobile and telephony services. It had been expected that a new competitively tendered agreement would be in place by Q2 2019. However, this tender competition had been delayed due to competing priorities following the move to Miesian Plaza. My Department has been liaising with the OGP in relation to this tendering process and I expect this process to commence shortly. There was also a contract for €31,763 that related to translation services. A tender competition is currently underway to select a supplier from the OGP framework.

In respect of 2019, details for non-compliant contracts are not yet available.

In relation to contracts awarded by the HSE, as this is an operational matter, I have forwarded your query to the HSE and asked that they respond directly to you on this.

Details for other bodies under the aegis of my Department are operational matters for the bodies concerned and the Deputy should contact the relevant Director/CEO/Registrar directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

643. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if there has been progress regarding ocrelizumab being made available to persons with multiple sclerosis; his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45074/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Minister for Health has no role in relation to reimbursement decisions.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, including on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess a drug's clinical and cost effectiveness as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro, ongoing investments. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

The HSE has advised that it has received two applications for pricing and reimbursement of Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) in Multiple Sclerosis.

On 29 August 2018, the NCPE completed a health technology assessment for Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (RMS). They recommended that Ocrelizumab not be considered for reimbursement unless cost-effectiveness can be improved relative to existing treatments.

Following a number of rounds of commercial negotiations, agreement has been reached in relation to the commercial terms which will apply to this indication when reimbursed. The HSE

intends to progress Ocrelizumab for the RMS indication, which was approved for funding from October 2019, on a patient-specific basis.

On 4 October 2018 the NCPE completed their assessment for Ocrelizumab indicated for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis. They did not recommend that Ocrelizumab be reimbursed for this indication.

The HSE and the manufacturer have had a number of rounds of commercial negotiations in relation to this indication. Commercial discussions have concluded, the medicine has been reviewed by the HSE Drugs Group and the HSE Senior Leadership Team have received the Drugs Group recommendation. The HSE's final decision on reimbursement will take into consideration the statutory criteria contained in the 2013 Health Act.

Hospital Appointments Status

644. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be seen at Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45076/19]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

645. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the meaning of the phrase "minded to approve" in terms of the drug osimertinib, or Tagrisso; and the way in which he can address the funding issues for the drug for 2020. [45093/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Staff Remuneration

646. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter relating to home help staff who are employed by the HSE and are not receiving a travel time payment,

which is a statutory entitlement, due to the fact they are refusing to sign a recently amended contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45126/19]

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

Tax Rebates

647. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if medical travel expenses are re-claimable in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45134/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Health Services Access

648. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason HSE transport was withdrawn in December 2018 in a case (details supplied); the other options open to pensioners living far away but needing to get transport to respite services in a centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45135/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Card Reviews

649. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in processing a medical card review application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45141/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medical Card Applications

650. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to have a medical card application renewal processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45142/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Question No. 651 answered with Question No. 550.

Cancer Screening Programmes

652. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the reason no breakdown was pro-

vided as to the degree of change noted in 305 of the slides under consideration in the laboratory audit of 221 cases; the further reason no breakdown was provided as to which laboratories the 305 slides came from and the degree of change that pertained to each laboratory concerned; the further reason the 38 slides that did not have changes in their original interpretation after the review; and the further reason they were not removed from the statistics provided in the laboratory breakdown in table 4. [45155/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The laboratory audit that the Deputy refers to was carried out by the HSE. Queries in relation to the information provided in the report of that audit are a matter for the HSE.

Accordingly, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Psychological Assessments

653. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 15 October 2019, if the person will be assessed in another catchment area in order that the child will not have to wait for a child psychologist. [45159/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Health Services

654. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if medical care for women going through the menopause in recent years has been reviewed, as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45162/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is recommended that women who experience menopausal symptoms which they find difficult to deal with see their GP. GPs can offer treatments and suggest lifestyle changes if a woman has severe menopausal symptoms that have a significant impact on her everyday activities. Women who have a medical card are entitled to a range of services including general practitioner services, prescribed drugs and medicines, all in-patient public hospital services in public wards (including consultant services), all out-patient public hospital services (including consultant services).

A Women's Health Taskforce has been established by the Department of Health to improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare. It met for the first time on 26th September 2019 and is being led by the Secretary General of the Department of Health and the Director General of the European Institute for Women's Health in partnership with the National Women's Council of Ireland.

The Taskforce will tackle a wide range of issues impacting women's health outcomes in Ireland and will work on these on a phased, prioritised basis. The first action will be a 'radical listening' exercise that will invite women in Ireland to share their experiences of and solutions for the health system. This will be a significant, substantial and large-scale consultation process. This data combined with the available evidence will form the basis for future policy and action to improve women's health in Ireland.

As this question relates to an operational issue I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

655. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a situation was allowed to arise on 25 October 2019 at University Hospital Kerry, which at one stage had seven ambulances waiting to offload patients and were unable to do so due to overcapacity in the emergency department; the ambulance cover the rest of County Kerry had while these ambulances were waiting at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45167/19]

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

Abortion Services Provision

656. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the course of action he has instigated to ensure that he fulfils his commitment to a follow-up meeting with the family at the heart of the National Maternity Hospital false diagnosis and abortion crisis before a review of their case is undertaken. [45184/19]

657. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken to ensure that there will not be a repeat of the wrongful abortion that was carried out in the National Maternity Hospital in March 2019. [45185/19]

659. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if all the medical notes in their entirety have been given to the family at the centre of the National Maternity Hospital false diagnosis abortion crisis. [45187/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 656, 657 and 659 together.

As the House will be aware, a termination took place at the National Maternity Hospital in March of this year on the grounds that a condition incompatible with life was present. The couple involved have requested a review of their case.

My overriding concern as Minister for Health is for the couple involved and ensuring that questions regarding this incident are appropriately answered. As such, I support an independent and external review into this case. I have been advised that the National Maternity Hospital has commissioned such a review. I am sure that the Deputy would agree it is important to await the outcome of that review process, which will allow for a better understanding of what has occurred. It will also allow for any learning that may emerge to be disseminated throughout the health system. I can assure the Deputy and the House that any recommendations made by the review panel will be actioned by my Department, as well as the HSE in order to ensure that a similar incident does not occur again. My Department has also sought assurances from the National Maternity Hospital with regard to the safety and operation of the termination service, and it in turn has confirmed its compliance with the relevant legislation.

I have also met with the family to hear directly of their experiences. I and my officials are in ongoing correspondence with their representative.

Finally, with regard to the issue the Deputy raises with regard to the medical notes in this case, I understand that an ICT issue has arisen with regard to their availability as a paper copy. However, I have been advised that a technical solution to allow access to them is being pursued by the Hospital and it is hoped that this aspect of the matter will be resolved shortly. In any event, both the Hospital and my Department have offered to provide the family with access to

these files via alternative electronic means.

Abortion Legislation

658. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the expert geneticist input that was used in the formulation of the abortion legislation and guidelines. [45186/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department consulted with a number of stakeholders in developing the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 including a range of medical professionals.

As the Deputy is aware, clinical guidance documents on termination of pregnancy have been developed and published by medical colleges to assist in the provision of services under the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018. While my Department provided financial support to ensure that clinical guidelines for medical professionals operating the termination of pregnancy service were put in place at the earliest opportunity, the guidelines were developed on an independent basis by the medical colleges

Question No. 659 answered with Question No. 656.

Maternity Services

660. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the status of the maternity patient safety statement for March 2019 of the National Maternity Hospital; the reason it was not published; and the implications for the hospital as a result of not publishing the statement for March 2019. [45205/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Maternity Patient Safety Statement for March 2019 for the National Maternity Hospital may be viewed on the website of the Health Service Executive, at the following link:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/3/maternity/mpss/2019/march-2019/march-2019-maternity-patient-safety-statements.html>

HSE Funding

661. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding provided to each county under the HSE capital programme expenditure in each of the years 2016 to 2018 to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45212/19]

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

Home Help Service Data

662. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours provided in each county in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45213/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services Funding

663. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding provided to each county for mental health services in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45214/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disability Services Funding

664. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding provided to each county for adult disability day services in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45215/19]

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

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

Disability Services Funding

665. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding provided to each county for adult disability residential services in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45216/19]

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

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

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

666. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for reimbursement under the cross-border directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45247/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Speech and Language Therapy Staff

667. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a school (details supplied) has been without a speech therapist since July 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45253/19]

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

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

Mental Health Services Data

668. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of specialist substance abuse mental health teams in CHO9; and the locations and base of such teams. [45260/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Consultant Data

669. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant cardiologist posts at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; the number of vacant posts; the length of time they have been vacant; and when these posts will be filled. [45261/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

National Drugs Strategy

670. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the measures he proposes to implement to restore confidence in the national drugs strategy; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the decision-making authority is being taken away from the partnership structures of the strategy and being centralised in his Department and the HSE; if his attention has been

further drawn to the fact that necessary consultation is not taking place with communities; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the strategy at local and regional level is perceived as being undermined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45265/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Maintaining a partnership approach between statutory, community and voluntary bodies is a core value of the national drugs strategy, *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025*.

In addition, Action 39 of the strategy is to support and promote community participation in all local, regional and national structures. In line with this, 11 community and voluntary representatives are included on the oversight structures of the strategy, which give leadership and direction to support the implementation of the strategy.

I am the chair of the National Oversight Committee which has a cross-sectoral membership from the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. The Committee meets every three months and held its most recent meeting on 20th September 2019. There is also a standing sub-committee which promotes coordination between national, local and regional levels.

Drug and alcohol task forces that play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in local communities and in ensuring that a coordinated approach is taken across all sectors to address substance misuse based on the identified needs and priorities in their areas. Again, the task forces are made up of community, voluntary and statutory representatives.

The Department of Health provides annual funding of €225,000 to support, develop and facilitate the involvement of communities in the local and national structures for implementing the national drugs strategy. This includes supporting community representatives on Drug and Alcohol Task Forces, organising a national community representatives' network and participating on the national oversight structures for the national drugs strategy.

The Task Forces oversee an annual budget of €28m from the Department of Health and the HSE. This funding supports over 280 community projects, in local areas and communities throughout the country, to support initiatives to tackle drug and alcohol use and misuse.

Additional funding of €1m has been provided in 2019. This included €480,000 to provide an additional €20,000 for each of the 24 Task Forces, €10,000 of which will be on a permanent recurring basis. It also funds 13 strategic initiatives to respond to emerging trends in substance misuse and to improve access to services for people with complex needs. The funding was allocated following a national consultation with the 24 Task Forces and 9 community healthcare organisations. I am confident the new strategic initiatives will have a positive impact and make a difference to people's lives as they journey to recovery.

I am committed to working in partnership with statutory, community and voluntary sectors in implementing the national drugs strategy.

General Practitioner Services

671. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some general practitioners in County Limerick are charging for the taking of blood samples; the steps he will take to enforce the provisions of the Health Act 1970 to ensure that persons covered by the general medical services scheme are not being incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45268/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with ‘all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess.’ There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient’s symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position, under successive Governments, that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

Nursing Staff Provision

672. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to appoint a lymphedema nurse to Letterkenny University Hospital; if not, his further plans for patients in County Donegal that require the specialist services of such a nurse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45275/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

673. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the status of a disability supports application management tool for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9. [45276/19]

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

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

HSE Staff Recruitment

674. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the HSE recruitment embargo (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45278/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Home Support Service is a core service which assists older people to live independently in their own homes for longer and enables large numbers of people to return home following acute hospital admission, who otherwise would remain in hospital or would be admitted to long stay residential care.

In line with Programme for Government commitments, the Government has made improved access to home support services a priority. In 2019 almost €30 million extra was added to the budget, with a target of delivering 18.26 million hours to over 53,000 people. This represented about 800,000 more hours of support than the 2018 target.

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

To achieve a balanced budget in 2019 the HSE must ensure that the cost of the home support hours being provided does not exceed the available budget. This is in line with normal prudent management of the budget. It is not correct to say that there is an embargo on home support hours. The allocation of new hours continues to be based on clients' needs and the resources available.

In the context of planning and preparing for the challenges of the winter period, an additional €26m has been made available for the last quarter of 2019 to support the hospital and community system to improve patient egress. The investment is supporting home support and transitional care as well as keeping the waiting time for access to support under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) at 4 weeks to the end of the year.

While the existing home support service is delivering crucial support to many people across the country, it needs to be improved to better meet the changing needs of our citizens.

We have committed to an additional investment of €52 million in Budget 2020 to bring the total funding for home supports to €487 million in 2020. In 2020 the HSE will deliver over 19.2 million hours of home support, a substantial increase of 1 million hours more than this year's target.

This investment is focused on enabling older people to remain at home and as appropriate, provision of hours will also be targeted at times of peak demand in Winter 2020, at the beginning and end of the year, to ensure more timely egress from hospital for our older citizens.

The core principles of Healthy Ireland, Positive Ageing, prevention and early intervention will underpin this approach.

In relation to recruitment, I am advised by the HSE that while there is no national recruitment embargo or moratorium, there is a priority requirement for all HSE services to maintain, or get to, an affordable staffing level that is sustainable in 2019 and 2020, while also prioritising the delivery of safe services.

In light of this, the HSE have introduced control measures relating to staffing and recruitment to ensure that they live within the available resources provided to them. This does mean that in some Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations non-critical replacement posts will be paused, however, the HSE report that there is on-going capacity for replacement of critical clinical posts within frontline services throughout this period.

Health Services Data

675. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with type 1 diabetes that had their diabetes care at University Hospital Waterford sourced to other hospitals in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45287/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible

Health Services

676. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the protocols in place when moving paediatric diabetes patients to adult diabetes services at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45288/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible

Hospital Appointments Status

677. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for scans at Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45296/19]

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

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

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

678. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with mental health issues accommodated by the HSE in nursing homes and other unapproved settings outside of hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45301/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Healthy Ireland

679. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE has spent to date in 2019 on Healthy Ireland branding materials; the way in which the money was spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45306/19]

680. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the section funding stream of the HSE that pays for Healthy Ireland branding materials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45307/19]

681. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the utilisation of HSE resources in providing Healthy Ireland branding materials is an effective use of scarce resources in view of the fact his Department is responsible for Healthy Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45308/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 679 to 681, inclusive, together.

Healthy Ireland is the national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Ireland. It takes a “whole of Government” and “whole of society” approach to addressing the social determinants of health, as well as an inclusive, intersectoral approach to improve population health and wellbeing. Healthy Ireland is a key action area under the Slaintecare reform programme, which strongly endorses the need for continued cross-government commitment to implement Healthy Ireland.

The HSE has an important role in implementing the policies and cultural change required to improve health and wellbeing. Communications and citizen engagement and empowerment are critical areas for the successful implementation of Healthy Ireland. Operational responsibility for the delivery of specific initiatives promoting health and wellbeing by the health services is a matter for the HSE and expenditure arising from this is part of the implementation process.

I have referred the Deputy’s questions to the HSE for direct response concerning the funding details requested.

Health and Social Care Professionals

682. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if his Department continues to recognise that physiotherapy is an autonomous health profession and that patients do not have to have a prior medical referral to access physiotherapy services in the public health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45316/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Physiotherapists are a regulated profession under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. All persons wishing to practice as a physiotherapist must be registered with the Physiotherapists Registration Board established under the Act and must adhere to the guidelines and codes of practice issued by the Board.

As the delivery of services is an operational matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Question No. 683 answered with Question No. 551.

Medicinal Products Supply

684. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he or his officials have received correspondence from a person (details supplied) in relation to spinraza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45328/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health has received correspondence from this individual and an acknowledgement of its receipt was issued on 03 April 2019.

On 11 June 2019, the HSE Leadership Team approved access to the drug Nusinersen (Spinraza) for children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type I, II or III on an exceptional and individualised basis.

The HSE decision process in relation to Nusinersen involved a full Health Technology Assessment followed by detailed consideration by the HSE expert groups on new drug therapies, including the HSE Drugs Group and the Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee. Evidence of the clinical effectiveness of this new drug therapy was also reviewed.

After a review of all the data it was decided to approve access for children with genetically confirmed SMA Type I, II or III, in accordance with the controlled access criteria recommended by the Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee. The actual patient assessment and approval process is the means for determining access, on an individual case-by-case basis, to this complex treatment.

Paediatric Services

685. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to improve screening for arthritis and Down's arthropathy for children with Down's syndrome; the specialist rheumatology services available following diagnosis; the measures he is taking to address the shortage of paediatric rheumatologists and specialist nurse practitioners nationally and at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45331/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that there are challenges in meeting the growing demand for paediatric rheumatology services, and that the Health Service Executive is working towards improving access to such services. This is supported by the ongoing implementation of the National Model of Care for Paediatrics and Neonatology, which includes Paediatric Rheumatology.

In relation to current paediatric rheumatology service provision, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Hospital Equipment

686. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a MRI scanner in Tallaght Hospital is not working; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that appointments have been outsourced; when the repairs will be carried out; the impact this will have on those waiting for MRI scans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45334/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible

Primary Care Centres Provision

687. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Bun-crana primary care centre, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45335/19]

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

General Practitioner Services

688. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons that are in receipt of a social welfare payment and hold GMS cards are being charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their general practitioner which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45339/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with “all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess.” There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient’s symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position, under successive Governments, that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

689. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide adult intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder speech and language therapist posts to cover Inishowen, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45342/19]

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

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

690. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the reimbursement scheme for reimbursing medical expenses for persons in Northern Ireland laid down in the Health and Childcare Support (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2019 will work in practice; and if detailed instruction can be given on the workings of the scheme. [45345/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health and Childcare Support (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2019 was passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas on 15 October, 2019 and is ready to be commenced if required.

This legislation, which will only come into effect in the event of a no-deal Brexit scenario occurring, provides for the establishment of a direct reimbursement scheme which will enable eligible residents of Northern Ireland to be reimbursed for the cost of necessary healthcare incurred while abroad in an EU/EEA member state or Switzerland.

Statutory regulations are also required to define as necessary the administrative arrangements for the direct reimbursement scheme and these are currently being finalised by officials from my Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General.

Under the proposed direct-reimbursement scheme, eligible residents of Northern Ireland will pay upfront for necessary healthcare received in another EU/EEA member state or Switzerland and can then, following return home, apply for reimbursement of this expenditure from the HSE.

Residents of Northern Ireland will be able to apply for refunds via an online system which will refund eligible persons for necessary healthcare received.

Ministerial Meetings

691. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if further consideration will be given to a request from a local authority for a meeting (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45347/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Requests to meet my colleague Minister Harris are normally arranged through his office. As a request has been made, I have no doubt that the Minister's Office will reply in due course.

Health Services Charges

692. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason charges are imposed on a person in rehab care in a public hospital following a hip replacement surgery; the reason such charges are passed to clients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45348/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that the Deputy's question refers to care in a community hospital rather than an acute hospital and that, accordingly, residential support services maintenance and accommodation contributions are payable in certain

circumstances under subsection 67C(1)(a) of the Health Act 1970 which provides that:

On 1 January 2017, a “long-stay” residential support services maintenance and accommodation contributions framework under sections 67A to 67D of the Health Act 1970 and the Health (Residential Support Services Maintenance and Accommodation Contributions) Regulations 2016 replaced the former system of long stay charges for in-patient services, which had been in place from July 2005 until 31 December 2016 under the (now-repealed) section 53 of that Act.

As indicated in the Oireachtas in June 2013 by the then Minister for Health James Reilly TD,

Residential support services maintenance and accommodation contributions apply to all forms of residential support services, other than acute in-patient services and nursing home services provided to those supported under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal). In line with the system of charges it replaced, residential support services maintenance and accommodation contributions:

- apply to the maintenance and accommodation elements only of services which are provided by the HSE or by agencies funded to provide services on behalf of the HSE under section 38 of the Health Act 2004.

- become payable when a person has already received at least 30 days of residential support services during the immediately preceding 12-month period. Accordingly, each episode of rehabilitative care might not necessarily result in a contribution requirement.

The Health (Residential Support Services Maintenance and Accommodation Contributions) Regulations 2016 (as amended) provide for the rates of income-based contributions which are payable towards accommodation and maintenance costs. In accommodation such as a community hospital where full-time nursing and/or medical care is provided, the current contribution rates payable are subject to a maximum of €25.57 daily (€179 per week) for a person whose income is €223 per week or more.

Affordability and the avoidance of financial hardship are built-in features of the residential support services maintenance and accommodation contributions provisions. In all cases, the contribution rates are based on sliding scales, with proportionally lower contribution rates applying to those on lower incomes. Additionally, section 67D of the Health Act 1970 provides that the HSE may reduce or waive a contribution where appropriate, in order to:

- avoid undue financial hardship on the part of the service user and/or on the part of the service user’s dependants ,

- advance a service user’s identified needs (e.g. care plan objectives), or

- take account of separate contributions (if any) made by a service user towards his or her maintenance or accommodation costs.

To assist in the fair application of the framework, the HSE has published, and periodically updated, national guidelines for the correct determination of the contributions and comprehensive waiver guidelines (approved by the Ministers for Health and Public Expenditure and Reform) on the individual circumstances where such contributions may need to be reduced or waived. The guidelines specify that service providers must have regard to the individual circumstances of each service user and his or her dependants. The guidelines ensure that the applicable contribution may be reduced or waived where appropriate, taking account of each person’s income and necessary outgoings, including reasonable regular financial commitments,

with a view to ensuring there is no unfair burden on the service user or on his or her dependants.

The features of the residential support services maintenance and accommodation contributions framework ensure that it is reasonable and fair and that each service user's contributions are based on what he or she can afford, taking account of the service user's individual circumstances.

The HSE publishes detailed supporting documentation in relation to residential support services maintenance and accommodation contributions on its website at www.hse.ie/long-staycontributions.

Healthcare Policy

693. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his position regarding the widespread failure to implement full travel time for healthcare support assistants further to the confirmation of this legal entitlement by the HSE in August 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45350/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

694. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when a medical procedure will take place for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45354/19]

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

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

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

Hospice Services Provision

695. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of future services at the South Westmeath Hospice facility; and if a commitment can be given regarding the long-term future of this facility. [45355/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have asked the

Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

696. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for Cork University Hospital to be assessed for cataract assessment with addresses in County Kerry; and the number of persons waiting for cataract removal in South Infirmiry Cork. [45373/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2019. The year-on-year increases to the NTPF since Budget 2017 reflect this Government's priority to improve waiting times for patients to access hospital treatment.

My Department is working with the HSE and the NTPF to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. In this regard, the HSE National Service Plan 2020 will set out a planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to reduce inpatient/day case, with a particular focus on improving access to hospital outpatient services.

In 2020, NTPF will further expand its list of targeted inpatient and daycase procedures to support further reductions in wait times as well as increasing funding towards supporting full packages of care for patients on the outpatient waiting lists, to include the surgery or treatment where required.

At the end of July 2017, the number of people waiting for a cataract procedure was 10,024. Under the Inpatient Day Case Access Plan 2018, cataracts were one of the specialties targeted by the NTPF, and by end December 2018, the number of patients waiting had fallen to 6,440, a reduction of 36%. The number of patients waiting for a cataract procedure at the end of September 2019 had further reduced to 5,074, with 506 of patients waiting over 9 months. This represents a reduction of 3,865 or 88% when compared to July 2017, when there were 4,371 patients waiting over 9 months for a cataract operation.

In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, the NTPF have provided details of the number of people with addresses in Co. Kerry waiting for an Ophthalmology Outpatient appointment in Cork University Hospital, and the number of people awaiting cataract surgery in South Infirmiry Royal Victoria Hospital, at the end of September, in the following table.

Total Number of people from Co. Kerry waiting for an Ophthalmology Outpatient Appointment in CUH as at 26/09/2019

Date	Area of Residence	Hospital	Specialty	Total
26/09/2019	Kerry	Cork University Hospital	Ophthalmology	534

Total IPDC Cataract Waiting List in SIVUH as at 26/09/2019

Date	Hospital	Total
26/09/2019	South Infirmiry Victoria University Hospital	463

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

697. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for an outpatient assessment and procedure, respectively in University Hospital Kerry, Cork University Hospital and the South Infirmity Hospital, Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45376/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2019. The year-on-year increases to the NTPF since Budget 2017 reflect this Government's priority to improve waiting times for patients to access hospital treatment.

My Department is working with the HSE and the NTPF to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020. In this regard, the HSE National Service Plan 2020 will set out a planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to reduce inpatient/day case, with a particular focus on improving access to hospital outpatient services.

In 2020, NTPF will further expand its list of targeted inpatient and daycase procedures to support further significant reductions in wait times as well as increasing funding towards supporting full packages of care for patients on the outpatient waiting lists, to include the surgery or treatment where required.

In relation to the particular query raised by the deputy, the following table shows the waiting list figures at the end of September 2019 for Outpatients and for Inpatient / Day Case procedures in University Hospital Kerry, Cork University Hospital and South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital, respectively.

[PQ 697 Table]

Primary Care Centres Provision

698. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the primary healthcare centres being developed in the CHO3 area; if community mental health services are included in the planning of such centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45377/19]

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

Dietician Service Provision

699. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the posts in place for community dietitians in mental health, disability and primary care in each of the HSE areas; the plans in place to fill gaps in these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45381/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct

reply.

HSE Staff Recruitment

700. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the HSE recruitment embargo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45382/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the HSE that while there is no national recruitment embargo or moratorium, there is a priority requirement for all HSE services to maintain, or get to, an affordable staffing level that is sustainable in 2019 and 2020, while also prioritising the delivery of safe services.

In light of this, the HSE have introduced control measures relating to staffing and recruitment to ensure that they live within the available resources provided to them. This does mean that in some Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations non-critical replacement posts will be paused, however the HSE report that there is on-going capacity for recruitment of newly funded posts and replacement of critical clinical posts within frontline services throughout this period.

I have been assured by the HSE that any difficulties which arise for applicants will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

701. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the details of the 1,000 posts for new frontline staff in the HSE primary care services announced in budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45385/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The recent Budget included an additional 2020 provision of €10 million (€60 million in a full year) for the enhancement of community and primary care. I particularly welcome the advance commitment to €60 million in 2021 as it will enable the recruitment of up to 1,000 therapists, nurses and other professionals in the community on a phased basis during the course of next year. This will allow for these funded posts to be in place by the end of next year and throughout 2021 in order to address the needs identified in the Health Service Capacity Review recommendations. This funding will also facilitate the recruitment of dementia advisers. The planning for these posts will be in conjunction with the development of the new regional health areas so as to reflect the specific needs of the region.

Drug Treatment Programmes Data

702. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if all persons on methadone treatment have received screening and treatment for hepatitis C; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45393/19]

703. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure incurred on needle exchange services in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45394/19]

704. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that en-

gaged with needle exchange services in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45395/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 702 to 704, inclusive, together.

As the information requested by the Deputy relates to service matters, the query has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

705. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the level of core funding for drugs task forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45398/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I am pleased that the additional funding of €1m announced by me in March 2019 to support the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy will be continued in 2020.

€240,000 of this funding will allow for the continuation of €10,000 in additional funding to each of the 24 Drug and Alcohol Task Forces in 2020.

Hospital Appointments Status

706. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45413/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

707. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health he status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45414/19]

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

individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Mental Health Services Staff

708. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when a consultant and supportive posts for mental health and intellectual disability which have been sanctioned for CHO3 will be filled; if the posts have been advertised both nationally and internationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45426/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Treatment Benefit Scheme Eligibility

709. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 795 of 6 September 2019, if an application under the treatment abroad scheme by a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if a positive result will be issued. [45429/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

710. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health when cannabis medication in tablet form, epidiolex, will be made available here in view of the decision taken by the EU to sanction its use here on 23 September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45430/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Minister for Health has no role in relation to reimbursement decisions. In line with the 2013 Act and the national framework agreed with industry, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE, the company must submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list. Reimbursement is for licensed indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency or the Health Products Regulatory Authority. Epidiolex received a marketing authorisation valid throughout the EU on 19th September 2019 (Agency Product Number EMEA/H/C/004675). It is a medicine used in addition to clobazam to treat patients from the age

of two years who have Lennox-Gastaut syndrome or Dravet syndrome.

I am advised by the HSE that it has not received a formal application for pricing and reimbursement to date for the drug Epidyolex (Epidiolex in USA). If an application for reimbursement is received, it will be processed in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Hospital Appointments Status

711. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45432/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

712. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45433/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

713. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45434/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

714. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45435/19]

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

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

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

Psychological Services Waiting Lists

715. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of young persons and teenagers awaiting psychologist intervention services in counties Wicklow, Dublin, Meath and Cork; the wait time for each district; the number of staff providing services by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45436/19]

719. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of young persons and teenagers waiting to see a psychologist in counties Wicklow, Dublin, Meath and Cork; the wait time for each district; the number of staff providing services in tabular form; the number waiting more than 1, 6, 12 and 18 months, respectively by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45448/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 715 and 719 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

716. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45441/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

717. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45442/19]

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

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

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

respond to the Deputy directly.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

718. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Cork can obtain assistance towards the cost of equipment. [45447/19]

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

Question No. 719 answered with Question No. 715.

Hospital Waiting Lists

720. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45488/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

721. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45489/19]

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

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

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

Medical Card Data

722. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards as of 31 October 2019; the number of general practitioner cards on the same date; and the number for each type of card issued on a discretionary basis on that date. [45510/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

723. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting placement under the fair deal scheme at the end of October 2019 or the latest date available; the average waiting time; the number of persons awaiting placement under the scheme in each local health area in tabular form; and the length of time waiting. [45511/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Beds Closures

724. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds and wards in public and voluntary acute hospitals that were closed on 31 October 2019 or the latest date on which data for validated bed closures at hospital and ward level are available in tabular form. [45512/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Open Beds Report, published by my Department monthly, provides a summary of the average numbers of open inpatient beds and day beds/places in the acute hospital system based on data provided by the HSE. It can be found on the Department's website: <https://health.gov.ie/publications/>

According to provisional data received from the HSE Acute Business Information Unit, there were on average 11,008 inpatient beds and 2,268 day case beds/places available nationally in July 2019.

Information relating to closed beds is collated at a particular date in time. The number of beds closed can fluctuate greatly from day to day for a variety of reasons, including on-going refurbishment, maintenance work, and infection control measures.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

Hospital Discharges

725. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of delayed dis-

charges in each public and voluntary hospital at the end of October 2019; and the number to date in each in 2019, in tabular form. [45513/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Delayed transfers of care (previously referred to as delayed discharges) occur when patients have been deemed clinically fit for discharge from an acute bed but their discharge is delayed because they are waiting for some form of ongoing support or care following their discharge. There are many reasons for this, such as a patient undertaking the application process for NHSS, awaiting assessment for a home support package, homelessness, ward of court application, and the availability of resources.

When possible, the HSE will use transitional care to accommodate the patient during the period between discharge and the finalisation of new care arrangements, but there can often be a delay, especially in cases where the patient and family are coming to terms with the new circumstances.

This year, services are being stretched more than ever, with demand consistently outstripping supply, and we have seen an increase the number of delayed transfers of care. While the HSE maximises the use of resources, prioritising those requiring discharge from acute hospitals, there is a growing demand for egress support. In response, and in the context of planning and preparing for the challenges of the winter period, the Department and the HSE have been considering a comprehensive approach to the current the high-level of DTOCs. However, recognising the urgency of the situation, approval was provided to the HSE to begin actions immediately to the value of €5m in 2019. As part of these measures the HSE released a significant number of funding approvals within NHSS in September, and provided additional home care and transitional care beds.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

Hospital Discharges

726. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed days lost in each public and voluntary hospital owing to delayed discharges between 1 January 2019 and 31 October 2019 or the latest date available in tabular form. [45514/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Ambulance Service Response Times

727. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of clinical status 1 ECHO incidents responded to by first responder in seven minutes and 59 seconds or less for each ambulance station in each month in 2019 to the end of October 2019 or latest date available; and the percentage of clinical status 1 DELTA incidents responded to by a patient carrying vehicle in seven minutes and 59 seconds or less in tabular form. [45515/19]

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

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

728. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients aged 75 years of age or over who experienced an emergency department wait time of more than 24 hours during October 2019; the total number to date in 2019; and the hospitals in which the wait occurred. [45516/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year, with approximately 1.3 million attendances in 2018, up 3.5% on 2017.

For the first nine months of 2019, the number of patients over the age of 75 attending hospital EDs increased by 2.9% compared to the same period last year. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group.

However, the National Service Plan 2019 includes an expected activity target that 99% of patients aged 75 and over attending at an Emergency Department are discharged or admitted within 24 hours and any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

Home Help Service Data

729. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of home support hours being provided in each LHO area to the end of October 2019 or the latest date available; the way in which this compares to target in each LHO for the same time period; the number of persons on the waiting list for home support hours in each LHO area; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form.. [45517/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Ambulance Service Data

730. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency department nationwide in October 2019; the number of such ambulances that waited longer than 20 minutes to hand over patients, get their trolleys back and return to responding to calls; and the number that waited longer than 40, 60, 90, 120 and more than 180 minutes for same, respectively in tabular form. [45518/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

731. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of spinal fusion patients waiting less than four, four to eight and more than eight months, respectively, at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin and Temple Street Children's University Hospital for the

end of October 2019 or the latest date available; and if he will provide the same information for other spinal patients [45519/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Health Services Data

732. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a podiatry appointment in primary care at the end of October 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively, in tabular form. [45520/19]

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

Health Services Data

733. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an ophthalmology appointment in primary care at the end of October 2019 or the latest date available; and the numbers waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively, in tabular form. [45521/19]

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

Health Services Data

734. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an audiology appointment in primary care at the end of October 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively, in tabular form. [45522/19]

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

Health Services Data

735. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a dietetics appointment in primary care at the end of October 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively, in tabular form. [45523/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Health Services Data

736. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an oral health in primary care at the end of October 2019 or the latest date available; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively, in tabular form. [45524/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

737. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a MRI scan in the RCSI hospital group for less than 3, 3 to 6, 6 to 9, 9 to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively in tabular form [45525/19]

738. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the RCSI hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45526/19]

739. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a MRI scan in the Dublin Midlands hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45527/19]

740. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the Dublin Midlands hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45528/19]

741. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the Dublin Midlands hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45529/19]

742. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the Dublin Midlands hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45530/19]

743. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the Dublin Midlands hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45531/19]

744. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the Dublin Midlands hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45532/19]

745. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the Dublin Midlands hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than

12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45533/19]

746. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the South/South West hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45534/19]

747. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the South/South West hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45535/19]

748. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the South/South West hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45536/19]

749. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the South/South West hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45537/19]

750. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the South/South West hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45538/19]

751. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the South/South West hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45539/19]

752. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the South/South West hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45540/19]

753. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the Saolta University Health Care Group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45541/19]

754. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the Saolta University Health Care Group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45542/19]

755. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the Saolta University Health Care Group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45543/19]

756. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the Saolta University Health Care Group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12

months, respectively, in tabular form. [45544/19]

757. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for electroencephalogram in the Saolta University Health Care Group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45545/19]

758. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the Saolta University Health Care Group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45546/19]

759. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the Saolta University Health Care Group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45547/19]

760. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the University Limerick hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45548/19]

761. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the University Limerick hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45549/19]

762. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the University Limerick hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45550/19]

763. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the University Limerick hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45551/19]

764. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for electroencephalogram in the University Limerick hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45552/19]

765. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the University Limerick hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45553/19]

766. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the University Limerick hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45554/19]

767. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the RCSI hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respec-

tively, in tabular form. [45555/19]

768. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the RCSI hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45556/19]

769. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the RCSI hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45557/19]

770. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the RCSI hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45558/19]

771. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the RCSI hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45559/19]

772. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an MRI scan in the Ireland East hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45560/19]

773. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a CT scan in the Ireland East hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45561/19]

774. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for a bone scan in the Ireland East hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45562/19]

775. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an angiogram in the Ireland East hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45563/19]

776. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an electroencephalogram in the Ireland East hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45564/19]

777. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for cholangiopancreatography in the Ireland East hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [45565/19]

778. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 31 October 2019 or the nearest available date for an ultrasound scan in the Ireland East hospital group for less than three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12 and more than 12 months,

respectively, in tabular form. [45566/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 737 to 778, inclusive, together.

The HSE advise that a pilot project was commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National Integrated Medical Imaging System (NIMIS) Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund for data collection and data management expertise.

The data requested by the Deputy is collected quarterly and will be provided by my Department to the Deputy, in the format requested, when the data for Quarter 3 2019 becomes available.

Nursing Staff Data

779. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff nurses employed as of 31 October 2019 or the latest date available; and the equivalent figure for the same date in 2018 [45567/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Strategic Workforce Planning & Intelligence Unit in the HSE publish a monthly staffing census called the Health Service Employment Report online here:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/our-workforce/workforce-reporting/health-service-employment-report-sept-2019.pdf>

This reports sets out current staffing WTE levels on a monthly basis, as well as how these levels compare to the previous month, and to the same period last year, and this is broken down by Employment Staff Group on page 2 of this report.

Information relating to October staffing levels are not as yet available, however the September data is already published at that link and as such, is publicly available.

The October data should be available at that same website shortly.

Health Services

780. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a series of matters (details supplied). [45571/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

781. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 346 of 15 October 2019, the engagement that has taken place with persons (details supplied) to date regarding the period of engagement with the HSE; if the HSE will outline the

plans in place for the provision of day services following the three-month period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45576/19]

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

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

Agriculture Scheme Payments

782. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if payments to a person (details supplied) under the BEAM and BEEP schemes, respectively, will be expedited. [44184/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The objective of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. Applications for the BEAM were accepted from the 19th of August to the 20th of September 2019. An application from the person named is currently being processed, with payments under scheme scheduled to commence in December 2019.

The Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot scheme (BEEP) aims to further increase economic and environmental efficiency in the suckler herd through better quality data on herd performance, supporting decision making on the farm. Payments will commence shortly to BEEP participants who have completed the weighing and submission of data in respect of all of their eligible animals. As the person named is a participant and has fully completed the required actions under the Pilot, payment under this Scheme will issue shortly.

Animal Passports

783. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason "not fit for human consumption" would be stamped on the duplicate passport when it was not on the original passport in cases in which a horse owner loses the passport of the horse and pays €200 for a duplicate passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44186/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/262 (CR 262/2015) sets out the rules governing the identification of equidae in the EU. This legislation was transposed into national legislation via S.I. 62 of 2016 (as amended).

The identification of an equine is the first step in ensuring the safety of the food chain. This process requires the engagement of a veterinary practitioner to mark the equine and to check for the presence of a transponder which, where present, provides an important link between the animal and its original identification document.

The administration of certain medications is recorded on the equine passport and the loss of this information represents a break in the identity and chain of information on the animal. The loss of an original document and its subsequent replacement with a duplicate passport or a replacement passport results in potentially more than one lifetime identification document in circulation in respect of the animal.

Duplicate documents are issued in accordance with Article 29 of CR 262/2015. Paragraph 2(c) of that Article provides that duplicate passports must be classified as ‘not intended for slaughter for human consumption’. Similarly, Article 32(2)(c) of CR 262/2015 sets out similar requirements for replacement equine passports.

The level of fees charged for the issue of duplicate passports is a commercial matter for Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs).

The Deputy will appreciate that it is imperative that all equine animals slaughtered for human consumption are properly identified in accordance with legislation to ensure the integrity of the food chain and the protection of human health.

Basic Payment Scheme

784. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when details of an overclaim will issue to farmers of a commonage (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44195/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application on 14 March 2019 in which he declared a share on two commonages in County Kerry.

As outlined by the Deputy, an over claim has occurred on the Shanahill commonage and my Department is currently reviewing this over claim.

The person named was requested to submit commonage evidence. However, the details submitted are not sufficient as they do not cover the full declaration made by him on his BPS application. An official from my Department has been in touch with the person named regarding the additional commonage evidence required. Once the additional information is received, my Department will further process his application.

Beef Environmental Efficiency Scheme

785. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the specifications in place for the BEEP scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44237/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot scheme (BEEP) aims to further increase economic and environmental efficiency in the suckler herd through better quality data on herd performance, supporting decision making on the farm. BEEP targets the weaning efficiency of suckler cows and calves through the collection of live weights of cows and progeny in the herd of each participant.

Participants cannot guess the weight of animals under the Pilot - animals must be weighed on the participant's holding on a set of scales registered with ICBF as part of the Pilot. Animals must be weighed individually and on the same day and the data submitted to ICBF within 7

days. All weights must be submitted before the 15th November 2019.

There are two options available to herd-owners for the recording of weight data as part of BEEP. These are: (i) a Rental model, whereby participants rent scales from an approved field service agent to undertake the BEEP weight recording process, or (ii) Owned, borrowed or using a third party service providers' scales. This is where a farmer can use their own scales or one belonging to a third party. These scales will have to be pre-registered with ICBF as per the Terms and Conditions of the Pilot.

Inspections in relation to BEEP are being undertaken. This is to ensure that data submitted under the pilot is accurate. These controls can include the verification of privately owned scales, the breed of the animals involved in the pilot and the accuracy of weights submitted.

Payments have commenced to BEEP participants who have completed the weighing and submission of data in respect of all of their eligible animals. Further payments will be made in the coming weeks as more participants complete the required actions under the Pilot. Final payments are scheduled for early December 2019.

Teagasc Courses

786. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44243/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Teagasc is responsible for the delivery and operation of the Green Cert course.

Accordingly, I have arranged that the matter be brought to the attention of Teagasc who have been requested to respond directly to the Deputy.

Agriculture Schemes

787. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the grants available for a person or business to set up an orchard on the person's lands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44262/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provides support to assist fruit and vegetable growers through the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector. This is a competitive scheme open to all horticultural sectors – field vegetables, mushrooms, protected food crops, amenity crops, soft fruit, apples and beekeeping and provides grant aid at a rate of 40% (50% for young farmers) on approved capital investments. The grant aid aims to provide support to the horticulture industry in each sector. I can confirm that the investments funded under this scheme include fruit trees such as apple trees.

At a broader level, the EU Producer Organisation Scheme which my Department operates provides important support for the fruit and vegetable sector. This scheme which is 100% EU funded provides an important mechanism for producers to achieve a more sustainable balance in the supply chain through collaboration and enhancing bargaining power by becoming part of a larger supply base.

Members can claim 50% EU aid on approved actions and investments implemented through

Producer Organisations, including actions and investments on fruit production.

Beef Industry

788. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the announcement made by a company (details supplied) in recent weeks relating to weight limits and penalties was in breach of the agreement reached on 15 September 2019 regarding a minimum of four months notice to the farmer before changes are implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44316/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I refer the Deputy to the text of the Agreement reached on 15 September 2019, which is available on the DAFM website at <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/farmingsectors/beef/Agreement15September170919.pdf>.

Specifically, in relation to this issue, industry committed to ‘no change in weight limits without a minimum of four months notice to the farmer’.

Meat Industry Ireland has informed my Department that the notification referenced by the Deputy was issued to provide clarification of the existing position in relation to penalties for weight limit breaches.

GLAS Appeals

789. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a full GLAS payment will be awarded to a person (details supplied). [44331/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is no record of any appeal in respect of GLAS payments for the person named.

In this case, as part of GLAS 2019 pre-payment checks, the area of the commonage claim will be reviewed to determine the correct baseline for payment under GLAS as the eligible area has been reduced.

GLAS payments are calculated annually for qualifying actions delivered. Prior to payment, administrative checks are made on all GLAS claims including a cross check with Basic Payment Scheme records to validate GLAS area-based claims. If there is a reduction in the area being claimed on BPS, this will be reflected in GLAS payments. GLAS actions must be delivered for the duration of the contract and cannot be moved during these five years.

Animal Welfare

790. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 211 of 10 October 2019, the outcome of the investigation carried out by his Department at the farm as reported in the media (details supplied). [44382/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is currently conducting an investigation under the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations (SI 456/2011) in County Donegal and, as a result, I cannot comment further while matters are under investigation.

Brexit Supports

791. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the BEAM scheme is open to farmers that sell their cattle to a feedlot and the cattle are then slaughtered 70 days after leaving the farm; if there are exemptions for farmers supplying cattle to feedlots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44434/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The object of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. BEAM is funded by a combination of EU exceptional aid and Exchequer support, provided in light of the difficult circumstances that Irish beef farmers have been facing as a result of market volatility and uncertainty.

Under the scheme, aid will be paid on adult cattle slaughtered between September 24, 2018, and May 12, 2019, at a rate of €100 per animal subject to a maximum of 100 finished animals per herd. Aid will also be paid on suckler cows that calved in 2018, at a rate of €40 per animal subject to a maximum of 40 sucklers per herd.

Where an animal is presented for slaughter by an agent or by a dealer within 30 days of purchase, including those purchased in the mart, payment may issue to the immediate previous herdowner if they are otherwise eligible and a participants in the scheme. There is no dispensation in the scheme for payment on animals sold to feedlots and slaughtered after 70 days to be made to the previous owner.

Sheep Census

792. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of breeding ewes in each of the years 2016 to 2018, according to the annual sheep census; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44436/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of breeding ewes recorded in the annual sheep census, which is carried out in December each year, for the years 2016 to 2018 are as follows -

December 2016 - 2,640,048

December 2017 - 2,646,078

December 2018 - 2,560,180

Live Exports

793. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of lambs under one year of age exported live in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the export destinations of these lambs in each year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44437/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of sheep exported live in each of the years 2016-2018 and to date in 2019, and the export destinations of these sheep in each year can be found below in tabular form. This data refers to EU countries and has been taken from the TRACES database which does not allow for the extrac-

tion of reports that indicate the age of the sheep.

A small number of consignments of sheep have been exported to some third countries during this period. My Department is currently gathering the data with regard to these and will revert as soon as possible.

Tables:

2016	-
Country of Destination	Total Number of Animals
Belgium	8,507
France	22,685
Germany	4,902
Italy	1,677
The Netherlands	7,845
United Kingdom	2,216
Total	47,832

2017	-
Country of Destination	Total Number of Animals
Belgium	4,683
France	16,554
Germany	5,144
Italy	746
Portugal	11
Romania	15
The Netherlands	8,112
United Kingdom	1,123
Total	36,388

2018	-
Country of Destination	Total Number of Animals
Belgium	1,510
France	16,768
Germany	5
Italy	276
Portugal	4
Spain	3
The Netherlands	2,077
United Kingdom	158
Total	20,801

2019 (YTD)	-
Country of Destination	Total Number of Animals
Belgium	253
Bulgaria	280

2019 (YTD)	-
Country of Destination	Total Number of Animals
France	4,555
Germany	23
Italy	858
Spain	4
The Netherlands	515
United Kingdom	285
Total	6,773

Sheepmeat Sector

794. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of lambs under one year of age slaughtered here in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44438/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Data is collected by the Department in relation to the category of Spring Lambs, defined as sheep that are under 12 months of age that are both born and slaughtered within the same calendar year,

The following table shows the number of spring lambs which were slaughtered in the Republic of Ireland from 2016 to date in 2019.

Year	Quantity
2019	1,183,957
2018	1,653,201
2017	1,695,277
2016	1,560,808

Figures as reported in the Meat Market Report up to 27 October 2019.

Aquaculture Licence Data

795. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide copies of each boat licence granted for fisheries and the historic tracks of vessels when dredging for seed since 18 September 2019, in view of the ongoing wild mussel seed dredging in accordance with SI No. 464 of 2019, Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction (Mussel Seed) (Opening of Fisheries) Regulations 2019. [44601/19]

796. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the economic contribution that mussel seed dredging and mussel bottom grown aquaculture play in the economy; the gross and net weight tonnage processed in 2018; the tonnage exported live; and the countries to which they were exported. [44602/19]

797. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is research funded or used by his Department on mussel seed and bed ecosystem services, especially the role that mussel seed and mussels beds play in supporting fish stocks; and if so, if the research is taken into account in deciding on the opening or closing of a particular seed mussel site. [44603/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 795 to 797, inclusive, together.

Sea-fishing boat licensing is the responsibility of the Licensing Authority for Sea-fishing Boats, which is independent in the exercise of its functions. The details of all currently registered Irish sea-fishing boats are available on the Irish Fishing Boat Register, which is published online: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/seafood/sea fisheriesadministration/sea fisheriesadministration/sea fishingfleetregister/>

The monitoring and control of fishing vessels within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone are matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Naval Service. As Minister, I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters including those in relation to law enforcement. I will forward your query regarding vessel monitoring to the SFPA for direct response.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) issues regular publications on the economic output and performance for seafood production, including aquaculture. BIM also carries out survey programmes related to mussels and, from time to time, commissions reports on particular aspects of the mussel industry. BIM's publications in this regard can be found online at

<http://www.bim.ie/our-publications/>.

The Marine Institute generally advises on fisheries interactions with marine ecosystems.

The Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction (Mussel Seed) (Opening of Fisheries) Regulations 2019 (S.I. No. 464 of 2019), permits mussel seed fishing to take place from 20 September to 22 December 2019. Fishing is restricted to periods that are specified as suitable tides. The statutory instrument also identifies that such fishing is also restricted in a number of areas.

Beef Industry

798. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if correspondence (details supplied) will be reviewed; the steps he will take to ease the crisis on affected farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44673/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The beef sector is an important element of the Irish economy and I am conscious of the importance that this key sector plays in rural Ireland. I am keenly aware that the past year has been very challenging for beef farmers.

The Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM), which recently closed for applications, will provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. BEAM is funded by a combination of EU aid and Exchequer support, provided in light of the difficult circumstances that Irish beef farmers have been facing as a result of the market volatility and uncertainty. Over 34,500 farmers had applied for BEAM at its closing date of 20 September, representing potential commitments of almost €78 million.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is currently the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current RDP period.

This year, I introduced the exchequer-funded Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP),

a €20 million scheme which will provide suckler farmers with valuable data on the weaning efficiency of their animals.

The Deputy will also be aware that my Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the €4 billion Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for beef farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, Knowledge Transfer Groups and the ANC scheme.

The total budget for the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was increased again this year to €250 million. Further to changes in EU Regulations, payments under the ANC scheme will now be delivered in two instalments, with 85% advance payments issuing from mid-September and a 15% balancing payment issuing from early December.

Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

In recognising the major challenges faced by the farming sector and the important role that various schemes operated by my Department play in underpinning the viability of many farms, I secured agreement from the European Commission that will allow for a higher rate of advance payments under the 2019 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and a number of Rural Development Schemes.

The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is a constant and central component of the strategic development of the industry, as evidenced by its placement at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development. Food Wise 2025 prioritises the potential for growth in new and emerging markets.

My Department has also proactively engaged with several potential beef Producer Organisations, which have the possibility to strengthen the bargaining power of beef farmers in the supply chain. Two beef producer organisations have been formally recognised by my Department in recent months.

Information and Communications Technology

799. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44703/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is currently undertaking the upgrade from Windows 7 to Windows 10 across 211 locations nationwide. My Department has at total of 5,100 devices of which 2,950 currently use Windows 7 operating system. It is planned that the upgrade of these devices will be completed by Q2 2020.

Table:

Operating System	Number of devices as of 1/11/2019	%
Windows 7	2,950	57.84
Windows 10	2,150	42.16

Information and Communications Technology

800. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44719/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has always sought to achieve best value for the tax payer by maximising the lifetime of its computer devices, thus reducing total cost of ownership.

It had been planned to have all devices upgraded before the withdrawal of Window 7 support. However, the need to divert resources to support my Department's Brexit plans extended the timeline of the Windows 10 upgrade, which will now be completed in Q2 2020.

Extended Windows 7 support will be necessary for a small number of devices. The cost will depend on progress with the rollout but is not likely to exceed €35,000 for 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

801. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44735/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is actively upgrading all of its (Windows) computer devices to Windows 10. This upgrade will be completed by Q2 2020.

Any devices not upgraded by the time Microsoft withdraws standard support for Windows 7, will use multiple layers of technology for protection including: -

- The purchase of on-going Windows 7 support for the small number of devices using this operating system

- The use of firewalls to protect the Department's IT network

- The use of spam filters on all mail servers which are continuously updated several times per day

- The use of anti-spyware and anti-malware software on all devices on the Department's network. These products are updated on a daily basis

In addition, my Department's computer systems are independently certified to meet the ISO 27001:2013 Information Security Standard. My Department invests considerable resources to protect the information that it needs to support the wide range of activities that it carries out and has experienced and trained staff dedicated to the prevention/detection of and the response to any cybersecurity threats. My Department will also continue with its on-going training of staff in relation to the threats posed by malware, phishing attacks etc and on how to avoid these threats.

Bord na gCon

802. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

the annual dividend return by Bord na gCon in each of the past 25 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44755/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

There is no legislative provision or requirement for Bord na gCon to make an annual dividend return.

Forestry Sector

803. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will issue on a forestry application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44783/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is required to carefully assess all forestry licence applications to ensure that, among other things, environmental and landscape considerations are taken into account and that appropriate prescribed bodies are fully consulted.

On the site in question, archaeological artefacts were identified and the application was therefore referred to my Department's Archaeologist for their input. In tandem, the application was referred to prescribed bodies, An Taisce, the local authority and the relevant Inland Fisheries Board.

Following a discussion with the Registered Forester, consideration was given to changing the species to be planted. This was particularly important for this site, as the change was from conifer to broadleaves. This site is adjacent to a SAC and the choice of species was of the utmost importance, as it would feed into the Appropriate Assessment Screening. The applicant was contacted in November 2018, requesting a decision on the species.

In January 2019, correspondence from the Registered Forester noted that the applicant wished to continue with the species chosen. In March 2019, the applicant and Registered Forester were asked to resubmit information in view of the surrounding SAC. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) was also requested and received from the applicant.

The information received is currently being examined by my Department.

Departmental Staff Data

804. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44838/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of full and part-time staff employed by my Department are shown in the table below:

Category	No. of Staff
Full-Time	3,045

Category	No. of Staff
Part-Time	512
Grand Total	3,557

There are currently no staff in this Department being paid at the National Minimum Wage rate of pay.

Animal Carcase Disposal

805. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of discussions between his officials and an association (details supplied) regarding funding for the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44872/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Officials from my Department, recognising and acknowledging the concerns raised in relation to the challenges facing the knackery industry, have met with the Animal Collectors Association (ACA) on a number of occasions since August 2019.

My Department is committed to putting together a scheme that will provide for significant financial support to the knackery industry to stabilise the industry and to restore a level of competitiveness to this difficult, but vitally important, industry.

My Department held the latest in a series of constructive meetings with the ACA on Monday 21st October and both parties have committed to meet again this month to continue discussions.

GLAS Appeals

806. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made in relation to a GLAS appeal for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44883/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was selected for an on-farm inspection and subsequently submitted a detailed review request in relation to a penalty under the coppicing of hedgerow action of the GLAS contract.

The review requested will now be carried out. Once this process has concluded, a decision will issue to the person named.

GLAS Appeals

807. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS appeal will be finalised for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44890/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an appeal to the Agriculture Appeals Office in relation to the Department's decision to refuse an application for Force Majeure following the termination of the GLAS contract in this case.

That office will notify the person named, in writing, of the outcome of the appeal in due course.

Agriculture Scheme Data

808. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of designated agents per annum submitting a SFP or BPS on behalf of farmers since the reference years of 2000, 2001 and 2002, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44905/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): It is not possible to ascertain figures for paper applications submitted by agents during the years in question.

The facility to apply online for SPS/BPS was first introduced for the 2007 application year and the information requested by the Deputy is provided below for the years since then.

Year	No. of Agents that submitted online applications on behalf of Farmers
2007	208
2008	328
2009	415
2010	391
2011	394
2012	427
2013	423
2014	451
2015	517
2016	578
2017	607
2018	607
2019	612

Animal Disease Controls

809. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost for BSE testing on fallen animals in knackereries in each of the years 2014 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44962/19]

810. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cases of BSE discovered in each of the years 2014 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44963/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 809 and 810 together.

No cases of BSE were identified in Ireland in 2014, 2016, 2018 and so far in 2019, with just one case identified in both 2015 and 2017 respectively.

In 2015, a case of Classical BSE was confirmed following an official sampling of a fallen animal aged 48 months and older. This sampling is one element of a comprehensive multi-layered control programme which is systematically applied in Ireland.

The same control system enabled my Department, in 2017, to confirm a case of Atypical

BSE in an 18-year-old cow, also through its surveillance of fallen animals at knackeries. There were no associated public health risks with this event. The disclosure of this case of Atypical BSE has no impact on Ireland's current OIE BSE "controlled risk" status or trade status.

Human health continues to be protected by the ante-mortem inspection of animals by veterinarians before being allowed into the food chain, and the removal and destruction of tissues shown to be capable of transmitting infection. A diminishing number of such cases have been identified in Ireland and in other countries over the years. Animal health continues to be protected by the ban on the feeding of ruminant meat and bone meal to all farmed animal species. Associated controls are in place to ensure implementation, as well as a range of further control measures. Accessing emerging beef markets in Asia requires robust assurances on BSE and this surveillance provides these assurances.

The cost for BSE testing on fallen animals in knackeries from 2014 to 2018 is shown in the table below.

BSE Testing	Cost
2014	€518,080.90
2015	€577,121.43
2016	€655,853.22
2017	€648,901.26
2018	€807,998.26
Total	€3,207,955.07

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

811. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal to the agriculture appeals office (details supplied). [44989/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office operates independently of my Department.

I am advised that the Appeals Office received an appeal on behalf of the person named on 31 July 2019 in relation to the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS). The Appeals Office requested the file and a statement on the grounds of appeal from my Department. All the relevant documents have recently been received by the Appeals Office.

I am advised that the appeal has now been assigned to an Appeals Officer and that the Office will be in contact with the appellant shortly to arrange an oral hearing of the appeal.

Forestry Sector

812. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a series of matters regarding the forestry industry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45007/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The forest estate is expanding and has reached 770,000 hectares, which is 11% of the total land area. This is as a result of significant State investment. We now have a new challenge, to meet 8,000 hectares of new planting each year as set out in the Climate Action Plan. I am very aware that this is in the face of declining planting rates and that this year has been disappointing in terms of

hectares planted.

However, I believe that we can, through a concerted and collaborative effort from government, the private sector, public bodies and local communities, reverse this trend and meet the Climate Action targets so essential to delivering on our national climate change objectives.

Support for afforestation from Government is delivered through the generous grants and premiums available, across 12 different planting categories which offer real options to suit every landowner. Farmers can continue with livestock farming, while supplementing their income by planting trees, and we intend communicating this message widely. To this end, we are funding 15 promotion projects countrywide this year and next in the amount of €830,000 and Teagasc is actively promoting forestry through a substantial programme of educational and forestry events.

Communities can and have become involved through the NeighbourWood Scheme, funded by my Department, which supports the development of accessible woodlands for public use and enjoyment.

The Woodland Environmental Fund allows business to discharge their corporate responsibility and to support the national effort by paying a supplementary €1,000 a hectare to landowners for the planting of native woodlands. I am delighted that An Post is supporting this initiative through the establishment of a new native woodland in County Galway, and I know that other organisations have expressed interest in encouraging native woodland planting by means of the Fund.

Public bodies have a role to play too. In this regard, I very much welcome the recent announcement by Coillte and Bord na Mona of their plans to plant 4 million native trees on 1,500 hectares over the next three years. I will be encouraging others to follow suit.

In terms of the afforestation scheme, I acknowledge that changes made to internal Appropriate Assessment Procedures (AAP) has resulted in delays to many files. These are beyond my Department's control as we are obliged to implement changes to AAP that were required following important Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decisions and their subsequent interpretation by the Forestry Appeals Committee and others. All forestry licences issued by the Department undergo a legal consent process. Since 2017, all licence afforestation and forest road applications received have been subject to a statutory public notification system and all afforestation, forest roads and felling decisions issued are subject to a statutory appeal system operated by the Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC).

Most appeals have been in connection with our Appropriate Assessment (AA) procedure. The Habitat Directive (Article 6.3) requires that where a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura site, either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, it must undergo an appropriate assessment of its implications for that Natura site. In this regard, the introduction of the 15 km assessment buffer around potential forestry sites is necessary and is an industry norm.

Currently, we are amending the AA procedure in order to introduce a robust and workable system which will address the issues now faced. Introducing this system involves the recruitment of additional ecological expertise and changes in procedures for the forestry inspectorate. Last week, the Department advertised for additional ecologists and we also have access to external ecological support, which will be supplemented in due course. Inspectors have already undergone training and will receive appropriate support in delivering these new procedures; they are not on a work to rule. A categorisation of files affected by these requirements is also underway in order to best assess further action needed and by whom.

Notwithstanding that this has led to a temporary disruption in issuing afforestation licences, we know that the sector has approximately 3,200 hectares of approvals issued this year which are shovel-ready and yet to be planted.

I am fully aware of the concerns of the sector in relation to the AA process. My officials are in regular communication with stakeholders and they have been fully apprised of the issues involved and of my Department's efforts to address them. They have also been advised of steps they can take to ensure that applications received are completed to an acceptable standard and to take account of any issues relating to sensitive habitats.

Furthermore, for my part, I have commissioned a consultant to review my Department's processes and procedures on forestry applications and approvals similar to an exercise undertaken in Scotland. I expect to receive this report by the end of November and that it will provide an opportunity to make our processes more effective and efficient going forward.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

813. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45056/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In line with the requirements of Department of Finance Circular 40/2002, each year my Department carries out an assessment of contracts with a value above €25,000 that were awarded in the preceding year without a competitive process, and submits a report to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) by 31 March. Accordingly, the information sought in respect of 2019 is not yet available but I will make it available to the Deputy in due course. The position in relation to 2017 and 2018 is set out below.

In 2017, my Department procured just under €100 million worth of goods, services and works of which 38 contracts with a value of €5,697,117.74 was declared non-compliant, comprised as follows:

- 13 contracts with a value of €825,995.73 were undertaken in the area of food safety and animal/plant health & animal welfare and relate to the purchase of proprietary laboratory consumables across my Department's Laboratory Complex;

- 7 contracts with a value of €354,968.39 were undertaken in the area of food safety and animal welfare and relate to testing and the provision of relief staff;

- 3 contracts with a value of €182,980.83 relate to canteen service, printing of export certificates and conferencing facilities;

- 6 contracts with a value of €1,731,879.75 relate to the provision of datalinks, telephony, mobile voice and data services;

- 1 contract with a value of €2,196,207.82 relates to the provision of storage services for intervention stocks;

- 2 contracts with a value of €74,683.87 relate to the emergency removal of waste water in a Fishery Harbour Centre;

- 3 contracts with a value of €184,301.65 relate to the provision of electrical services, hard-

ware supplies and equipment hire in Fishery Harbour Centres;

- 2 contracts with a value of €107,882.26 relate to local purchases of hardware supplies;
- 1 contract with a value of €38,217.44 relates to aggregate expenditure on fuel card services.

In 2018, my Department procured just over €105 million worth of goods, services and works of which 47 contracts with a value of €3,902,538.80 was declared non-compliant, comprised as follows:

- 4 contracts with a value of €301,590.43 relate to plant hire, equipment hire and consultancy services in the Fishery Harbour Centres;
- 37 contracts with a value of €3,226,454.96 relate to the procurement of proprietary laboratory supplies, proprietary maintenance and servicing of laboratory instruments, and laboratory testing undertaken across the areas of food safety and animal/plant health & animal welfare;
- 5 contracts with a value of €322,522.11 were undertaken in the area of IMT;
- 1 contract with a value of €51,971.30 relates to the provision of relief staff.

As regards the twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department, the information requested is an operational matter for the State Bodies themselves. I have referred the Deputy's question to the Agencies and have requested that a response should issue within 10 days.

While my Department is making headway in addressing non-compliance with a reduction of €1.795 million evident between 2017 and 2018, it aims to redouble these efforts in the coming year to ensure there is an appropriate focus on good practice in procurement and that procedures are in place to improve compliance with relevant guidelines and legislation.

Brexit Supports

814. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the breakdown of BEAM funding paid out to date by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45078/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The objective of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. Applications for BEAM were accepted from the 19th August to the 20th September 2019.

Payments under the scheme are scheduled to commence in December 2019.

GLAS Payments

815. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the breakdown of GLAS funding paid in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45079/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The table below shows the total payment for all GLAS schemes in respect of scheme years 2016 - 2018.

GLAS payments continue to be processed on a weekly basis, as all requirements are fulfilled.

The 2019 Advance payments for GLAS are due to commence shortly.

County	2016	2017	2018
Carlow	€1,731,861.26	€2,247,954.33	€2,201,806.64
Cavan	€5,664,675.08	€7,825,695.00	€7,753,256.93
Clare	€10,277,605.55	€13,602,548.95	€13,443,869.98
Cork	€13,152,877.45	€16,688,073.61	€16,371,509.65
Donegal	€11,642,428.99	€16,692,110.93	€16,423,622.88
Dublin	€317,843.62	€380,609.60	€363,109.67
Galway	€18,148,614.84	€24,346,973.19	€23,986,123.26
Kerry	€11,622,885.16	€14,708,160.42	€14,482,715.06
Kildare	€1,373,515.27	€1,803,421.76	€1,773,483.03
Kilkenny	€2,728,481.46	€3,505,615.52	€3,410,644.81
Laois	€2,372,018.02	€3,313,906.17	€3,257,038.53
Leitrim	€6,183,062.52	€8,321,915.35	€8,252,414.61
Limerick	€5,963,983.92	€7,599,451.38	€7,525,864.24
Longford	€3,610,637.74	€4,966,325.69	€4,889,822.29
Louth	€942,214.29	€1,308,760.10	€1,298,699.23
Mayo	€15,955,805.29	€22,370,967.82	€22,014,682.53
Meath	€2,620,777.70	€3,569,818.72	€3,531,556.85
Monaghan	€2,783,990.33	€4,081,176.95	€4,025,105.65
Offaly	€3,232,666.23	€4,485,961.24	€4,424,032.15
Roscommon	€8,721,516.09	€11,638,570.29	€11,517,309.51
Sligo	€5,342,565.39	€7,304,125.92	€7,197,606.47
Tipperary	€7,159,457.04	€9,211,155.16	€9,105,887.32
Waterford	€2,066,963.15	€2,539,057.55	€2,521,809.68
Westmeath	€3,839,505.87	€5,014,732.46	€4,961,409.27
Wexford	€4,489,087.52	€5,742,119.29	€5,674,411.86
Wicklow	€2,142,350.52	€3,010,869.26	€2,961,577.78

Agriculture Scheme Administration

816. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the procedures in his Department when dealing with invalid single and basic payment scheme applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45161/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As required under EU legislation governing the implementation of schemes such as the Basic Payment Scheme and, prior to 2015, the Single Payment Scheme, applications are subject to comprehensive validation checks to ensure that only valid applications are processed for payment.

At the validation stage of processing, a variety of issues are identified which require examination and correspondence is entered into with the applicants concerned, as necessary.

Such issues include dual claims, insufficient commonage evidence, over claims and incomplete applications.

As replies to these queries are received, further processing may take place and cases are cleared for payment if the issue(s) identified have been sufficiently addressed to meet the criteria for payment.

If the Deputy has a specific case in mind, I will be happy to make further enquiries if he supplies the details to my office.

Basic Payment Scheme Administration

817. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason satellite inspections are not carried out earlier in the year (details supplied). [45317/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU regulations governing the administration of the Basic Payment Scheme, the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme and other area-based schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including Ground or Remote Sensing (Satellite) inspections where applicable, are fully completed to ensure eligibility with the various schemes requirements before any payments issue. There are certain minimum numbers of inspections that must take place annually under the various schemes.

The method of selecting cases for inspection is set down in EU regulations and is undertaken by means of a risk analysis process with cases being selected on a risk and random basis. All cases to be selected for inspection must be in respect of eligible beneficiaries under the various schemes. Therefore, the selection of cases for inspection, while commencing after the closing date for receipt of applications, i.e. 15th May, is an on-going process so as to ensure this specific regulatory requirement is fulfilled..

This year, late applications were accepted up to 9th June, with a deduction. Furthermore, amendments to applications were accepted up to 9th June, and, allowing for the Preliminary Checks process whereby applicants could amend their application further up to 19th June as a result of issues notified to them by my Department, the final details of the land to be subject to the inspection process cannot be fully established until these periods have elapsed.

The process of a Remote Sensing inspection involves a comprehensive review of the satellite imagery received at two stages during the year, and also the assessment of additional imagery, where required, to ensure that the actual claimed area in the application corresponds to the area farmed by the applicant, that the crop types are as claimed and that ineligible land or features are not included for payment purposes. The governing regulations further prescribe that where it is not possible to make an accurate determination on the eligibility of a parcel or parcels of land by means of an assessment of the available imagery, a field visit must be undertaken to verify the position on the ground.

Some 6,840 applicants have been selected for a Remote Sensing inspection in respect of the various 2019 area-based schemes. As of 4th November, my Department had received inspection results in respect of 83% of these cases for final processing. Of these cases, over 95% have been finalised and advanced to payment stage processing, which ensures that any non-inspection related scheme criteria have been met. For example, an applicant under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme must meet scheme specific criteria relating to stocking density and stock retention periods before payment can issue.

Where an over-declaration in area, at scheme level, is identified as part of the inspection process, officials in my Department contact the applicant concerned giving them the opportu-

nity to accept the inspection findings or to submit comments for examination. Currently, 2% of cases for which inspection results have been received are at this stage of the process and will be finalised when the applicant contacts my Department. The remaining cases are subject to final processing.

My Department continues to finalise the outcome of Remote Sensing inspections on a daily basis to ensure that ANC and BPS payments due are issued as quickly as possible.

Farm Costs

818. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has studied the average price of rent paid per hectare in County Galway; if so, the average price; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45349/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's "Annual Review and Outlook for Agriculture, Food and the Marine 2019" provides up to date information and statistical analysis on a wide variety of topics impacting the agri-food sector. It includes an overview of "Land Prices and Land Mobility", including the "Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland/Teagasc Land Market Review & Outlook 2018", which showed the following average rental prices per acre in Connaught/Ulster by land use:

Land usage	Average Rental 2018 €
Graze/Meadow/Silage	160
Grazing only	141
Cereal Crops	179
Roots/Maize/Pulses	183
Potatoes	252

The "Agri-taxation Review" identified increasing the mobility and the productive use of land as one of its key objectives. A number of measures to rebalance the rental sector in favour of long-term leasing have been introduced in recent years. Long-term leasing has a number of advantages over the short-term conacre system: it allows progressive farmers to enlarge their farm holdings and increase productivity; it provides young farmers and new entrants cheaper access to land as opposed to the relatively high cost of ownership; it provides security of tenure and the certainty required to encourage lessees to maintain and make an investment in improving land and is especially important in accessing bank credit. It also provides a route to retirement for older farmers, assisting in generation renewal.

Greyhound Industry

819. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the support of the Irish greyhound industry; if his attention has been drawn to an ongoing report into greyhound tracks here; the position regarding the Greyhound Racing Act 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45353/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The provisions of the Greyhound Racing Act 2019 improve governance, regulation and control. The future of the sector depends on the adoption of best practice on animal welfare matters by all involved. My Department is conscious of the need for Bord na gCon to improve regulation and control and my officials and I have worked with the sector to introduce new and strengthened regulations in this regard.

The Board of Bord na gCon remains committed to the protection of the integrity of the greyhound industry and promotion of the welfare of greyhounds. With the new legislation in place, together with the maintenance of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund for Bord na gCon at €16.8m for 2020, the industry will have the tools to strengthen and reform.

I am aware that Bord na gCon has commissioned a full analysis of and recommendations on the industry footprint of the future by Indecon Economic Consultants. The publication of the report is expected at the end of November 2019.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

820. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1430 of 6 September 2019 and the decision to increase the eligible area of land in November 2018 backdated to 2015, the reason balancing payments for AEOS, ANC and GLAS for the period 2015 to 2018 has not issued to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45374/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The position in relation to AEOS, ANC and GLAS payments for the person named is as follows:

AEOS: The person named completed their AEOS contact on 31 December 2015. The position in relation to AEOS payments for the 2015 scheme year is currently under review. The applicant will be contacted directly if any balance is due.

ANC: Payments in respect of the person named are under review and my Department will contact the applicant when the review is complete.

GLAS: The GLAS payments for scheme years 2016, 2017 and 2018 have issued to the person named. Any outstanding payments identified from a review of land area eligibility will be processed in due course.

Protected Disclosures

821. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to a case (details supplied); if the case has been assessed and conclusions made; the steps he has taken regarding the case and the information it has provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45379/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The protected disclosure referred to deals with operational fisheries control matters, responsibility for which rests with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority. I am aware of the issues raised in this disclosure and I can assure the Deputy that it is being treated with the utmost seriousness.

The matter is being considered by the SFPA, which is the body legally assigned responsibility for fishery control matters. Given the nature of the issues raised, I have asked the SFPA to keep me informed of developments.

Brexit Supports

822. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of partnerships with two or more herd numbers that will receive funding under the beef emergency aid measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45401/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The objective of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. Applications for BEAM were accepted from the 19th of August to the 20th of September 2019.

There are 134 partnerships with two or more herd numbers that should receive a payment under BEAM.

Brexit Supports

823. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of partnerships with one herd number that will be limited to just one payment under the beef emergency aid measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45402/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The objective of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. Applications for BEAM were accepted from the 19th of August to the 20th of September 2019.

There are 492 partnerships with one herd number that should be limited to just one payment under BEAM.

Brexit Supports

824. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the criteria applicable to BEAM will be improved in view of the likely shortfall in drawing down the full funding available for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45464/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The objective of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. BEAM is funded by a combination of EU aid and Exchequer support, provided in light of the difficult circumstances that Irish beef farmers have been facing as a result of market volatility and uncertainty.

The implementing regulation was within the competence of the European Commission and Member States were invited to comment on the contents of the draft regulation. However, it was not open for negotiation. Ireland subsequently published a formal notification of the scheme as required under the regulation.

The scheme was designed to target aid to those who had been most impacted by the market disturbance for which it was requested. The reduction/restructuring requirement was required

by the Commission; it was also required to be at individual farm level.

As the scheme is voluntary, it is a decision for individual eligible farmers as to whether to participate or not. In response to requests from farm bodies, the period for receipt of applications was extended to 20 September and there was support and advice available to prospective applicants from my Department at the National Ploughing Championships.

In total 34,517 applications were received, representing a potential payment of €78,192,380. A further 560 applicants, who did not qualify for the support as they had failed to meet the eligibility criteria laid down in the scheme Terms and Conditions, submitted an application under appeal in order to have their eligibility for the scheme reviewed.

Under the implementing regulation, Ireland may grant additional national support for the measures taken under Article 1 of the regulation up to a maximum of 100% of EU funding. Therefore, undrawn funds cannot be used for other purposes outside of the measure.

In Budget 2020, I have provided almost €85 million in targeted schemes to support sustainable beef farming. This includes almost €45 million for the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), and a further €40 million for targeted supports. I intend to consult with stakeholders as to the use of these funds.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

825. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a remote sensing inspection will take place for a person (details supplied) relating to the person's ANC application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45491/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes application on the 8th May 2019. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including, in some cases, remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was the subject of a Remote Sensing land eligibility inspection and he was notified by letter on 7th October 2019 of the initial inspection findings, which identified an over-declaration in area. This letter afforded the person named the opportunity to submit his comments on the inspection findings and comments were received on 11th October 2019. In order to address the concerns raised by the person named, a field visit was arranged to verify the position on the ground.

This field visit took place on 25th October and the outcome is now being processed. On completion of this process, the person named will be notified of the final inspection findings. Further processing of payments under both BPS and ANC will then be undertaken with the aim of issuing any payments due shortly thereafter.

In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the findings of the final inspection, they can request a review of the decision, details on this will be set out in the final notification letter.

National Broadband Plan Funding

826. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the amount allocated to the national broadband plan in 2020; the amount of this which will be coming from the reserve fund of €200 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44183/19]

827. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount required in each of the years 2019 to 2028 and from 2029 to 2043 under the headings of projected subsidy, conditional subsidy and contingent subsidy encroachment in the context of the level of funding required for the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44239/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 826 and 827 together.

The overall subsidy for the NBP State intervention over 25 years, as approved by Government, is €2.143 billion, excluding a contingency of €480 million and VAT of €354 million.

Based on the National Development Plan allocation, funding for the National Broadband Plan in my Department in the 2019 budget was €75 million.

The Government has allocated €119m in the 2020 budget, including an additional allocation of €30 million from the 2020 capital reserve, for the initial roll out of the National Broadband Plan State Intervention in 2020.

The multi-annual expenditure ceilings for Capital Expenditure for my Department are published in the Budget 2020 Expenditure Report. The total capital expenditure ceiling for my Department for 2021 is €517m and for 2022 is €611m.

The detailed allocations required for the NBP for 2021 and for subsequent years of the NBP, to deliver high speed broadband to over 1.1 million people in the intervention area, will be settled in the context of the annual Estimates process.

Climate Action Fund

828. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of a grant for local authorities towards the replacement of street lighting with energy efficient LED bulbs; and the status of an application by Westmeath County Council to the scheme. [44296/19]

850. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the operation of the climate action fund; the date for the opening of the 2019 application process for the fund; the details of the scheme to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44547/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 828 and 850 together.

The Climate Action Fund is one of four funds established under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 as part of Project Ireland 2040. The fund supports initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets in a cost effective manner. It also offers the potential for innovative interventions which, in the absence of support from the fund, would not otherwise be developed.

Following the first call for applications, I announced the seven successful projects which

will receive up to €77 million in support. Funding was allocated following a competitive process with public and private sector organisations eligible to apply.

The project validation process (which includes detailed due diligence) is on-going for six projects. The ESB ecars project has successfully completed the validation process and commenced delivery. The Local Authority Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project is one of projects which is currently in the validation process. The Roads Management Office is the lead applicant for the project and Westmeath County Council is one of the project partners.

The majority of funding for the Climate Action Fund will be provided by excess income from the petroleum products levy collected by the National Oil Reserves Agency. The legislation to enable this funding to be provided is currently being developed.

The Climate Action Plan sets out that the next round of the Climate Action Fund will commence by the end of this year.

Illegal Dumping

829. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of intermediate bulk containers containing diesel sludge waste dumped in County Louth in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number of arrests and subsequent prosecutions made pertaining to each of the dumping incidents recorded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44960/19]

830. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the annual cost for clean-up and disposal of dumped intermediate bulk containers containing diesel sludge waste in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019 in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44961/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 829 and 830 together.

Enforcement in relation to illegal diesel laundering activities is primarily a matter for the Revenue Commissioners from the point of view of avoiding loss of revenue to the Exchequer and my Department does not compile statistics in relation to arrests made or prosecutions taken.

My Department assists local authorities in carrying out their role as competent authorities under waste legislation, which is to take the necessary measures, on behalf of the State, to ensure that any waste generated and left abandoned by diesel launderers is disposed of without endangering human health and without harming the environment.

Over 1,000 incidents of diesel laundering waste dumping have been dealt with by local authorities to date and my Department has reimbursed the costs associated with such disposal in every instance. Details of the amount provided by my Department to Louth County Council for the period 2016-2019 are set out in the following table.

Louth County Council	Incidents	Costs
2019	26	€161,963.33
2018	26	€166,215.67
2017	37	€174,905.74
2016	48	€922,518.09

Warmer Homes Scheme Eligibility

831. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the parameters for the section of budget 2020 which proposes to provide free upgrades to lower income households to make their homes warmer, more comfortable and more energy efficient; the definition of the proposed financial outlay from the State regarding free upgrades; the definition of a lower income household; the measures proposed to make such homes warmer, more comfortable and more energy efficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45248/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Supporting home owners on low incomes to retrofit their homes is a priority for Government. In Budget 2020, the Government allocated €52.8 million for the Warmer Homes Scheme to support the retrofitting of the homes of people living in or at risk of energy poverty. This represents the biggest ever allocation for the Scheme – more than double the initial allocation for 2019. €13 million of this funding is ring-fenced revenue arising from the increase in the carbon price. Income eligibility for the Warmer Homes Scheme requires applicants to be in receipt of one of the following Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection payments: - -

- Fuel Allowance
- Job Seekers Allowance for over 6 months and have a child under seven years of age
- Working Family Payment
- One-Parent Family Payment
- Domiciliary Care Allowance
- Carers Allowance and live with the person you are caring for

The measures that can be carried out under the Warmer Homes Scheme include the following:

- Attic Insulation
- Cavity Wall Insulation
- External Wall Insulation
- Internal Wall Insulation
- Ventilation
- Lagging Jackets, Draught Proofing and Energy Efficient Lighting
- Heating Systems and Windows (only when recommended by SEAI surveyor)

The exact mix of measures provided to each property depends on the existing condition of the home and the recommendations of an SEAI survey of the home.

Additional funding is also being made available to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to retrofit local authority homes. This includes €20 million of carbon price revenue which has been allocated to deliver grouped upgrades as promised in the Climate Action Plan. Targeted at the Midlands, the new scheme will be built around core work on some of the social housing stock in the region but also designed to allow other homeowners to “opt

in” to the aggregation model which will streamline services on an area basis. The specific design of the scheme will be led by the Retrofit Taskforce which is chaired by my Department.

National Broadband Plan

832. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that he and-or his officials provided the Oireachtas Committee of Public Accounts and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment with the most up-to-date information and mapping information in respect of recent committee hearings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44245/19]

833. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale for the approach taken in the context of the market survey update consultation regarding the national broadband plan mapping exercise; if his attention was drawn to the difficulties obtaining mapping and future plans by smaller internet service providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44246/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 832 and 833 together.

The Government appointed National Broadband Ireland (NBI) as the Preferred Bidder for the NBP in May 2019. This followed a tender process designed to ensure that every home and business throughout the country will have access to future proofed high speed broadband and will cater specifically to an estimated 1.1 million people, representing almost 25% of the population of rural Ireland who would not otherwise have access to this vital service. Since then my officials have been performing the due diligence work needed before a contract can be concluded.

As a State intervention, the NBP must comply with the requirements of the European Commission’s Guidelines on the application of the State aid rules on broadband. The Guidelines require, amongst other things, that Member States carry out a detailed mapping exercise and public consultation process in particular to identify as far as reasonably possible those areas where intervention is required.

My Department recently conducted a public consultation to close the ongoing mapping exercise, seeking submissions from operators who wish to have their existing high speed broadband networks, or who have developed plans to invest in high speed broadband networks over the next 7 years, to be included on the Department’s High Speed Broadband Map. That consultation was extended twice at the request of operators, resulting in a total nine week period for submissions and it closed on 30th September 2019.

As part of the consultation, over 180 submissions were received from a variety of stakeholders, including 30 from large and small commercial telecommunications operators, with the remainder from local authority broadband officers and members of the public.

Operator submissions are assessed against the Department’s published assessment criteria. Operators submitting planned investments are required to sign a declaration that they will enter into a Commitment Agreement with the Department if their plans satisfy the assessment criteria and are accepted by the Department as being concrete and credible.

The findings of the consultation, which will be available in the coming weeks, will ensure that the State Intervention Area is up to date and that it reflects commercial operators’ plans and the responses from householders and businesses, in advance of a contract being signed later this

year. This will be an important element in concluding the State Aid approval process with the European Commission.

Both I and my officials have provided detailed and comprehensive information to the Oireachtas on the National Broadband Plan (NBP), including with the respect to the Intervention Area Map, and details of the process through which the map may be changed are published on my Departments website.

National Broadband Plan

834. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has undertaken the process of due diligence in respect of a person (details supplied) and their former businesses and-or enterprises in the context of the national broadband plan; if concerns were raised during this process; if so, the way in which he and-or his officials dealt with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44247/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government appointed National Broadband Ireland (NBI) as the Preferred Bidder for the National Broadband Plan (NBP) in May 2019. Since then my officials have been performing the necessary financial and contractual due diligence work needed before a contract can be awarded. The Department's work is well progressed and, pending Government approval, I expect that the contract will be signed before the end of the year after which deployment will commence.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

835. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 520 and 521 of 15 October 2019, the cost of the additional appointee to which he referred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44289/19]

836. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 520 and 521 of 15 October 2019, the specific details of the role of the additional appointee with regard to the design of certain river habitat enhancement projects on OPW drained channels that have been allocated funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44290/19]

837. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 520 and 521 of 15 October 2019, the projects the additional appointee is working on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44291/19]

838. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 520 and 521 of 15 October 2019, his plans with regard to appointing a replacement for the project management officer that recently resigned from the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44292/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 835 to 838, inclusive, together.

The additional appointee is on the pay scale of a Research Officer in Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) which is €35,151 to €67,575 per annum.

The role of the appointee is to review the projects proposed on OPW channels and determine, in the first instance if they are appropriate. If the works are required, the appointee will prepare habitat enhancement plans that will increase the biodiversity of the riverine environment. The additional resource will also have a role in assisting with the supervision of the construction of the works necessary for the plan and in ad-hoc duties in support of the Project Management Office in delivering river channel enhancement projects.

There currently are a number of river habitat enhancement projects on OPW drained channels that have been allocated funding by IFI that are not making progress towards completion. IFI are engaging with the applicants for these projects to ascertain if they intend to or are able to make progress with the projects. If the applicants do not make progress with these projects it is IFI's intention to withdraw the offer of funds from the applicants and determine what works are required at these sites to increase the biodiversity of those riverine habitats and the priority of those works to IFI. The appointee will develop plans for those sites where enhancement works are required. To that end, and in order to avoid possible delays to those projects arising from season critical factors, the additional resource has commenced reviews and surveys of those projects in advance of the withdrawal of funds. The projects are the Abbert River Spawning & Habitat Regeneration project, the Boycetown and Trimblestown project, the Deel Project Phase 1, the Hartions Bridge Instream Work Project and the Navan Anglers O'Grady Phase 1 and 2 projects.

There are currently no plans to replace the temporary project management officer that recently resigned from IFI.

Building Energy Rating Administration

839. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of the 420,000 homes that have availed of the range of home retrofit schemes administered by SEAI that have changed their building energy rating as a result of work carried out under the retrofit scheme; the changes by BER rating in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44301/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Government funded grant schemes for energy efficiency have supported upgrades to over 400,000 homes since 2000. Data in relation to the number of homes that have changed their BER following an upgrade under these schemes is not available. However, the SEAI has carried out analysis on a sample of the homes upgraded under the Better Energy Homes scheme. The findings are presented in Table 1. A similar analysis, again estimating the pre works BER was carried out on 2017 and 2018 completions under the Warmer Homes Scheme. The estimated pre works BERs and actual post works BERs are presented in Table 2

The Climate Action Plan has committed to increasing the scale and depth of retrofit activity in order to meet our emissions reduction targets from the Built Environment. This will involve 500,000 homes being upgraded to a BER B2 or the cost optimal or carbon equivalent by 2030. A Retrofit Taskforce, chaired by my Department, is driving the achievement of this target. A key part of the Taskforce's work will be designing a national retrofit delivery model that groups homes together to achieve economies of scale and provides smart financing options and easy pay back methods. A €20 million pilot in the Midlands in 2020, funded with the revenues from the increased carbon tax and focussing on social housing as a core element of the project, will inform this model.

Energy Schemes Data

840. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes in each county that have availed of retrofit programmes (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44302/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A range of Government funded grants are available to householders to suit their circumstances and scale of work they wish to undertake. The measures available under these grants have been progressively expanded in recent years to promote deeper measures and support the transition away from fossil fuel heating systems. The majority of these grants are available to homeowners whose properties were built before 2006. Since the introduction of these grants nearly 400,000 homes across the country have received an energy efficiency upgrade, representing nearly one home in five across the country.

The Government's Climate Action Plan sets an ambitious target of 500,000 energy efficiency retrofits by 2030. Achievement of this target will be supported by the Project Ireland 2040 allocation of €3.7 billion as well as the range of measures identified in the Plan.

Budget 2020 has allocated €146 million for retrofitting homes and businesses. This record level of investment is an important step towards realising the Government's Climate Action Plan targets for building retrofits.

The information requested in relation to the number of homes that availed of grants under each scheme, by county breakdown where available, from 2009 to end of September 2019 is set out in the table below. Approximately 40,000 additional homes were also upgraded from 2000-2008 under the Warmer Homes scheme and from 2012 to date under the Better Energy Communities scheme. A county breakdown is not readily available for those properties.

-	Better Energy Homes Scheme	Warmer Homes Scheme	Warmth & Well-being Pilot	Deep Retrofit Pilot
2009-2019	No. of Homes Completed	No. of Homes Completed	No. of Homes Completed	No. of Homes Completed
Carlow	2438	1904		0
Cavan	4062	2299		1
Clare	9393	3137		2
Cork	32917	14088		8
Donegal	5352	5582		16
Dublin	49873	18239	1130	62
Galway	17033	6416		10
Kerry	10283	4171		3
Kildare	7940	4542		4
Kilkenny	4159	1992		5
Laois	3391	2001		1
Leitrim	1118	1763		1
Limerick	14483	5749		6
Longford	1669	1747		0
Louth	8241	4779		1
Mayo	6376	6111		64
Meath	9339	4112		2

-	Better Energy Homes Scheme	Warmer Homes Scheme	Warmth & Well-being Pilot	Deep Retrofit Pilot
2009-2019	No. of Homes Completed	No. of Homes Completed	No. of Homes Completed	No. of Homes Completed
Monaghan	3062	1848		0
Offaly	2476	2637		1
Roscommon	3060	2929		0
Sligo	2464	2401		0
Tipperary	8885	5529		27
Waterford	7896	4460		15
Westmeath	3321	3006		7
Wexford	8494	5170		23
Wicklow	4759	3426		2

Commercial Property

841. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of commercial property green leases that SEAI has identified that are under operation by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44303/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The SEAI do not gather or have information on the number of commercial property green leases in Ireland. Property leases, whether green or not, are private agreements and would be considered commercially sensitive contracts. Green leases usually rely on tenant–landlord cooperation by promoting collaboration and fostering better communication between the parties.

It is generally recognised that there are advantages to green leases, or the incorporation of green clauses in leases, when it comes to promoting improved energy efficiency.

In this context, green leases are included as an area of focus as part of the public consultation exercise to be launched shortly on ways to help address the split incentive problem in the rented sector. This will include seeking suggestions on how in practice more widespread use of effective green leases could be encouraged or promoted in rented commercial buildings.

Just Transition Fund

842. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a just transition fund will be provided for Moneypoint power station to offset the move from fossil fuels and its impact on workers that lose their jobs at the station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44324/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ireland’s necessary transition away from carbon-intensive sources of energy, towards more sustainable, renewable energy sources, will have a significant impact on the workers in these carbon-intensive sectors, their families, and communities. Government has committed to delivering a whole of Government approach, and to working with local stakeholders, to ensuring that a just transition is provided to those impacted by this transition. Budget 2020 includes a number of measures that will form part of the Governments approach to supporting a Just Transition. They include:

- €6 million for a Just Transition Fund;
- €5 million for bog restoration and rehabilitation; and
- €20 million to deliver new model to group housing upgrades.

These measures will be immediately targeted at the Midlands and will support retraining and reskilling workers and assist local communities and businesses in the Midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition. There will be further engagement with local stakeholders on the application of the funding.

I understand that, following extensive engagement between ESB, the staff at Moneypoint and their trade unions, staff have accepted a proposal relating to the reconfiguration of the station based on a new lower running regime. This proposal was accepted in a staff ballot which concluded on 4 October. This is a positive step in retaining an on-going operation in Moneypoint. ESB will continue to work with staff and their representatives to implement the agreement in a collaborative way to face the challenges ahead.

I can assure the Deputy that ESB remains committed to Moneypoint and, in line with its Brighter Future strategy and Government decarbonisation policy, the Company is currently examining technology options for the plant that will deliver large-scale, low-carbon electricity generation, fuel diversity, and security of supply, after generation from coal ceases no later than 2025.

The agencies of the State will support workers affected through their services and I am open to receiving submissions from regional stakeholders on remaining challenges which might need support in the context of just transition.

Energy Infrastructure

843. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to reconsider including the Shannon liquid natural gas terminal on the EU project of common interest list; the analysis made in the context of the proposed inclusion; if he sought external advice on the matter; if so, if he will provide the advice; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44329/19]

845. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to approve the inclusion of the proposed gas terminal on the Shannon Estuary in the fourth list of projects of common interest in the absence of assessments of energy security, greenhouse gas emissions and sustainability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44404/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 843 and 845 together.

The Shannon LNG project to which the Deputies refer has been designated as a project of common interest for the last 6 years. It was designated as a project of common interest in 2013 and again in 2015, and 2017. It has been supported by Ireland since 2013 as it would enhance Ireland's energy security by increasing import route diversity. This project is one of a number of natural gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects included in the 4th EU PCI list.

However, while Ireland continued to support the inclusion of Shannon LNG on the 4th EU PCI list, I have made it clear that the Government will not consider any application for EU Con-

necting Europe Facility (CEF) funding for any LNG project until an energy and sustainability security of supply review has been completed and considered by the Government and the Dáil, and only if the projects in question are consistent with national and EU climate policy objectives.

The energy sustainability and security review will consider how and from where fossil fuels are sourced during a transition to a carbon neutral economy. It will also consider the role that battery storage, pumped storage, hydrogen and CCS can play.

In addition, at the meeting of 4 October 2019 which considered the 4th PCI list, Ireland enquired from the EU Commission whether the implications of importing LNG to the European Union, from conventional and unconventional fracked sources, have been examined in terms of a sustainable, secure and competitive European energy policy. The Commission advised that it had launched a study on methane emissions and agreed with the need to link gas imports to the objective of a climate neutral economy.

In relation to the process of PCI selection, it is organised by the European Commission in accordance with the requirements of EU Regulation 347/2013 which covers PCIs. This involves an evaluation process of projects put forward by project promoters. The process also involves the project promoters, regulators, Member States and other stakeholders participating in regional groups to discuss the projects.

The draft PCI list, which was agreed by Member States and the Commission at a meeting of 4 October 2019, has now been adopted by delegated act by the European Commission, and forwarded by the Commission to the European Council and Parliament for their consideration.

My Department did not seek external advice on the inclusion of the Shannon LNG project on the 4th list of Projects of Common Interest; the project has been included on each of the previous PCI lists from 2013 to date. The project is a private commercial project and the future development of this project, including final investment decisions, are matters for the project promoter.

The EU Regulation which provides for the designation of a project of common interest does not override the requirement to comply with environmental law or to obtain the necessary permits or consents. Compliance with all legal and regulatory requirements in relation to consents or permits, including environmental assessment, are the responsibility of the project promoter. Decisions on consents for the construction of an LNG plant would be a matter for the relevant consenting authorities.

Housing Estates

844. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider housing estates (details supplied) in County Westmeath as part of the retrofit programme allocation made in budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44375/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A just transition and protecting the most vulnerable is at the heart of the Climate Action Plan and measures announced as part of Budget 2020 will support those most affected. The Government has allocated €20 million of Carbon Price revenue to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to deliver grouped upgrades as promised in the Climate Action Plan. Targeted at the Midlands, the scheme will be built around core work on some of the social housing stock in the region but will also be designed to allow other homeowners to

“opt in” to the aggregation model which will streamline services on an area basis. It will also support an estimated 400 jobs directly and indirectly. The specific design of the project will be led by the Retrofit Taskforce which was established in recent weeks and is chaired by my Department. Decisions in relation to the locations that will be involved in the scheme next year have not yet been made.

This significantly increased level of investment represents an important step towards realising the Government’s Climate Action Plan targets in the area of building retrofitting while prioritising the most vulnerable households.

Question No. 845 answered with Question No. 843.

National Broadband Plan

846. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has funded or if funds relating to national broadband plan funding have been directed towards a company (details supplied) in 2019; his plans for same in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44413/19]

847. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has funded or if funds relating to the national broadband plan have been directed towards a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44431/19]

848. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to award an initial percentage of national broadband plan funds to a company (details supplied) via another company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44453/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 846 to 848, inclusive, together.

The Government appointed National Broadband Ireland (NBI) as the Preferred Bidder for the National Broadband Plan (NBP) in May 2019. Since then my officials have been performing the necessary financial and contractual due diligence work needed before a contract can be concluded. The Department’s work is well progressed and, pending Government approval, I expect to sign the contract before the end of the year after which deployment will commence.

The NBP contract for the State intervention will be with NBI. NBI will be supported by a number of internationally experienced subcontractors, including the KN Group, Kelly Group and Actavo among others to assist in the delivery of the NBP. NBI is also finalising infrastructure access agreements with key infrastructure providers such as eir and enet. NBI will be required to demonstrate good value for money for these key subcontracts.

Landfill Sites

849. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the person or body that will cover the costs associated with the remediation works at Whitestown landfill, County Wicklow, including legal costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44522/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard

Bruton): The costs of the required remediation works at Whitestown are not yet known and are a matter for the Local Authority in the first instance. No decision has been taken about funding of the remediation works.

Question No. 850 answered with Question No. 828.

Environmental Protection Agency Reports

851. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the report from the Environmental Protection Agency Air Quality in Ireland 2018 and its specific call for the effective implementation and enforcement of the proposed nationwide smoky coal ban to reduce air pollution; the timeline for a decision in relation to fulfilling the existing commitment to introduce a smoky coal ban; his views on the comments by an organisation (details supplied) on the issue of the smoky coal ban; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44548/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I welcome the recent publication by the Environmental Protection Agency report “Air Quality in Ireland 2018”, which sets out the current position as regards our air quality and illustrates certain challenges in this regard. The report indicates that air quality levels at monitoring sites in Ireland were below the current EU legislative limit values in 2018, although the stricter World Health Organisation (WHO) guideline values (which are lower and, therefore, offer greater protection) were exceeded at a number of monitoring sites for fine particulate matter, ozone, and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). Particulate matter from the domestic burning of solid fuel is one of the main pollutants identified in the report. In relation to the proposed nationwide extension of the ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal (or “the smoky coal ban”, as it is commonly known), I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question [41406/19] of 16 October, and note that the position is unchanged.

In relation to the comments of the Asthma Society, my officials recently had a positive meeting with representatives of the Society to hear their views on the issue, and I look forward to further engagement in the future.

In the meantime, I intend to publish the National Clean Air Strategy in the coming months, to inter alia set out a number of policy measures to improve air quality nationwide.

My Department is also funding the Environmental Protection Agency’s roll-out of the Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP), which will greatly improve the data available on air pollution in Ireland, facilitating the design and targeting of appropriate policy measures to tackle it.

National Broadband Plan

852. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if broadband connection points are to be tendered for under the national broadband plan; when the tendering process will commence; if a company (details supplied) is eligible to bid for the tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44578/19]

861. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has met a company (details supplied) in the context of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44816/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 852 and 861 together.

The Government appointed National Broadband Ireland (NBI) as the Preferred Bidder for the National Broadband Plan (NBP) in May 2019. Since then my officials have been performing the necessary financial and contractual due diligence work needed before a contract can be concluded. The Department's work is well progressed and, pending Government approval, I expect to sign the contract before the end of the year after which deployment will commence.

The NBP contract for the State intervention will be with NBI. NBI will be supported by a number of internationally experienced subcontractors, including the KN Group, Kelly Group and Actavo among others to assist in the delivery of the NBP. NBI is also finalising infrastructure access agreements with key infrastructure providers such as eir and enet.

In the first year of roll out, the NBI will deploy over 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide communities with a high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations. The BCPs are included in the overall scope of the National Broadband Plan and NBI's solution which was submitted and evaluated as part of their final tender submission. The BCPs along with a number of other parts of NBI's solution will be subject to a subcontract. NBI will be required to demonstrate good value for money for these key subcontracts. NBI is currently putting in place the necessary subcontracts with its key suppliers, so that it can assure the delivery of its commitments under the NBP contract.

I can confirm that neither I nor officials in my Department have met with the company referred to by the Deputy in the context of the National Broadband Plan.

Medical Waste Disposal

853. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 346 of 28 June 2019, the outcome of the meeting on 13 June 2019. [44580/19]

863. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the delivery of the annual support of €75 for the disposal of medical incontinence wear for vulnerable persons to help meet the average annual coat of disposing of domestic waste; when the support will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44860/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 853 and 863 together..

Since mid-2017, a range of charging options have operated, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste. This provides flexibility to waste collectors to develop various service-price offerings that suit different household circumstances. Mandatory per kilogramme 'pay by weight' charging was not introduced. A Price Monitoring Group (PMG) was established in mid-2017 to monitor the on-going cost of residential waste collection to homeowners across Ireland as the 'flat-rate structure' was being phased out. While fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend has been relative price stability.

My Department has been examining this issue in detail and has engaged with relevant stake-

holders in an effort to see how best to provide a financial support to persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical incontinence wear. In this regard my officials held a meeting with a number of representative organisations on 13 June 2019 to provide an update on the current situation regarding the proposed support along with a summary of efforts to date to develop a suitable mechanism to deliver this support. There are complex issues at play, which is understandable given the sensitive nature of the medical data in question.

Postal Codes

854. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if an issue with an eircode (details supplied) will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44654/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geographical locations provided by authoritative sources. These sources are An Post, who collect information on new and existing properties, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) who provide the geographical locations for all these properties. The National Ambulance Service (NAS) integrated Eircodes into its computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system in February 2016. NAS use a state-of-the-art CAD system that utilises only the latest version of Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) digital maps for call taking and ambulance dispatch and not Google maps. Callers to the NAS give the patients address and Eircode. The advanced mobile locator automatically positions the patient's property and the nearest available ambulance on the NAS call takers OSI digital map. The patient's geographical location along with the Eircode is then sent to the mobile data terminal (MDT) in the ambulance, which allows the ambulance crew navigate to the scene using OSI digital maps so as to arrive at the correct location facilitating speedier access to care.

Ambulance emergency requests often come from isolated locations. The use of Eircodes assists in the rapid identification of often non-unique, rural addresses. The NAS considers the Eircode information to be very important in responding to emergency calls for such addresses.

Electric Vehicles

855. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason there are no electric vehicle fast charging points in County Cavan; if matters raised by a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if consideration will be given to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44678/19]

881. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of electric vehicle charging points installed in each county in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; the number of planned installations in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45081/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 855 and 881 together.

The Climate Action Plan sets out a range of actions to support the delivery of charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. These actions include developing the infrastructure to stay sufficiently ahead of demand.

There are currently over 650 standard public charge points and 96 fast chargers, which are mainly on national routes, in Ireland. Most of this infrastructure was installed up to 2016 by the ESB as part of its eCars programme with a limited number of charge points installed since. My Department does not have a detailed breakdown by county and year of the charge point installations. However, the public charge points currently provided by ESB eCars are shown along with the status of each charger on their online map.

I am aware that there is currently no fast charger in County Cavan. I also understand that there is a need for greater numbers of charge points, and in particular fast chargers, as the number of electric vehicles increase. Under the first call for applications from the Climate Action Fund, I approved funding of up to €10 million will support ESB eCars to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network, with ESB eCars also investing €10 million. This project includes the installation of 140 fast chargers consisting of 90 150kW chargers (each of which will be capable of charging two vehicles simultaneously) and upgrading 50 existing standard chargers to 50kW chargers. The project will also involve replacing over 500 existing standard charge points with next generation high reliability models.

This is a multi-annual project and is expected to be fully completed by 2022. The locations of the chargers that will be installed as part of this project have not been finalised. However, a provisional map of the planned network, showing indicative locations, was developed by ESB eCars and has been published on my Department's website.

I expect approximately half of the 140 new fast chargers to be installed by the end of 2020 bringing the total to over 160 fast chargers. This is expected to further increase to over 200 by the end of 2021 and over 230 by the end of 2022.

In addition, Budget 2020 provided €2 million in funding for a new SEAI support scheme for public charge points. This scheme provides funding to Local Authorities who install public charge points. A grant of up to €5,000 per charge point is provided with sufficient funding available to support the installation of up to 400 charge points next year.

Energy Schemes Data

856. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if funding will be made available in late 2019 to SEAI to conduct energy efficiency works on homes of persons in receipt of eligible social welfare payments whose homes previously had limited works carried out under the remit of the free upgrade scheme; his views on whether a home that may have received nominal works in the past such as attic insulation would benefit greatly from full energy efficient works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44691/19]

886. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes that previously received works under the better energy warmer homes schemes that have been successful for a second visit to date in 2019; the number of applications requesting a second visit to date in 2019; the criteria used to assess eligibility for a second visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45340/19]

887. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes that previously received works under the better energy warmer homes schemes which have been successful for a second visit in 2019; the number of applications requesting a second visit in 2019; the criteria used to assess eligibility for a second visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45346/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 856, 886 and 887 together.

The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty.

The initial Warmer Homes Scheme budget allocation for 2019 was €24 million. However, following a mid-year capital review conducted by my Department and SEAI, the budget has been increased to €39.8 million for 2019. The budget for 2020 will be €52.8 million - a record level of funding for the scheme.

The aim of the scheme is to deliver efficiency measures in a way which represents the best possible use of Exchequer funding. The rules of the Scheme stipulate that repeat upgrade visits are not provided. This rule is in place to ensure that the available Exchequer funding provides upgrades to as many eligible homes as possible and to prioritise eligible homes that have never had any work completed under the scheme.

In 2018, the measures available under the scheme were expanded. Previously, those homes which were not suitable for cavity wall insulation could not get their walls insulated under the scheme. Since the expansion of measures, the scheme can now, in certain circumstances, provide internal or external wall insulation. This is permitting the upgrade of a wider range of property types (such as homes with solid walls) and also increases the energy savings and emissions reductions that the scheme can achieve. In addition, it will enable future fuel switching.

Demand for the scheme is extremely high, reflecting the shift to deeper measures, and is impacted by longer delivery times associated with these types of works and the available budget. The homeowners on this waiting list have never received any form of free upgrade from SEAI under the scheme.

The Climate Action Plan commits to reviewing ways to improve how current energy poverty schemes target those most in need. This review is underway and will consider the issue of revisits for additional works.

Information and Communications Technology

857. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44706/19]

858. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44722/19]

859. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44738/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 857 to 859, inclusive, together.

My Department currently has 552 devices using the Windows 7 operating system. My Department has not been informed of any additional charges with regard to extended support for the Windows 7 operating system beyond January 2020. There is no obligation on my Department to accept any additional premium payments for on-going support that may be applied by Microsoft from January 2020. My Department has a complex security infrastructure deployed that incorporates the use of hardware and software to protect all network assets and devices on the Department's network and my Department is satisfied that this infrastructure is providing optimum protection to the Departments ICT network.

My Department is working with our shared service provider, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to implement a phased migration of all computers on the network to a later version of the Windows operating system during 2020.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

860. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the pledges, initiatives, partnerships and funding committed to in the context of the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit nine action areas; the nature of commitment and involvement by Ireland in each of the coalitions and multi-state initiatives established as part of the summit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44812/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The UN Climate Action Summit, which took place on 23 September, was convened by the UN Secretary General to build momentum towards enhanced climate ambition by Parties to the Paris Agreement. This was preceded on Saturday, 21 September, by the Youth Climate Summit. Parties to the summit were invited to make new commitments under a number of different themes, include mitigation strategy; resilience and adaptation; climate finance and carbon pricing; social and political drivers; energy transition; resilience and adaptation; nature-based solutions; infrastructure, cities and local government; industry; and youth engagement and public mobilisation. Ireland has confirmed support for a number of initiatives under different themes for the Climate Action Summit which are aligned with domestic policy priorities and these are set out below.

1. Mitigation Strategy Coalition

Ireland was included on a list of countries and non-Party stakeholders that demonstrated genuine leadership either by having developed plans to achieve net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050, by having identified this target as a long-term national goal or by advancing consultations on a long-term strategy for climate-neutrality in line with the Paris Agreement.

2. Resilience and Adaptation Coalition

- *Call for Action: Raising Ambition for Climate Ambition*
- *InsuResilience Initiative*
- *Global Commission on Adaptation Agriculture Food Security Initiative*
- *Africa Adaptation Initiative*
- *LDC Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR)*

3. Social and Political Drivers Coalition

- *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Climate Action Initiative*
- *Health as a Political Driver for increased Climate Ambition on Climate Change*
- *Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change on Culture and Natural Heritage*
- *Just Transition and the Creation of Green Jobs for All*

4. Energy Transition Coalition

- *Decarbonising Shipping: Getting to Zero Coalition*
- *Three Percent Club for Energy Efficiency*

5. Nature-Based Solutions Coalition

- *Nature Based Coalition*

6. Industry Coalition

- *Leadership Group for Industry Transition*

7. Youth Engagement and Public Mobilisation Coalition

Ireland and the Marshall Islands jointly sponsored the preparation of the 'Kwon Gesh' (or "Solemn Duty") climate pledge, which invites its signatories to give the younger generation a greater voice in creating climate policy.

A full list of the announcements and commitments made at the Climate Summit can be found at UN climate website at www.un.org/climatechange.

The commitments entered into by Ireland do not give rise to any new funding commitments for the State. In terms of next steps, it is now a matter for the lead countries to determine how each initiative can be further developed and implemented. My Department expects to have further engagement from the relevant lead countries in relation to each initiative over the coming months.

Question No. 861 answered with Question No. 852.

Departmental Staff Data

862. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44841/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are currently 349 full time and 48 part time (work sharing) staff in My Department. All staff in my Department are paid above the minimum wage rate of pay.

Question No. 863 answered with Question No. 853.

Warmer Homes Scheme

864. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the timelines and deadlines for the expanded warmer homes scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44861/19]

865. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the retrofitting of social housing and those at risk of energy poverty under the expanded warmer homes scheme will be prioritised; his plans to ensure that delivery of same is done in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44862/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 864 and 865 together.

The Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households that meet the defined eligibility criteria and are vulnerable to energy poverty. The Scheme has been in existence since 2002 and has provided upgrades to over 140,000 homes, leaving the occupants better able to afford to heat their homes to an adequate level.

The scheme is available nationwide and has evolved over time from initially only providing basic insulation, to now also offering a much deeper retrofit including internal and external wall insulation. The Climate Action Plan commits to a review of the scheme being completed by the end of the year to ensure that those most in need are targeted.

A budget of €52.8 million has been allocated to the Scheme for next year. This represents the biggest ever budget for the Warmer Homes Scheme – more than double the initial allocation for 2019. €13 million of this funding is ring-fenced revenue arising from the increase in the Carbon Price. This significantly increased level of investment represents an important step towards realising the Government's Climate Action Plan targets in the area of building retrofitting while prioritising the most vulnerable householders.

Social housing upgrades are a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. A budget of €25 million has been allocated for the social housing energy efficiency retrofit programme in 2019. Budget 2020 has provided an additional €20 million from revenues arising from the increase in the carbon price, for the retrofitting of social housing in the Midlands. This scheme will focus on upgrading much larger batches of homes in distinct, compact geographical areas and allow private homeowners to opt-in. This will determine the savings that can be achieved through a larger scale and more structured approach to the renovation of our housing stock. It will also create new, sustainable employment in the region. The specific design of the project will be driven by the Retrofit Taskforce which is chaired by my Department.

Illegal Dumping

866. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding being made available to each county council to deal with incidents of illegal dumping and fly tipping in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44863/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provided funding of €1.2 million and €1.8 million to the Anti-Dumping Initiative in 2017 and 2018 respectively and a further allocation of €3 million has been made available this year to support over 280 projects across the country. Details of this year's allocations and the projects funded by the Anti-Dumping Initiative in both 2017 and 2018 can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/waste/enforcement/anti-dumping-initiative/Pages/AntiDumpingInitiative.aspx>

Electricity Generation

867. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which electricity generation can depend on alternatives such as wind, solar and hydropower; the percentage of electricity being met by each of these means; his projections for the future in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44864/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government's Climate Action Plan sets out the roadmap to increasing the overall share of renewable electricity generation to 70% of demand by 2030. This is a significant increase from the current level of 30%. The Climate Action Plan provides for the early and complete phase-out of the highest CO₂ intensity fossil fuels in the electricity sector - coal by 2025 and peat by 2028 - leading to a reduction of 7-8Mt of CO₂ emissions by 2030. The specific trajectory of renewable electricity out to 2030 will be set out in Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan which is due to be finalised by the end of 2019.

Regarding the current fuel mix, I refer the Deputy to the 2018 statistics published by Eirgrid which shows the fuel mix for electricity generation in Ireland. They can be found on Eirgrid website at

<http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/Fuel20Mix.jpg>.

This generation mix is expected to change with the planned increase of renewables between now and 2030, further detail on which can be found in EirGrid's recently published All Island Generation Capacity Statement 2019-2028, which can be found on EirGrid's website at:

<http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/EirGrid-Group-All-Island-Generation-Capacity-Statement-2019-2028.pdf>.

Broadband Service Provision

868. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of broadband service to an area (details supplied). [44891/19]

869. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the availability of broadband for a property (details supplied). [44932/19]

870. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the availability of fibre broadband in an area (details supplied). [44945/19]

871. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the availability of fibre broadband to an area (details supplied). [44947/19]

872. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of fibre broadband to an area (details supplied). [44958/19]

873. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of fibre broadband to an area (details supplied). [44959/19]

875. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of fibre broadband to an area (details supplied). [44975/19]

878. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the availability of fibre broadband services for an area (details supplied). [44990/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 868 to 873, inclusive, 875 and 878 together.

Every home, farm, school and business in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband – no matter where they are located – following the Government’s decision to approve the appointment of a preferred bidder to the National Broadband Plan. Under this plan, Ireland will become one of the first countries in the world to ensure that those in rural areas have the same digital opportunities as those in urban areas.

The premises referred to by the Deputy are in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department’s website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP.

Since the Government decision in May 2019 to appoint NBI as the Preferred Bidder for the National Broadband Plan contract, work has continued on the due diligence necessary to conclude the contract. This process is progressing towards contract award, which is expected before the end of the year. The network deployment will commence shortly after that.

The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment. A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed.

In the first year of roll out, the Bidder will deploy approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations.

The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises at the end of the second year, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll out is completed.

Work continues on finalising the contract and in parallel to this work, I am considering the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Communications Committee report which was published recently. I will bring my deliberations of the report to Government in due course.

Broadband Service Provision

874. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the broadband service being provided to person (details supplied) will be investigated; and when high speed broadband will be made available to this location. [44973/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): According to my Department’s high speed broadband map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, the premises referred to by the Deputy is one which is indicated as having been

passed by eir as part of their rural deployment of high speed broadband. Therefore, that premises should be in a position to order a high speed broadband connection from a provider offering services on the network.

Where a premises in this situation is having difficulty getting connected, my Department's customer service team in the National Broadband Plan (NBP) Division can assist by raising a case with eir.

I advise the Deputy's constituent to contact the NBP customer service team at broadband@dcae.gov.ie directly, providing their name, phone number, email address and Eircode, as well as details of the issues they are experiencing. My Department will then be in a position to pursue a case on their behalf with eir.

Question No. 875 answered with Question No. 868.

Electric Vehicle Grants

876. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to consider the inclusion of imported hybrid vehicles in the outdoor charge point grant scheme. [44978/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Electric Vehicle Home Charger Grant scheme provides grants of up to €600 towards the cost of installing a home charger. These grants are available for buyers of both new and second-hand electric vehicles whether purchased in Ireland or imported. Purchasers of all types of electric vehicles (including battery electric vehicles and plug in hybrid electric vehicles) which currently qualify or have previously qualified for support under the Electric Vehicle Purchase Grant scheme are eligible for the grant.

Currently, the Electric Vehicle Home Charger Grant is only available for homes with off-street parking locations where the charger is connected to the domestic electricity supply of the home. Early next year, as set out in the Climate Action Plan, I intend to expand the Electric Vehicle Home Charger Grant to include locations with shared parking such as apartments.

Broadband Service Provision

877. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the availability of fibre broadband in an area (details supplied). [44979/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): According to my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, the premises referred to by the Deputy is one which is indicated as having been passed by eir as part of their rural deployment of high speed broadband. Therefore, that premises should be in a position to order a high speed broadband connection from a provider offering services on the network.

Where a premises in this situation is having difficulty getting connected, my Department's Customer Service team in the National Broadband Plan (NBP) Division can assist by raising a case with eir.

I advise the Deputy's constituent to contact the NBP Customer Service team at broadband@dcae.gov.ie

dccae.gov.ie directly, providing their name, phone number, email address and Eircode, as well as details of the issues they are experiencing. My Department will then be in a position to pursue a case on their behalf with eir.

Question No. 878 answered with Question No. 868.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

879. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45059/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a matter of course, my Department complies with the procurement framework. However, on occasion, contracts are awarded without a competitive tender. These contracts are approved in accordance with Circular 40/2002 (Public Procurement Guidelines), which recognises that in certain exceptional circumstances, the award of a contract without competitive procurement is justified.

My Department discloses details all contracts in excess of €25,000 awarded without competitive procurement in its Appropriation Account each year.

Since 2017, 34 contracts (totalling €14.6m) have been awarded non-competitively by my Department. Details of these contracts, along with the exception which applies in each case, are shown in the table below.

Year Awarded	Contract	Contract Value	Exception for not following a competitive procurement process
2017	Maintenance of the Department's core ArcGIS platform.	€684,000	The agent, licensee or franchise holder has sole rights to supply a service or product.
2017	Supplier of geocodes for use in the Department's mapping systems.	€34,000	The particular service provider has exclusive data or information required to perform a particular task.
2017	Software licensing and support for the Department's virtual server environment.	€109,594	The particular service provider has exclusive data or information required to perform a particular task.
2017	Upgrade to the Department's financial management system.	€74,600	The agent, licensee or franchise holder has sole rights to supply a service or product.

Questions - Written Answers

Year Awarded	Contract	Contract Value	Exception for not following a competitive procurement process
2017	Modelling of the implications for Ireland of the proposed EU 2030 Climate and Energy Framework.	€350,000	The particular service provider has exclusive data or information required to perform a particular task.
2017	Ongoing development and application of energy systems modelling, integrated electricity and gas modelling and policy simulation modelling.	€250,000	The particular service provider has exclusive data or information required to perform a particular task.
2017	Supporting the development of Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan and related technical analytical support.	€61,000	The particular service provider has exclusive data or information required to perform a particular task.
2017	Delivery of a waste information and awareness campaign.	€35,000	The particular service provider has exclusive data or information required to perform a particular task.
2017	Urgent environmental monitoring at mining sites.	€65,450	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2017	Examination of the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the proposed North-South interconnector.	€100,000	The particular service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2017	Provision of legal advice regarding the Corrib gas field project.	€100,000	Due to urgency a competitive process could not be undertaken in the time available.
2017	Purchase of firewalls for the National Cyber Security Centre.	€296,990	Any public knowledge of the operations of the National Cyber Security Centre would be considered a security risk.
2017	Purchase of hardware for the National Cyber Security Centre.	€121,983	Any public knowledge of the operations of the National Cyber Security Centre would be considered a security risk.

Year Awarded	Contract	Contract Value	Exception for not following a competitive procurement process
2018	Management of the National Digital Research Centre.	€5,250,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2018	Financial and procurement advisory services in relation to the National Broadband Plan.	€1,140,014	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2018	Technical advisory services in relation to the National Broadband Plan.	€1,093,014	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2018	Legal advisory services in relation to the National Broadband Plan.	€1,087,564	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2018	Economic and strategy advisory services in relation to the National Broadband Plan.	€250,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2018	Legal advice in relation to Shell's proposed divestment of its shareholding of Shell in Corrib Gas Field.	€100,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2018	Investigation into the mine collapse at the Gyproc gypsum mine in Co. Monaghan.	€100,000	Due to urgency a competitive process cannot be undertaken in the time available.
2018	Purchase of servers for the National Cyber Security Centre.	€68,293	Any public knowledge of the operations of the National Cyber Security Centre would be considered a security risk.
2019	Financial and procurement advisory services in support of National Broadband Plan.	€850,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.

Questions - Written Answers

Year Awarded	Contract	Contract Value	Exception for not following a competitive procurement process
2019	Legal advisory services in support of National Broadband Plan.	€600,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2019	Technical advisory services in support of National Broadband Plan.	€430,375	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2019	Marginal abatement cost curve for Ireland.	€318,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2019	Economic and strategy advisory services in support of National Broadband Plan.	€100,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2019	Simulated cyber operations.	€80,000	Any public knowledge of the operations of the National Cyber Security Centre would be considered a security risk.
2019	iSummation infrastructure licence.	€66,000	The agent, licensee or franchise holder has sole rights to supply a service or product.
2019	Seismic Programme.	€50,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2019	Tax & VAT advisory services in support of National Broadband Plan.	€40,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.
2019	GeoDirectory Licence.	€34,000	The service provider has exclusive data or information required to perform a particular task.
2019	Legal drafting services.	€25,000	The service provider possesses a special advantage due to earlier research exclusively carried out in a particular area.

Year Awarded	Contract	Contract Value	Exception for not following a competitive procurement process
2019	Open source IT forensics training.	€24,500	Any public knowledge of the operations of the National Cyber Security Centre would be considered a security risk.
2019	Repairs of 850 adit at Avoca mine.	€600,000	Due to urgency a competitive process cannot be undertaken in the time available.
		€14,589,377	

The information requested in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. The Department will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisations.

Energy Schemes Data

880. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the level of funding issued for SEAI grants in each county in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45080/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A range of Government funded grants are available to householders to suit their circumstances and scale of retrofit work they wish to undertake. Over the last year the measures available under these grants have been expanded to promote deeper measures and support the transition away from fossil fuel heating systems.

Since the introduction of these grants nearly 400,000 homes across the country have received an upgrade, representing nearly one home in five across the country.

The table below presents the amount spent, per county, on the Better Energy Homes Scheme, Warmer Homes Scheme and Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Scheme combined from 2016 to end of September 2019.

Better Energy Homes, Better Energy Warmer Homes and Warmth and Wellbeing Schemes Combined				
	2016	2017	2018	2019 YTD
Carlow	€344,294	€398,401	€371,669	€766,880
Cavan	€447,627	€521,416	€1,008,773	€714,973
Clare	€696,822	€1,013,857	€903,490	€806,768
Cork	€3,725,078	€3,580,207	€5,251,691	€4,042,527
Donegal	€1,137,115	€1,255,158	€3,113,870	€1,258,690
Dublin	€7,790,073	€15,627,265	€24,816,191	€19,405,988
Galway	€1,551,803	€2,578,829	€2,060,983	€2,177,996
Kerry	€1,030,704	€1,087,345	€2,924,650	€1,166,218
Kildare	€1,404,362	€1,082,946	€1,784,531	€1,826,873
Kilkenny	€867,322	€314,309	€503,877	€518,113
Laois	€959,753	€465,433	€642,696	€786,676

Leitrim	€202,128	€259,694	€424,321	€256,584
Limerick	€1,412,136	€1,577,177	€1,619,337	€1,076,699
Longford	€241,631	€234,408	€359,427	€397,514
Louth	€1,625,832	€910,333	€1,606,023	€1,846,215
Mayo	€1,339,108	€2,145,379	€1,555,489	€1,856,927
Meath	€2,219,215	€1,088,491	€2,390,644	€2,118,018
Monaghan	€231,345	€298,227	€471,790	€356,334
Offaly	€1,071,266	€456,136	€606,922	€557,576
Roscommon	€405,749	€430,129	€872,898	€617,933
Sligo	€557,966	€874,599	€682,601	€707,463
Tipperary	€1,042,079	€1,286,521	€1,248,318	€988,941
Waterford	€794,202	€1,445,988	€1,409,366	€1,944,487
Westmeath	€756,383	€709,176	€864,613	€806,848
Wexford	€1,266,123	€1,928,577	€2,387,486	€983,436
Wicklow	€1,534,021	€1,015,681	€1,319,929	€1,845,358
Total	€34,154,138	€36,085,680	€48,941,585	€42,932,035

The Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme and Better Energy Communities Scheme facilitate projects spanning across counties and for that reason, a county breakdown is not readily available.

The table below presents the amount spent under the Deep Retrofit Pilot from 2017 (when the pilot was launched) to end of September 2019.

Deep Retrofit Pilot	2017	2018	2019 YTD
	Amount Paid (€)	Amount Paid (€)	Amount Paid (€)
	€816,000	€4.72m	€2m

* €861,000 spend in 2017 relates to 3 completed homes and 37 homes partially completed.

The table below presents the number of projects and spend from 2016 to end of September 2019 under the Better Energy Communities Scheme.

Better Energy Communities	2016		2017		2018		2019 YTD	
	No. of Successful Projects (homes completed)	Amount Paid (€)	No. of Successful Projects (homes completed)	Amount Paid (€)	No. of Successful Projects (homes completed)	Amount Paid (€)	No. of Projects Approved (homes completed)	Amount Paid (€) to date
	36 (2,013)	€16.7m	46 (1,965)	€22.7m	37 (1,189)	€19.9m	57 (288)	€6.2m

Question No. 881 answered with Question No. 855.

Energy Schemes

882. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a reply will issue to queries raised regarding the deep retrofit scheme by a person (details supplied). [45289/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme was launched in 2017 as a time bound pilot to investigate the challenges and opportunities of deep retrofit in Ireland. The scheme closed for applications on 19th July in line with the published Application Guidelines.

The scheme is funded by my Department and operated by the SEAI. The Pilot provides 50% funding for energy upgrades to an A BER rating with 95% funding provided for low-income households. The total budget for the scheme this year is €10 million – double the amount spent on the scheme last year. Almost €2m has been paid in grants under the scheme to date in 2019.

As Minister, I have no function in relation to individual applications or the approval of applications. However, the SEAI has informed my officials that they have been in contact directly with the homeowner this week in relation to this query.

Broadband Service Provision

883. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of fibre broadband service to an area (details supplied). [45309/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Every home, farm, school and business in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband – no matter where they are located – following the Government's decision to approve the appointment of a preferred bidder to the National Broadband Plan. Under this plan, Ireland will become one of the first countries in the world to ensure that those in rural areas have the same digital opportunities as those in urban areas.

The premises referred to by the Deputy are in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP.

Since the Government decision in May 2019 to appoint NBI as the Preferred Bidder for the National Broadband Plan contract, work has continued on the due diligence necessary to conclude the contract. This process is progressing towards contract award, which is expected before the end of the year. The network deployment will commence shortly after that.

The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment. A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed.

In the first year of roll out, the Bidder will deploy approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations.

The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises at the end of the second year, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll out is completed.

Work continues on finalising the contract and in parallel to this work, I am considering the

recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Communications Committee report which was published recently. I will bring my deliberations of the report to Government in due course.

National Broadband Plan Expenditure

884. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the cost of the roll-out of Project Stratum in view of the cost of the national broadband plan and the potential involvement of a company (details supplied) in both projects. [45324/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I do not propose to comment in detail in respect of a project in another jurisdiction. I understand, however, that the aim of Project Stratum is to improve broadband connectivity by extending Next Generation Access (NGA) broadband infrastructure to premises across Northern Ireland that cannot yet access such a service. I further understand that while a budget has been identified and a public process of engagement with industry is underway, that the detailed strategy and technical requirements have not yet been published.

Based on learning from Ireland's NBP process, where the technology approach and project cost were developed through a very detailed engagement with industry in a competitive public procurement process, it would be premature to draw any comparison between the NBP and Project Stratum at this time.

Building rural broadband networks is complex and expensive, as we can see from other jurisdictions. For example, Scotland has recently awarded preferred bidder status to BT for Scottish Borders which comprises approximately 26,090 premises, with an estimated subsidy value of £133m which is around £5,000 per premises ex VAT.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

885. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if large providers have informed his Department of roll-outs within the intervention area within the six-month timeframe suggested in the context of the national broadband plan and in view of a recent decision by the Commission for Communications Regulation (details supplied); if information has been made publicly available, including when products will be made available to the public; if the specified locations will be removed from the intervention area or overbuilt by a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45325/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The telecoms market is fully liberalised and regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), who is statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions. ComReg published a number of decisions in November 2018 governing the regulation of wholesale broadband access markets (ComReg docs 18/94, 18/95 and 18/96 – available on ComReg's website). I understand that ComReg, has concluded that certain obligations be imposed on Eir in certain wholesale broadband access markets, with the intention of promoting effective competition by, inter alia, making it easier for other telecoms operators to use Eir's wholesales services. The obligations include the requirement that Eir publish information in advance regarding its products, services and facilities.

Separately, in relation to the NBP, my Department recently conducted a public consultation to close the ongoing mapping exercise, seeking submissions from operators who wish to

have their existing high speed broadband networks, or who have developed plans to invest in high speed broadband networks over the next 7 years, to be included on the Department's High Speed Broadband Map. That consultation was extended twice at the request of operators, resulting in a total nine week period for submissions and it closed on 30th September 2019.

As part of the consultation, over 180 submissions were received from a variety of stakeholders, including 30 from large and small commercial telecommunications operators, with the remainder from local authority broadband officers and members of the public.

Operator submissions are assessed against the Department's published assessment criteria. Operators submitting planned investments are required to sign a declaration that they will enter into a Commitment Agreement with the Department if their plans satisfy the assessment criteria and are accepted by the Department as being concrete and credible.

The findings of the consultation, which will be available in the coming weeks, will ensure that the State Intervention Area is up to date and that it reflects commercial operators' plans and the responses from householders and businesses, in advance of a contract being signed later this year. This will be an important element in concluding the State Aid approval process with the European Commission.

Questions Nos. 886 and 887 answered with Question No. 856.

National Broadband Plan

888. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if clarification will be provided to the comments made by An Taoiseach in Dáil Éireann on 1 October 2019 regarding the national broadband plan; if a company (details supplied) challenged the maps that caused the delay at the time; the nature of the challenge made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45572/19]

889. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to his comments in Dáil Éireann on 15 October 2019 regarding the national broadband plan, the providers or bodies that requested the extension for the deadline of submissions for the national broadband plan; if a company (details supplied) requested same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45573/19]

890. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the intervention area for the national broadband plan in terms of the number of premises; when the consultation process in terms of the map will terminate; if the intervention area will be less than the original estimate of 540,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45574/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 888 to 890, inclusive, together.

My Department recently conducted a public consultation to close the ongoing mapping exercise, seeking submissions from operators who wish to have their existing high speed broadband networks, or who have developed plans to invest in high speed broadband networks over the next 7 years, to be included on the Department's High Speed Broadband Map.

The consultation was extended twice, which provided for a nine week consultation period and closed on 30 September. These extensions were at the request of a number of telecommunications operators, including the operator referenced by the Deputy. Over 180 submissions were

received from a variety of stakeholders, including 30 from large and small commercial operators, with the remainder from local authority broadband officers and members of the public.

Operators submitting planned investments were required to sign a declaration that they will enter into a Commitment Agreement with the Department if their plans satisfy the financial and technical assessment criteria and are accepted by the Department as being concrete and credible. My Department is in the process of finalising its assessment of these submissions.

The findings of the consultation, which will be available in the coming weeks, will ensure that the State Intervention Area is up to date and that it reflects commercial operators' plans and the responses from householders and businesses, in advance of a contract being signed later this year. This will be an important element in concluding the State Aid approval process with the European Commission.

National Broadband Plan

891. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the value of the contingency fund for the national broadband plan; the amount that can be awarded to a company (details supplied) for encroachment of the intervention area; the circumstances in which an encroachment of the intervention area would trigger compensation to the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45575/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) contract provides a mechanism for National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to apply for compensation for encroachment where other commercial operators have deployed a future proofed high speed broadband service in advance of NBI's own deployment in the intervention area. This subsidy is capped and can only be applied for where my Department determines a commercial deployment of high speed broadband meets the requirements set out in the NBP contract, specifically a deployment of a fibre or equivalent high speed broadband technology, and that this deployment has had a negative impact on NBI's business case. The mapping consultation, which will confirm the intervention area prior to contract award, will reduce the risk of this element of contingency subsidy being required.

The specific capped subsidy for such operator encroachment, should it arise, forms part of contingency funding of €480 million (excluding VAT).

Tourism Promotion

892. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the recent decision taken by Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland not to feature greyhound racing in tourism marketing campaigns here or abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44581/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I was gravely concerned following the coverage and debate regarding alleged cruel practices within Ireland's greyhound industry.

One of the issues that arose as a result was the promotion of greyhound racing by our tourism agencies.

Consequently, while the process of investigating and addressing issues was underway in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I asked the agencies to review their promo-

tion of greyhound racing. I subsequently welcomed their decision to pause active promotion of greyhound racing and to keep the situation under review, pending implementation of several reforms.

Since then, my colleague Brendan Griffin T.D., Minister of State for Tourism and Sport at my Department, has received an update on Bord na gCon's additional and enhanced care and welfare measures, which he forwarded on within the last fortnight to both Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Minister Griffin has made it clear that he has strong personal views on the industry, which do not coincide with my own. I have no problem with him letting those personal views be known to third parties.

Road Signage

893. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider introducing new or additional signage for disabled parking bays (details supplied); and if he is considering other measures or awareness campaigns to educate the general public on differing holders of blue badges. [44659/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Both my Department and the two bodies charged with issuing the Disabled Parking Permit, the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI) and the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), are very aware of the misunderstandings that can arise in public perceptions of physical disability and the challenges that this can pose for drivers with invisible mobility impairments. It was never the intention of the Disabled Parking scheme that permits and designated bays be restricted to wheelchair users. The choice of the wheelchair symbol, however, is based on the fact that it is internationally recognisable and not tied to a particular language or culture, a universality that allows the holder of a permit to use it all over the world. The Irish permit is designed to a common European standard and any change to the Irish legislation on the matter would require a change at European level first.

Disabled Parking Permit

894. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason persons with hidden disabilities are not entitled to the disabled person's parking card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45106/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Disabled Parking Permit (also known as the European Parking Card or Disabled Parking Badge) is available to people living in Ireland whose mobility is severely restricted, whether they are drivers or passengers, and also to those who are registered blind. In 2010 the Department conducted a review of the Disabled Parking Scheme, in consultation with various stakeholders and one of the issues examined was eligibility for the scheme. As a result of the review the scheme was revised so that permits are now given on the basis of mobility impairment rather than the diagnosis of a particular condition or illness. This is in line with the original intention of the scheme.

People whose invisible disability directly affects their ability to walk may in fact qualify for the permit. The possibility of extending the eligibility criteria for the scheme to include people with invisible disabilities which do not necessarily impair mobility, meanwhile, has been raised on a number of occasions and the Department has consulted extensively with the joint issuing authorities of the scheme, the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI) and the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWC), on this matter. In light of this consultation there are currently

no plans to change the criteria.

I would particularly emphasise to the Deputy that issuing a large number of extra permits by extending the eligibility criteria would in fact put the existing scheme under significant additional pressure and compromise the availability of disabled parking spaces in general.

Tourism Industry

895. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budgetary steps that have been taken to support the tourism sector specifically in the midlands and western region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44544/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross) (Deputy Shane Ross): Tourism has received an allocation of €186 million in Budget 2020, up 10% on the 2019 allocation. Furthermore an extra €7m was provided to support the industry in 2019.

With regard to the various regions, Fáilte Ireland develops and promotes their tourism potential in line with the relevant tourism experience brands – namely Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, Ireland’s Ancient East, the Wild Atlantic Way and the Dublin brand – which are designed to boost tourism and drive visitor growth throughout the country, with consequential benefits for the local economy and jobs right across Ireland, including the midlands and western region. Tourism Ireland promotes the island of Ireland overseas.

Fáilte Ireland also provides targeted capital investment in attractions and other tourism infrastructure throughout the regions, consistent with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040 to help support and grow tourism. Priority areas for tourism capital investment include the development and enhancement of tourist attractions and activity-based tourism to provide the type and quality of experience that visitors are seeking. This capital investment is further supported by Fáilte Ireland current investment in complementary programme supports – including festivals and events, business supports and training – aimed at enhancing, animating and promoting the regional tourism experience brands.

I have asked the two tourism agencies Tourism Ireland, in regard to overseas tourism marketing, and Fáilte Ireland, in regard to regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion, to provide the Deputy with more detail. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy’s question to the two tourism agencies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Projects Status

896. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans to construct two right turning lanes for both Croghan and Cootehall on the N4 Boyle to Carrick-on-Shannon route, County Roscommon further to the commitment by Transport Infrastructure Ireland to carry out such a project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44185/19]

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

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

Bus Services

897. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to concerns raised by commuters owing to the recent changes introduced to rural bus services in Inishowen, County Donegal and routes operating between the peninsula and Letterkenny; if his attention has been further drawn to the considerable price differential which exists between rural transport services operated by LocalLink on the Malin to Cardnonagh route and the Buncrana to Carndonagh route compared to a connecting service between Carndonagh and Letterkenny which is operated by a private transport provider; the options being currently considered by his Department and the NTA with respect to the latter route with the view to reducing fares for commuters of the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44240/19]

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

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme, which now operates under the 'Local Link' brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Dublin Bikes Scheme

898. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to expand the Dublin bikes scheme further; the areas of Dublin that will be included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44286/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to cycle and public transport infrastructure. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, including the management of public bike schemes.

Noting the National Transport Authority's statutory responsibilities in relation to cycling and cycling infrastructure, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rural Transport Services

899. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of works by the NTA in designing a new bus stop system in Mullingar, County Westmeath; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the lack of works in providing the new system is holding up the roll out of a new local link town service in the area. [44312/19]

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

While I am aware there is ongoing liaison between the NTA and the local authority in relation to bus stops within Mullingar, in light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct and more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rural Transport Programme

900. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the NTA will issue updated health and safety guidelines and declarations for board members of rural transport programmes. [44313/19]

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

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme, which now operates under the 'Local Link' brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Air Traffic Control Services

901. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there has been a change made to a flight path above Firhouse, Dublin 24 impacting on areas, including Aylesbury, Knocklyon and Ballycullen, in view of the fact there have been local complaints in relation to early morning disturbance due to increased plane traffic. [44338/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the issue raised is, in the first instance, an operational matter for the Irish Aviation Authority, which has responsibility for air traffic control in Irish airspace, I have referred the Deputy's question to it for direct reply.

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

Road Network

902. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a motion was passed at the Laytown and Bettystown municipal district meeting to designate the R132 Julianstown Road a national road and that this motion will be going before Meath County Council on November 7 2019; if he will consider a

Ministerial Order to designate the R132 Julianstown Road a national route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44378/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Section 10 of the Roads Act 1993 as amended by the Roads Act 2007 provides for the classification of national, regional and local roads and as such periodic reviews are undertaken in that regard.

It is a matter for Meath County Council to decide whether to make a submission regarding the re-classification of the R132. Any such request would be considered as part of the periodic review process.

Rail Network

903. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to move beyond the steady State investment in rail in the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44412/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that *Project Ireland 2040* provides significantly enhanced funding levels for our rail network which will expand its capacity, improve line journey speeds and lead to a better passenger experience across an improved network.

Key to this improvement is the increased funding being made available under the *Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract* or IMMAC. The IMMAC is the funding programme under which an extensive range of infrastructure improvements are carried out which will deliver improved journey speeds and increased reliability for passengers across the country. I have no doubt the Deputy welcomes the fact that I will shortly be seeking Government's approval to enter into a new 5 year IMMAC which will provide over €1 billion to Iarnród Éireann and allow it maintain, renew and improve rail infrastructure. This level of funding represents an approximate 40% increase in the amount of taxpayer funding as compared to the five years between 2014 and 2018 and the fact the network is now funded at a "steady state" level is hugely significant.

However, *Project Ireland 2040* provides additional funding for the rail network above and beyond this significant contribution under the IMMAC.

In the summer Government approved a new National Train Control Centre which will completely modernise and improve the management of the network and services across the country. Construction will start next year and its completion will support the expanded services planned under the DART Expansion Programme which will roughly double the capacity of the network in the Greater Dublin Area, an area which handles approximately 70% of passenger journeys in any given year. Other projects underway include the City-Centre Re-signalling project, while construction will start next year on a new station in Pelletstown.

The Deputy will also acknowledge that funding under the PSO programme increased by approximately 6% between 2016 and 2018 which has supported increased services such as the 10-minute DART or greater utilisation of the Phoenix Park tunnel on the Kildare Line in recent years. In order to support further passenger growth Government has very recently approved the purchase of 41 additional InterCity Railcars and I expect those to start entering service in late 2021.

Separately to the above, the future potential for rail is also being examined at a metropolitan level through the development by the National Transport Authority of metropolitan area trans-

port strategies for all cities, which will assist with the Department's approach toward the mid-term review of the current Project Ireland 2040 funding profiles envisaged in 2022, while an independent review of a potential extension of the Western Rail Corridor is expected to be submitted to the Department shortly. My Department also plans to conduct an evaluation in 2020 of higher speeds on the network in line with the commitment given in *Project Ireland 2040*.

As the Deputy can see, there is a significant investment programme underway in relation to rail and I expect this to continue in the years ahead.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

904. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the camera infrastructure in place and operational at a location (details supplied) in Cork city; if there is a live feed from the cameras available to An Garda Síochána to assist it in its work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44416/19]

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

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

Road Projects Status

905. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Ardee bypass project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44443/19]

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

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

Rail Network

906. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of carrying out a feasibility study on reopening the railway line from Dublin to Kingscourt, County Cavan; the average cost of a rail feasibility study in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44445/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have previously informed the Deputy that the priority funding objective in relation to mainline rail is the maintenance and renewal of the existing operating network. That objective is supported by the significantly enhanced funding now available to support that network as evidenced by the ap-

proximate 23% increase in Exchequer funding provided in 2019.

The Deputy is also aware from previous answers I have given on this issue that there is no funding provided within *Project Ireland 2040* for the re-opening of the Kingscourt line nor to undertake a feasibility on the line.

In light of the National Transport Authority (NTA)'s responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, I have referred the Deputy's specific question in relation to the average cost of a rail feasibility study to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Light Rail Projects Status

907. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposed Lucan Luas transport link; his views on the need for a Luas extension to Lucan in view of the gridlock that commuters living in the locality and in neighbouring areas face daily and the resulting unacceptable level of carbon emissions; if a date will be committed to for the development of the Lucan line especially in the context of climate change mitigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44454/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. As the Deputy is aware *Project Ireland 2040* provides funding for appraisal, planning and design of LUAS network expansions to Bray, Finglas, Lucan and Poolbeg.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including light rail.

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

Ports Facilities

908. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of full-time equivalent staff vacancies at each port; and the function of each role in tabular form. [44476/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Issues relating to staff are day to day internal HR matters for the port companies concerned. As such, I have referred the Deputy's Question to all the State port companies for direct response.

Please contact my Office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

Human Trafficking

909. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met the Minister for Justice and Equality to discuss migrant smuggling and the preventative measures needed to detect same. [44477/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have not met with

the Minister for Justice and Equality to discuss the issue of migrant smuggling.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

910. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application for a sports capital grant by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44501/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

2,337 applications were submitted under the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme seeking a total of €162m in funding.

The application referred to by the Deputy was for “equipment only” and these applications were assessed earlier this year. Unfortunately, the application did not achieve a sufficiently high score to secure a grant on this occasion and the club has been notified in this regard.

Grants in respect of the remaining capital applications are expected to be announced shortly after which a review into the operation of the 2018 SCP will be undertaken. Part of the review will be consideration of timing of the next round but I fully expect a new round of the SCP to be open in the coming months. It will again be open to the club referred to by the Deputy to apply for funding under this new round.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

911. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a driver licence exchange agreement between Ireland and Alberta, Canada; when a bilateral agreement for licence exchange with Alberta is likely to be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44516/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Reaching bilateral agreements on the exchange of foreign driving licences between two countries can take time as the agreements can be made only when the relevant authorities in each jurisdiction have studied and compared the two licensing regimes, so that each side can be satisfied that they are compatible.

The Memorandum of Understanding between Ireland and Alberta, Canada on the reciprocal exchange of driving licences is currently in the final stages of preparation.

Driver Licences

912. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase the upper age limit for bus driver licences beyond 70 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44517/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is no upper age limit for obtaining a driving licence for any category of vehicle, including buses, provided that

the relevant medical report by a registered medical practitioner accompanies the application.

Greenways Development

913. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the 2020 greenway application process will be announced; the details of changes to the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44528/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Earlier this year I allocated €40m in 2019 to ten greenways projects across the country. These allocations, combined with existing projects such as the Dublin to Galway project, account for the bulk of the funding over the years 2019 to 2021 and I have no plans at this stage for a funding round for the construction of new greenways in 2020. At the appropriate stage I will consider advertising a new round of the funding for the years beyond that period.

Separately, in Budget 2020 my Department was allocated an additional €4.5m for greenways from the Carbon Tax fund. While this is not sufficient to warrant a round of funding for the construction of new greenways I have asked my officials to consider options in regard to the best use of this funding.

Parking Provision

914. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the use by coach companies of the NTA-provided coach park in the vicinity of a location (details supplied) on the quays in Dublin; the reason it closes at 7 p.m. each evening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44534/19]

915. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of the NTA coach parking facility at the quays in Dublin; the number of spaces it contains; the average number of coaches that park there each evening including weekends; the cost of parking; the operating hours from Monday to Sunday; his views on whether it represents value for money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44535/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 914 and 915 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Éireann Services

916. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Bus Éireann has plans to erect a bus shelter at a location (details supplied) to service the large volume of persons commuting to Dublin daily to work; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [44642/19]

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

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety

917. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will re-evaluate the need for additional capital investment to address safety needs and congestion issues on the N81 in view of the ongoing fatalities on the road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44663/19]

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

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

Departmental Programmes

918. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the active smarter travel programme; if and when further funding calls will be made by his Department for this funding mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44685/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand that the Deputy is referring to two separate, though complementary, programmes that were in operation over the years 2012 to 2016: these were the Active Travel Towns programme and the Smarter Travel Areas programme. While both of these were specific, fixed-term programmes that have now finished, the overall themes that they supported - active travel and smarter travel - of course remain very relevant and are receiving considerable support from Government under a range of present-day programmes.

Funding for active travel generally is made available through the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Sustainable Urban Transport programme and the Cycling and Walking programme. The Deputy will be aware that Exchequer support for active travel generally has increased significantly in recent years, with Budget 2020 providing approximately €91million for these two programmes as compared to approximately €48million in Budget 2019 for example.

More broadly, I will very shortly launch a public consultation on reviewing sustainable mobility policy. This will look at all aspects of current policy, including active travel. Among the documentation to be published as part of this public consultation period is an *Ex-Post* Evalua-

tion of the Smarter Travel Areas programme, which contains a number of useful recommendations in terms of future potential policy direction.

I look forward to engaging with the public and all stakeholders as we look to shape the future direction of sustainable mobility policy.

Information and Communications Technology

919. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44718/19]

920. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44734/19]

921. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44750/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 919 to 921, inclusive, together.

The Department has 150 computers using the Operating System supplied. The Department is currently working on a project to upgrade all computers from the version of the operating system referred to. All patching for the current operating system is maintained to ensure that no security risks arise.

Driver Licences

922. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a situation in which a person (details supplied) is without work due to changes to the person's driver licence will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44776/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

923. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the review carried out by the National Transport Authority in conjunction with an association (details supplied) relating to accessible buses, specifically single decker buses, in County Waterford and nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44780/19]

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

transport.

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

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

Public Transport Review

924. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the latest south-eastern line capacity study was carried out; if a copy of the report will be provided; his plans for the implementation of the plans contained in the 2011 south-eastern line capacity study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44798/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The *Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 to 2035* is the statutory transport strategy for the GDA, development of which was informed by a number of corridor studies, included a South East Corridor Study. The Strategy must be reviewed every six years and it is my understanding the NTA will commence such a review toward the end of next year.

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

Public Transport Fares

925. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration has been given to include Wicklow town and Arklow, County Wicklow, in the short hop zone for Leap cards; if not, if such a proposal will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44799/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services. I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

926. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funding will be made available to Kerry County Council to carry out works on the Rathscannel road, R551, Abbeydorney, County Kerry; the plans in place to have the road reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44820/19]

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

Decisions relating to road closures and re-openings on regional and local roads is a matter entirely for the local authority and I have no involvement in that process.

€300,000 was allocated to R556 Dale Road through the Specific Improvement Grant in January 2019. Specifically, this project from Ballinclogher to Rathscannel, aims to improve safety, journey times and the quality of this regional road. Preliminary ground investigation works, approved and managed by the local authority, include the closure of the R556, with local diversions and alternative HGV routes at Abbeydorney and Ballyduff. Other traffic management measures relating to this project, including signage and reduced road speeds, are also managed by Kerry County Council. To date in 2019, Kerry County Council has drawn down over €130,000 for this project.

There are no specific grants allocated to the R551 to which the Deputy refers and upgrades to this road are a matter for the local authority to manage through their own resources and the pavement and rehabilitation grants allocated annually.

Grant allocations for 2020 will be announced early next year.

Taxi Ranks

927. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures being taken to ensure that taxi drivers in Cork city are fully consulted regarding facilities and ranks in their area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44830/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Decisions regarding the location and operation of taxi ranks are a matter for the relevant local authority which is responsible for the making of bye-laws in respect of its functional area.

Section 25 of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2013 provides for both the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the Garda Commissioner to be consulted by a local authority when it is proposing to make such bye-laws. I have no function in the matter.

I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Anti-Social Behaviour

928. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures being taken to ensure that taxi drivers in the Cork city area are protected from anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44831/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am keenly aware of the importance of protecting the safety of our small public service vehicle (SPSV) drivers. In this regard, there are currently a number of offences for passengers, or intending passengers, set under the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*. Furthermore, under SPSV regulations made by the

regulator, the National Transport Authority (NTA), a driver may refuse to carry a disorderly or abusive passenger.

Earlier this year, the NTA launched a “Taxi Driver Respect” public awareness campaign advocating respect for taxi drivers. It illustrates how taxi drivers can be anyone – a family member or a friend and, as such, deserve our respect.

While the NTA is the regulator of the SPSV sector, if an incident of a criminal nature is brought to the NTA’s attention, they will refer it to An Garda Síochána. It is An Garda Síochána who investigate offences of this type – not the NTA. Furthermore, as the Deputy is aware, legislation relating to matters of a criminal nature and enforcement against same is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Departmental Staff Data

929. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44854/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to inform the Deputy that there are currently 599 staff employed by my Department of whom 89 avail of reduced working hours. There are currently no staff members being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay.

Airport Charges

930. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the recommendation by the Commission for Aviation Regulation to reduce the passenger levy at Dublin Airport by 20%; the estimated lesser amount would the levy recoup in the period 2020 to 2024 compared to retaining the current level of passenger levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44876/19]

961. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered the implications of reductions in view of the decision of the Commission for Aviation Regulation to reduce airport charges at Dublin Airport from €9.65 to €7.50 per passenger in 2020, with ongoing reductions planned through to 2024 and the impact it could have in a number of areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45351/19]

962. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that the Commission for Aviation Regulation has decided to reduce airport charges significantly at Dublin Airport further to an announcement (details supplied); his further views on whether these savings will be made at the cost of a State owned enterprise which is embarking on a major capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45352/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 930, 961 and 962 together.

In accordance with Aviation Regulation Act 2001, as amended, the Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) has statutory responsibility for setting maximum airport charges at Dublin airport taking account of national aviation policy. I have no function in setting the level of airport charge.

This independent regulation is intended to serve as a proxy for competition and to require the regulated entity (daa) to do things both in terms of pricing and quality of service provision at Dublin Airport that it would almost certainly not choose to do given a free hand. The overriding strategic objective is to ensure that current and future airport customers are presented with choice, value and quality services which also meet the highest international safety and security standards.

In the Final Determination on the maximum level of airport charges at Dublin Airport, for the period 2020 to 2024 recently announced by CAR, the average price for the period 2020 – 2024 will be €7.87. This represents an 11% reduction in the base-level 2019 price cap of €8.81 and was made following an extended period of stakeholder consultation. The reasons underpinning this Final Determination have been set out in some detail by CAR in the published document.

I understand that CAR has acknowledged the need for Dublin Airport to grow and that capital investment is required in both existing and new capacity generating infrastructure which are key pieces of national infrastructure. The price set by CAR makes provision for all capital projects proposed by the daa – up to €2.3bn of capital investment in the period. The implementation of this investment programme will result in an airport capable of serving 40m passengers per year.

With regard to the airports outside Dublin there are always competitive challenges to be faced not least because of the overlap in catchment areas with Dublin Airport and/or each other. Indeed it is for this reason that only Dublin Airport is considered to have market power that necessitates regulatory intervention to protect the interests of consumers. There is clearly a market to be served by the regional airports generally and I am confident that they will continue to successfully exploit the opportunities and grow services. With the exception of Waterford Airport which has not had scheduled services for some years, both the State-owned and other regional airports have all increased passenger traffic over recent years.

Road Traffic Legislation

931. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is considering proposals to allow limousines used by private hire companies to use bus lanes in the same manner as regular taxis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44892/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am not currently considering proposals to allow limousines used by private hire companies to use bus lanes. Bus lanes were created - at some expense to the public - to provide on-street priority for bus-based public transport. Their goal is to make bus transport faster and more reliable, thereby encouraging more people to switch from private cars to public transport. This will achieve the twin goals of reducing congestion and reducing pollution.

In addition to buses, bus lanes may also be used by cyclists who, as vulnerable road users, are safer in bus lanes than in general traffic. The lanes may also, of course, be used by the emergency services.

After the lanes were originally introduced it was decided to allow taxis to use them. This was a concession based on the fact that taxis are a form of public transport available for on-street hire, like buses, unlike private hire limousines.

Since bus lanes were first introduced, there have been many requests to allow other classes of traffic to use the lanes. These have included requests on behalf of motorcyclists, multi-occupancy vehicles, electric vehicles, hired limousines, hackneys, and animal ambulances, among

others. My predecessors and I have always rejected these requests. Any addition to the categories of vehicle permitted to use the lanes would inevitably reduce their efficiency in performing the original purpose of prioritising bus-based public transport. This would reduce the quality and level of service for the ordinary commuter travelling by bus. In addition, it would not enhance the safety of the cyclists using bus lanes.

Bus Services

932. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to date in 2019 regarding all aspects of BusConnects since the project was first conceived; the consultancy firms engaged; the costs and headings under which costs were incurred; the amounts of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44918/19]

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

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

Driver Test Data

933. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driver testers in whole-time equivalent terms allocated to each driver test centre; and the basis on which these allocations are made. [44919/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Public Transport

934. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the level of accessibility on public transport vehicles is sufficient; his plans to improve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44927/19]

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

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

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

Sports Capital Programme Applications

935. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by South Dublin County Council for sports capital funding for a sports pavilion programme, including the provision of a pavilion in an area (details supplied). [44929/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 2,337 applications were submitted under the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May.

Work is now being finalised on the remaining applications for capital works, including an application from the organisation referred to by the Deputy and I expect the allocations to be announced shortly.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

936. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of UK driver licence holders in the wake of Brexit; if UK licences will remain valid; if there will be an amnesty to exchange such licences for an Irish version; and if plans will include provisions for asylum seekers that hold a UK licence. [44968/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Motorists resident in Ireland with a UK, including NI, driving licence are advised to exchange that licence for an Irish driving licence before the UK withdrawal date from the EU. In the event of a no-deal Brexit, the UK will no longer be a Member State and so the UK (including NI) driving licence will not be recognised. People resident in Ireland will no longer be able to drive on a UK (including NI) driving licence.

If there is an agreed Brexit, the current Withdrawal Agreement provides for arrangements to recognise UK driving licences across the EU during the transition period which is until December 2020.

In the Road Traffic Acts, legislation exists to allow for the recognition of foreign driving licences for exchange purposes. In a no deal Brexit, when the UK becomes a third country, arrangements can be made under those Acts. Ireland will pursue this option which will allow UK (including NI) licences to be exchanged for an Irish licence. However this may take a little time to complete as it involves a formal agreement and legislation here in Ireland.

As the Deputy is aware, historically Ireland has not issued driving licences to asylum-seekers.

Road Tolls

937. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status

of policy in relation to tolling on the M50 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45010/19]

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

The Government has no plans to introduce alternative tolling arrangements on the M50 at the present time.

Following the publication of the M50 Demand Management Study in April 2014, TII implemented a range of measures designed to improve the operational efficiency of the route, particularly at peak times. These include modifications to the merge and diverge layouts at junctions, increased incident access points and increased provision of incident response units. Measures to improve incident management co-operation with the emergency services, including An Garda Síochána and Dublin Fire Brigade, have also been developed and are monitored to ensure that optimum procedures are in place to minimise delays caused by traffic incidents.

In addition, the introduction of the Variable Speed Limit system on the M50 will improve its operational efficiency by smoothing traffic flow, improving journey time reliability and reducing the number of traffic collisions. This will be achieved through the setting of mandatory reduced speed limits, appropriate to the prevailing traffic conditions, using electronic speed limit signs displayed overhead each lane. Also, Lane Control Signalling will be installed, allowing the temporary closure of lanes which will be signalled by a red 'X' over the closed lane on the overhead illuminated gantry signage, to protect road users and emergency services during an incident on the route.

I hope that this information is of assistance to you.

National Transport Authority Funding

938. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding allocated to the National Transport Authority to increase bus route capacity in Dublin in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by type of funding in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45011/19]

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

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

Traffic Management

939. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of funding for traffic management measures in the four Dublin local authority areas, including

funding provided by his Department to State agencies that are allocated funding that in turn fund local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45012/19]

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

Noting the NTA's responsibility in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

940. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps that can be taken to alleviate a transport problem for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45030/19]

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

Sports Events

941. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when financial support will be announced in relation to a sporting event (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45031/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I can inform the Deputy that officials of my Department and I met with the organisers of the bid for the sporting event in question to discuss their proposal. I have also provided a letter in support of the bid to host the event.

Any State support for the hosting of sporting events such as this is provided by the relevant tourism and sport agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Sport Ireland, based on their assessment of the business case for the bid. The organisers have been advised to submit their funding proposal to Fáilte Ireland and Sport Ireland for their consideration.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland and Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if reply is not received within 10 days.

Tourism Promotion

942. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level of spending on tourism marketing in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45032/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the tourism agencies. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Expenditure

943. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding spent on sports capital programmes in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45033/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

Details of all payments made under the SCP are published on [https://www.gov.ie/en/col-lection/efc6c4-sports-capital-programmes-payments/](https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/efc6c4-sports-capital-programmes-payments/)

Fishing Industry

944. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the intentions behind and intended implications of the European Council Directive 2017/159/EU concerning the implementation of the Work in Fishing Convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45045/19]

945. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the range of proposed changes to be made to the existing legal and regulatory framework and requirements imposed on the fishing industry (details supplied) under the implementation of the European Council Directive 2017/159/EU by his Department. [45046/19]

946. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the changes to be made in the area of protection for workers in relation to EU Council Directive 2017/159/EU (details supplied). [45047/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 944 to 946, inclusive, together.

The ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 was adopted at the 96th session of the International Labour Conference on 14 June 2007. The Convention aims to ensure decent conditions of work in fishing with regard to minimum requirements for work on board; conditions of service; accommodation and food; occupational safety and health protection; and medical care and social security.

In May 2012, the EU social partners in the sea fisheries sector reached an agreement concerning the ILO Work in Fishing Convention. The agreement aimed to, promote the ratification of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention; create a level playing field within the EU fishing sector; improve the living and working conditions fishers on board sea going fishing vessels. On 31st January 2017, Council Directive 2017/159 on the implementation of the social partners' agreement on the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 was published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJ No. L 25, 31.1.2017, p.12).

The Directive comprises seven articles and an Annex which sets out the Agreement concerning the implementation of the Convention. My Department supports the Directive which aims to enhance the working and living conditions for fishers working on vessels registered in an EU member state. In particular, the Directive seeks to improve health and safety for fisher's within the EU and establishes a consolidated legal framework suited to working conditions in the commercial fishing sector.

Work on the transposition of Council Directive (EU) 2017/159 is at an advanced stage. At present, my officials are working closely with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on the drafting of a package of Regulations in order to ensure the transposition of the Directive. The Regulations will provide for decent working and living conditions for the fishing sector and will deal with a range of issues such as:

- Hours of work and rest
- Manning
- Medical Examinations
- Fishing vessel owner liability and repatriation
- Food and accommodation
- Minimum safety and health requirements for improved medical treatment on board vessels.

Marine Notice 42 of 2019 was published on 9th October to provide key stakeholders with further information on some of the main changes that will come into effect from 15 November. However, the full range of changes to be made to the existing legal and regulatory framework is subject to the finalisation of the draft legislation.

Departmental Contracts Data

947. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45072/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Department's Appropriation Account, which is publicly available on the C&AG website provides details of each voted service administered by it.

The 2017 Appropriation Account confirms the Department incurred no expenditure which was not procured in accordance with national and EU tender requirements.

The 2018 Appropriation Account confirms the Department complied with procurement guidelines with the exception of one contract to the value of €60,872. That contract related to the commissioning of a review into the Oversight Search and Rescue (SAR) Aviation Operations in Ireland following a safety recommendation from the Department's Air Accident Investigation Unit.

In view of the urgency of the recommendation, the Department elected to use a "negotiated procedure without prior publication", in accordance with Regulation 32 of S.I. 284 of 2016 - European Union (Award of Public Authority Contracts) Regulations 2016. Details of this con-

tract are included in the Department's annual return in respect of Circular 40/02.

The Department's 2019 Appropriation Account will be published in 2020.

Bus Services

948. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason fines were imposed on a company (details supplied) for failure to operate or reach agreed targets for the provision of services in Dublin city; and the breakdown in relation to the categories of driver availability, on road bus breakdown, absence, late sickness and no reason given. [45150/19]

949. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason in the categories provided for the imposition of fines imposed by the NTA on Dublin Bus and a company (details supplied) there are categories no reason given and other; and if the NTA can provide further information regarding same. [45151/19]

950. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of scheduled departures from termini that failed to operate by each company in 2018 and to date in 2019, in relation to fines imposed by the NTA on Dublin Bus and a company (details supplied) for the failure to operate schedules, services or reach agreed targets. [45152/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 948 to 950, inclusive, together.

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

Rail Services

951. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if customers are now required to pre-book Irish Rail seats in advance of travel; and the effect this will have on free travel recipients. [45179/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport

952. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will respond to the demands put forward by an organisation (details supplied) for inclusive public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45180/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Trans-

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

However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport which are matters for the individual operators, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) as appropriate.

As the issues raised in this case come under the remit of Irish Rail, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days

Parking Regulations

953. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a motorist with an Irish registration that has received a fine for a parking violation in Northern Ireland can be pursued for same here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45210/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is a matter for the authorities in Northern Ireland to enforce Northern Ireland law. If there are any reciprocal enforcement arrangements they would be a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Ministerial Meetings

954. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will next meet with the chairpersons of Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland. [45263/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I do not currently have any plans to meet with the chairpersons of Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland.

Bus Éireann Services

955. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve the bus services to Ashbourne and Ratoath, County Meath in terms of reliability and cost comparison with other locations equidistant from Dublin; if he is satisfied that the Bus Éireann 103 service is meeting the terms of its contract obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45291/19]

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

Sports Capital Programme Administration

956. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date on which the next round of applications for the sports capital programme will commence;

the date on which the current round will cease granting to successful applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45293/19]

970. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when sports capital funding will be made available in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45390/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 956 and 970 together.

2,337 applications were submitted under the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced in May.

Work is now being finalised on the remaining applications for capital works and I expect the allocations to be announced shortly. As soon as these grants have been announced a review into the operation of the 2018 SCP will be undertaken. Part of the review will include consideration of timing of the next round but it is anticipated that the SCP will be open for applications again in the coming months.

Road Projects Status

957. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of funding for the N2 upgrade between the Rath roundabout and Kilmoon Cross, County Meath; the position of the project in the list of roads infrastructure priorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45298/19]

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

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

Road Traffic Legislation

958. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to respond to the request by the National Transport Authority that it be given power to enforce the laws in relation to bus lane usage; if new legislation is being progressed which will give the authority the power to use automatic number plate recognition to carry out enforcement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45303/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A proposal was sub-

mitted to my Department by the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to the enforcement of restrictions applying to bus lanes and the possible use of a camera based enforcement system to combat illegal usage of bus lanes. I understand from the NTA that this issue has also arisen during the recent public consultation on BusConnects.

Section 81 of the Road Traffic Act 2010 provides the legal vires for establishing prima facie proof of a commitment of an offence under the Road Traffic Acts (including section 35 of the Road Traffic Act 1994), and may be discharged by tendering evidence from electronic or other apparatus, including cameras. In relation to bus lanes usage, the prohibitions and restrictions applying to bus lanes are provided for in regulations made by the Minister under Section 35 of the 1994 Act, with enforcement being primarily a matter for An Garda Síochána. Such offences fall within the remit of the fixed charge system, which is administered by the Gardaí. There are no plans at present to confer such an enforcement role on the NTA.

Public Transport

959. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding commuters that wish to take their bicycles onto trains, trams and buses; his plans to ensure that greater provision can be made for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45304/19]

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

Road Projects

960. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the engagement he has had on the provision of the north ring road in Cork city. [45312/19]

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

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

Questions Nos. 961 and 962 answered with Question No. 930.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

963. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of sports capital applications received as part of the current programme; the number of applications that have been validated to date; the number that have been rejected; and the number under internal review by county in tabular form (details supplied). [45362/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

2,337 applications were submitted under the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May.

Work is now being finalised on the remaining applications for capital works and I expect the allocations to be announced shortly.

The following table sets out the results of the assessment of all applications to date.

-	Total	2017 Re-submitted applications	2017 Resubmitted allocations	2018 "Equipment only" applications	2018 "Equipment only" allocations	Capital applications being considered for allocations
Carlow	46	5	2	13	11	28
Cavan	43	5	4	8	8	30
Clare	82	7	7	16	13	59
Cork	260	15	14	83	58	162
Donegal	101	8	8	27	26	66
Dublin	333	27	25	118	70	188
Galway	160	14	12	40	29	106
Kerry	123	8	8	37	33	78
Kildare	98	8	8	25	19	65
Kilkenny	57	3	3	19	16	35
Laois	60	4	4	18	15	38
Leitrim	24	1	1	3	3	20
Limerick	106	10	8	24	18	72
Longford	22	2	2	5	5	15
Louth	52	4	4	15	11	33
Mayo	85	5	5	19	15	61
Meath	95	11	11	9	5	75
Monaghan	43	4	4	8	5	31
Offaly	51	3	2	7	5	41
Roscommon	49	7	7	14	11	28
Sligo	49	6	5	12	11	31
Tipperary	86	4	3	13	11	69
Waterford	74	8	7	17	13	49
Westmeath	61	3	3	21	17	37
Wexford	93	9	8	21	20	63
Wicklow	84	5	5	27	21	52
Grand Total	2337	186	170	619	469	1532

Rail Services Provision

964. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the delivery and roll out date of the 41 additional carriages as announced on 30 September 2019 (details supplied); the role the NTA and Irish Rail will have in the procurement in the new stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45366/19]

967. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost and expected delivery date of the 41 new rail carriages announced for Irish Rail by him at the end of October 2019. [45371/19]

979. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the extra commuter line facilities, such as, extra rail carriages recently announced are likely to come on stream; the commuter routes likely to benefit; the extra passenger capacity arising from same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45486/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 964, 967 and 979 together.

As the Deputies are aware, I announced last week the Government's approval for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann to proceed with the proposed purchase of 41 additional InterCity Railcars to increase capacity across the Greater Dublin Area rail network.

This additional stock, which will increase capacity by around 34% on the Kildare, Maynooth and Northern lines in the morning peak time, will cost approximately €150 million and is expected to commence entry into service by end 2021.

Obviously, expenditure of this nature involving the investment of considerable taxpayer resources, must comply with the Public Spending Code which sets out the roles and responsibilities of public authorities in relation to public expenditure generally. For this project, Iarnród Éireann is the Sponsoring Agency and the National Transport Authority (NTA) exercises the role of the Sanctioning Authority.

Noting the responsibility of the agencies, I have referred the Deputies' questions to the NTA for further details and direct reply on the specific issues raised. Please advise my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Fáilte Ireland Expenditure

965. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the volume of capital funding allocated by Fáilte Ireland by county since 1 January 2016. [45368/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. While my Department provides capital funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism product development, it is not directly involved in the management of individual tourism projects and has no role in the administration of the agency's grants programmes.

Accordingly, I have asked Fáilte Ireland to reply directly to the Deputy with the further detail sought by the Deputy regarding capital funding allocations in the period in question. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Departmental Correspondence

966. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a copy of all correspondence between his Department and Fáilte Ireland and-or Tourism Ireland regarding promotion of the greyhound industry in 2019 will be provided. [45369/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter on which the Deputy is seeking information will involve a search of Departmental records, which will require additional time beyond the usual timeframe for answering a PQ. Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 42A, a more detailed reply will be provided to the Deputy within ten working days.

Question No. 967 answered with Question No. 964.

Departmental Communications

968. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a copy of all communications to and from his Department with Transport Infrastructure Ireland in October, November and December 2017. [45378/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Department has, on an ongoing basis, extensive communications with Transport Infrastructure Ireland. The subject of this PQ therefore requires extensive searches of Departmental records. In these circumstances additional time is required over and above the normal timeframe for answering this PQ. It is noted that Standing Order 42A makes provision for such circumstances. It is therefore proposed to provide more detailed information to the Deputy within ten days.

Departmental Correspondence

969. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he or his current or past advisers sent or received official departmental correspondence to or from an email address that are not either Houses of the Oireachtas or departmental; and if so, if he will provide copies of all such correspondence. [45383/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I can confirm that I have never sent or received official Departmental correspondence from an email address that is not either provided by the Houses of the Oireachtas or my Department.

My Department has an ICT systems usage policy that provides a suite of ICT policies governing the use of ICT systems by all users, with every effort being taken to obtain a balance between IT security and the usability of the Department systems. That policy includes a section on how limited use of personal email is permitted, subject to the conditions set out in the policy document.

As regards to my advisers, since I became Minister in May 2016, there have been some rare occasions where my advisers have had to communicate through their personal emails on Departmental matters. This correspondence has included engagement on a number of topics, for example;

Press queries;

Representations from local representatives seeking meetings on DTTAS matters;

Update on changes to IT systems;

Photographs from DTTAS events;

Information about sporting events.

Question No. 970 answered with Question No. 956.

Tourism Data

971. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of UK tourists that came here in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; his plans to ensure that the number of tourists from the UK does not decrease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45391/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Using data from the CSO and other sources, Fáilte Ireland publishes estimates of the number of tourists coming to Ireland from both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The aggregate estimates for 2011 to 2018 are as follows:

Year	(000's)
2011	6,230
2012	6,033
2013	6,455
2014	6,729
2015	6,853
2016	7,006
2017	6,777
2018	6,836

(2019 year to date estimates are not available).

The initial impact of the Brexit referendum for tourism saw a reduction of 5% in the number of tourists coming from Britain in 2017 (compared to 2016) on foot of the depreciation in Sterling. The GB market was steady in 2018, with the number of visits up marginally up compared to 2017. To date in 2019, the number of GB visitors remains steady, but is still down when compared to 2016.

Brexit has been a major factor in my Department's planning for some time now, particularly given the importance of Britain as a key source market for tourism.

In 2019 the Government allocated almost €8 million in additional funding to the tourism agencies specifically to respond to the impact of Brexit. In addition, I was pleased to secure a €7 million supplementary budget for the tourism agencies for the remainder of 2019 to mitigate the on-going effects of Brexit uncertainty.

This additional funding has enabled Tourism Ireland to put in place a programme of marketing activity, post-Brexit research, and stakeholder information to ensure that potential visitors

in relevant markets fully appreciate that it is “business as usual” for Ireland and the Irish tourism industry. Tourism Ireland also concluded a wide-ranging review of the British market in early 2019 and implemented its new market strategy for growth in the GB market in June.

Fáilte Ireland is supporting tourism enterprises to respond to the impact of Brexit. The ‘Get Brexit Ready’ programme is helping businesses to assess the risk and respond to changes and will also assist the sector in diversifying into other markets. Fáilte Ireland’s work is focusing primarily on border counties and the South East region which have been most adversely affected by the drop in the value of sterling. It is also taking action to promote domestic holidays to visitors from Northern Ireland.

Tourism is a sector that has already been impacted by Brexit and in that regard my Department and the tourism agencies continue to monitor the situation closely, working with our industry colleagues here and our trade partners and carriers in the markets.

Budget 2020

972. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level of funding he has requested in budget 2020 to improve Dublin Bus services for customers in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45396/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In Budget 2020, I secured an overall allocation of €1 billion to fund public and sustainable transport projects. This includes funding for approximately 127 diesel/electric hybrid buses for the Dublin Bus fleet. 32 of these buses are additional buses and the remainder will improve the environmental performance of the bus fleet by replacing older buses.

Since 2010, my Department no longer pays subvention for public transport services directly to operators. The award of public service obligation (PSO) funding falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA). The allocations to the companies are decided by the NTA in exercise of its statutory mandate and, in accordance with the various contract arrangements that it has in place with PSO service providers. The increased funding that I have secured over recent Budgets will enhance and improve the experiences of the travelling public in 2020 and beyond.

Budget 2020

973. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of additional buses that will be provided in Dublin in 2020 resulting from budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45397/19]

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

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

Road Network

974. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the emergency vehicle breakdown and recovery plans in place in view of the traffic congestion caused by breakdowns and accidents on the M50; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45403/19]

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

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

Departmental Correspondence

975. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a copy of all correspondence between him or the Secretary General of his Department, his private secretary or the assistant secretary in charge of sport or the principal officers or assistant principal officers in the sports capital section and his advisers (details supplied) from July 2019 to 31 October 2019. [45419/19]

976. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a copy of all correspondence, notes, reports and briefings brought to the management board meetings and-or the ministerial management board meetings of his Department on sports capital funding since 1 January 2017. [45420/19]

977. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a copy of all correspondence, notes, reports, briefings and emails between the Secretary General of his Department and-or the assistant secretary for sport and-or the sports capital division regarding sports capital allocations from 1 January 2017. [45421/19]

978. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of each meeting he has had with the Minister of State with special responsibility for tourism and sport regarding the sports capital programme since 1 July 2017; and the attendees, minutes and notes of each meeting to date. [45422/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 975 to 978, inclusive, together.

The information sought by the Deputy will require an extensive examination of a very large volume of records to cover the period in question. Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 42A, a more detailed reply will be furnished to the Deputy within 10 working days.

Question No. 979 answered with Question No. 964.

Brexit Preparations

980. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for an economic impact assessment of the current withdrawal treaty on trade and other economic metrics under the auspices of her Department and agencies under her remit; and if she

will make a statement on the matter. [44269/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department of Finance have advised that they will provide a response to this PQ regarding the broad economic impact based on published economic studies. Therefore this question is more properly directed at my colleague the Minister for Finance.

Child and Family Agency Funding

981. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if adequate funding will be provided to an organisation (details supplied) that receives its main funding from Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44310/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Barnardos provide a range of services for children and families in Ireland, including family support, therapeutic services, school completion programmes and counselling services. These services are available in 24 locations around Ireland.

In 2018, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, provided funding of €8.596 million to Barnardos. Final funding figures are not yet available for 2019.

Prevention and early intervention has been a key priority for me during my time as Minister. My Department has funded and supported several important prevention and early intervention programmes, including Tusla’s Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme and the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme in which Barnardos is involved.

I highly value the work that Barnardos does in providing supports and services to vulnerable children, young people and families. Tusla values the work of Barnardos and will continue to consult with Barnardos regarding potential funding for 2020.

Child Abuse Reports

982. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the date on which a report by a person (details supplied) will be furnished to her Department; if the report will be made public; if her Department has been involved in the creation of the report; if her attention has been drawn to the number of cases being investigated by the person for the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44390/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that the individual in question has undertaken, or is undertaking, a number of projects for the commissioning organisation.

In August 2012 a full review was undertaken of all files relating to cases involving the inappropriate actions of adult volunteers in the specified organisations. The files related to child abuse and many other behavioural issues with adult volunteers of the time.

The purpose of this review was to look at each file to ensure there was no volunteer currently active in the commissioning organisation was named in a legacy files. A secondary objective was to ensure that where there was a reportable offence that all necessary reporting had been done by the legacy organisation.

No volunteers active in the commissioning organisation in 2012 were found to be named in

the legacy files. It was unclear from five files as to whether incidents had been reported to the relevant authorities and the commissioning organisation brought these files to the attention of An Garda Síochána.

A second report into historical child sex abuse in the commissioning organisation in Ireland is currently being completed by the individual in question on behalf of the commissioning organisation. The purpose of this report is to set out the evidence which has emerged in recent times, the actions taken by the organisations and the learnings as it seeks to continuously improve its safeguarding. This report is due in February 2020.

This work is commissioned by, and provided to, the commissioning body, and while an integral part of this process is to keep my Department informed of ongoing developments, my Department is not involved in the creation of the reports.

Childcare Costs

983. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the practice by which crèches are charging the full fees for children who are attending an ECCE course in their local naíolann Gaelach and also attending the local crèche for the rest of the day, which is making it more expensive for parents whose children attend a crèche part time in order to enable them to learn the Irish language than it is for those who attend full time in circumstances in which the ECCE grant is rebated from the fees; if so, her plans to take steps to deal with same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44466/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Services who have signed a grant funding agreement to provide any of my Department's childcare funding programmes must have their fees list, for all approved funding programmes, clearly displayed in an area accessible to parents/guardians. Pobal compliance inspectors, who carry out unannounced inspections of service providers, check that the approved fees list is clearly displayed and that it indicates the full childcare fees for the service as well as the reduced childcare fees taking account of any approved funding based on the relevant programme.

It must be noted that my Department is not the owner/employer of Early Years services; they are private businesses and their policy on fees relating to levels of service not funded by my Department, including full time and part time care, are a matter between the service provider and the individual parent.

I would urge any parent/guardian who believes that their fee is not accurately reflected on their service's fees list to contact their local City/County Childcare Committee (CCC) as a matter of urgency. All CCC contact details are available at the following link: <https://myccc.ie/where-is-my-nearest-ccc>

Childcare Services Staff

984. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether there is a staffing crisis in the childcare sector; the steps she is taking to address same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44513/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am acutely aware of the difficulties that many early learning and care services report in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, and the high rate of staff turnover in the sector. In Pobal's latest Early

Years Sector Profile Report (2017/2018), the staff turnover rate stood at 24.7% which, despite a 3% improvement on the previous year, was unsustainably high. However, data from previous years suggests that only half of those contained in the 24.7% figure have left the sector, with the other half joining other services.

Low pay and poor working conditions in the sector remain a serious concern and impact on the quality of provision to children through their effect on the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. The lack of consistency of care caused by high staff turnover impacts directly on quality, while low wages are a constraint on plans to upskill and professionalise the workforce. The most recent data on pay and conditions indicates that the average hourly pay in early learning and care and school-age childcare is now €12.55 (as of May 2019), which represents a 3% increase on last year.

As the State is not the employer, my Department does not pay the wages of staff working in early learning and care settings, and I cannot set wage levels or determine working conditions for these staff. I am, however, doing all that is in my power to improve wages and working conditions in the sector. My support for improved pay and conditions for early learning and care professionals has been explicit, as their role is critical to supporting children's development and delivering better outcomes for children and families.

Budget 2020 saw a 9% increase in investment in early learning and care and school age childcare. Additional investment of €54.5m will bring spending to €628m in 2020, a 138% increase in investment over five budgets. The very welcome level of investment needs to continue if we are to offer services that are of high quality, affordable and accessible. However, increased investment by itself will not ensure that staff wages and conditions will improve.

My Department has set out its vision for the sector, and a roadmap to achieve it, in *First 5* the whole-of-Government strategy for babies, young children and their families. *First 5* recognises that the workforce is at the heart of high-quality early learning and care and school-age childcare and seeks to build 'an appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families'.

In particular, *First 5* commits to a Workforce Development Plan to raise the profile of careers in the sector and to ensure sufficient numbers of staff at all levels within the sector. The Workforce Development Plan, work on which began recently, will set out plans to raise the profile of careers in the sector, establishing role profiles, career pathways, qualifications requirements, and associated policy mechanisms along with leadership development opportunities and work towards a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce.

Preparation of the Workforce Development Plan will involve close collaboration between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills, and an extensive consultation process. To help ensure a strong consultation process, a Stakeholder Group comprising representatives from across the sector has been formed and will work alongside the Steering Group.

Delivering on a further commitment in *First 5*, I have also recently appointed an expert group to examine the current model of funding for early learning and care and school-age childcare and its effectiveness in delivering quality, affordable, sustainable and inclusive services. The Expert Group is independently chaired and includes national and international experts in early learning and care systems, funding and quality, economics, and policy experts from a number of Government Departments.

In Budget 2020, I secured increased funding for the sustainability fund for the sector. This

will see funding to support sustainability rising from €1.7m to €2.2m per annum. The fund will assist high quality services which are experiencing financial difficulties to transition themselves to a sustainable footing, and will also assist with needs arising in the event that the Labour Court introduces a Sectoral Employment Order, which I have repeatedly called for the sector to pursue. My Department will readily co-operate with such a process when it is under way.

Other recent measures I have taken to assist employers to improve the pay and conditions of their staff whilst also addressing administrative demands include: a 7% increase in ECCE capitation in 2018; higher capitation payments for graduates and Inclusion Coordinators; annual Programme Support Payments to recognise administrative demands; support for school-age childcare which will make it easier to offer full-time, full-year employment contracts; and a pilot measure to fund participation in CPD. In April I announced capital funding for service providers who sign up to the National Childcare Scheme. This funding allowed service providers to purchase ICT support which will assist them in recording and reporting children's attendance.

Child Abuse

985. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla is providing funding for the provision of counselling to persons who have raised issues with an organisation (details supplied) in respect of historic cases of abuse; if so, the funding provided to date; the number of persons in receipt of funding; the length of time into the future the funding is being provided for; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44526/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy is referring to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct response be provided to the Deputy.

Legal Proceedings

986. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases of legal action her Department has been informed of that are being taken against an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44527/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department is aware that there are a number of legal cases pending against the specified organisation. As neither myself as Minister nor my Department are named in these cases we do not have precise details as to the number and nature of these cases, nor would it be appropriate to comment further as the cases are still in process.

Foster Care Expenditure

987. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the fees paid to private fostering agencies by Tusla since its establishment in 2014; the names of the private agencies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44570/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy is referring to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct response be provided to the Deputy.

Children in Care

988. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in the care of private fostering agencies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44571/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy is referring to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct response be provided to the Deputy.

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

989. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 544 of 13 November 2018, the status of quality enhancements that were promised for the 2019-20 ECCE programme year to improve the roll out of higher capitation payments; the steps that have been taken by Pobal to address the delays in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44645/19]

990. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 544 of 13 November 2018, the average turnaround times for applications for ECCE higher capitation payments in Pobal in each year since the higher capitation scheme came into operation; the number of applications received each year; the number of applications approved each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44646/19]

991. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 544 of 13 November 2018, the number of ECCE higher capitation applications lodged in the week the application system went live in August 2019 that are still awaiting approval; the reason some of the applications are still to be approved by Pobal in cases in which applicants have provided all of the requisite documentation; if her attention has been drawn to the serious impact this delay is having on providers that are unable to pay staff; if the payments will be expedited without further delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44647/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 989 to 991, inclusive, together.

I am aware of the distress and inconvenience caused by delays in the processing of ECCE Higher Capitation applications, and my Department has taken action to provide additional preliminary payments to affected services in order to minimise the negative impacts. Officials in my Department are also working with Pobal to ensure that outstanding applications are processed as fast as possible and to remedy the causes of the delays.

In addition, officials in my Department are in the process of finalising a Focused Policy Assessment of the ECCE Higher Capitation payments, which includes analysis of administrative procedures used in the processing of applications. It is hoped that this report, once finalised, will inform decisions on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Higher Capitation payments.

While I must stress that the delays in the payments are not acceptable, it is important to note that part of the reason for the delays is the large and rising volume of applications, linked to the rising number of graduates working in the sector, which is a reflection of the success of the Higher Capitation payments in supporting the professionalization of the early learning and care

workforce. The proportion of ECCE services receiving Higher Capitation payments rose from 20% of services in the 2012-13 programme year to 53% of services in 2018-19. The number of applications has increased significantly in recent years, from 1,562 in 2015-16 to 2,785 in 2018-19. At the same time the proportion of applications approved rose from 83% to 97%. The number of applications approved therefore more than doubled in this 3-year period, from 1,301 in 2015-16 to 2,693 in 2018-19.

So far (as of 4th November) in the 2019-20 programme year, Pobal have received 2,299 applications, of which 790 have been approved and 2 declined. Of the applications that have not yet been approved or declined, Pobal is actively engaging with a large number of services in relation to their applications. The number of applications is expected to continue rising over the coming months.

A significant administrative reform took place in mid-2018, with the transfer of administration of the Higher Capitation from my Department to Pobal, thus completing the transitioning of administration of the ECCE programme to Pobal, and enabling early learning and care providers to conduct all business relating to the ECCE programme with one agent.

On 19th August 2019, Pobal issued an announcement to services through the PIP system informing them of the Higher Capitation application timelines for the 2019-20 programme year. Regrettably these timelines resulted in a start date which was later than had been indicated the previous year and was due to a combination of resourcing issues and a delay in closing off the 2018/2019 programme year. I understand the frustration the timelines and delays have caused.

Pobal officials began processing applications for the programme year 2019/2020 in October 2019, in line with the announced schedule. Pobal is currently processing a large volume of applications, and is working to approve applications and release funding as soon as possible.

Considering the significant pressure on services, my Department has made the decision that early learning and care providers whose applications have not yet been processed and who were also in receipt of the first preliminary payment on 23rd August 2019, would receive an additional preliminary payment on 1st November 2019. This payment was for a four-week period that will take early learning and care providers to 20th October 2019. The payment was based on a child's Full Time Equivalent (FTE) numbers for the week ending 18th November 2019 using the max FTE cap for services which were approved for Higher Capitation last year.

A further preliminary payment will be made on 8th November 2019 for any early learning and care service providers whose application has still not been processed at that stage. This payment will be for a four week period that will take early learning and care service providers to the 22nd November 2019. Early learning and care service providers who had not previously been approved for the Higher Capitation rate but have submitted an application for the 2019/2020 programme year, that has not been processed, received a preliminary payment on 29th October 2019. This payment was for an eight week period. An additional preliminary payment will also be made to these services on 8th November and this payment will be for a four week period.

For any Higher Capitation application or payment queries, service providers are recommended to contact highercap@pobal.ie who are best placed to advise on these matters.

Orthodontic Services

992. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied) regarding children that were harmed by HSE orthodontic services in the Dublin mid-Leinster region over a period of time; if she will

request Tusla to engage with the HSE to immediately publish the report; if she will examine the matters contained in the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44651/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to state that I have not had sight of the report to which the Deputy refers.

Orthodontic services are a matter for the HSE, which falls under the policy remit of my Cabinet colleague, the Minister for Health.

Family Resource Centres

993. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if correspondence from a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if a 5% increase in family resource centre core funding will be granted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44698/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, on 23 April 2019, I made an announcement that the additional €1.5m in funding for Family Resource Centres (FRCs) was to be used this year as follows:

- to increase core funding to each of the 110 FRCs which existed pre-2018 by 5%,
- to employ an additional 17 Family Support Workers - one FRC in each of the 17 Tusla geographical areas is to be allocated funding to employ a Family Support Worker,
- to fund the Family Resource Centre Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Promotion Programme.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administers the Family Resource Centre Programme.

I understand that Tusla issued the promised 5% funding increase to FRCs on 11 October, 2019, including the organisation referred to by the Deputy. Tusla has also informed FRCs of its decision regarding the distribution of Family Support Workers in the 17 named FRCs throughout the country. In the Cavan/Monaghan area, Teach Oscail FRC in Cavan will receive funding for the employment of an additional Family Support Worker.

Arrangements are to be in place to ensure that the 17 new Family Support Workers are employed by FRCs by the end of the year.

I can confirm that while my office has not directly received the correspondence to which the Deputy refers, it has received and dealt with documentation from other representatives on behalf of the named organisation.

Information and Communications Technology

994. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of computers in her Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44705/19]

995. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44721/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 994 and 995 together.

There are two computers in my Department utilising the operating system the Deputy has enquired about.

These computers are currently carrying out dedicated tasks in relation to the Department's telephone systems. They are not on the Department's network.

These computers will no longer be required to carry out these tasks from January 2020. Therefore support for their specific operating system will no longer be required.

Information and Communications Technology

996. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to protect her Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in her Department and the agencies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44737/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As outlined in my response to the Deputy's other questions relating to this specific operating system, there are only two computers in my Department utilising that system at present. They are stand alone machines and not on my Department's network. They do not represent a security risk.

In addition, my Department implements a multi-layered approach to cyber security and to protecting our ICT systems, data and infrastructure. This includes preventative controls like firewalls, anti-virus and endpoint protection. Software vulnerabilities are managed by maintaining up-to-date versions.

My Department does not provide ICT infrastructure or ICT support to any of the agencies under its remit. For this reason I have asked the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Ombudsman for Children's Office and Tulsa - the Child and Family Agency to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue.

Departmental Budgets

997. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the breakdown of funding announced in budget 2020 (details supplied); the amount allocated to each stream; the way in which funding for each stream is to be dispensed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44754/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): An additional €54m of funding has been allocated to Early Years policies and programmes in Estimates 2020. This represents a year-on-year increase of 9%, and a total growth of the Early Years allocation of c. 138% since 2014.

This significant investment of public money will support the provision of affordable, accessible and quality ELC & SAC in Ireland. It has been allocated to the purposes specified as follows:

Area of Expenditure	2020 Allocation	Change to allocation
The introduction of the NCS; and an increased level of uptake for both the universal under 3 subsidy and targeted subsidies to families	€197.2m	+€40m
Meeting the continuing cost of two years of ECCE	€297m	-€1.1m[1]
Increased funding for beneficiary elements of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)	€31.4m	+€10m
An increase in allocation for Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate	€5.1m	+€0.7m
Meeting additional costs associated with delivery of the schemes and the implementation of First 5	€50.5m	+€5.6m
Supporting quality in the sector and improving the sustainability of services	€14.4m	+€2.5m

Increases to these allocations captured in the table above were offset by savings identified across Early Years Subheads of c. €3.7m.

[1] This allocation Reflects the slightly lower number of children who will be eligible for ECCE in 2020 due to the decreasing birth rate.

Early Childhood Care and Education Expenditure

998. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated annual full year cost of extending the early childhood care and education scheme from 38 to 39 weeks. [44832/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): €297m euro has been allocated to the Early Childhood Care and Education programme in 2020.

ECCE is available for 38 weeks throughout the year, the following table outlines the cost of increasing the weeks available as per the question.

ECCE Capitation Costs		
Proposed change	Annual Cost (€m)	Increase (€m)
No change	€297.0	
1 week increase	€304.8	€7.8

As AIM funding is intrinsically linked to ECCE capitations any increase in rates or durations for the ECCE programme has an impact on associated AIM costs.

While AIM Levels 1 & 7 are awarded on a weekly basis, €2 per child per week and €195 per week respectively (the underlying basis for AIM Level 7 figure is the cost of ECCE capitation for 3 children). If the number of ECCE weeks available increased, there would be a corresponding increase in AIM Levels 1 & 7 costs

Initial estimates indicate that the AIM level 7 programme will cost circa €26m and AIM level 1 programme will cost circa €5.4m in 2020 based on current AIM level 1 and 7 projected applications.

The following table captures the impacts of the outlined increase would have, on a pro-rata basis, to the estimated allocation for AIM Levels 1 & 7 costs in 2020.

Associated AIM costs		
Proposed change	Annual Cost (€m)	Increase (€m)
No change	€31.4	
1 week increase	€32.2	€0.8

Departmental Staff Data

999. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of full and part-time staff employed in her Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44840/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are 285 staff employed in my Department. As the Deputy maybe aware, any adjustments to the salaries of public and civil servants are set out in the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) 2018-2020.

DPER Circular 17/2019 sets out the adjustments to the pay of civil servants on 1 September 2019 as provided for under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 and is available on www.circulars.gov.ie

All Civil Service salary scales comply with the minimum wage.

Youth Services Funding

1000. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding funding for youth services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44969/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has obligations with regard to the management and control of Exchequer resources assigned to it and also to ensure that the administration of all grant funding is carried out in accordance with correct public financial procedures. All youth organisations in receipt of grant funding from my Department are required to adhere to the financial management principles associated with the provision of public grant funding.

The Education and Training Boards (ETBs), as funding intermediaries, administer funding on a regional basis to youth services on behalf of my Department. ETBs are required to carry out on behalf of my Department, the financial management and administrative system for the management and monitoring of the expenditure of youth funding and general governance of the funded youth organisation.

In order to ensure that my Department and ETBs can fulfil their respective obligations with regard to public funding it is essential that all ETBs put an appropriate service level agreement in place with funded youth organisations prior to the payment of any funding.

Over the course of 2019, the realignment of the funding intermediaries for the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme (TYFS) resulted in the transfer of the administration of funding for all Kerry youth projects to Kerry Education and Training Board (KETB). KETB as grant administering body for funding provided under the TYFS in Kerry is required to put service level agreements in place with relevant youth organisations.

In advance of entering into a service level agreement with a funded youth organisation it is not considered disproportionate for KETB to engage in a due diligence exercise to fulfil its obligations for the financial management and monitoring of grant funding administered on behalf of my Department. Youth organisations in receipt of youth funding are also subject to audit at any time by an agent of the grant administering body.

The Accounting Officer of my Department has been in correspondence with the Chief Executive of the organisation concerned and has clarified the conditions associated with youth funding provided by my Department including the necessity for a service level agreement to be in place.

I understand that KETB has made numerous attempts to arrange a meeting to discuss these matters and I would strongly encourage the organisation to continue to engage with KETB to complete the due diligence process. This will enable the requisite service level agreement to be put in place and minimise any further delay with the payment of the funding allocation for the final quarter of 2019 which has not been reallocated or decommitted.

City and County Child Care Committees Data

1001. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of funding provided to each city and county childcare committee in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and date in 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45034/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) were established in 2001 to advance the provision of childcare facilities in their local areas.

The CCCs support the delivery of the childcare programmes operated by my Department. They also carry out a range of activities to promote the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), including the provision of information and support for parents and ECCE providers. CCCs are also responsible for rolling out the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training programme to preschool practitioners nationwide.

The information relating to the funding of CCC's requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following tables.

In 2016 funding was allocated under the category 'core funding allocation' only. In 2017 additional funding streams under the AIM and EDI programmes were made available to CCCs, and, in 2019, a further funding allocation was provided to CCCs to prepare for the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme.

2016

City and County Childcare Committee	Core Funding €
Galway City and County Childcare Committee	456,378.00
Donegal County Childcare Committee	370,000.00
Meath County Childcare Committee	380,920.00
Cavan County Childcare Committee	234,000.00
Fingal County Childcare Committee	479,407.94
Sligo County Childcare Committee	307,102.50
Longford County Childcare Committee	209,000.00
Carlow County Childcare Committee	224,000.00
Mayo County Childcare Committee	313,000.00
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	302,782.00
Louth County Childcare committee	301,761.89
Wexford County Childcare Committee	345,631.19
Offaly County Childcare Committee	233,680.05
Laois County Childcare Committee	192,500.00
South Dublin Childcare Committee	478,552.58
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Childcare Committee	375,151.90
Kildare County Childcare Committee	384,952.33
Cork City Childcare Committee	299,000.00
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	254,988.13
Cork County Childcare Committee	496,922.48
Clare County Childcare Committee	296,290.00
Dublin City Childcare Committee	788,869.00
Kerry County Childcare Committee	348,500.00
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	208,997.00
Westmeath County Childcare Committee	240,918.37
Monaghan County Childcare Committee	234,000.00
Roscommon County Childcare Committee	234,000.00
Waterford Childcare Committee	458,000.00
Limerick County Childcare Committee	546,000.00
Tipperary Childcare Committee	440,189.68

2017

City and County Childcare Committee	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI
Galway City and County Childcare Committee	523,498.27	26,775	35,000
Donegal County Childcare Committee	408,535.00	14,070	20,000
Meath County Child-care Committee	447,211.00	20,055	27,500

Questions - Written Answers

City and County Childcare Committee	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI
Cavan County Child-care Committee	254,000.00	6,300	7,500
Fingal County Child-care Committee	514,056.73	32,340	45,000
Sligo County Child-care Committee	264,826.03	16,510	7,500
Longford County Childcare Committee	273,214.29	3,570	5,000
Carlow County Childcare Committee	234,000.00	5,145	7,500
Mayo County Child-care Committee	333,000.00	12,705	17,500
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	350,202.82	17,115	25,000
Louth County Child-care committee	352,852.35	11,550	17,500
Wexford County Childcare Committee	416,351.50	13,755	20,000
Offaly County Child-care Committee	257,119.98	7,665	10,000
Laois County Child-care Committee	187,797.00	8,085	12,500
South Dublin Child-care Committee	496,063.65	24,255	35,000
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Childcare Committee	372,728.00	19,635	27,500
Kildare County Childcare Committee	447,400.73	19,950	30,000
Cork City Childcare Committee	354,669.40	8,610	12,500
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	274,919.05	10,080	15,000
Cork County Child-care Committee	519,079.00	38,430	47,500
Clare County Child-care Committee	321,184.47	14,175	17,500
Dublin City Child-care Committee	693,145.42	40,110	57,500
Kerry County Child-care Committee	416,561.00	12,600	17,500
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	218,509.00	3,255	2,500
Westmeath County Childcare Committee	272,812.96	8,400	12,500

City and County Childcare Committee	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI
Monaghan County Childcare Committee	244,000.00	6,195	7,500
Roscommon County Childcare Committee	243,385.00	5,460	7,500
Waterford Childcare Committee	446,952.72	9,345	12,500
Limerick County Childcare Committee	566,000.00	18,060	25,000
Tipperary Childcare Committee	448,806.25	16,275	25,000

2018

City and County Childcare Commit- tees	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI
Galway City and County Childcare Committee	476,020.41	25,935	30,000
Donegal County Childcare Committee	375,736.29	13,650	17,500
Meath County Child- care Committee	375,134.76	20,370	20,000
Cavan County Child- care Committee	244,892.00	6,300	7,500
Fingal County Child- care Committee	465,637.50	31,815	37,500
Sligo County Child- care Committee	275,414.00	11,720	7,500
Longford County Childcare Committee	339,439.16	3,465	2,500
Carlow County Childcare Committee	246,308.20	5,145	5,000
Mayo County Child- care Committee	331,285.00	12,705	15,000
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	320,769.86	16,380	17,500
Louth County Child- care committee	316,084.60	11,445	12,500
Wexford County Childcare Committee	377,353.78	13,965	15,000
Offaly County Child- care Committee	248,152.00	7,455	5,000
Laois County Child- care Committee	171,439.50	7,980	7,500

Questions - Written Answers

City and County Childcare Committees	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI
South Dublin Childcare Committee	437,216.15	23,520	27,500
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Childcare Committee	370,625.72	18,795	22,500
Kildare County Childcare Committee	406,927.32	19,635	22,500
Cork City Childcare Committee	405,673.57	8,190	10,000
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	268,352.17	9,870	10,000
Cork County Childcare Committee	468,056.00	37,695	50,000
Clare County Childcare Committee	318,948.41	13,440	12,500
Dublin City Childcare Committee	709,539.00	38,955	55,000
Kerry County Childcare Committee	460,688.13	13,020	15,000
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	220,199.00	2,940	2,500
Westmeath County Childcare Committee	250,394.32	8,085	10,000
Monaghan County Childcare Committee	246,052.23	5,985	7,500
Roscommon County Childcare Committee	259,122.00	5,460	5,000
Waterford Childcare Committee	454,290.87	9,240	12,500
Limerick County Childcare Committee	572,279.02	17,850	20,000
Tipperary Childcare Committee	505,358.77	15,855	17,500

2019

City and County Childcare Committees	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI	National Child-care Scheme
Galway City and County Childcare Committee	505,240.00	26,250	15,000	16,509
Donegal County Childcare Committee	392,566.00	14,175	7,500	9,688
Meath County Childcare Committee	408,610.00	19,950	10,000	9,616
Cavan County Childcare Committee	241,183.00	6,405	2,500	4,367
Fingal County Childcare Committee	509,806.00	31,710	17,500	15,270
Sligo County Childcare Committee	244,271.00	6,825	2,500	4,764
Longford County Child-care Committee	217,060.00	3,465	2,500	2,374
Carlow County Childcare Committee	236,704.00	5,250	2,500	3,176
Mayo County Childcare Committee	325,159.00	12,915	7,500	9,163
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	334,815.00	16,485	7,500	9,171
Louth County Childcare committee	314,375.00	12,075	5,000	6,011
Wexford County Childcare Committee	371,748.00	13,965	7,500	8,417
Offaly County Childcare Committee	246,236.00	7,140	2,500	4,335
Laois County Childcare Committee	234,582.00	7,980	2,500	4,828

Questions - Written Answers

City and County Childcare Committees	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI	National Child-care Scheme
South Dublin Childcare Committee	517,211.00	23,835	12,500	12,126
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Childcare Committee	385,557.00	18,690	10,000	9,259
Kildare County Childcare Committee	420,261.00	20,265	10,000	9,648
Cork City Childcare Committee	309,123.00	8,190	5,000	6,027
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	263,647.00	9,975	5,000	5,598
Cork County Childcare Committee	547,489.00	37,380	25,000	21,417
Clare County Childcare Committee	314,074.00	13,335	5,000	7,964
Dublin City Childcare Committee	837,398.00	40,320	27,500	26,197
Kerry County Childcare Committee	357,380.00	12,915	7,500	8,457
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	216,292.00	3,255	2,500	3,088
Westmeath County Child-care Committee	248,687.00	8,085	5,000	5,534
Monaghan County Child-care Committee	241,913.00	6,195	2,500	4,343
Roscommon County Child-care Committee	247,700.00	5,565	2,500	4,327
Waterford Childcare Committee	465,191.00	9,345	5,000	6,051
Limerick County Childcare Committee	562,831.00	17,850	10,000	11,689

City and County Childcare Committees	Core Funding €	AIM	EDI	National Child-care Scheme
Tipperary Child-care Committee	497,751.00	16,170	7,500	9,672

Early Years Sector

1002. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of early years capital funding in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45035/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department provides capital funding annually to early learning and care and school age childcare services. The capital programme is designed each year to ensure that capital grants have a positive, lasting impact on the childcare sector.

The following table shows the amount of capital funding which was approved in the years 2016 to 2019 and the amount of capital funding paid during those same years by county.

County	Approvals 2016	Payments 2016	Approvals 2017	Payments 2017	Approvals 2018	Payments 2018	Approvals 2019	Payments 2019
Carlow	€88,954.00	€88,692.02	€118,143.00	€111,759.92	€99,659.00	€99,508.80	€50,000.00	€0.00
Cavan	€178,618.00	€147,960.05	€194,394.00	€194,331.53	€185,900.00	€185,771.91	€50,000.00	€45,000.00
Clare	€155,842.00	€152,940.71	€504,793.00	€447,454.15	€305,194.00	€248,245.88	€63,366.00	€57,029.40
Cork	€639,451.00	€605,835.85	€658,702.00	€603,102.69	€354,740.00	€377,072.53	€181,414.00	€48,081.60
Donegal	€265,028.00	€242,059.22	€321,940.00	€320,878.91	€536,208.00	€383,302.91	€269,896.00	€13,500.00
Dublin	€1,204,492.00	€1,069,438.24	€1,573,731.00	€1,070,934.44	€1,051,430.50	€942,514.93	€873,215.00	€157,297.80
Galway	€514,269.00	€486,537.00	€536,710.00	€455,762.95	€275,595.00	€281,784.15	€330,394.00	€88,440.30
Kerry	€255,089.00	€233,370.76	€390,850.00	€333,402.90	€286,350.00	€234,415.90	€112,269.00	€64,464.30
Kildare	€271,682.00	€231,687.34	€122,402.00	€120,010.44	€170,465.00	€169,046.34	€137,747.00	€35,253.00
Kilkenny	€171,116.00	€160,138.12	€172,854.00	€172,031.89	€197,986.00	€205,276.90	€136,972.00	€13,500.00
Laois	€91,625.00	€90,890.71	€171,709.00	€93,119.94	€50,962.00	€57,067.00	€85,683.00	€19,753.20
Leitrim	€31,230.00	€30,710.66	€179,361.00	€129,699.67	€45,691.00	€46,949.74	€67,705.00	€16,411.50
Limerick	€298,987.00	€257,108.55	€494,304.00	€283,324.03	€194,673.00	€191,562.50	€55,401.00	€4,860.90
Longford	€107,331.00	€98,524.70	€286,943.00	€236,897.00	€70,000.00	€70,877.96	€160,875.00	€103,500.00
Louth	€181,955.00	€151,760.94	€372,664.00	€307,692.93	€48,936.00	€48,936.00	€94,721.00	€0.00
Mayo	€219,911.00	€209,167.96	€326,926.00	€271,406.05	€147,130.00	€95,781.50	€96,097.00	€0.00
Meath	€288,979.00	€243,958.28	€444,983.00	€444,370.37	€340,487.00	€291,809.21	€152,829.00	€13,200.00
Monaghan	€153,604.00	€122,150.89	€293,118.00	€182,244.42	€216,977.00	€216,369.17	€95,380.00	€58,842.00
Offaly	€160,681.00	€158,769.68	€155,429.00	€152,818.46	€45,571.00	€51,230.29	€108,996.00	€98,096.40
Roscommon	€156,592.00	€155,110.54	€296,227.00	€295,912.90	€114,626.00	€107,677.00	€54,904.00	€2,973.60
Sligo	€70,103.00	€69,080.16	€176,695.00	€161,232.07	€111,339.00	€111,307.63	€125,529.00	€34,457.40
Tipperary	€228,214.00	€223,578.60	€337,847.00	€307,181.58	€185,069.00	€159,848.90	€29,399.00	€26,459.10
Waterford	€123,514.00	€113,784.39	€240,703.00	€182,366.78	€182,252.00	€126,886.42	€136,795.00	€3,871.80
Westmeath	€179,033.00	€175,749.20	€202,463.00	€196,909.10	€159,979.00	€179,250.95	€290,596.00	€35,374.80
Wexford	€286,672.00	€283,936.48	€213,414.00	€212,095.02	€343,136.00	€292,318.14	€196,329.00	€71,700.60
Wicklow	€232,687.00	€207,695.09	€261,943.00	€248,880.22	€207,740.00	€226,081.04	€110,995.00	€9,900.00

Departmental Contracts Data

1003. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by her Department or bodies under her aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45058/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Details of con-

tracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by my Department that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017 and 2018 are outlined in the following table. No such contracts exist to date in 2019.

Subject of Contract / Purchase	Value €
2017	
TRK Construction t/a TKC Construction - Secure replacement doors were required for Oberstown Children Detention Campus	€775,000
Aspect Interior Systems - Goods of a highly specialised nature (acoustic panelling) were required at the Oberstown Children Detention Campus	€56,000
PC Peripherals - Purchase of laptops for staff moving to another premises and to cater for incoming staff	€31,487
Expert Technical Group - To Identify the Options and Appropriate Courses of Action available to Government at the site of the former Mother and Baby Home, Tuam, Co. Galway	€123,692
Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) - It was considered that ECI was best placed to develop and deliver a Train the Trainer Programme for the “Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education” because of the uniqueness of the guidelines and the exceptional expertise that the organisation had in this area to fulfill all requirements.	€45,155
2018	
Independent Reviewer appointed to carry out investigations to see if any evidence of illegal registrations could be obtained from records of former adoption agencies held by Tusla or the Adoption Authority.	€ 35,138

The Adoption Authority of Ireland has advised that all contracts awarded in 2017, 2018 and 2019 are compliant with procurement guidelines.

I have referred the question to Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) and the Ombudsman for Children’s Office and asked them to provide the information sought directly to the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency Data

1004. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of files relating to historical complaints that remain in the possession of an organisation (details supplied); the number of such files reviewed in view of requirements of the organisation under mandatory reporting; if the files have not been reviewed, when they will be reviewed and referred on to the relevant authority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45129/19]

1005. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases relating to historical complaints that have been reported to Tusla under mandatory reporting requirements of an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45130/19]

1006. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of active investigations that have arisen from referrals to Tusla by an organisation (details

supplied) relating to historical cases that have been reported since 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45131/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1004 to 1006, inclusive, together.

The Deputy is referring to an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have therefore referred the matter to Tusla, and asked that a direct response be provided to the Deputy.

Childcare Services

1007. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason a funding application by an organisation (details supplied) was refused to allow for an increase in support staff at the facility; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the decision to refuse the application has resulted in children that previously attended the facility no longer being able to do so owing to inadequate staffing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45140/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Officials from my Department contacted Pobal, who administer programme funding on the Department's behalf. Pobal have confirmed that there have been no unsuccessful applications for funding for the service in question for the 2019-20 programme year under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), which supports the participation of children with additional needs in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) preschool programme.

AIM is limited to children who are ECCE age-eligible and are registered for the programme.

The case mentioned in the question relates to school-age childcare. AIM currently does not provide additional supports for children with disabilities to attend school-age childcare services.

My Department has made a commitment in *First 5*, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, to consider enhancements to, and/or extension of, AIM to, for example, all early learning and care services, all school-age childcare services and/or to children with additional needs other than a disability. AIM will commence its end of year 3 evaluation in the coming months and findings from this will provide information for future decisions on extension or reform of AIM.

In addition, officials from my Department recently carried out a public consultation on school-age childcare, focusing particularly on the development of comprehensive regulations and a national quality framework to support quality improvements in school-age childcare services. The findings from this consultation are currently being analysed.

Orthodontic Services

1008. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 449 of 15 October 2019, if a report (details supplied) by the HSE will be published and investigated in view of the fact an audit of 7,500 minors has now been completed; if Tusla is investigating this matter; the number of litigations active against the State in relation to the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45154/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will

be aware that the report in question has been commissioned by the Health Service Executive, and that decisions with regard to the possible release or publication would be a matter for that body.

My Department is not aware of litigation against the State in relation to this matter.

I have requested Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to respond directly to the Deputy with regard to the elements of her question that relate to Tusla.

School Libraries

1009. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a grant is available for a school (details supplied) to provide library books for use by students; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45231/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to inform the Deputy that the Educational Welfare Service has no role in the provision of grant funding for the purchase of books for school libraries. This question is more properly directed at my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills.

Early Years Sector

1010. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the persons considered to be competent to conduct a fire risk assessment with regard to the fire and planning requirements for early years services reregistration and change of circumstances process (details supplied). [45246/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has liaised with Tusla to answer this question. Tusla is the independent statutory regulator of early learning and care and school age childcare services in Ireland. In performing its regulatory function, its actions include responding to breaches of regulations while respecting fair procedures and natural justice.

The suitability and safety of premises is a key concern in the assessment of quality provision for children in early learning and care settings. Section 58G of the Child Care Act, 1991 (as amended by Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013) places an onus on the providers of early years services to ensure that they take all reasonable measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children. In August 2019, Tusla issued guidance for the registered providers of early years services on the fire and planning requirements for the re-registration and change in circumstances process, which is available for download on the Tusla website. As stated in this guidance, the guidance reflects the following definition of a competent person for the purposes of a fire risk assessment: "A person is deemed to be a competent person where, having regard to the task he or she is required to perform and taking account of the size and/or complexity of the building or works, the person possesses sufficient training, experience and knowledge appropriate to the nature of the work to be undertaken".

The guidance specifies that competent persons for the purpose of fire safety assessments are:

(a) Architects that are on the register maintained by the RIAI under Part 3 of the Building Control Act 2007; or

(b) Building Surveyors that are on the register maintained by the SCSI under Part 5 of the

Building Control Act 2007; or

(c) Chartered Engineers on the register maintained by Engineers Ireland under section 7 of the Institution of Civil Engineers of Ireland (Charter Amendment) Act 1969.

In developing this guidance Tusla worked in collaboration with the Association of Chief Fire Officers in Ireland and all of the definitions and content contained therein were approved prior to publication as relevant and up to date. These definitions are reviewed on an on-going basis by Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate, in liaison with the fire representative body, and subject to amendment, in line with statutory requirements, should it be considered appropriate to do so.

In relation to fire safety audits, fire safety legislation and compliance with it comes under the remit of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate liaises with Local Authority fire services where appropriate.

Youth Services

1011. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to issues existing with the management and running of a project (details supplied); if a report update on the project can be issued; and the measures being taken to resolve existing issues. [45254/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB), a committee of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board, administers targeted youth funding on behalf of my Department to youth services in the Dublin area which includes this youth project. CDYSB notified officials in the Youth Affairs Unit of my Department on 11th October that it has concerns with regard to the financial management and oversight by the Board of this organisation.

CDYSB as part of its oversight function has held a number of meetings, with the board of the organisation concerned, to assess the exact financial position of the project and the circumstances which led to the existing issues.

CDETB will submit a report of its findings and recommendations to my Department. On receipt of this report, further consideration will be given to available options for the service delivery and financial management of the youth project for the months ahead.

Departmental Schemes

1012. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the budget allocated to the parent and toddler grant scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2019; and the budget allocation for same in 2020. [45256/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Parent & Toddler Groups which are organised on a not-for-profit basis, and which involve the participation of parents in the local community, are eligible for grant aid from my Department.

These grants are available for the funding of:

- toys, equipment and books;

- training for parents, such as in paediatric first aid, committee skills and parenting courses; and

- children's activities, including arts and crafts and music.

Limited funding is also available to contribute towards insurance, rent or minor refurbishment of the premises used by the Groups, up to a maximum of 30% of the total grant aid. These grants range from €100 to €1,000. Existing groups may apply for a maximum grant of €800. New start up groups may apply for a maximum grant of up to €1,000. The budget allocated to the parent and toddler grant programme in each of the years 2016 to 2020 is set out in the table below.

Programme Year	Budget Allocated Amount	Payments Granted
2016	€250,000.00	€224,419.00
2017	€250,000.00	€235,128.55
2018	€250,000.00	€244,538.00
2019	€250,000.00	€237,218.89
2020	€250,000.00	

CLÁR Programme

1013. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if further allocations of CLÁR funding will be awarded in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44202/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small infrastructural projects in rural areas which have suffered high levels of population decline. I launched the 2019 CLÁR Programme on 28th February last, with a closing date for applications of 25th April.

Applications were invited under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety

Measure 2: Play Areas (including Multi Use Games Areas)

Measure 3: Community Wellbeing Support comprising of:

- Measure 3(a) First Response Support

- Measure 3(b) Mobility and Cancer Care Transport

- Measure 3(c) Sensory Gardens

There was a huge level of interest in the CLÁR Programme this year and unfortunately it was not possible to fund all of the applications submitted within the budget available. Almost 500 applications to a value of over €16 million were received and I have announced funding of €6 million for 179 projects countrywide.

Given the demands on my Department's overall budget for programmes to support rural and community development, I currently have no plans to allocate further funding to CLÁR this year. However, I intend to launch a further round of CLÁR funding in 2020.

Local Improvement Scheme Applications

1014. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the LIS scheme is now closed to new applications in a location (details supplied) due to a 15-year application backlog; his plans to invest further in such areas to clear the backlogs on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44325/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I reintroduced the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) in September 2017, after a number of years when no dedicated funding was available for the scheme. Since then, I have allocated over €48 million to Local Authorities under the scheme for improvement works on non-public roads.

The number and location of roads to benefit from improvement works under the LIS is a matter for the Local Authorities, as are the arrangements for inviting applications under the scheme.

Since 2017, I have allocated over €1.1 million to the County Council referred to by the Deputy for the completion of works on almost 60 LIS roads. This includes an allocation of €250,000 in 2019, which has not yet been drawn down by the Local Authority concerned. Funding can only be drawn down on the basis of works completed.

I am aware of the importance of the LIS to many people who live in rural Ireland, and I have secured funding for the scheme again in 2020. The amount to be allocated to each Local Authority will be announced when the scheme is launched next year.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund Applications

1015. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when successful category 1 projects from the second call of the rural regeneration development fund will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44512/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund seeks to support ambitious and strategic projects which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities. The Government has committed €1 billion over 10 years to the Fund and €315 million is allocated to the Fund for the period 2019-2022.

The second call for Category 1 applications for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund closed on 6th August 2019. Category 1 projects are projects which have all necessary planning and other consents in place and are ready to proceed. There was an excellent response from across the country and my Department received 69 applications for funding.

The applications underwent assessment by my Department under the oversight of the Project Advisory Board, which includes representatives from key Government Departments as well as independent experts. On foot of this process, a report on recommended projects was submitted to me to inform my decision in relation to the allocation of funding to successful projects. Having now made my decision, I am delighted to say that the successful projects will be announced tomorrow, Wednesday 6th November 2019.

Information and Communications Technology

1016. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44716/19]

1017. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44732/19]

1018. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44748/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1016 to 1018, inclusive, together.

My Department's ICT managed service is provided by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform through the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO).

There are currently 154 personal computing devices running the Microsoft Windows 7 operating system in my Department. I understand that all of these devices will be upgraded to Microsoft Windows 10 by the end of 2020.

In the meantime, extended support arrangements will be put in place for all devices running Windows 7 to ensure they continue to receive security updates and patches to protect against malware attack. It is expected that the cost of extended support for the period concerned will be in the region of €7,500.

Departmental Staff Data

1019. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44852/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): There are a total of 189 staff employed in the Department of Rural and Community Development. This comprises 171 staff working full-time and 18 staff working part-time. I can confirm that all officers are paid at a rate which is above the minimum wage rate of pay.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

1020. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45070/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): All procurement within my Department takes place in the context of national guidance, and national and EU requirements and regulations. From establishment in July 2017 to date, my Department has not awarded any contracts which were found to be non-compliant with these requirements.

With regard to the four bodies under the aegis of my Department, (Pobal, Water Safety Ireland, The Charities Regulator and the Western Development Commission), compliance with these requirements is a matter for each body. The procedures for procurement by State Bodies are set out in the code of practice for Governance of State Bodies and, in accordance with this code of practice, it is the responsibility of each Board to satisfy itself that public procurement requirements are adhered to.

In line with these responsibilities I have asked my officials to contact the agencies to provide you with the information requested by separate cover within the next 8 working days.

CLÁR Programme

1021. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a requirement for recipients of CLÁR funding to make the funded facility open to the general public unconditionally; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this stipulation is preventing school boards of management from applying for such funding; and if he will review this condition in respect of applications from schools, which would ensure the facility is used in the first instance by the school and thereafter by the wider community with prior agreement from the school. [45073/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department was established to promote rural and community development throughout Ireland. In order to do achieve this objective, funding provided to projects should have the widest possible benefit for communities. The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructure projects in rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

Since I reintroduced the programme in 2016, funding has been provided for a range of measures to help achieve this objective, including up to €50,000 for the enhancement or development of Play Areas and Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs). Eligible applicants under this measure include both schools and communities.

In order to ensure that value for money is derived from funding of projects of this nature, I believe it is appropriate that such facilities should be available to the general community and I have no plans at present to review this condition. Many schools in CLÁR areas are willing to make their playground facilities available for wider community use and have consequently received support under the programme.

LEADER Programmes Data

1022. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of LEADER-funded projects approved in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by county in tabular form; the level of funding for each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45082/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme with a budget of €250 million over the period 2014-2020. €225 million of this budget is allocated to Local Action Groups, or LAGs, who deliver the programme and approve projects at local level. This allocation includes €5 million in additional funding which I have recently allocated to the top 10 performing LAGs.

The balance of €25 million is provided for thematic projects which are approved at national

level.

As of 4th November 2019, 2,494 core projects with a value of over €93 million have been approved for LEADER funding by the LAGs. A further 301 projects requesting over €26.9 million in funding are at various stages in the approval process. This funding will be drawn down as projects start to incur expenditure and submit payment claims.

In addition, over 100 Food and Co-operation projects have been approved at national level, outside of the core budget available to the LAGs

Details of all projects approved under LEADER on a county-by-county basis and the funding allocated to them are available on my Department's website at:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b849be-local-action-groups-approved-projects-2014-2020/>

The information is currently being updated to show the year of approval of each project and this additional information will be available on the website on Monday, 11th November 2019.

Philanthropy Initiatives

1023. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the development of a strategy on philanthropy; the stakeholders he has been engaging with in respect of same; if the development of such a strategy will include a public consultation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45266/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department has commenced work on the development of a national policy and strategy to grow and develop philanthropy in Ireland. As a first step in this process, a request for tender is in preparation to conduct research into the current landscape of philanthropic giving in Ireland and to complete an independent report providing an overview of the philanthropy sector.

The Department has engaged with key stakeholders - Philanthropy Ireland, Charities Institute Ireland and Social Innovation Fund Ireland - to seek their views on the scope of the research.

Once the body of research has been completed and the results assessed, it is intended to consult with the public on the issues arising, before preparing a National Philanthropy Policy for Government approval.

LEADER Programmes

1024. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he has examined enabling private applicants for LEADER funding to qualify for the grant aid rate of 75% for projects that fall under capital investment, investment and other supports including capital+ as is permitted for community applicants; the reason private applicants receive only 50% grant aid; if the 50% grant rate is a domestic or European rule; when the rule was first introduced; the corresponding regulation or circular for same; the estimated annual cost of adapting the current rate to 75%; and the definitions for private and community applicants. [45332/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme covering the period 2014-2020 and is delivered through Local Action Groups (LAGs) in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the country. In order for a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy for the relevant LEADER sub regional area, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

The LAG may award funding under all themes and sub themes of the LEADER 2014-2020 programme to a maximum rate of aid of 50% of the total project cost to both Private and Community applicants. This percentage may be increased to 75% for analysis and development type projects and to 100% for training type projects. These are maximum rates of aid and the LAG may award lower rates of aid as it considers appropriate. The LAG considers the rate of aid offered on a project-by-project basis.

Higher maximum rates of aid may be awarded to community-based projects where there is no commercial basis for the project and where the project applicant satisfies certain additional criteria.

Maximum rates of aid for the LEADER programme are set at EU level. Each Member State, can if it deems it appropriate, set lower maximum rates of aid. The setting of lower rates enables a greater number of projects to be supported from the overall funding available.

The current 50% maximum rate of aid in Ireland for project applicants (whether Private or Community applicants) where the project generates an economic activity is a national rule and was in place under all previous LEADER programmes.

Based on an analysis of private sector projects funded to date where the maximum rate of aid was 50%, my Department estimates that the application of a 75% aid rate would have cost an extra €16.5 million. This increase would have negatively impacted on the funding available to many other applicants for LEADER funding.

The decision to approve any project, including the level of funding to be awarded and the applicable rate of aid (subject to the maximum threshold limits), is a matter for the LAGs. The delineation of what constitutes a private or community project essentially hinges around the type of activity involved in each case.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

1025. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of funding allocated for LIS by county; and the amount claimed by county in 2019, in tabular form. [45367/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in rural areas. The scheme is funded by my Department and is administered through the Local Authorities.

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

The table below outlines the funding allocated to each Local Authority for works in 2019 and the amount of funding drawn down to date in respect of each allocation. Under the terms

of the scheme, Local Authorities can only draw down funding for projects that have been completed.

Local Authority	2019 Allocation	2019 Funding Drawn Down to Date
Carlow	€250,000	€0
Cavan	€269,254	€267,071
Clare	€480,811	€480,720
Cork	€900,000	€0
Donegal	€677,456	€0
Galway	€856,959	€856,959
Kerry	€669,930	€0
Kildare	€250,000	€0
Kilkenny	€288,905	€0
Laois	€250,000	€241,871
Leitrim	€250,000	€250,000
Limerick	€384,092	€0
Longford	€250,000	€0
Louth	€250,000	€125,000
Mayo	€778,496	€0
Meath	€326,394	€0
Monaghan	€250,000	€0
Offaly	€278,871	€0
Roscommon	€355,104	€354,774
Sligo	€256,154	€256,154
Tipperary	€599,969	€0
Waterford	€258,802	€258,802
Westmeath	€256,433	€256,433
Wexford	€329,878	€0
Wicklow	€282,494	€0
TOTAL	€10,000,002	€3,347,785

Public Services Card Data

1026. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of the development and implementation of the MyGovID online system; the annual maintenance cost of same; the number of MyGov accounts created to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44494/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): MyGovID is a secure online identity verification service that my Department carries out on behalf of bodies providing public services online. It allows individuals to access a range of government services more easily via a single online account and reduces the need to have multiple accounts and passwords with different public sector bodies.

The Government's eGovernment Strategy, published in 2017, states that the widespread adoption of the Public Services Card infrastructure, including its online counterpart MyGovID, to underpin access to public services by citizens is critical to the successful delivery of the

eGovernment strategy. MyGovID is also essential for Ireland to be aligned with the EU eIDAS regulation, which is a key aspect of the EU's eGovernment Action Plan and Digital Single Market Strategy.

I am advised that there are currently 1,231,409 MyGovID users.

The cost to date of IT infrastructure and support to develop, implement and maintain the MyGovID system since its introduction in 2014 is approx. €8.1m, excluding VAT. It is expected that the maintenance costs for 2020 will be in the region of €1.3m, excluding VAT, which includes provision for service improvements and production support.

MyGovID is a valuable service which forms the central plank of the Government's eGovernment Strategy and provides access to online services from my own Department, Revenue MyAccount services, Driver Licence and Learner Permit renewals and Student Grant applications. I am pleased to note that MyGovID won both the Overall and General Award categories at the recent Ireland eGovernment awards in September 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Rights

1027. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to companies that employ persons on 24-month contracts and terminate the contracts prior to the contract date, with pension investments being paid back to employers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44773/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I have not been made aware of instances such as those referred to by the Deputy.

The Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015 provide protection for employees from being unfairly dismissed from their jobs by laying down criteria on which the fairness or otherwise of dismissals can be judged, and by providing an adjudication system and redress for an employee whose dismissal has been found to be unjustified. The Acts apply to employees who (with certain exceptions) have had at least one year's continuous service with the same employer.

If an employee considers that he or she has been unfairly dismissed, he or she may apply to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for a hearing by a WRC Adjudication Officer of a case under the Unfair Dismissals Acts. If the Adjudication Officer finds that the dismissal was unfair, redress can take the form of financial compensation or re-instatement or re-engagement. A WRC Adjudication Officer's decision may be appealed by either party to the Labour Court.

The Pensions Act 1990, as amended provides for the preservation of retirement benefits for members of occupational pension schemes who leave employment before their normal pensionable age for any reason, other than death, provided they satisfy certain qualifying conditions.

Section 28 of the Pensions Act provides for an entitlement to the preservation of pension benefits where a person has completed at least two years' qualifying service. If a person is a member of a pension scheme and has less than 2 years' qualifying service they may be obliged, when they leave service, to take a refund of the value of their own contributions less tax at the basic rate. In such circumstances, the employer contributions would be refunded back to the employer.

Some schemes may permit a person with less than 2 years' scheme membership to leave

their contributions in the scheme, even though they are not required to do so by law. Additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) are treated in the same way as main scheme benefits. Even if a person is not obliged to take a refund of contributions and have less than two years' qualifying service, they may still choose to do so.

The Pensions Authority is the regulatory body charged with the supervision of pension schemes and has the necessary powers under statute to investigate the conduct of a pension scheme should it become aware that a scheme is not in compliance with the provisions of the Pensions Act. Where a pension scheme member is of the view that the scheme is not in compliance with legislative requirements he or she may make a formal complaint to the Pensions Authority.

I hope the above clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1028. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44207/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of this person's application, her application for disability allowance (DA) was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. The person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 4 July 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

Further medical evidence was received and a review of this decision was carried out. The original decision was upheld and the person concerned was notified in writing on 25 October 2019. She was also advised again of her right to appeal this decision to the independent SWAO.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizens Information Board

1029. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the funding made available to the Citizens Information Board in 2019; the projected funding for the board and the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities in 2020; the number on waiting lists to receive support from the service; the average length of time persons are on the waiting list; the longest period a person has been waiting; and the target time to respond to requests for support by service region. [44257/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money and budgeting advice) and advocacy services to citizens on a wide range of public and social services. In 2019, the Citizens Information Board (CIB) has been allocated State funding of €59.26 million to fund its activities and that of its service delivery partners.

The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) is funded and supported by the Citizens Information Board (CIB), which has a mandate under the Citizens Information Act 2007 to provide advocacy for people with disabilities. NAS has been allocated funding of

€3,250,952 in 2019 . The projected grant for 2020 remains at the same level.

The information requested by the Deputy regarding waiting times is not readily available, therefore I have asked the CIB to provide the information directly to the Deputy when available.

NAS has a target time of 3 working days to respond to an enquiry for support and aims to meet the individual requesting advocacy support within 28 working days.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

1030. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision will be reviewed on an illness benefit application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44259/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for Illness Benefit was received from the person concerned on 14 September 2019.

One of the qualifying conditions for Illness Benefit is that a person must have 39 weeks of PRSI contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year, of which 13 must be paid contributions at class A, E or H. Alternatively, a person may have 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the relevant tax year, and 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the tax year immediately before the relevant tax year with all such contributions at class A, E or H.

I am advised that the person concerned does not satisfy the contribution conditions for Illness Benefit and a letter issued on 11th October 2019 explaining the position.

Upon receipt of a further query a letter issued to the person concerned on 14th October requesting the submission of information in relation to student credits and these will be assessed by the Department when it receives them.

Should the person concerned be in need of financial assistance, it is open to him to contact the Community Welfare Service at his local Intreo Centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Applications

1031. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for child benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44294/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Where an application for child benefit is made by a person who is not a parent of the child(ren) concerned the Department contacts the parents/guardians of the children for further information and confirmation (or otherwise) of the information provided in the application.

In this case, the required information has been requested from the relevant persons and the Department is awaiting their replies. Once this information comes to hand a decision will be made and issued to the person concerned.

I trust that this helps clarify the position.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

1032. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the criteria for inclusion on the free travel companion pass scheme; and if there are circumstances in which a person who is not in receipt of a suitable payment can be provided with a pass due to medical circumstances. [44295/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 953,000 customers with direct eligibility. In Budget 2019 the funding for the free travel scheme was increased by €5 million to a total of €95 million.

The Free Travel Companion Pass scheme was introduced in 1990 for persons who qualify for the Free Travel scheme and who, on account of their disability, are unable to travel alone. It enables a person 16 years of age or over to accompany the pass holder free of charge.

A free travel cardholder aged 66 or over may qualify for a companion pass if they are:

- aged 66 to 69 inclusive and are medically assessed as unfit to travel alone;
- aged 70 or over and are medically unfit to travel alone;
- receiving full-time care and attention from someone who is in receipt of Carer's Allowance from my Department;
- certified by either the Irish Wheelchair Association or by their GP as being a permanent wheelchair user.

A free travel cardholder aged under 66 may qualify for a companion pass if they are getting a qualifying payment and are:

- assessed as unfit to travel alone;
- certified by either the Irish Wheelchair Association or by their GP as being a permanent wheelchair user;
- receiving full-time care and attention from someone who is in receipt of Carer's Allowance from this Department;
- a widowed person / surviving civil partner aged between 60 and 65 years inclusive, whose late spouse / civil partner held a Free Travel Card from this Department, and who at the time of his / her death, resided with him / her on a permanent basis.

A person who is blind or severely visually impaired and satisfies the blindness condition for the Blind Pension or is registered as a blind person with either the National Council for the Blind of Ireland or the National League of the Blind of Ireland may qualify for a companion pass at any age. This is the only circumstance in which a person aged under 66 may receive a free travel companion pass while not in receipt of a qualifying payment from my Department.

Any decision to allow for discretionary travel passes would have significant costs impli-

cations for the free travel scheme and would need to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Applications

1033. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the fuel allowance was not approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if the application will be reviewed and approved. [44308/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Fuel allowance is a means tested payment. All income, including private/occupational pensions and capital such as savings and investments are taken into account.

A single person, under age 80, can have €348.30 per week income (the equivalent of the maximum State Pension Contributory plus €100) and still qualify for fuel allowance. The person concerned applied for fuel allowance in September 2018. However I am advised that her application was disallowed as her means were in excess of this limit.

If the means of the person concerned have reduced, it is open to them to re-apply for fuel allowance and their entitlement will be re-examined. An application form has been issued to the person concerned.

Additionally, under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources and this may include exceptional heating costs. The person concerned may wish to contact the community welfare officer in their local Intreo Centre to have any possible entitlement examined.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

1034. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a pension by a person (details supplied); if their pre-1979 record has been made available from PeoplePoint; if not, the reason for the delay; and if the pension due from February 2019 will be expedited. [44309/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for State pension (contributory) on 28 February 2019. Their entitlement to this pension was examined based on their contribution history, including their Pre 1979 record which was made available to my Department. I am advised that the person concerned does not have the required 520 full-rate contributions to qualify for a standard State pension (contributory).

Provisions exist for the award of a mixed insurance pro rata state pension, where a person has periods of PRSI coverage from employment in the public or civil service. The person's pension entitlement to this pension was determined under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods.

The pro rata pension entitlement of the person concerned was assessed as 67.21% of the

maximum pension rate, based on their social insurance record of full-rate contributions and credits, modified rate contributions and credits, together with homecaring periods. This is the most financially beneficial rate of State pension (contributory) based on their individual circumstances and the correct rate of pension commensurate with their contribution history. They have been notified in writing of this decision on 29 October 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Eligibility

1035. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) will have their FIS entitlement re-examined as a matter of urgency. [44320/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

WFP for the person concerned was renewed on 28 February 2019. At the date of renewal the person concerned had an entitlement to €0.65 per week. However once a person qualifies for WFP they are entitled to a minimum payment of €20 per week.

Once WFP is awarded the same weekly rate of payment applies for 52 weeks. This rate is not affected by any increase or decrease in income.

The person concerned may make a request to have their current claim closed and make a new application. This new application will be based on the circumstances for the person concerned at the time of application.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

1036. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) is entitled to a hearing aid under the treatment benefit scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44371/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is qualified for treatment benefits and will be entitled to a grant contribution towards the cost of hearing aids. She will receive a letter within the next few days advising her of the position and confirming her eligibility for medical appliance (hearing aid) benefit.

The Audiologist can claim the grant payment directly on-line once the hearing aids have been provided.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1037. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [44376/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady on 5 June 2019.

On 7 September 2019, the 20 September 2019 and the 23 October 2019 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on her DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance

1038. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if insurance contributions will be credited to farmers for pension purposes for the time they were in receipt of farm assist; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44421/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Currently, PRSI credited contributions (credits) are awarded to former employees to cover gaps in social insurance where they are not in a position to pay PRSI contributions, for example during periods of unemployment or illness. Self-employed workers do not qualify for credits.

The Farm Assist scheme was introduced in 1999 to provide income support for low income farmers. It replaced the former Smallholders' Unemployment Assistance payment. In line with the then existing arrangements for Unemployment Assistance (including Smallholders' Unemployment Assistance) and Pre-retirement Allowance, the non-welfare income of Farm Assist recipients was exempt from the payment of Class S PRSI for self-employed workers.

Recipients of Farm Assist who had previously paid Class S social insurance contributions had the option of paying voluntary contributions to maintain their social insurance record, provided they satisfied the qualifying conditions to do so. Since 1st January 2007, the exemption from Class S PRSI has been removed and those self-employed persons receiving Jobseeker's Allowance or Farm Assist are subject to Class S PRSI as self-employed contributors on their self-employed income, provided their annual income is €5,000 or more.

Any self-employed person, including farmers, with an annual income less than €5,000 can pay voluntary contributions to maintain their social insurance record for pensions purposes, once qualified to do so.

A person aged 66 or over with insufficient PRSI contributions to qualify for a full rate State Pension (Contributory) may claim a State Pension (Non-Contributory) if they have an income need. The current maximum weekly personal rate is €237, which is over 95% of the maximum State Pension (Contributory) rate. While it is means-tested, there are very significant disregards which are to the benefit of claimants, and a significant majority of such pensioners are paid at the full rate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

1039. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the action she plans to take to ameliorate the effects of increasing fuel costs and the increased carbon taxes for Travellers living in temporary accommodation, mobile homes and caravans due to the disproportionate heating costs they face and the effect this will have on their ability to keep warm for the 2019-2020 winter season and in line with the recommendation in the MABS report Addressing Energy Poverty Among Travellers Living in Mobile Homes and Trailers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44461/19]

1040. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the fuel allowance to Traveller families that are officially sharing a bay in a halting site to assist them with their fuel costs in line with a recommendation of the MABS report Addressing Energy Poverty Among Travellers Living in Mobile Homes and Trailers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44462/19]

1045. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an increase will be made in the winter fuel allowance payment for Traveller families living in mobile homes or trailers. [44553/19]

1046. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the winter fuel payment will be extended to Traveller families that are officially sharing accommodation. [44554/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1039, 1040, 1045 and 1046 together.

The Fuel Allowance is currently a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €630 each year) from October to April, to over 372,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €240 million in 2019. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. It should be noted that only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the household benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €188 million in 2019.

I am aware of the MABS report addressing energy poverty among travellers living in mobile homes and trailers and I have asked officials in my Department to examine the recommendations in the report in relation to the fuel allowance scheme.

Fuel Allowance is a household payment and can be paid when the residence is on an approved site (publically or privately owned) with planning permission for the caravan / mobile home. However, where someone lives in a residence which is without planning permission such as in the case where an additional mobile home or caravan is placed on a bay designed for single use, these 'additional' places of residence are not currently legally distinct households which impacts on their eligibility for Fuel Allowance.

In Budget 2020, I increased the Fuel Allowance payment by €2 to €24.50 per week. This is an increase of just under 9% and will increase the annual Fuel Allowance rate from €630 to €686, i.e., a €56 yearly increase. This increase follows on from a number of other improvements and increases made to the Fuel Allowance scheme in recent Budgets including an increase from €20 to €22.50 per week and the number of weeks the fuel allowance is paid for increasing from 26 to 27 and then to 28.

In addition, it is important to note that, while the Fuel Allowance increase will come into effect from the 6th January 2020, the carbon tax increase will not take effect until May 2020 for home heating fuels, giving such households additional headroom for its introduction.

The Fuel Allowance is intended to address income deficiency, not energy poverty. My colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, has the role of reducing energy poverty by implementing measures (administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)) to improve the energy efficiencies of Irish homes. In this respect, the Government Climate Action Plan commits to reviewing ways to improve how current energy poverty schemes can target those most in need. In this regard Budget 2020 is the first to put a major focus on climate action but has also ensured that the most vulnerable will be protected and supported to participate in the transition.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1041. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) will receive a decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44497/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 9 July 2019.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 24 October 2019 and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 31 October 2019.

Arrears of allowance due for the period 2 May 2019 to 30 October 2019 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 24 October 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Non-Contributory)

1042. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the further documentation that can be given as proof of habitual residence for a pension in view of the volume of material already submitted by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44538/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): State pension non-contributory is a means-tested payment for people aged 66 and over, habitually residing in the State, who do not qualify for a state pension contributory, or who only qualify for a reduced rate contributory pension based on their social insurance record. In order to satisfy the habitual residence condition, the person must have a legal right of residence in the State.

All European Union (EU) citizens have a right of residence in the State for up to three months, during which time they may not access the social welfare system. The right of residence in the State of an EU citizen for longer than this period is conditional on the citizen satisfying the relevant provisions set down in legislation and having sufficient resources so as

not to become an unreasonable burden on this country's social welfare system. EU citizens can gain a right of permanent residency after five years legal residence in the State, or after three years if they have worked in the State for the twelve months immediately prior to reaching state pension age.

The person concerned is an EU citizen who came to Ireland to reside with their daughter (who is also an EU citizen) on 10 April 2019. The person has no record of employment in the State and submitted an application for state pension non-contributory on 29 April 2019. I am advised that the application was disallowed as the person concerned, not yet residing in the State for five years or more and not appearing to have sufficient resources so as not to be a burden on the State, had not established a legal right of residence and failed to satisfy the habitual residence condition for the state pension non-contributory scheme.

In due course, if the person concerned can provide a verified record of at least five years residency in the State, it is open to them to re-apply for state pension non-contributory.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

1043. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when self-employed persons can access jobseeker's allowance; the way in which they can approach same; the documentation that will be needed to prove they no longer derive an income from self-employment as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44539/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The main social welfare schemes for people who are unemployed are the jobseeker's allowance and benefit schemes which provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment.

On 1 November I introduced a new scheme of job-seekers benefit for self-employed people which is based on a person's social insurance record.

Jobseekers allowance is a means tested scheme and is available for jobseekers who do not qualify for social insurance-based benefits. In assessing means from self-employment, income from the previous twelve months is used as an indicator of likely future earnings. As there is a wide range of self-employment situations, means are assessed to take an individual's circumstances into account. This allows for situations where a person's income can increase or decrease significantly from one year to the next.

Application forms are available on my Department's website www.welfare.ie or from the local Intreo Centre or Social Welfare Branch Office.

I would advise the Deputy that the person concerned should contact their local Intreo Centre which will be able to advise on their specific circumstances including the relevant documents required to support their application.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Fuel Allowance Applications

1044. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a fuel allowance application by a person (details supplied). [44551/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Fuel allowance is a means-tested payment to assist householders on long-term social welfare payments towards the cost of their heating needs.

The person concerned applied for State pension (contributory) on 6 September 2018, and indicated on the application form that they wished to apply for fuel allowance. In order to ascertain their eligibility for fuel allowance, details of their means were requested on 11 October 2018. The person was notified in writing on 22 May 2019 that their application for fuel allowance was disallowed as they had not replied with the information required to process their application.

A questionnaire has reissued to the person concerned, requesting details of their means. Once this information is received, their eligibility for fuel allowance will be determined and they will be notified of a decision without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 1045 and 1046 answered with Question No. 1039.

Illness Benefit Applications

1047. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for illness benefit in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44577/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department has received medical certificates from the person concerned, however, an application form for Illness Benefit (IB1) has not yet been received from him.

This form has been sent to the person concerned for completion and his claim will be processed as soon as it is received by the Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

1048. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if carer's allowance will be granted to persons who care for incapacitated children or persons; if same will be granted automatically to carers (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44598/19]

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

My Department provides a range of supports to those who are caring for family members, friends or neighbours. These income supports include the Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit,

Carer's Support Grant and the Domiciliary Care Allowance. Spending on these payments in 2019 is expected to exceed €1.2 billion.

The Carer's Allowance is the main scheme by which the Department provides income support to carers in the community. Carer's Allowance is a means tested social assistance payment awarded to those carers who are caring for certain people who require full-time care and attention.

The primary objective of the payment is to provide an income support to carers whose earning capacity is substantially reduced as a consequence of their caring responsibilities and in so doing to support the ongoing care of the person in respect of whom care is being provided. In doing this it also contributes to recognising the valuable role of carers and helping to maintain people with caring needs in their own homes / communities.

The means test for Carer's Allowance is the most generous within the social welfare system in that €332.50 of gross weekly income is disregarded in the calculation of means for a single person; the equivalent for someone who is married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting is €665 of combined gross weekly income. At the end of December 2018, there were 79,914 people in receipt of Carer's Allowance. The projected expenditure on Carer's Allowance in 2019 is almost €840 million.

The conditions attached to payments of Carer's Allowance are consistent with the overall conditions that apply to social assistance payments generally. This system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need with the means test playing the critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency – be that illness, disability, unemployment or caring. Carer's Allowance acts as an income support for those who cannot earn an income in the open labour market due to their caring responsibilities. The continued application of the means test not only ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need but that resources are targeted to those with greatest need.

Based on the number of carers identified as part of Census 2016, it is estimated that by automatically granting the allowance to all carers by removing the means test, such a universal carer's payment could cost up to an additional €1.2 billion per annum.

My Department offers further supports to carers which are not means tested:-

- Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is a monthly payment for a child, aged under 16 with a severe disability who requires ongoing (continual or continuous) care and attention, substantially over and above the care and attention usually required (in excess of that required) by a child of the same age. The child is likely to require full-time care and attention for at least 12 months. There are no PRSI conditions and it is not means tested. The Domiciliary Care Allowance rate is €309.50 per month.

- The Carer's Support Grant is an annual payment of €1,700 a year for each care recipient paid in a single lump sum with no requirement to satisfy a means test.

Any changes to the eligibility for Carer's Allowance would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context. I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

1049. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if new interim arrangements in regard to the State pension (contributory) for post-2012

pensioners that allow for extended homecaring credits and aggregated contributions will apply to all pensioners (details supplied); if legislation is needed in this regard; if so, when the legislation will be introduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44609/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Initially, it should be noted that central policy relating to public service pensions rests with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Depending on the sector the person in question works in, their pension scheme may have its own specific qualifying rules and criteria.

The interim Total Contributions Approach (TCA) arrangements, as announced in January 2018, work alongside the Yearly Average (YA) method of calculating the rate at which the contributory state pension (SPC) is paid, with the customer receiving the higher of the two calculated rates. This will continue to be in place until replaced by new legislation. This approach includes consideration of regulations relating to Homecaring periods which were introduced as part of the interim TCA approach.

Homecaring periods can be used to help increase a person's rate of payment with the SPC if they have spent time out of the workforce to care for children (up to 12) or sick or disabled persons. To be in a position to claim these homecaring periods, they must first satisfy the minimum conditions for receipt of the SPC (i.e. have 10 years' worth of reckonable contributions, with the first coming before their 56th birthday). Class B or D PRSI contributions, as paid by the majority of public servants recruited prior to April 1995, are *not* reckonable for State Pension purposes.

The Roadmap for Pension Reform sets out a target to introduce a new Total Contributions Approach for all new contributory state pension applications from the 3rd quarter of 2020. I have received analysis of a public consultation held by my Department and I hope to be in a position to bring a proposal to Government and make an announcement on the proposed design of the scheme shortly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

1050. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications awaiting assessment by the medical review and assessment section, in tabular form; the payments to which the applications refer; the length of time in months such persons are waiting; the counties from which the applications come; the length of time allocated for a medical review or assessment; if she is satisfied that there is an adequate number of medical assessors to undertake the assessments on hand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44618/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed as expeditiously as possible and to providing a quality service to all claimants.

Please see the following table containing sought information.

Scheme	Numbers of applications Awaiting Desk Assessment as of 04/11/19	Current Wait Time (in weeks) on Medical opinions as of 04/11/19.
Carers Allowance	332	1.5
Carers Benefit	183	2.2
Disability Allowance	2,056	4.0

Questions - Written Answers

Scheme	Numbers of applications Awaiting Desk Assessment as of 04/11/19	Current Wait Time (in weeks) on Medical opinions as of 04/11/19.
Domiciliary Care Allowance	339	2
Companion Free Travel	149	0.8
Partial Capacity Benefit	35	2
Invalidity Pension	413	6.4
Respite Care Grant	118	4
Standalone Respite Care Grant	7	1.6

Profiles by county, please refer to Appendix 1.

The length of time taken for each schemes for desk assessments varies depending on the complexities of the case and the volume of documents submitted, Domiciliary Care Allowance is such example. Therefore it is not feasible to allocate a fixed time for each case as they are unique in their own way even with clients of similar diagnosis. The Medical Assessor will take the time as required to read, analyse and evaluate each case in the assessment and arrives at the clinical opinion for capacity for work or the need for full time care. Furthermore, the Medical Assessor will take the time to prepare the narrative for the reasoning in the event of a not eligible opinion.

The Medical Review and Assessment Section (MRAS) in conjunction with individual scheme business sections, co-ordinates and manages all referrals for assessment to the Medical Assessors.

The Department offers a number of schemes on illness, disability, carers and occupational injury and applications vary in volume and frequency both yearly and seasonally.

High volume and resource intensive schemes like Domiciliary Care Allowance and Disability Allowance would have a higher proportion of Medical Assessors delegated to these schemes. Medical Assessors are assigned to specific schemes on a daily basis.

A dedicated fast-track system is in place between the office of the Chief Medical Advisor/ Deputy Chief Medical Advisor and all scheme business areas, to facilitate referral of claimants with serious and poor prognosis medical conditions, for expediting assessment and processing of claims.

The Department endeavours to maintain adequate Medical Assessor capacity in staffing, and following a successful process in 2018 an additional 5 Medical Assessors were recruited. All vacancies are now currently filled.

I hope this satisfactorily clarifies the concerns raised by the Deputy.

Appendix 1

Profile of Numbers of Medical Claim Application Cases Awaiting Assessment on 30/09/19 broken down by Scheme and by County.

County	Carers Allowance	Carers-Benefit	Disability Allowance	Disability Benefit	Domiciliary Care Allowance	Free Travel	Partial-Capacity-Benefit	Invalidity Pension	Respite Care Grant	Stand Alone Respite Care-Grant
Carlow	4	1	49		4	2	1	9	1	
Cavan	5	1	45	2	4	5	2	12	3	3
Clare	4	3	50		5	5	3	13	7	1
Cork	19	10	284	1	42	28	12	95	18	1

County	Carers Allowance	Carers-Benefit	Disability Allowance	Disability-Benefit	Domiciliary Care Allowance	Free Travel	Partial-Capacity-Benefit	Invalidity Pension	Respite Care Grant	Stand Alone Respite Care-Grant
Donegal	13	2	90		9	3	7	19	3	
Dublin	43	18	534	4	82	48	43	138	28	4
Galway	9	8	126	4	19	8	5	33	7	2
Kerry	8	3	101	1	10	6	2	18	5	1
Kildare	6	7	93	1	12	3	9	24	2	1
Kilkenny	4	3	42	1	7	2	5	9	2	
Laois	3	1	49	1	6	9	4	14	2	
Leitrim		1	17		1	4	3	4	3	
Limerick	5	5	105		19	11	8	39	2	1
Longford	2	2	23		3	2	3	7	1	
Louth	7	4	60		8	7	6	31	5	1
Mayo	4	4	63	1	11	3	6	11	4	2
Meath	10	3	79	1	15	5	5	26	7	1
Monaghan	4		31	1	7	1		12	1	
Offaly	1	2	66		5	8	6	11	5	2
Roscommon	6	2	41		9	3	2	12	3	
Sligo	3	2	27		7	1	4	9	7	
Tipperary	10	5	98		12	8	5	43	5	1
Waterford	8	2	65		8	7	6	13	4	
Westmeath	3	7	65		5	7	2	22	5	
Wexford	7	5	104		10	4	5	22	7	1
Wicklow	7	1	52		13	5	7	24	5	

Legislative Process

1051. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 will be progressed; if enabling the use of public service cards as identification for the purposes of persons opening current accounts and obtaining other services from banks or credit unions has been examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44640/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that a person can only use their PSC for the purposes of a transaction with a body which has been specified in Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended). It also provides that only a specified body may request a person's PSC for the purpose of transacting with that body.

Credit unions or other financial institutions are not currently specified bodies for the purposes of the PSC, so it is not possible for a person to offer their PSC as proof of identity for this purpose.

One of the provisions set out in Section 5 of the Social Welfare, Pensions, and Civil Registration Bill 2017 would, if enacted, enable citizens to volunteer their PSC where they wish to use it as a form of proof of identity and/or age. A non-specified body could not, however, request or demand the production of a PSC. The provision in the Bill simply gives individuals the option to use their PSC if they wish, as proof of identity and/or age, in transactions with non-specified bodies.

The 2017 Bill proposes a number of amendments to the Social Welfare Acts, the Pensions Act 1990 and the Civil Registration Act 2004, in addition to the provisions relating to PSC use.

The amendments to the Pensions Act contain a number of key measures relating to Defined Benefit pension schemes which are very technical and involve complex policy issues. In order to achieve a resilient solution, it has been necessary to consult in detail with other Government Departments and obtain numerous legal advices from the Office of the Attorney General on various aspects of the provisions. When these matters have been resolved and amendments approved by Government, an early date for Committee Stage will be requested.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card Data

1052. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of offences recorded and-or investigated regarding breaches of Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 regarding unspecified bodies requesting a person to produce a public services card since its introduction; the number of complaints by persons to her regarding same since the card has been introduced; if she will provide a schedule of the offending bodies and or organisations that breached Schedule 5 of the Act; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44657/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Public Services Card (PSC) can only be requested by a body specified in Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended, and only where that specified body has a transaction with the person concerned.

Specified bodies are, in all cases, required to process and store data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as amended.

Where my Department is made aware of any requests being made by a non-specified body for a person to produce their PSC, officials from the Department contact the organisation concerned, inform them of the legislative provisions in place in respect of this matter and instruct them to take all necessary steps to comply with social welfare legislation.

I am advised that the Department does not maintain a list of notifications received concerning bodies which have been contacted in relation to questions about PSC use.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Household Benefits Scheme

1053. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44671/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for the Household Benefits Package was received from the person concerned on 7 October 2019. The person concerned has been awarded the Household Benefit Package, back-dated to the date of award of their Invalidity Pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

1054. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if referrals to JobPath will be made in 2020. [44674/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): JobPath is a contracted public employment service supporting people who are long-term unemployed to secure and sustain full time paid employment. Two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua, are currently contracted by my Department to deliver the service.

The JobPath employment service commenced in 2015 and, under the terms of the contracts signed with the providers, was to run for at least six years comprising two consecutive phases: phase one entailed four years' of client referrals, while phase two entailed a 'run off' period during which time no additional clients were to be referred. Therefore client referrals were originally due to cease on 31 December 2019. The contract includes an option to extend the term of referrals for a period no greater than two years.

My Department has agreed with the JobPath providers to extend phase one of the contracts for a further twelve months until the end of 2020, which will enable referrals to continue throughout next year. This is not a renewal of the JobPath contracts, but the execution of the extension clauses of the existing contracts. This extension is important as it will ensure that the Government retains the necessary labour activation capacity to deal with any labour market uncertainty that arises as a result of Brexit.

In addition, it provides my Department with the opportunity review all contracted public employment services and to design and introduce a comprehensive model that will incorporate various models of response and be fit for purpose for the Irish labour market from 2021 onwards.

Disabilities Data

1055. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of research being commissioned into the cost of disability as per budget 2019; the timeframe for the report to be completed and published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44676/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As part of Budget 2019, I announced my intention to commission research into the cost of disability. This is the first step in reaching an in-depth understanding of this complex issue.

Indecon International Consultants have been commissioned to carry out the research and are expected to submit an interim report shortly. Their work programme to date has included the following elements:-

- An International review of existing research, including approaches to defining 'cost of disability' and government responses to costs of disability.

- Indecon have also invited submissions from representative organisations, and have received a number of submissions. By way of follow up to this process, Indecon are proposing to meet organisations that have made submissions.

As part of the "mixed-method" (top-down and bottom-up) approach. The research will include a range of methodologies for example the Standard of Living (SOL) approach using econometric analysis of data from household survey data to estimate a model linking living standards to incomes.

In addition the study will include a direct measurement method using survey based data of the experience of people with disabilities. As part of the stakeholder engagement programme element a survey will be issued to 33,000 recipients of DEASP disability-related payments. This will be followed up by structured interviews with a small sample of persons with a disability or with their families. This very large sample is designed to ensure that the different costs incurred by individuals with a disability are taken into account.

It is expected that this research, when complete by the end of the year, will provide a road-map to inform policy direction in the future – from a whole-of-Government perspective – in relation to the adequate provision of support to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

1056. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason full-time carers providing 365 24-7 care in a home setting are in receipt of only a half rate carer's allowance if they are in receipt of certain social welfare payments; if consideration has been given to raising this payment to full entitlement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44680/19]

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

My Department provides a range of supports to those who are caring for family members, friends or neighbours. These income supports include the Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Support Grant and Domiciliary Care Allowance. Spending on these payments in 2019 is expected to exceed €1.2 billion.

At the end of December 2018, there were 35,542 people in receipt of a half-rate Carer's Allowance. This is an increase of almost 43% since 2013.

There are a number of basic principles which underpin the Irish social insurance system, one of which is the general principle of one person, one payment, which applies across the social welfare system. People qualifying for two social welfare payments receive the higher payment for which they are eligible.

There are a limited number of exceptions in the social insurance system to the general principle of one person, one payment. In 2007 a new half-rate Carer's Allowance was introduced for certain people with another social welfare entitlement. This had been a particular concern to people in receipt of a social welfare payment when they became carers. The issue was highlighted by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs in its Report on the Positions of Full-time Carers (2003). In order to address these concerns, reforms in this area were provided for in Budget 2007. Under the new arrangements, people in receipt of certain social welfare payments other than Carer's Allowance or Benefit who are providing full-time care and attention can retain their main payment and receive another payment, depending on their means, the maximum of which is equivalent to a half-rate Carer's Allowance. Therefore a person who may have an underlying entitlement to another social welfare payment, such as State-Pension (contributory), can transfer to that payment and continue to receive up to a half-rate Carer's Allowance. These arrangements apply to almost all weekly social welfare payments and to people in receipt of qualified adult allowances. Recipients of Jobseeker's Al-

lowance or Benefit are not eligible given the job seeking nature of these payments.

To pay full-rate Carer's Allowance along with another social welfare payment, as proposed - would involve significant expenditure and could only be considered in an overall Budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

National Minimum Wage

1057. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the motion passed by Dáil Éireann on 17 October 2019 condemning the decision not to increase the minimum wage and calling for the introduction of a living wage of €12.30 per hour to be introduced in 2020; her plans to act on this motion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44690/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am aware of the Motion the Deputy has referred to. The Deputy will also be aware that the principal function of the Low Pay Commission is, once each year, to examine the national minimum hourly rate of pay and to make a recommendation regarding the rate, ensuring that all decisions are evidence-based, fair and sustainable, and do not create significant adverse consequences for employment or competitiveness.

In developing its recommendation this year, the Low Pay Commission assessed various economic indicators such as changes in earnings, exchange rates, employment, unemployment, productivity, international minimum wage comparisons, the need for job creation and the likely impact of the National Minimum Wage changes on levels of employment, cost of living, and national competitiveness.

Numerous economic commentators, both in Ireland and overseas, have highlighted that any form of Brexit has the potential to impact negatively on the Irish economy. Accordingly, although the Low Pay Commission recommended an increase in the national minimum wage of 30c to €10.10, it did so on the assumption of an orderly Brexit, and acknowledged that the Government might wish to reserve its position in the event of a disorderly Brexit.

The Government accepted the recommendation of the Commission in its entirety but decided to defer a decision on when the Commission's recommendation will commence until the nature of the Brexit becomes clearer.

I intend, therefore, to make provision in the Social Welfare Budget Bill to allow me to give effect to the National Minimum Wage in respect of 2020, in line with the Commission's proposals, once the situation in respect of Brexit is clarified.

It is important that Ireland's statutory National Minimum Wage and the Living Wage concept are not conflated. The Living Wage is a voluntary societal initiative centred on the social, business and economic case to ensure that, wherever it can be afforded, employers will pay a rate of pay that provides an income that is sufficient to meet an individual's basic needs, such as housing, food, clothing, transport and healthcare.

As a voluntary initiative, the Living Wage has no legislative basis and confers no statutory entitlement. The National Minimum Wage, on the other hand, has a legislative basis and confers a statutory entitlement on employees, and a statutory obligation on employers.

Information and Communications Technology

1058. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of computers in her Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44710/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department utilises a wide variety of computer operating systems and associated services across its extensive ICT desktop and server environments. The number of Windows 7 operating system devices across the entire network is 11,010 and consists of desktop PCs, small factor PCs used for video conferencing and laptops.

I am advised that the project to upgrade and replace the Windows 7 operating system on these devices is well underway and will complete during 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

1059. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44726/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department makes every effort to maximise the product lifetime and value it extracts from its ICT assets. A project to upgrade and replace all Windows 7 devices is underway in my Department and it will complete during 2020. The focus of this project up to this point, has been on compiling, building and extensively testing the variety of customised Windows 10 images that are required specifically for the Department's network and wide portfolio of business systems.

A substantial range of complex business applications spanning many generations of technology and a wide portfolio of supporting devices, such as document scanners, printers, signature pads etc. are presented at and all must work at the user desktop. The planning, compilation of the future operating system images and the testing phases are crucial to the successful delivery of the project and these are now substantially completed.

I understand that a procurement phase is currently underway utilising an Office of Government Procurement (OGP) framework for the supply and upgrade of desktop devices (PC's and laptops) for the Department and the deployment of new Windows 10 devices will commence before year end.

I am advised that my Department will have a mixed desktop estate for a period during 2020. This will include Windows 7, Windows 8 and Windows 10 devices. My Department has separately procured a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement via an Open EU tendering process and we will avail of a discounted service available through this agreement to ensure continuing support for the Windows 7 estate until fully replaced in 2020.

Information and Communications Technology

1060. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to protect her Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in her

Department and the agencies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44742/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has comprehensive cyber security arrangements and patch management protocols in place to secure all devices on the Department's ICT network irrespective of the operating system being used.

My Department has plans in place to ensure continuing support for devices running the Windows 7 operating system until all are fully retired in 2020.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1061. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision will be reviewed regarding a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied). [44751/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision on 21 March 2019. Under social welfare legislation the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts, or where there has been a change of circumstances which has come to notice since the date of the Appeals Officer's original decision.

I am advised that, on foot of the Deputy's representations, this appeal file has now been recalled by the Appeals Office from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for review. On receipt of same, this file together with the Deputy's representations will be brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer dealing with this case. The person concerned will be advised of the outcome of the review as soon as possible.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Data

1062. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she received correspondence from a company (details supplied) relating to collective redundancies in the past two years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44797/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Protection of Employment Act 1977 makes it mandatory on employers proposing a collective redundancy:

(a) to engage in an information and consultation process with employees' representatives and

(b) to notify the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection of the proposed collective redundancy (SI 140/1977 sets out the information an employer is obliged to provide to the Minister).

I have not received notification of a proposed collective redundancy in the company in the past two years.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

1063. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons issued with a public services card before they were 18 years of age since the card was introduced; the process of issuing a card to a minor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44811/19]

1066. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of a process that results in a person being posted a public services card on his or her 18th birthday; the extent and geography of the way in which this occurs; the way in which it complies with consent and dealing with a minor; the way in which such persons are identified by her Department; the way in which this conforms to SAFE 2 and GDPR; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44826/19]

1069. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if it is policy to issue persons with a public services card when they reach 18 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44871/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1063, 1066 and 1069 together.

My Department does not have a policy to issue a Public Services Card (PSC) when a person reaches the age of 18 years.

In cases where a person applied for and was issued a PSC before the age of 18, a new card issues when they turn 18.

If a person under the age of 18 presents for SAFE registration, they must be accompanied by a parent or guardian in order to be SAFE registered. The parent/guardian must complete the relevant registration form.

I am advised that the number of PSCs issued to people under the age of 18 years to date is 137,839. Of these, 66,162 have now reached the age of 18 years and have been issued with a new card.

It should be noted that disability allowance is payable from the age of 16, where a person satisfies the relevant qualifying conditions. Customers in receipt of this payment have an entitlement to Free Travel and, accordingly, they need a PSC to access this entitlement. Customers who choose to collect their social welfare payments in post offices also require a PSC to access their payment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

1064. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if joint savings in respect of a person applying for an adult dependant allowance on the State pension (contributory) of his or her spouse are fully assessed or if they are assessed on half basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44821/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A recipient of the state pension (contributory) can claim an increase to their pension in respect of a qualified adult. A qualified adult is the spouse / partner of the pensioner who is being wholly or mainly maintained by the pensioner.

An increase may be payable at the maximum rate of payment where the means of the spouse / partner is €100 a week or less, while reduced rates are payable where the means are over €100 and less than €310 per week. No increase is payable where the means of the spouse/partner are in excess of €310 per week.

The means assessed are those of the spouse/partner only and generally include;

- Income from employment and self-employment;

- Income from non-social welfare pensions;

- Income from any other sources including insurance policies such as life assurance, a trust fund, a deed of covenant, social welfare payments other than payments made in respect of a minor (e.g. child benefit, guardians, foster child etc.); maintenance payments from a former spouse / civil partner, and various other forms of periodic payment;

- The capital value of property investments (whether rented or not), as well as savings. Note: If the capital value of property owned and invested is assessed, any income derived from the rental properties or leases is not included as income for means assessment purposes.

Where a couple has a joint savings account, the value of half of the capital amount is assessed against the spouse / partner.

In calculating the weekly means of the qualified adult the first €20,000 of capital is fully disregarded, the next €10,000 assessed at €1 per thousand, the next €10,000 assessed at €2 per thousand, with the remainder assessed at €4 per thousand.

The capital disregard, as well as the general €100 weekly income disregard, mean that, assuming no other means, a spouse / partner can have capital of up to €57,500 without affecting entitlement to a qualified adult increase payable at the maximum weekly rate. Tapered reduced rates of qualified adult increase can continue to be payable where the spouse / partner has capital of up to €110,000.

It should be noted that the value of the family home, regardless of who is the legal owner, is never taken into account in this assessment.

State Pensions Reform

1065. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the date of 1 September 1946 was chosen as the cut-off in the creation of the State pension review launched earlier in 2019; if an analysis of those left out of the review has been conducted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44823/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A policy to introduce the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pensions calculation was adopted by Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the decision to base the entitlements of all new pensioners on this approach from around 2020.

In January 2018, I announced the Government Decision to introduce a new interim Total

Contributions Approach (TCA) to the calculation of State Pension that will allow pensioners who reached pension age from September 2012 (i.e., those born on or after 1 September 1946), to have their pension entitlement calculated by an interim “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) which will include up to 20 years of new HomeCaring Periods. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person’s social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines their final pension outcome. The HomeCaring Periods can be claimed for any year in which they occurred - they are not limited to years since 1994.

The interim TCA was introduced to deal with pensioners subjected to new pension ratebands introduced in September 2012 which resulted in a number of such pensioners receiving lower pension payments than pensioners prior to then. People whose pensions were decided under the previous 2000-2012 ratebands (i.e., those born before 1 September 1946) were subject to a significantly more generous payment regime than those who qualified before or afterwards, as a Yearly Average of only 20 contributions per year (out of a maximum of 52) could attract a 98% pension. The effect of those changes, as it impacted upon those new pensioners since 2012, will be familiar to anyone who followed the debate on this matter over the last 6 years. If pre-2012 pensioners were also allowed avail of HomeCaring Credits, their arrangements, as a group, would continue to be significantly more generous than those of post-2012 pensioners. There would also be a very significant additional cost which would be expected to be of the order of several hundred millions of euros each year. This in turn could significantly impact funds for future pension increases with consequential implications for pensioner poverty.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1066 answered with Question No. 1063.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

1067. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an exception will be made to the rules to allow a person (details supplied) to participate in a community employment scheme with nine months on jobseeker’s allowance; if she will meet with the person to discuss same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44829/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of a jobseeker’s benefit payment until his entitlement to this short term payment completed on 9/5/2019. The person concerned is currently in receipt of unemployment credits with effect from 10/5/2019. An unemployment credited contributions claim does not confer any payment entitlement rather it ensures that a person’s social insurance record remains unbroken for the period of the claim.

Unfortunately the person concerned does not qualify to participate in a community employment (CE)scheme as he is not in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment for at least 12 months and does therefore not meet the relevant qualifying criteria. I am advised that my Department has no record of receiving an application for a jobseeker’s allowance payment from the person concerned following the ending of his claim to jobseeker’s benefit.

Regrettably the person concerned does not meet the conditions for participation in a CE scheme at present.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Data

1068. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of full and part-time staff employed in her Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44845/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In figures to end September, there were the equivalent of 6,308 staff on full-time contracts (6,651 people) and 5 staff on part-time contracts. The figure for full time equivalents takes account of staff that avail of work-share options. All staff are paid above the minimum wage level.

Question No. 1069 answered with Question No. 1063.

Pensions Legislation

1070. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when legislation is expected to be introduced on pension auto-enrolment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44886/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am pleased that the Government recently approved significant elements of my design for an automatic enrolment retirement savings system. These include key decisions in relation to the target membership, the contribution rates, the policies in relation to opting-out and re-enrolment, the administrative arrangements and organisational approach and the investment options.

As stated in the ‘The Roadmap for Pensions Reform’, the Government proposes to begin implementation of a supplementary retirement savings system, known as Automatic Enrolment (AE), by 2022. AE will see a transition from the current and purely voluntary system to one which will, subject to certain parameters, automatically enrol employees into a quality assured retirement savings system. The saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out.

There are five main areas where work is on-going so as to produce design options for Government to consider. These areas relate to the design of: the State financial incentive; the scope and role of the Central Processing Authority; the nature and functions of the Registered Providers; the investment framework and funds to be offered by Registered Providers, including the design of the default fund, and also the pay-out phase; and the phasing of implementation.

Given the low level of occupational pension coverage we continue to work towards the 2022 target with the required legislation commencing in 2020.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer’s Allowance Payments

1071. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment and arrears will issue in respect of a carer’s allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44894/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My department received an application for Carer’s Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 27 June 2018. CA is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitu-

ally resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that although a certain level of care was being provided the level involved did not amount to full-time care.

The person concerned was notified on 20 December 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application.

The outcome of the review was that the decision still stood; review no change. The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 12 March 2019, the reason for it and of her right of appeal.

My department was notified that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) and a submission was prepared and forwarded to the SWAO.

As a result of an Appeals Officer's decision, CA was awarded to the person concerned on 29 October 2019 with effect from 28 June 2018. The first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 31 October 2019. Arrears for the period 28 June 2018 to 30 October 2019 issued by cheque on the same date, 29 October 2019.

The person concerned was notified of this on the 29 October 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Appeals

1072. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a non-contributory pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44898/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 4 September 2019. At the hearing it was agreed that further investigation of the case was required and, accordingly, the matter was referred to a social welfare inspector. The report of the social welfare inspector has now been received and the case will be reviewed, in the first instance, by a Deciding Officer as to whether a revised decision is appropriate. If the person concerned is not satisfied with the outcome of the review, the matter will be referred to the Appeals Officer for their consideration and decision.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Transitional Payment

1073. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the decision to remove lone parents from jobseeker's transitional payment automatically when the youngest child turns 14 years of age is having a negative impact on such applications for other funding streams such as SUSI (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44903/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): When a customer on Jobseekers Transitional (JST) wishes to commence a course of education, they are required to advise their Intreo Centre where an appointment will be made with a case officer to discuss the customer's options.

Customers in receipt of Jobseekers Transitional (JST) payments have two options if they wish to complete a course of education. First, where the course can be completed within the 7 years that they have access to JST (i.e. until their youngest child is 14 years of age), these customers can avail of the SUSI grant and a JST payment subject to the conditions of both schemes.

Secondly, where the course cannot be completed within the 7 years available on JST, for example if the course is over 3 years and the youngest child is now 12, the customer may instead apply for the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) when s/he commences the course. This allowance will continue to be paid, subject to the conditions of the BTEA scheme, until the course is completed even when the customer's youngest child reaches 14 years of age.

The BTEA is not intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third-level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, is Ireland's single national awarding authority for all higher and further education grants.

The Deputy should note that applicants approved for BTEA are not eligible for a maintenance grant from SUSI. The type of funding that BTEA recipients may be eligible for from SUSI will depend on the course that they are studying. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

Since September 2017, recipients of BTEA can get a Cost of Education Allowance of €500 if they have a dependent child.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1074. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44943/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 7 June 2019.

Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding

officer on 30 October 2019.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

Jobseeker's Transitional Payment

1075. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the jobseeker's transitional payment was discontinued from January 2019 for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44944/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied on the 25th February 2019 for an illness benefit payment whilst undergoing medical treatment. Once an illness benefit claim is opened, Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) is no longer payable as a condition of JST is that a claimant must be fit for work.

The JST claim continued to be paid until the 6th March 2019 when the claim was closed. The person concerned subsequently withdrew her Illness Benefit claim but as her JST claim had been closed it was not possible to recommence her JST without a certificate of fitness

I am advised that the person concerned did not resubmit another application for JST until the 04th of July 2019 when a new claim was made and a certificate of fitness provided for reduced hours. This claim has been paid from that date and remains in payment.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1076. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44946/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for this gentleman on 14 February 2019. His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on 25 May 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

The gentleman concerned subsequently requested a review and lodged an appeal of the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) and submitted further medical evidence in support of his requests.

Following a review of all the information available the gentleman referred to has been awarded IP with effect from 14 February 2019. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 14 November 2019. Any arrears due from 14 February 2019 to 13 November 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on 31 October 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

1077. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if the person will be assisted in locating their contributions. [44965/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A minimum of 520 full-rate paid contributions is required for the standard state pension (contributory), with a minimum of 260 full-rate paid contributions required for entitlement to a mixed insurance pro-rata pension. According to the records of my Department, the person concerned does not have any full rate social insurance contributions.

The person concerned was employed with the Department of Agriculture and Energy and would have paid modified rate social insurance contributions as applied to civil servants at that time. As modified rate insurance in itself does not give entitlement to state pension (contributory), the person concerned does not qualify for state pension (contributory).

If the person concerned had other periods of insurable employment or self-employment, they should forward details to the state pension contributory section and the matter will be examined.

It is also open to the person concerned to apply for the state pension (non-contributory) which is a means-tested, residency-based payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

1078. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if self-employment contributions from 2013 to 2018 will be accepted for contributory pension purposes for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44988/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides for the use of S Class contributions from self-employment in a person's 66th year (up to their 66th birthday) to satisfy the 'minimum 520 paid contributions' condition for State pension (contributory) eligibility.

The person concerned applied for State pension (contributory) on 22 July 2013. They did not have the required 520 full-rate contributions to qualify for this pension. They were notified accordingly in writing on 2 September 2013.

As the person concerned reached 66 on 8 July 2013, any self-employment contributions after that date are not included in assessment of pension entitlement.

It is open to the person concerned to apply for the State pension (non-contributory) which is a means-tested, residency-based payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

1079. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the maximum social welfare benefit will issue to a person (details supplied); if disability benefit will be approved in the case; and if supplementary welfare benefit will be approved to assist them. [45023/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady on 27 August 2019.

On 21 September 2019 and on 14 October 2019 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on her DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I can confirm this lady is currently in receipt of supplementary welfare allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1080. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on an invalidity pension arrears appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45025/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to allow the invalidity pension appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision on 7 February 2019. The appeal was allowed with effect from 2 September 2018.

Under social welfare legislation the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed under section 317 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts, or where there has been a change of circumstances which has come to notice since the date of the Appeals Officer's original decision.

I am advised that the person concerned has sought further backdating of the award of invalidity pension and has submitted additional evidence which was received in the Appeals Office on 23 September 2019. The appeal decision is now being reviewed by an Appeals Officer. The person concerned will be contacted when the review of this appeal decision has been finalised.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Investigations

1081. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 653 of 17 September 2019, the reason data regarding decisions made on employment and self-employment cannot be provided; the reason it is unavailable; her plans to improve record keeping in view of the fact a significant amount of important data is not being quantified; if she will consider tracking such cases by sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45027/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The historic database used in the Scope Section of my Department prior to 2018 did not provide data regarding decisions made on employment and self-employment status. Since then, a new system has been introduced. The new system records and categorises, in a more specific way, the different types of cases handled by Scope Section, including those dealing with employment status. A breakdown of such cases was provided to the Deputy on 17 September 2019.

As the Deputy will be aware, I have reallocated resources in my Department to tackling the issue of false self-employment. In addition to tackling it, I intend to measure and better quantify its prevalence across the workforce, and any sectoral characteristics that may pertain to it.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

1082. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by her Department or bodies under her aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45063/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The procurement of supplies and services is essential to support my Department and bodies under the aegis of my Department in providing high quality services to the public, in a cost effective and efficient manner. The tables below set out details of contracts over €25,000 that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

In the 2017 Appropriation Accounts 6 contracts were deemed to be non-compliant. Details are as follows:

Contracts	-	Non-compliant
Wordperfect	€524,022	Contract extended due to legal issues with an OGP framework. A new contract is in place.
Vodafone	€456,000	Contract extended due to delays in formulating an OGP framework. A new contract is in place.
Office Depot	€130,000	Contract extended due to legal challenge with an OGP framework. A new contract is in place.

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Contracts	-	Non-compliant
Safekeeping Ltd	€50,300	Contract extended to facilitate the transfer to a new company.
Consult Hyperion	€41,500	Contract extended to cover urgent additional consultancy work. A new contract is in place.
Greenstar Ltd	€36,476	Contract extended to facilitate the transfer to a new company.

In the 2018 Appropriation Accounts 5 contracts were deemed to be non-compliant. Details are as follows:

Contracts	-	Non-compliant
Colorman Ltd	€262,000	Contract extended to facilitate urgent Department needs. A new contract is in place.
Access Translations Unique Voice Translation Accord Translations	€159,000	This service was supplied by three companies. A new contract is in place.
Word Perfect Ltd Deaglan Ó Caoimh STAR Translation Services	€97,000	This service was supplied by three companies. A new contract is in place.
Applied Signs & Display	€37,320	Contract extended to meet business needs. A new tender is being prepared for issue in 2019.
Kieran Murphy	€35,000	Contract extended to complete necessary work and is now complete.

For 2019 no contracts are deemed to be non-compliant at this time.

Citizens Information Board (CIB)

In the 2017 Financial Statement for CIB, 5 contracts were deemed to be non-compliant. Details are as follows:

Contracts	-	Non-compliant
IPB Insurances	€195,000	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.
Marketing Network	€153,923	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.

Contracts	-	Non-compliant
Michael Browne, Research Consultant	€54,796	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an open competition.
The Creative Brains Trust Ltd.	€36,250	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.
PC Peripherals	€26,565	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.

In the 2018 Financial Statement for CIB, 6 contracts were deemed to be non-compliant. Details are as follows:

Contracts	-	Non-compliant
Vodafone	€479,306	The WAN side of this contract has now been procured through an OGP Framework. The Telephony procurement process is nearing completion, through an open process.
IPB Insurances	€475,978	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.
Marketing Network	€415,681	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.
PC Periphals	€158,417	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.
Dataworks Ltd	€32,000	Spend with this vendor has ceased pending an RFT process.
Vodafone	€25,871	The service that this vendor provided has now been procured through an OGP framework.

In 2019, 3 contracts are currently deemed to be non-compliant. Details are as follows:

Contracts	-	Non-compliant
Vodafone	€428,943	The WAN side of this contract has now been procured through an OGP Framework. The Telephony procurement process is nearing completion, through an open process.
Hibernia Evros - Technology Group	€258,714	This procurement will be commenced by end 2019 through an open competition.
Integrity Communications Ltd	€62,100	This was a once off emergency procurement, a competitive process was adopted but not through eTenders.

The Pensions Council, Pensions Authority, Low Pay Commission and Social Welfare Tribunal had no non-compliant procurements for the years in question 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Details of the Department's non-compliant procurements are published annually on the Comptroller and Auditor General's website and details of the Citizens Information Board's non-compliant procurements can be found in the Financial Statement of the Annual Report which is published annually on the Citizen Information Board's website.

My Department and bodies under the aegis of my Department ensure that the necessary work is undertaken to make non-compliant contracts compliant as soon as possible.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

1083. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a companion travel pass will be granted to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45099/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised that an appeal application for a companion free travel pass for the person concerned was medically assessed by a Medical Assessor on 22 October 2019 where she was deemed eligible for Companion Free Travel Pass after the additional medical evidence submitted was considered. The medical opinion was conveyed to Household Benefits Section in Sligo and correspondence giving the result was issued to the customer in the last few days.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1084. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45107/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 14 June 2019.

Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 18 October 2019 and, following receipt of incomplete details, information was again requested on 29 October 2019.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1085. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45108/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 24 April 2019. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 20 November 2019.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1086. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a disability allowance will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45109/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 4 February 2019. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this gentleman was substantially restricted in taking up employment. The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 6 June 2019.

Further medical evidence was received and a review of this decision was carried out. The original decision was upheld and the person concerned was notified in writing on 30 October 2019. He was also advised of his right to appeal the decision to the independent social welfare appeals office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

1087. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person residing here permanently in receipt of a pension from abroad but not in receipt of an Irish State pension is eligible to apply for the winter fuel allowance; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [45110/19]

1088. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person residing here permanently in receipt of a pension from abroad but not in receipt of an Irish State pension is eligible to apply for the living alone allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45111/19]

1089. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person residing here permanently in receipt of a pension from abroad but not in receipt of an Irish State pension is eligible to apply for the household benefits package; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45112/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1087 to 1089, inclusive, together.

The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €630 each year) from October to April, to over 372,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €240 million in 2019. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household. The allowance is increasing by €2 to €24.50 from January 2020 following changes announced in the budget.

A person in receipt of a Social Security Payment from a country covered by EU Regulations or a country with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement (of which there is an Irish equivalent payment) is eligible to apply for the fuel allowance payment on the same basis as Irish State pension recipients. As with all other recipients of the fuel allowance, the person must satisfy a means test as well as all other qualifying conditions. If a person is in receipt of a foreign pension other than a qualifying foreign pension as outlined above, then they will not be entitled to the fuel allowance payment.

The Living Alone Increase is a €9 increase in the weekly rate of payment of certain Irish social protection payments awarded where the recipient is living alone. These payments include State pensions, disability allowance, invalidity pension, incapacity supplement and blind pension. It is not a stand-alone payment. This payment is rising by €5 to €14 from January 2020 following changes announced in the budget.

People in receipt of a State pension or other equivalent payments from a country covered by EU Regulations or a country with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement are not currently entitled to receive the Irish living alone increase to that payment, as the respective rates of those payments to people living alone or with other people are set by national legislation in those countries. There are no circumstances where the living alone increase can be paid to people who are not in receipt of a qualifying payment from my Department.

The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €248 million this year on HHB for over 448,000 customers.

The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments.

Pensioners aged between 66 and 70, who are in receipt of an equivalent social security pension from a country covered by EU Regulations or from a country with which Ireland has

a Bilateral Social Security Agreement, are eligible to apply for the HHB package and would be eligible for the scheme, once he or she satisfied the relevant household conditions and the means test.

For the household benefits package, pensioners aged 70 or over who are legally resident in Ireland are entitled to the package without being in receipt of any qualifying social welfare payment. The package is not means-tested; however, as it a household benefit, only one person per household is eligible for the scheme.

I hope this clarifies these matters for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

1090. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that the tender process for the public services card adhered to public procurement guidelines insofar as a company (details supplied) appears to have been the sole bidder for the second generation card contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45114/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am satisfied that my Department has fully complied with its legal obligations under EU law and Irish law with regard to the tender process for the implementation, production, personalisation and distribution of the Public Services Card (PSC).

The request for tender was an open procurement which was advertised on eTenders, which is the Irish Government's electronic tendering platform administered by the Office of Government Procurement.

The tender process was open from 16th February 2018 to 19th of March 2018. The timeframe allowed was commensurate with the timeframe used when the original tender for the PSC was published in 2008.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

1091. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting time for social welfare payments (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45115/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Table 1. Average weeks to award a claim in September 2019

Average Weeks to Award	September 2019
Domiciliary Care	10
Carer's Allowance	15
Carer's Benefit	10
Invalidity Pension	9
Disability Allowance	13

Average Weeks to Award	September 2019
State Pension Contributory	7
State Pension Non-Contributory	9

Illness Benefit Applications

1092. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for illness benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45132/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for Illness Benefit was received from the person concerned on 7th August 2019.

One of the qualifying conditions for Illness Benefit is that a person must have 39 weeks of PRSI contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year, of which 13 must be paid contributions at class A, E or H. Alternatively, a person may have 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the relevant tax year, and 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the tax year immediately before the relevant tax year with all such contributions at class A, E or H.

I am advised that the person concerned does not satisfy the contribution conditions for Illness Benefit and a letter issued on 8th August 2019 explaining the position.

Should the person concerned be in need of financial assistance, it is open to him to contact the Community Welfare Service at his local Intreo Centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1093. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a half-rate carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45175/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 27 August 2019.

Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 30 October 2019.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1094. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment and arrears will issue in relation to a carer’s allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45183/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department received an application for Carer’s Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 4 January 2019.

CA is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 11 March 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application.

The outcome of the review was that the decision still stood. The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 24 April 2019, the reason for it and of her right of appeal.

My Department was notified that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) and a submission was prepared and forwarded to the SWAO on 30 July 2019.

As a result of an Appeals Officer’s decision, CA was awarded to the person concerned on 30 October 2019 with effect from 10 January 2019. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 7 November 2019.

Arrears for the period 10 January 2019 to 6 November 2019 will issue to her nominated bank account on the same date, 7 November 2019.

The person concerned was notified of this on the 30 October 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1095. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45191/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability al-

lowance (DA) on 16 August 2019. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this gentleman was substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 1 November 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1096. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45200/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 19 August 2019.

On 30 October 2019 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on his DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1097. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45201/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 9 September 2019. The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. She was also deemed to have means in excess of the statutory limit for her circumstances.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 30 September 2019. The person was also notified of her right to a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office. To date no request for an appeal or review has been received.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1098. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45202/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision on 30 October 2019. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1099. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45203/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of their application for disability allowance (DA), this person's application was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. They were notified in writing of this decision on 4 July 2019.

The person concerned requested an appeal and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration. The Department was notified by the social welfare appeals office (SWAO) on the 29 October 2019 that the appeal for the person in question has been successful.

The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 17 April 2019. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 27 November 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1100. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45204/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 19 September 2018. The first payment was made by his chosen payment method on 2 October 2019.

Arrears of payment due less any necessary deductions in respect of overlapping payments, issued to the person concerned on 12 October 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1101. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied). [45252/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 24 April 2019.

Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 16 July 2019 and again on 9 August 2019.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 30 October of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1102. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45267/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that the above named person applied for disability allowance (DA) on 24 May 2019. On 6 September 2019 the claim was sent to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for investigation of their means and circumstance.

On 14 October 2019 the person concerned contacted the SWI. They informed the SWI that they wished to withdraw their application for DA. On 24 October 2019 the person concerned was notified in writing that their DA application was withdrawn.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

1103. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a medical review application will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [45272/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The decision review request for Disability Allowance for the person concerned, following the sub-

mittal of further medical evidence, was assessed by a Medical Assessor on 30 October 2019.

I am advised that on the basis of Medical evidence including MRI scans of the Neck and Back and a Neurosurgeon's report dated 31st January 2019, advising conservative management and in absence of neurological signs the medical assessor deemed the claimant, capable of suitable light or sedentary categories of work.

The medical opinion was conveyed to a Deciding Officer in the relevant scheme area and correspondence detailing the result will issue to the customer in due course.

Hope this addresses the Deputy's question.

Data Protection

1104. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level of personal information sharing and-or exchange between her Department and the National Screening Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45274/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Data Protection Act 2018 amended the Health (Provision of Information) Act 1997 to provide that the National Cancer Registry Board and the Health Service Executive can request personal data in order to carry out their functions in respect of the National Screening Service (NSS).

On the basis of this legislative provision, my Department provides personal data (name, address, birth surname, mother's birth surname, date of birth, gender and PPS Number) to the HSE on a monthly basis in respect of the bowel, breast and cervical screening programmes. This data is used to compile and maintain a record of persons who, for public health reasons, may be invited to participate in any cancer screening (including any breast, cervical or bowel cancer screening) programme, in line with the provisions of section 184 of the Data Protection Act 2018.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Eligibility

1105. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated first and full year cost of changing the farm assist means testing rules in order that irrespective of the source of income the first €3,000 would be disregarded and the balance would be means tested at 50%. [45292/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The farm assist scheme is a means-tested payment for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseekers allowance. Recipients retain the advantages of jobseekers allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2020 Revised Estimates provide for expenditure of almost €61 million for farm assist (which also includes provision for fish assist).

Budget 2017 fully reversed the previous cuts to the farm assist means test. The changes included that 70% of farm income is now assessed as means (previously 100%) which is equivalent to a 30% income disregard, and an additional annual means disregard of €254 for each of the first two children and €381 for the third and subsequent children. Budget 2020 provides for a €2 per week increase in the Increase for a Qualified Child for children aged under 12 and a €3

per week increase for children aged 12 and over. These increases will be implemented from 6th January 2020 and will benefit farm assist recipients with children.

The estimated cost of changing the farm assist means testing rules so that the first €3,000, irrespective of the source of income is disregarded and the balance is means tested at 50%, is approximately €18 million for a full year. This estimate is based on the existing number of recipients and current rates. The number of new farm assist applications may increase if these measures were introduced and the cost should be regarded as a minimum estimate.

Any further changes to farm assist would have to be considered in a budgetary context and within the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

Fuel Allowance Applications

1106. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45295/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Fuel allowance is a means-tested payment to assist householders on long-term social welfare payments towards the cost of their heating needs.

The person concerned applied for the fuel allowance on 7 August 2019. In order to ascertain their eligibility for fuel allowance, details of their means were requested on 26 August 2019. Following receipt of their reply, a follow-on request for information outstanding issued to the person concerned on 21 October 2019.

Once this information is received, the person's eligibility for fuel allowance will be determined and they will be notified of a decision without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

1107. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a full disability allowance payment will be reinstated for a person (details supplied). [45300/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This gentleman's entitlement to disability allowance (DA) was recently reviewed on cessation of his employment. It was established that he had means not previously disclosed to the Department from his spouse's employment and the person concerned was awarded a reduced rate of DA.

The person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 24 October 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Payments

1108. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the statutory redundancy claims made by the 111 employees of a company (details supplied) will be expedited in view of the fact the necessary RP50 forms have been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45380/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Redundancy Payments Act 1967, as amended, provides for the making of payments by employers to employees in respect of redundancy. It is the employer's responsibility to pay statutory redundancy payments to all eligible employees. In the event that an employer is unable to pay due to financial difficulties, an application for payment from the Social Insurance Fund may be submitted to the Department. Proof of the employer's inability to pay is required before applications can be processed.

The Department has received 70 applications to date under the Redundancy Payments Scheme in respect of the former employees of Avara Pharmaceuticals. I can assure the Deputy that these applications and any further applications received will be dealt with promptly once as soon as outstanding financial information has been supplied.

Disability Allowance Applications

1109. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45415/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 22 July 2019.

Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 31 October 2019.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Review

1110. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of carer's allowance reviews carried out in each month from September 2018 to date; the results of the reviews; the number of allowances increased, unchanged and reduced, respectively, as a result of these reviews in each month, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45423/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a dis-

ability that they require that level of care. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CA, evidence must be provided in respect of the carer's habitual residence in the State, the level of care they provide, their means and also that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

Carer's allowance reviews take place in a number of circumstances as follows:-

- If the decision on a new claim is negative the customer has the option of a review.
- Once claims are in payment, my Department undertakes periodic reviews as part of its control strategy to ensure that there is continued entitlement.
- A customer can at any stage request a review of their entitlement.

As outlined above, a wide range of reviews are carried out arising from customer requests, together with reviews undertaken by the Department. I am advised that numbers are not readily available with respect to reviews of claims conducted at the request of customers however I can advise the Deputy that:

- 2,905 control reviews were completed in 2018 yielding control savings of some €12.5m.
- 2,914 control reviews were completed to the end of September 2019 yielding control savings of some €15.3m.

I am also advised that while the Department records the number of control reviews undertaken and the saving achieved it does not keep a record of the number who receive increased, decreased or remain unchanged.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Review

1111. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of half and-or reduced rate carer's allowance reviews carried out in each month from September 2018 to date; the results of the reviews; the number of allowances increased, unchanged and reduced respectively as a result of these reviews in each month in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45424/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CA, evidence must be provided in respect of the carer's habitual residence in the State, the level of care they provide, their means and also that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

Carer's allowance reviews take place in a number of circumstances as follows:-

- If the decision on a new claim is negative the customer has the option of a review.

- Once claims are in payment, my Department undertakes periodic reviews as part of its control strategy to ensure that there is continued entitlement.

- A customer can at any stage request a review of their entitlement.

As outlined above, a wide range of reviews are carried out arising from customer requests, together with reviews undertaken by the Department. I am advised that numbers are not readily available with respect to reviews of claims conducted at the request of customers however I can advise the Deputy that:

- 2,905 control reviews were completed in 2018 yielding control savings of some €12.5m.

- 2,914 control reviews were completed to the end of September 2019 yielding control savings of some €15.3m.

I am further advised that while the Department record the number of control reviews undertaken and the saving achieved it does not keep a record of the number who receive increased, decreased or remain unchanged.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

1112. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason legitimate outgoings such as visits to the cinema, attractions visits, travel expenses, parking and meals for respite care are ineligible for the calculation of the means test for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45425/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The system of social assistance supports provides payments based on an income need. The means test plays a critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency – such as disability, unemployment or caring. This ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need and that resources are targeted to those who need them most.

By its nature, the means test takes account of the income a person or couple has in terms of cash, property - other than the family home - and capital. It does not take account of a person's expenditure. In line with most social assistance payments, deductions permitted for carer's allowance include PRSI, union dues, superannuation (pension contributions) and travel expenses. Uniquely in the system, an income disregard of €332.50 per week or €665 for a couple applies to carer's allowance.

Including costs such as visits to the cinema and attractions visits would have significant budgetary implications and would give rise to inconsistencies in how means tests are applied across schemes. It would also significantly increase the complexity of the means assessment. Any changes in this regard would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

However, the carer's support grant is an annual non-means tested payment made by my Department to carers. This €1,700 grant may be used in whatever way the carer wishes.

I recognise the crucial role that carers play in Irish society and will continue to seek to improve the supports for carers. However, any changes must be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1113. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an invalidity pension or long-term illness benefit will issue to a person (details supplied). [45427/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last or second last complete contribution year before the relevant date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E, H or S contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

A claim for IP was received from the gentleman concerned on 30 October 2018. His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the contribution conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. Specifically, he does not have the required 260 contributions paid since he entered social insurance. He was notified on 07 August 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

He requested a review and lodged an appeal of the decision. Following a review of all the information available it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision. The gentleman concerned was notified on 30 October 2019 of the outcome of the review and a submission was prepared by the department and forwarded to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office for determination.

The gentleman referred to was in receipt of disability allowance (DA) payment but this payment has been stopped from 10 April 2019 as he no longer satisfies the Habitual Residence Conditions. He has appealed the decision to stop his DA payment to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The person concerned was in receipt of Illness Benefit (IB) from August 2007 to April 2017 when he commenced DA payment. My Department is carrying out a full review of his entitlement to IB and he will be informed of the outcome as soon as the review has been completed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

1114. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application with supporting letters and work and family history for a State pension (contributory) by a person (details supplied) will be re-examined taking all matters outlined by the person into consideration; and if a positive outcome will be expedited. [45431/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for State pension (contributory) on 21 March 2019, and was assessed as having 362 paid full-rate social insurance contributions. As their contributions fall short of the required 520 paid full-rate contributions to qualify for State pension (contributory), the claim was disallowed. The person was notified in writing of this decision on 10 June 2019, and provided with a copy of their social insurance record on which the decision was based.

If the person concerned had other periods of insurable employment or self-employment, which they consider should be recorded, it is open to them to forward details to my Department and the matter will be examined.

The interim Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation, announced in January 2018, includes provision for homecaring periods, but does not alter the qualifying conditions for State pension (contributory) and will not assist any person whose claim was disallowed for failure to fulfil the legislative condition of having a minimum of 520 paid full-rate contributions.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Local Employment Service

1115. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding a matter (details supplied) in respect of a review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45445/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Local Employment Services are contracted by my Department on an annual basis to provide activation services to those on the Live Register, as well as “drop-ins” to these services. These contracts are reviewed annually to ensure they are fit-for-purpose in the context of the Irish labour market, as well as providing value for money for taxpayers.

Indecon, in its reviews of the LES and Job Clubs published in January, recommended the Department consider the introduction of multiannual contracts and a competitive procurement process for future provision of these services. The Department has also received legal advice to the effect that renewing the LES and Job Clubs contracts annually, without any movement towards competitive procurement, is no longer sustainable.

In September, my Department published a Request for Tender for consultancy services, to provide advice and support regarding the future of the State’s public employment service and assist with the procurement of contracted public employment services in Ireland, covering the period 2021-2025. It is anticipated that the successful tenderer will provide the Department with a final report in the second quarter of 2020.

In the interim, no changes will be made to the contracting process for the Local Employment Services and bids to provide services for 2020 will be invited and considered in the usual manner.

I am on the record in recognising the valuable work performed by Local Employment Services. It is my view that, within the parameters of current procurement rules, any future procurement process give due recognition to the ability to deliver high quality, locally-based services. Indeed, it is in everyone’s interests - jobseekers, service providers and the State - to ensure, insofar as it is possible, that experienced employment service providers with a strong community ethos continue to form a core part of our employment services infrastructure.

Irish Water Funding

1116. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount transferred to Irish Water in funding from the Exchequer in the past five years to date; the projected amount to be transferred to Irish Water over the next decade

from central funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44630/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): State Funding provided to Irish Water over the past 5 years is set out in following table:

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
€m (to nearest)	900	495	836	1,200	1,100	4,531

The Irish Water Strategic Funding Plan 2019-2024 sets out Irish Water's multi-annual strategic business planning funding requirement of €11bn to 2024, comprised of a €6.1bn investment in infrastructure and assets and €4.9bn in operating costs. This funding requirement will be met through a combination of non-domestic revenue including new connections revenue, domestic excess usage charges, non-domestic borrowings, government subvention and capital contributions.

Furthermore, Irish Water's capital investment of over €8bn is projected over the lifetime of the National Development Plan 2018-2027.

Energy Efficiency

1117. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocation that will be given to local authorities in 2020 and 2021 for phase 2 of energy efficiency works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44761/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has operated an Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme for local authority social housing since 2013, under which over 70,700 social homes have been insulated to date with funding support from the exchequer of some €139 million. The budget for this programme in 2019 is €25m.

I am pleased to say support for this important programme will continue in 2020, with a further €25 million being made available in grant aid to the local authorities, but with an additional €20 million to be allocated for 2020 to provide for energy efficiency renovations for social housing homes in the midlands. The budget for 2021 is not yet decided and will be subject to the annual estimates process.

My Department will commence working with local authorities shortly regarding their work proposals and funding requirements for 2020, following which allocations will be made. The number of social homes to be targeted in 2020, and for subsequent years, will depend on the work proposals and priorities submitted from the local authorities.

Energy Efficiency

1118. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to provide deep retrofitting for social housing stock in County Wicklow over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44762/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has operated an Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme for local authority social housing since 2013, under which over 70,700 social homes have been insulated to date with funding support from the exchequer of some €139 million. The budget for this programme

in 2019 is €25 million. Under the scheme to date Wicklow County Council have retrofitted over 1,900 units of their social housing stock with funding support from my Department of over €5.3 million.

I am pleased to say support for this important programme will continue in 2020, with a further €25 million being made available in grant aid to the local authorities. The budget for 2021 and beyond is not yet decided and will be subject to the annual estimates process.

My Department will commence working with all local authorities shortly regarding their work proposals and funding requirements for 2020, following which allocations will be made. The number of social homes to be targeted in 2020, and for subsequent years, will depend on the work proposals and priorities submitted from the local authorities.

Local Authority Members' Remuneration

1119. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the qualifying criteria for serving Members of Dáil Éireann to receive termination payments from a local authority. [44837/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Section 142 of the Local Government Act 2001 and the Local Authority Members (Gratuity) Regulations 2002 to 2006 provide that, subject to certain conditions, a councillor who ceases to be a member of a local authority is entitled to receive a gratuity payment at, or after, the age of 50. This is regardless of whether the retirement is voluntary, as a result of failure to be re-elected or for any other reason, such as being elected to be a member of Dáil Éireann following the abolition of the dual mandate in 2004.

Where a person ceases to be a member of a local authority before age 50, the gratuity will be paid when the person reaches age 50. The Regulations allow the gratuity to be paid before age 50 where retirement is due to permanent infirmity or where the member dies in office.

The representational payment to councillor's is currently €17,359 per annum with effect from 1 September 2019. The gratuity is calculated as 4/20ths of a councillor's representational payment for each year of service, from 4 May 2000, subject to a maximum twenty years' service. The gratuity amount is calculated based on the amount of the representational payment either at the time of retirement or when the former member reaches the qualifying age of 50.

Water Quality

1120. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress of compliance with the EU Water Framework Directive; the headings in which Ireland falls under the required acceptable thresholds for surface and groundwater; the steps he is taking to improve a score (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45313/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the EU's Water Framework Directive my Department has a lead role in developing and implementing policies to protect our water. Ireland's River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2018-2021, available on www.housing.gov.ie, outlines the measures the Government and other sectors are taking to improve water quality in Ireland's groundwater, rivers, lakes, estuarine and coastal waters during the period 2018 - 2021.

Key actions include investment in management measures to address agricultural and waste water discharges, the two most significant pressures on waters, including significant investment by Irish Water in wastewater infrastructure. The Government has also invested significantly in the establishment of a Catchment Science Unit within the EPA and the Local Authorities Water Programme to drive the targeted implementation of management measures.

The progress made in relation to compliance with the EU Water Framework Directive quality objectives since the first plan was published in 2010 can be viewed in the EPA report on Water Quality 2017, published in 2018, available on www.epa.ie. An updated report will be published shortly. While it is too early yet to see significant water quality improvements as a result of management measures in this plan, the new targeted approach focused on high risk areas of catchments is expected to bring about an improvement in water quality over the coming years.

With regard to compliance with the Directive generally, Ireland received a Letter of Formal Notice from the European Commission on 24 January 2019 which raised a significant number of broad and complex issues in relation to the legal transposition of the Directive. My Department is liaising with the European Commission with regard to progressing specific areas for action under the infringement.

Question No. 1121 answered with Question No. 68.

Homeless Persons Data

1122. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons that have entered homelessness since the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44231/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at the local level.

Monthly homelessness data reports are produced by housing authorities using the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities. My Department collates this information into monthly national homeless reports, which are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>. The reports do not currently provide information on the number of people who entered emergency accommodation.

Supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. In 2016, the Government published the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. Rebuilding Ireland is designed to significantly increase the supply of social housing by 50,000 homes in the period to 2021, double the output of overall housing to at least 25,000 homes per annum by 2020, support all tenure types (social, private and rental), and tackle homelessness comprehensively. In 2018, 8,000 new social homes were delivered nationally and this year, a further 10,000 new social homes will be delivered.

Rebuilding Ireland is delivering significant results in supporting exits from homelessness. In 2018, 5,135 adults exited homelessness into homes, an 8.6% increase on 2017. I expect that the numbers of exits from homelessness will increase again in 2019.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

1123. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of preventative HAP payments granted based on notices of termination and on homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44232/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In order to further assist homeless households in exiting emergency accommodation all local authorities have, since January 2018, been provided with the option to pay deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, or who are at immediate risk of entering emergency accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP Scheme. The HAP Place Finder service is a targeted support for homeless households who may find it difficult to secure HAP tenancies.

To qualify for these specific additional supports available to homeless households, a household must have been determined by the relevant local authority to be homeless within the meaning of section 2 of the Housing Act 1988. The operation of local homeless services, including the Place Finder service, is a matter for each local authority.

The information requested in respect of payments being required on foot of specific circumstances is not currently available in my Department. However, the Place Finder service has been successfully utilised by local authorities, with more than 6,200 households supported by the Homeless HAP scheme in the Dublin region up to the end of Q2, 2019. Nationally, the corresponding figure is over 8,100 households.

Homeless Persons Supports

1124. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average length of stay in homeless hubs; the costs incurred in respect of hubs; his plans for the opening of further hubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44233/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of emergency accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, includes the objective that hotels will only be used in limited circumstances as emergency accommodation for families. To meet this objective, housing authorities are pursuing the delivery of a range of additional and enhanced family-focused facilities, or family hubs, which offer greater stability than is possible in a hotel, until such time as a home can be secured.

There are currently 29 hubs operational nationally, offering approximately 680 units of family accommodation. Of these hubs 23 are in Dublin, with one each in Clare, Cork, Galway, Kildare, Limerick and Louth. It is expected that further facilities will become operational during the remainder of 2019 and into 2020, details of which will become available as projects are finalised by the housing authorities.

In general, the operation of family hubs is contracted out by local authorities, under service level agreements, to NGOs involved in the delivery of homeless services. Local authorities and NGO service providers work with families in family hubs to secure tenancies in the shortest

timeframe possible. Data on the average length of stay in family hubs is not available in my Department.

My Department is providing capital funding to local authorities to support the development of family hubs. In 2017 and 2018 capital payments amounting to €8.74 million and €21.96m, respectively, were made in respect of family hubs. The funding to be provided in 2019 and 2020 will be dependent on the progress made by local authorities on the development of additional family hubs.

In relation to the operational funding for the family hubs, my Department provides funding to housing authorities on a regional basis towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services. Under the funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources. Housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of the funding arrangements with my Department. Therefore, the exact amounts spent by housing authorities on homeless services, as well as the types of accommodation and the service providers engaged, are a matter for those authorities. Financial reports from each of the regions, setting out expenditure on homeless services, including family hubs, in each region in 2018, are published on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/sub-type/financial-report> .

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

1125. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a request by Westmeath County Council to move from band 3 to band 2 for social housing income limits will be considered (details supplied). [44297/19]

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

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

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

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

their own resources.

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

Energy Efficiency

1126. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when details of the social housing retrofit scheme targeted at the midlands region will be released to each local authority following its inclusion in budget 2020; and his views on whether details of the scheme need to be supplied in advance of the completion of local authority budgets for 2020. [44298/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A budget of €20million has been allocated for 2020 to provide for energy efficiency renovations for social housing homes in the midlands.

My Department is currently exploring and considering arrangements for the scheme in question and once that work is completed, details of the scheme and its impact, if any, on local authority budgets will be notified to those local authorities, as soon as possible.

Housing Adaptation Grant

1127. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will include the provision of a pathway around a home in the housing adaption works for persons with a disability scheme for 2020 (details supplied). [44299/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme for Older People and People with a Disability, there is currently no restriction on the provision of a pathway, where necessary, to allow access to a home.

The detailed administration of the scheme, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of grants to applicants under the various measures, is the responsibility of the local authorities. It should be noted that any application for the provision of a pathway would require an assessment by an Occupational Therapist, recommending the works.

Traveller Accommodation

1128. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a caravan rental or rent-to-buy scheme that will provide residential standard mobile homes for Travellers will be developed. [44344/19]

1132. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a caravan rental or rent-to-buy scheme will be developed that will provide residential standard mobile homes for Travellers. [44555/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

(Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1128 and 1132 together.

My Department commissioned the Housing Agency to conduct a comprehensive review of the scheme of loans and grants for caravans that had been in operation since 2000. The Housing Agency surveyed all local authorities and engaged in broad consultation with all key stakeholders. A report on the review was submitted to my Department in 2017.

On foot of the review, I requested that my Department consult with the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and other relevant stakeholders to consider the development a revised scheme of loans and grants having regard to the recommendations contained in the review. This consultation is ongoing. Further to this, my Department has recently completed an economic assessment of a number of different funding options for the provision of affordable, good quality caravans to Travellers, which is being considered presently.

More broadly, my Department and I, are considering the recommendations made by the Expert Group on Traveller accommodation with a view to implementing appropriate actions and policies that will improve the delivery of Traveller accommodation nationally and help to ensure that full use is made of the increasing level of funding available for investment in Traveller accommodation. The recommendations by the Expert Group are comprehensive and wide ranging, and I will seek to ensure that any revised caravan scheme will align with the recommendations and values of the Expert Group report, as closely as possible.

Local Authority Housing Funding

1129. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding has been provided for the construction of 69 units on Griffeen Avenue, Lucan, between Foxborough Lawn and Tor An Rí Walk, following Part 8 planning approval in April 2019 by South Dublin County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44368/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In March 2019, my Department received a proposal from South Dublin County Council for the construction of 74 homes at the above site. As the estimated cost of the scheme is expected to exceed €20 million, the local authority, as the Sponsoring Agency, is required to submit a Cost Effectiveness Analysis (CEA) in line with the Public Spending Code, prior to receiving approval in principle to proceed with the project. It is understood from the Council that a revised scheme to provide 69 homes at the site, has received Part 8 planning approval.

According to the Council, the CEA is currently being finalised and will be submitted to the Department shortly. On receipt of the CEA, my Department will assess the documentation, in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with a view to issuing funding approval at the earliest opportunity.

Planning Issues

1130. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding land that has been rezoned; the period of time within which building thereon must take place; the penalties that arise for failure to utilise zoned land that has been specifically zoned for residential purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44433/19]

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

The zoning of land is a statutory function of the relevant local authority under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Section 10 (2)(a) of the Act provides that a City or County development plan shall include objectives “for the zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, as open space or otherwise, or a mixture of those uses), where and to such extent as the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, in the opinion of the planning authority, requires the uses to be indicated”.

A new development plan for each local authority must be made every six years. In accordance with Section 10 (8) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), “There shall be no presumption in law that any land zoned in a particular development plan (including a development plan that has been varied) shall remain so zoned in any subsequent development plan”.

The zoning of land does not confer automatic permission for development to take place and any potential development on zoned land must be subject to the planning application process in accordance with Part III of the Planning and development Act 2000 (as amended). There is not, therefore, a specified period of time within which building on zoned land must take place.

It is open to local authorities to apply a vacant site levy to land zoned for residential purposes in certain circumstances, under the provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015. A vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of the relevant vacant site may be applied where a site exceeds 0.05 hectares in area; is in the planning authority’s opinion vacant or idle in the year preceding; is in an area identified by the planning authority for residential development and; meets certain other specified criteria including whether the land is serviced by infrastructure. Further to Budget 2018, the rate of the levy was increased to 7% for sites on a local authority vacant sites register from 2019 onwards.

Illegal Dumping

1131. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when legal advice was first sought in respect of the dumping at the old dock, Galway; when a decision will be made regarding the action he plans to take regarding the complaint in view of the length of time this matter has been with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44460/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): My Department has been engaged with the State’s legal services since 2014 in relation to the case in question.

Following a circuit court judgement, a case that my Department was not party to, it was necessary to devote resources to identify whether the area in question was State Owned Foreshore. Subsequently, my Department sought advice on issues such as whether that circuit court judgement needed to be revisited, and if so how. Furthermore, advice was required on whether it was possible to identify who may have placed material on the Foreshore and if so the next appropriate steps to be taken as many years may have elapsed since the material was placed in the Mud Dock.

In addition to the complex legal issues arising in the case, the matter of how the public interest is best served in the context of the future management of the area in question also needs to be carefully considered. In the light of these complexities, I cannot provide a definitive date regarding the finalisation of this work at this time.

Question No. 1132 answered with Question No. 1128.

Appointments to State Boards Data

1133. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacancies that arose on the board of the National Oversight and Audit Commission since January 2018 to date in 2019; the number that have been filled; the process engaged to fill vacancies; the number remaining vacant as at 24 October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44589/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) was established on 1 July 2014 under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to provide independent oversight of the local government sector at a local, regional and national level. Its functions are wide ranging, involving the scrutiny of performance generally and financial performance specifically, supporting best practice, overseeing implementation of national local government policy, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of corporate plans, adherence to service level agreements and public sector reform by local government bodies, as well as any additional functions assigned, or reports requested, by the Minister. Since January 2018, eight vacancies have arisen on NOAC, of which: four were filled by re-appointment; one by replacement of the Officer of the Minister; the position of Chairperson was filled following a process managed by the Public Appointments Service (www.stateboards.ie) and two vacancies are currently in the process of being filled, through another process managed by the Public Appointments Service (www.stateboards.ie), which is nearing completion.

Local Authority Staff Data

1134. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of full-time equivalent cycling officers employed by each local authority; and the seniority level of each officer in tabular form. [44597/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority. However, granular data, in terms of the specific role and function of each individual staff member, is not collected and consequently is not available in my Department.

This information should be available directly from local authorities themselves.

Irish Water Data

1135. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a full schedule of assets transferred from the State to Irish Water since Irish Water was established by assets type will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44626/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy)(Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 12 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the transfer, by Ministerial Order, of the property of a water services authority (a city council, county council or city and county council) to Irish Water. The process requires that any land transferred to Irish Water must be clearly and unambiguously identified. Accordingly, land (including water services assets) is being transferred by reference to its Property Registration Authority folio number.

Considerable complex work is required to identify all of the folios containing water services assets with many of the folios being of mixed use thus requiring sub-division before transfer to Irish Water.

Prior to the vesting of assets by Ministerial Order, local authorities working in conjunction with Irish Water and the Property Registration Authority (PRA), with the support of my Department, ensure that each asset has been correctly identified and included on a Manager's Order for subsequent inclusion in the Ministerial Order.

To date, a total of 14 Ministerial Orders have been made to transfer water services assets from the local authorities to Irish Water as set out in the following table:

Statutory Instrument	Title
S.I. No. 13 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 111 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 2) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 112 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 3) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 146 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 4) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 181 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 5) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 319 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 6) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 461 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 7) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 509 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 8) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 632 of 2015	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 9) Order 2015.
S.I. No. 335 of 2016	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) Order 2016.
S.I. No. 329 of 2017	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) Order 2016.
S.I. No. 607 of 2017	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 2) Order 2017.
S.I. No. 297 of 2018	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) Order 2018.
S.I. No. 573 of 2018	Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Property Vesting Day) (No. 2) Order 2018.

Further Ministerial Orders are being completed in line with the receipt of the Manager's

Orders from local authorities.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

1136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a person who has partaken in a shared ownership scheme through a local authority 20 years ago is eligible to apply for a tenant purchase scheme in a different local authority at present. [44672/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015, provide the basis for the current Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme, which came into operation on 1 January 2016.

The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year. All tenants of houses included in the scheme who meet the eligibility criteria can apply to purchase their house, provided they are not disqualified from doing so under the provisions of the legislation. Reasons for disqualification include rent arrears, participation in a previous tenant purchase scheme or engagement in anti-social behaviour.

The 2015 Regulations governing the Scheme provide for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale, including houses provided to local authorities under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, houses specifically designed for older persons, group Traveller housing and houses provided to facilitate people with disabilities transferring from institutional care to community-based living.

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

Local authorities are by law (Section 63 of the Local Government Act 2001) independent in the performance of their functions. The operation of the current Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is therefore a matter for the relevant local authority concerned, in line with legislation, including the Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015. Thus, the situation referred to by the Deputy in his question would best be resolved by direct contact with the relevant local authority concerned.

In the absence of precise details in relation to the prior house purchase referred to by the Deputy it is simply not possible to give a definitive reply to the query raised. However, it should be noted that it was possible to purchase a house from a local authority through a shared ownership option under the then 1995 Tenant Purchase Scheme (operated under the terms of the Housing (Sale of Houses) Regulations, 1995). Any person who purchased a home in this way would not now be eligible to avail of the terms of the current Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme.

Finally, as the Deputy will be aware, section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 specifically provides that the Minister's power to issue policy directions and guidelines to housing authorities in relation to their housing functions shall not be construed as enabling the Minister to exercise any power or control in relation to any individual case with

which a housing authority is or may be concerned.

Home Loan Scheme

1137. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if consideration will be given to examining an issue regarding the way in which the maximum amount allowed to be borrowed under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme is set at €250,000 in view of the fact that this funding cannot be allocated to an applicant if the house the applicant plans to build will be worth more than €250,000 upon completion; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this approach does not take into consideration varying land values, location and other localised factors (details supplied); his views on whether the scheme focuses on a minority as opposed to the majority of the population that is seeking assistance with building a new home under the scheme; his further views on whether the scheme is not fit for purpose in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44682/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is a Government-backed mortgage for first-time buyers and has been made available nationwide from local authorities from 1 February 2018. The loan can be used both for new and second-hand properties, or to build your own home.

With a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan you can borrow up to 90% of the market value of a residential property. Maximum market values of the property that can be purchased or self-built are:

- €320,000 in the counties Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow, and
- €250,000 in the rest of the country.

This limits the amount that can be borrowed to no more than €288,000 in the counties Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow and no more than €225,000 in the rest of the country. These maximum limits apply equally to self-builds.

Within the maximum loan limits, there are some rules that set out the limit of funding for self builds. Funding should not exceed 90% of total build costs (which can include site cost where the site is purchased).

For self-builds, applicant(s) are required to submit with their loan application a valuation report that details the site value, cost of works and post construction market value of the completed property. The valuation report is required to be completed by an Independent Valuer and will be considered by the local authority in assessing the associated loan application.

It is important that all applicants are treated equally. In this regard, it is reasonable that the rules for setting the maximum market value of completed homes eligible for this scheme are the same for individuals either buying or building their own homes. I have no plans to change this requirement.

It should also be noted that individuals self-building may be able to avail of the Help-to-Buy scheme, which is available for purchasers of new residential construction, such as self-builds.

Proposed Legislation

1138. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the status of the general scheme of the building control (construction industry register Ireland) Bill; and when he plans to publish the Bill. [44684/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Government has committed to placing the Construction Industry Register Ireland, or CIRI, on a statutory footing. CIRI was established on a voluntary basis in 2014 and over 850 building and contracting entities are currently included on the register.

The Government approved the draft heads of a Bill to place the CIRI on a statutory footing and the Bill was referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Committee's report has since been received and my Department is currently working through the Committee's recommendations. The General Scheme is available on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/legislations/general_scheme_of_the_building_control_construction_industry_register_ireland_bill_2017.pdf .

The main objective of the legislation is to develop and promote a culture of competence, good practice and compliance with Building Regulations within the builder community of the construction sector. The establishment of a robust, mandatory, statutory register of builders and specialist contractors is an essential consumer protection measure giving those who engage a registered builder the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator. In addition, it will complement the reforms made through the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 and contribute to the development of an enhanced culture of competence and compliance in the construction sector.

It is proposed that the operation of CIRI will be vested in the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) in the same way that statutory registration of Architects was vested in the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI), pursuant to the Building Control Act 2007. My Department is working with the Attorney General's Office with a view to achieving publication of the Bill in early 2020.

Local Authority Housing Funding

1139. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if financial support for a housing facility (details supplied) in County Wicklow as ring-fenced by Wicklow County Council constitutes housing funding support as opposed to Department of Health funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44686/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Financial support for the facility referred to is being provided by Wicklow County Council, with housing funding support from my Department.

Information and Communications Technology

1140. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of computers in his Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44714/19]

1141. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [44729/19]

1142. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to protect his Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in his Department and the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44745/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1140 to 1142, inclusive, together.

A major project underway in my Department to upgrade Windows 7 computers to the Windows 10 operating system is substantially completed, with 89% of the estate upgraded and work ongoing in respect of the remaining 11%. Details of the locations of computers is not provided for security reasons. My Department will ensure that security and support is available for any computers continuing to use Windows 7 after the January 2020 deadline, if required. Details of any additional costs that may be involved are not currently available.

Information in relation to agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. Arrangements have been put in place by each agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is in the table attached.

Body under the aegis of the DHPLG	Agency Email
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency (Housing Agency)	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Land Development Agency	info@lda.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
Office of the Planning Regulator	info@opr.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	oireachtas.enquiries@VALOFF.ie

Planning Issues

1143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the changing requirements under section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 following the various legislative amendments that have been made (details supplied); his plans to make further changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44787/19]

1175. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to make changes to the legislation with regard to the process of taking in charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45299/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1143 and 1175 together.

Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), provides for the taking in charge of housing developments by local authorities. The most recent amendments to the provisions were incorporated in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 with a view to further strengthening and streamlining the taking-in-charge process.

Under section 180(1) of the Act as now constituted, where a planning authority considers that a development has been satisfactorily completed in accordance with the planning permission granted, it shall, where requested by the developer or a majority of the owners of the houses involved, initiate the taking-in-charge procedures under section 11 of the Roads Act 1993 (the Roads Act) not later than 6 months after being so requested.

With regard to developments that have not been completed to the satisfaction of the planning authority and enforcement proceedings have not been commenced by the planning authority within 4 years of the expiry of the planning permission relating to a development, section 180 (2)(a) of the Act now provides that the planning authority shall, where requested by the majority of owners of the houses involved, initiate the taking-in-charge procedures under section 11 of the Roads Act.

The most recent amendments further provide under section 180(2A) of the Act that where enforcement proceedings have not been commenced by a planning authority within 4 years of the expiration of the planning permission concerned or the planning authority considers that enforcement proceedings will not result in the satisfactory completion of the development by the developer, the planning authority may in its absolute discretion, at any time after the expiration of the planning permission concerned and where requested by a majority of the owners of the houses in question, initiate the taking-in-charge procedures under section 11 of the Roads Act. Where this approach is adopted, the authority may apply the security or bond given as part of the planning application for the satisfactory completion of the development.

Furthermore, section 180(2A) now provides that the initiation of the taking-in-charge procedures under section 11 of the Roads Act shall not preclude the planning authority concerned from pursuing a developer for any costs incurred by that authority in respect of works undertaken on a development to enable it to be taken in charge by that authority.

In addition, the most recent amendments of the section 180 provisions were supplemented by amendments to sections 34 and 35 of the Act. In this connection, section 34 - which relates to applications for planning permission - has been strengthened to provide that planning authorities shall, in the assessment and determination of planning applications, have specific regard to previous developments by a developer which have not been satisfactorily completed as well as any previous convictions against the developer for non-compliance with the Planning Act, the Building Control Act 2007 and the Fire Services Act 1981.

Section 35 of the Act - which relates to refusal of planning permissions for past failures - has been strengthened to empower the refusal of planning permission in situations where a developer has previously left an estate unfinished under one company name and then re-applies for permission for a new development under a different company name.

All of these changes were specifically aimed at strengthening the taking-in-charge processes and better ensuring the satisfactory completion of housing developments, and were somewhat informed by a Private Members Bill entitled the Planning and Development (Transparency and Consumer Confidence) Bill 2013 tabled by the Deputy.

I have no plans to make further amendments to the section 180 taking-in-charge provisions of the Act at this time.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

1144. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of new grants forthcoming towards water wells and rural water supplies; and when a new grant for such supplies will be available to applicants. [44788/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 8 February this year, I announced details of the measures being funded through my Department under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021.

Local authorities were subsequently invited to submit their bids for the funding of schemes or projects in their functional areas. An Expert Panel was put in place to support the evaluation process and its membership includes Departmental, stakeholder and independent representation. The Expert Panel has made recommendations to my Department on the suitability of schemes and projects for funding based on objective criteria which are set out in the framework document issued to local authorities when requesting proposals.

On 14 October, and based on the recommendations of the Expert Panel, I announced approval of projects and schemes under the multi-annual programme. Local authorities were informed of the details on the same date.

Work is also at an advanced stage of development for 2 new schemes to replace existing schemes which assist householders, in certain circumstances, in the provision of on-site domestic water supplies (individual wells) and waste water treatment systems (septic tanks).

The changes that I have approved to the individual wells grant scheme are as follows:

- A maximum grant for rehabilitation works of €3,000, which represents an increase of 47% on the current maximum grant amount;
- Where the local authority agrees that the most appropriate solution is to provide a new well, the maximum grant payable would be €5,000;
- Recognising the role of the grant in improving quality, the water quality treatment element (typically filtration and UV filtration) will qualify for 100% funding up to a maximum of €1,000;
- Up to 85% of other costs would be met, subject to the total combined maximum costs of €3,000 for well rehabilitation or €5,000 for a new well;
- For clarity, applicants would not be able to avail of both grant amounts, so they would not be able to avail of €3,000 for well rehabilitation as well as the €5,000 for a new well.

The waste water treatment system grant allows under certain conditions, households to receive a grant to assist them in carrying out remediation, repair or upgrading works to, or replacement of their individual septic tanks.

In order to ensure greater uniformity with other measures in the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme, the means test that previously applied to this grant scheme is being removed and the level of grant support is being increased to 85% of the eligible costs of installation/upgrade or €5,000 (up from €2,500/€4,000) whichever is the lesser. This represents an increase of 100% and 25% respectively, relative to the current maximum grant levels.

I expect that the process for these new schemes will be completed shortly when the necessary regulations dealing with the financial assistance arrangements and related administrative

matters are put in place. This will enable circular letters, terms and conditions, guidance and the application forms to issue to local authorities shortly thereafter.

In the meantime, the existing schemes continue to operate. Details are available on my Department's website at the following links or from the local authority concerned:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/private-wells> .

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/domestic-waste-water-systemsseptic-tanks/domestic-waste-water-treatment-1>.

Proposed Legislation

1145. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the legislation mentioned in the legislative report for the summer session 2019, specifically the housing and residential tenancies Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44800/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing and Residential Tenancies Bill, referenced in the Summer Legislative Programme, has been restructured into the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill and the Housing and Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill as part of the Autumn Legislative Programme.

It is anticipated that the General Scheme of a Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill, which will propose further amendments regarding private rented sector tenancies during receivership, will be submitted to Government for approval in December 2019. The General Scheme of a Housing and Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill which was recently approved by Government, will facilitate the bringing forward of amendments to both planning and housing legislation.

Local Authority Housing Data

1146. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applicants on the local authority housing list in an area (details supplied) in each of the past five years by area; the number of applicants housed in the same period; the number of new projected housing builds in the planning stage for the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44807/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area is provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The SSHA has been conducted on an annual basis since 2016, prior to which it was carried out once every three years, with the last Summary under this approach having taken place in 2013.

My Department is currently finalising the 2019 summary with the Housing Agency and I expect to be in a position to publish the full detailed report shortly.

Below are links to the summary reports for 2016, 2017 and 2018 which contain data broken down for the 31 local authority areas. SSHA data is collected and collated at Local Authority level and therefore a breakdown of the numbers by electoral area cannot be provided.

Report 2016

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf.

Report 2017

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2017.pdf.

Report 2018

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf.

As there was no SSHA carried out in either 2014 or 2015 my Department does not have data for those years.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists.

The allocation of social housing support is a matter for each individual local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and associated regulations. Section 22 of the 2009 Act requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

My Department does not hold information on the number of applicants housed in the specific area referred to in the Question.

In relation to new projected housing builds in the planning stage, overall planning statistics are collated and available on my Department's website at this link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1>.

In most cases local authorities use the Part 8 process for local authority own development, which is not a planning application, and data on Part 8 cases is not collated in the planning statistics as these applications are a matter for each relevant local authority.

Construction projects listed in the Social Housing Construction Status Report include projects which are both within and outside the Part 8 process. Non-part 8 projects include those being advanced by Approved Housing Bodies and projects by private developers that are being secured on a turn-key basis by local authorities.

The latest Construction status report, which relates to the position at end Q2 2019, is available at the following link:

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/>.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

1147. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons in receipt of the housing assistance payment in an area (details supplied) in the past five years; the amount being paid by his Department and the local

authority to fund these HAP payments over the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44808/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is available to all eligible households throughout the State. HAP was rolled out on a phased basis, beginning in September 2014. It has been available to all households in South Dublin County Council (SDCC) since 1 October 2014. In Dublin City Council (DCC), HAP has been available to homeless households since February 2015 and all other households since March 2017.

While the information requested is not available in my Department in the format sought, at the end of Q2 2019 over 62,000 tenancies had been set up under the HAP scheme. Of these 3,158 were set up by Dublin City Council, 3,111 by South Dublin County Council and 6,255 set up by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive.

The average rent paid to landlords in DCC and SDCC in each of the five years is set out in the table below:

Local Authority	Avg. Payment 2014	Avg. Payment 2015	Avg. Payment 2016	Avg. Payment 2017	Avg. Payment 2018	Avg. Payment Q2 2019
Dublin City Council	-	€979	€1,244	€1,258	€1,290	€1,292
South Dublin County Council	€1,058	€1,006	€1,104	€1,147	€1,213	€1,245

Departmental Staff Data

1148. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of full and part-time staff employed in his Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44849/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department had a serving headcount of 818 staff at the end of September 2019, of which just one person was recruited on a part-time basis. The headcount of 818 equates to a Full-Time Equivalent of 785.44. Staff recruited on a full-time basis can subsequently apply for alternative, non full-time working patterns under the Civil Services' family friendly working practices. At the end of September 2019 there were 101 full-time staff on reduced working patterns in my Department.

Payment of salaries to staff in my Department is made in line with pay scales approved by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. There is no one in my Department on a salary at or below the minimum wage of €9.80 per hour.

Housing Estates

1149. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local

Government if his attention has been drawn by local authorities to impediments under section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 since Irish Water was established; if so, the local authorities; the issues that have been highlighted; his plans to revise the law as a consequence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44915/19]

1150. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reporting from local authorities that followed the issuing of circular PD1/06 with respect to taking housing estates in charge; if he will seek information on impediments experienced in the process since the establishment of Irish Water; if local authorities have been petitioned to take an estate in charge in cases in which housing estates meet the time criteria and they have not done so; if the report will include the number of housing estates involved, the number of houses in each estate, the year it received planning permission and enforcement actions in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44916/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1149 and 1150 together.

Residential developments consisting of two or more dwellings that have been granted planning permission under section 34 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) may be eligible (depending on the grant of planning condition) for taking in charge. The taking in charge of residential estates by local authorities is provided for under section 180 of the 2000 Act and is a reserved function of the elected members.

Under Section 180 (1) of the Act, the planning authority is obliged to initiate taking in charge procedures where requested by either the developer or by the majority of owners of the dwellings. However, this is subject to the development being completed to the satisfaction of the authority and in accordance with the permission and any conditions.

Circular PD 1/08 updates the earlier policy guidance issued by the Department and replaced circular letters PD 1/06 and 5/06 which directed planning authorities to develop a policy on taking in charge. All planning authorities were required to develop or update, as appropriate, their policy on taking in charge by the end of June 2008 on the basis of the framework set out in Circular PD 1/08.

My Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April 2016 to trial new approaches and working methods in supporting and accelerating overall national and local action on the taking-in-charge process of housing estates, including estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure which can include stand-alone treatment plants. Under the terms of the NTICI, which was underpinned by €10 million in funding, developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the associated call for funding proposals. Ultimately, €7.5 million of the allocated funding was paid to local authorities in respect of 330 developments, containing some 14,930 homes.

A Steering Group was established consisting of representatives from this Department, Irish Water and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assess submissions and focus on finding solutions through collaboration between government, local authorities, Irish Water, and the EPA.

Findings and recommendations from the NTICI process were included in a report on the initiative that was published by my Department in December 2018. The report is available at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/national_taking_in_charge_initiative_report_dec2018.pdf.

The publication of the NTICI report is of value to local authorities and other stakeholders

in streamlining approaches to taking-in-charge, including through coordination with capital works by Irish Water. In this regard, my Department is liaising with Irish Water in relation to the report.

Ultimately, however, progression of individual developments through the taking-in-charge process is a matter for the relevant housing developer, the residents in such developments and the relevant local authorities, following the procedures laid out in section 180.

The National Development Plan, published last year, includes provision of €31 million for the period 2018-2021 for developer-provided infrastructure, commencing with an estimated provision of €6 million in 2019. The multi-annual programme was initiated through the invitation of project bids from local authorities in July of this year, followed by their evaluation by an Expert Panel, set up by my Department, to independently evaluate the bid projects and make recommendations to my Department on suitable projects to be approved for funding. It is expected that approval and allocations will be made on funding applications in the coming months.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

1151. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the net change in State-owned social housing units; if he will provide a breakdown based on new completed units, units purchased, sale of units and demolitions and voids in each of the years 1995 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44936/19]

1152. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing units owned by the State at the end of each of the years 1995 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44937/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1151 and 1152 together.

The information sought is not collated in the precise format requested but there is a large volume of relevant data available in respect of many of the categories included.

Data on social housing stock occupied as distinct from owned at the end of each year has been collected and reported by the Department from 1994 until 2016. This data is available on my Departments website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-rented-sector-activity>.

The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) has been collecting and producing a detailed overview of data in respect of the social housing stock since 2014. Data for the numbers of dwellings owned, constructed, purchased and provided under the RAS, HAP and Leasing programmes were provided in their Annual Indicators Reports for 2014 and 2015. These reports can be found at <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2014.pdf> and <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2015-PI-Report.pdf>.

Following a review of this data further improvements were made and data on the numbers of dwellings owned, added, sold and demolished were added to the report for the years 2017 and 2018. This data can be found at <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2017.pdf> and <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/NOAC-Performance-Indicator-Report-2018-1.pdf>

Data is also available on my Department's website in respect of new dwellings constructed, acquired and sold over a number of years. Data in respect of units constructed and acquired can be found at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> while data on sale of local authority housing can be found at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics>

Rental Sector

1153. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average length of a private rental tenancy here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44985/19]

1154. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the outcome of the tender process that was conducted in 2016 for a deposit protection scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44986/19]

1155. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost for mediation, an adjudication and a tribunal provided via the Residential Tenancies Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44987/19]

1156. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of unlawfully retained deposits that the Residential Tenancies Board ordered landlords to return to tenants in each of the years 2015 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44991/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1153 to 1156, inclusive, together.

My Department does not hold or collate the information referred to in the Questions.

The Clerk of the Dáil requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) set up a dedicated email address for this purpose. The RTB may be contacted at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie to establish the extent to which it may hold the information sought.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

1157. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by his Department or bodies under his aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45067/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details of the contracts referred to by the Deputy are published in the annual Appropriation Accounts. The account for 2017 is available at: <https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/2018/vote-34.pdf> while that for 2018 is available at: <https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/2019/Vote-34-Housing-Planning-and-Local-Government.pdf>.

In summary, my Department complied with the guidelines with the exception of five con-

tracts in 2017 totalling €425,388 (excluding VAT) and eight in 2018 totalling €770,842.

The exceptions generally occurred for reasons of urgency or where an existing contract was rolled over, pending completion of a new procurement process.

Information in relation to 2019 will only become available following completion of the Appropriation Account for 2019 and the assessment of that account by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Information in relation to contracts awarded by agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. Arrangements have been put in place by each agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is in the table below.

Body under the aegis of the DHPLG	Agency Email
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency (Housing Agency)	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Land Development Agency	info@lda.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
Office of the Planning Regulator	info@opr.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	oireachtas.enquiries@VALOFF.ie

Homelessness Strategy

1158. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeline to reduce and end homelessness here greatly. [45147/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Addressing homelessness is an absolute priority for the Government. Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, is designed to significantly increase the supply of social housing by 50,000 homes in the period to 2021, double the output of overall housing to at least 25,000 homes per annum by 2020, support all tenure types (social, private and rental), and tackle homelessness comprehensively. In 2018, 8,000 new social homes were delivered nationally and this year, a further 10,000 new social homes will be delivered.

Budget 2020 has increased funding available to local authorities to provide homeless accommodation and related services to €166m, an increase of €20m on this year's budget. While the priority is to support families to secure a home, the Government is also committed to ensuring that appropriate emergency accommodation is available until a home can be provided. In this regard, the Government is providing funding to local authorities to develop and operate family hubs. To date, 29 family hubs have been developed nationally, providing almost 680 units of family accommodation.

In addition, the National Implementation Plan for Housing First is being implemented to address the needs of those individuals sleeping rough or long term users of emergency accommodation. Housing First enables homeless individuals with high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive housing and health supports to help them maintain their tenancies. The Plan contains targets for each local authority, with an overall national target of 663 tenancies to be delivered by 2021. The implementation of the Plan is a joint initiative of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Health, the HSE and the local authorities.

Rebuilding Ireland is delivering permanent solutions as new homes are delivered and house building is increasing at a significant rate. Under Rebuilding Ireland results are being achieved in supporting exits from homelessness. In 2018, 5,135 adults exited homelessness into homes, an 8.6% increase on 2017. I expect that the numbers of exits from homelessness will increase again in 2019.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1159. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to provide more social housing in County Meath. [45189/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing is a key Government priority, as can be seen with almost €2.4 billion being provided in 2019 for all housing programmes - this is a 25% increase on the 2018 allocation. The level of progress being made is reflected in social housing waiting lists, which have reduced by 26% nationally, from 91,600 households to just over 68,000 between 2016 and 2019.

In 2018, Meath County Council delivered 437 social housing homes through build, acquisition and leasing programmes, with an additional 767 households being supported through HAP and RAS, resulting in the needs of over 1,200 households being met across all delivery schemes in 2018. In 2019, as of the end of Quarter 2, this figure stands at 465 across all delivery streams. Since 2016 to the end of Quarter 2 of 2019, more than 3,400 households in County Meath have had their housing needs met.

In relation to social housing construction activity, my Department publishes comprehensive status reports on a quarterly basis of all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas. The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of Quarter 2 of 2019 and contains information on the progress of over 22,139 new social housing homes, which are currently approved and progressing through planning, design and construction, as well as homes delivered to the end of Quarter 2 of 2019. This report is available at <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/>.

The report shows that Meath County Council - and the Approved Housing Bodies they are working with - have a social housing construction programme of 82 projects already complete or at planning, design, tender or construction stage, which will deliver 1,056 homes when complete. This programme continues to be added to on an ongoing basis. I have assured all local authorities, including Meath County Council, that funding is available to support their activity in delivering on their social housing targets. *Question No. 1160 answered with Question No. 30.*

Commercial Rates

1161. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of plans to deal with the rising cost of business rates in rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38582/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): As Minister with special responsibility for Local Government and having served as a member of Kilkenny County Council, I understand the vital role local businesses play in supporting local authorities to deliver services to their communities. Commercial rates, at approximately €1.5bn per annum, make up roughly a third of local government current (revenue) income.

Recognising the critical importance of commercial rates, I prioritised the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 and it was enacted earlier this year. The Act modernises the rates system for both ratepayers and local authorities.

Local authorities are required by legislation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes, in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015.

The annual rate on valuation (ARV) is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function. The ARV is then applied to each property's valuation to obtain the amount payable in rates.

The independent Commissioner for Valuation is currently conducting a national programme of revaluation to provide consistent, up-to-date valuations so that rates are equitably distributed. Revaluation results in a redistribution of the commercial rates liability between ratepayers. While an individual occupier's rates liability may increase or decrease, the revaluation will not increase the overall commercial rates income of the local authority. It is not the purpose of a revaluation to increase the commercial rates collected.

After a revaluation of a local authority area the Minister is required to make a Rates Limitation Order (RLO) to ensure that the overall rates collected in that area for the following year, does not increase beyond normal inflation and buoyancy to take account of new valuations. RLOs have been made for each of the 16 local authorities that have undergone a revaluation to date and will be made in the coming weeks in respect of the eight local authorities where revaluations concluded this year.

The final tranche of revaluations should be completed by 2021. At all stages of the process, ratepayers are consulted and informed and can bring relevant information to bear on the valuation. Ultimately ratepayers have a right of appeal to the Valuation Tribunal. In terms of revaluations to date, I understand that the trend is that approximately 60% of ratepayers have experienced a decrease.

Local authorities work closely with ratepayers experiencing difficulties with the payment of commercial rates. In this regard, local authorities may facilitate the payment of commercial rates by instalments, and work with businesses to put in place flexible payment options. The Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 will further facilitate such flexible approaches, provided ratepayers engage with the local authority concerned.

Importantly, the Act also provides for rates alleviation schemes, to be decided by local authority members in order to promote national and/or local policy objectives, including for example, the implementation of the Government's Realising Our Rural Potential: The Action Plan for Rural Development.

My Department recently wrote to all local authorities highlighting the new alleviation pro-

visions, contained in the 2019 Act, indicating that the work in respect of commencing Section 15, is underway. Local authorities were further advised that if they plan to implement an alleviation scheme in 2020, they should make a provision in their budget.

Nitrates Usage

1162. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider extending the slurry spreading deadline in counties Cavan and Monaghan as a special case due to flooding; if he has had discussions with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41974/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, as amended, give legal effect in Ireland to the Nitrates Directive and to our Nitrates Action Programme. The Nitrates Directive requires all member states to define set periods when the land application of fertiliser, including slurry, is not allowed and in Ireland the closed season commenced on 15 October.

The closed periods for land application of fertiliser in Ireland were decided following extensive consultation and were discussed with farming bodies and the European Commission as Ireland introduced the Nitrates Action Programme. The provisions of the Regulations are underpinned by scientific research and good agricultural practice. The most recent scientific studies carried out on a diverse range of farm and soil types as part of Teagasc's ongoing Agricultural Catchments Programme have provided further evidence in support of regulating spreading periods as an effective means of reducing nutrient losses to waters.

The closed period protects water from pollution by excessive fertilisers flowing from farmland into surface water and groundwater.

While there have been some challenging weather conditions across the country, particularly in August and September, and including conditions in counties Cavan and Monaghan, farmers are required to provide sufficient slurry storage. In the lead up to the start of the closed period in October 2019, my Department kept this issue under review – in close consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine - and it was considered that changes should not be made to the slurry spreading deadline.

In cases of animal welfare issues arising from tanks that have reached capacity, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine operates an animal welfare helpline Lo-call 076 1064408, along with a dedicated email address, AnimalWelfare@agriculture.gov.ie. Farmers contacting the helpline will be advised to provide details of animal welfare issues, their herd number and other relevant data.

Local Authority Funding

1163. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to each local authority in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45206/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Local authorities derive their income from a variety of sources

including commercial rates, charges for goods and services and funding from Central Government. Central Government funding of local authorities includes transfers, both current and capital, from a range of Departments and Offices for a variety of purposes. Some streams of funding are delivered directly from funding departments to local authorities, while others are routed through departmental agencies.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) publishes a report on the central government funding of local government. The most recent report refers to 2018 and is available at the following link:

<https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/Report%20on%20the%20Accounts%20of%20the%20Public%20Services/Report%20on%20the%20Accounts%20of%20the%20Public%20Services%202018.html> .

The tables below detail funding to local authorities from my Department as it was configured in each year from 2016 to 31 August 2019. The figures include funding from the Departmental Vote (as it was configured in that year), the Local Government Fund and the Environment Fund (until October 2016), when responsibility for the Environment Fund transferred to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

Details of local property tax payments to local authorities which are included in the Local Government Fund are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/chargestaxes/local-property-tax/local-property-tax>.

Payments from Departmental Vote

LOCAL AUTHORITY	2016	2017	2018	to 30 Aug 2019
CARLOW	€ 13,026,204.52	€ 18,395,673.22	€ 23,758,027.84	€ 16,584,698.07
CAVAN	€ 8,799,462.04	€ 10,527,807.97	€ 18,925,895.04	€ 7,444,313.36
CLARE	€ 12,137,852.76	€ 23,067,916.64	€ 31,354,479.67	€ 17,974,689.56
CORK CITY	€ 59,506,398.38	€ 47,606,481.56	€ 88,190,415.05	€ 53,191,689.42
CORK COUNTY	€ 31,761,940.40	€ 48,211,396.11	€ 81,188,230.34	€ 28,521,660.89
DONEGAL	€ 14,429,068.82	€ 23,680,677.35	€ 26,121,400.61	€ 15,192,147.11
DLR	€ 16,079,591.21	€ 38,002,928.76	€ 31,994,299.29	€ 6,093,358.31
DUBLIN	€ 201,092,646.17	€ 277,541,666.17	€ 419,551,978.07	€ 222,746,588.94
FINGAL	€ 19,463,233.64	€ 60,423,202.34	€ 116,993,525.08	€ 52,603,406.49
S. DUBLIN	€ 42,056,689.50	€ 57,400,930.54	€ 115,463,719.54	€ 42,709,624.00
GALWAY CITY	€ 10,894,636.46	€ 18,296,412.51	€ 26,813,741.57	€ 17,775,924.73
GALWAY COUNTY	€ 13,469,203.87	€ 13,011,266.13	€ 30,586,372.05	€ 20,895,416.92
KERRY	€ 19,101,608.90	€ 25,932,695.89	€ 46,747,950.95	€ 24,291,611.37

LOCAL AUTHORITY	2016	2017	2018	to 30 Aug 2019
KILDARE	€ 40,320,359.96	€ 60,887,144.32	€ 91,573,026.17	€ 75,060,704.46
KILKENNY	€ 17,642,150.17	€ 26,037,386.44	€ 44,417,522.55	€ 24,144,519.96
LAOIS	€ 11,571,191.85	€ 17,738,392.56	€ 14,580,011.63	€ 10,367,978.95
LEITRIM	€ 4,359,837.62	€ 3,006,889.33	€ 5,600,745.97	€ 3,902,564.12
LIMERICK	€ 101,535,926.24	€ 214,424,681.11	€ 352,559,405.99	€ 284,559,897.17
LONGFORD	€ 6,205,919.04	€ 7,424,944.54	€ 16,723,530.51	€ 12,246,627.86
LOUTH	€ 23,374,452.58	€ 20,574,381.08	€ 35,097,943.46	€ 26,268,798.23
MAYO	€ 21,542,870.31	€ 20,900,894.37	€ 26,351,289.37	€ 21,329,311.63
MEATH	€ 27,537,594.37	€ 30,431,809.28	€ 65,915,825.02	€ 33,210,826.78
MONAGHAN	€ 10,522,660.74	€ 17,745,018.19	€ 19,835,869.21	€ 12,983,194.92
OFFALY	€ 9,982,875.57	€ 11,709,441.35	€ 17,842,834.16	€ 14,283,655.27
ROSCOMMON	€ 7,593,143.07	€ 10,844,914.38	€ 10,019,811.13	€ 7,910,070.38
SLIGO	€ 12,913,445.45	€ 15,419,887.17	€ 22,032,153.44	€ 13,772,735.98
TIPPERARY	€ 28,547,394.67	€ 33,641,527.49	€ 49,894,484.79	€ 23,349,100.52
WATERFORD	€ 24,653,412.11	€ 20,150,524.96	€ 52,268,341.52	€ 17,268,005.93
WESTMEATH	€ 13,119,608.67	€ 16,321,206.49	€ 22,845,086.54	€ 19,030,807.63
WEXFORD	€ 21,840,923.80	€ 30,438,698.85	€ 49,217,286.68	€ 21,375,955.11
WICKLOW	€ 13,511,050.99	€ 10,486,421.12	€ 41,678,282.76	€ 23,003,355.75
TOTALS	€ 858,593,353.88	€ 1,230,283,218.22	€ 1,996,143,486.00	€ 1,170,093,239.82

Local Authority Housing Funding

1164. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to each local authority for the provision of housing in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; the number of housing units built over the period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45207/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): This year, more than €2.4 billion was allocated to the delivery of social homes nationwide, as part of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

As part of this programme, targets are set against a range of delivery mechanisms and resources are allocated to local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, as the key delivery

agents for this work.

My Department work closely with both local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to monitor progress against these targets and progress is published on a quarterly basis on my Department's website.

The most recent report covers the period up to the end of Q2 2019 and includes a breakdown of all homes delivered, on a county by county basis, including information on the funding stream for each scheme. Detailed information can be found here: <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/>

The funding provided by my Department to each local authority in respect of the delivery of housing programmes, in each year from 2016 to 2018, and for the first 9 months of 2019, is set out in the table below.

	2016 €m	2017 €m	2018 €m	2019 (To end Sept) €m
Carlow	12.0	17.7	22.5	20.3
Cavan	7.5	9.9	13.8	7.9
Clare	12.3	23.8	29.1	22.0
Cork City	58.2	47.5	86.3	63.2
Cork County	43.4	62.3	94.4	58.9
DL Rathdown	27.5	57.2	51.1	19.5
Donegal	12.3	23.0	25.1	16.0
Dublin City	230.0	301.8	439.9	303.3
Fingal	34.9	76.9	127.6	80.2
Galway City	13.4	20.5	28.7	23.9
Galway County	11.4	11.7	23.8	20.0
Kerry	17.1	25.4	45.5	28.5
Kildare	41.8	61.5	91.9	89.1
Kilkenny	16.5	24.4	42.8	31.3
Laois	10.4	17.0	13.4	11.5
Leitrim	3.7	2.9	5.0	4.0
Limerick	97.2	212.1	346.2	317.1
Longford	4.9	7.0	15.8	12.7
Louth	21.2	19.7	34.3	34.1
Mayo	14.7	15.1	18.0	18.3
Meath	27.7	30.2	64.4	38.1
Monaghan	8.9	17.2	16.5	15.3
Offaly	8.5	10.3	15.7	18.0
Roscommon	5.4	9.4	7.4	7.9
Sligo	12.2	15.2	20.1	14.7
South Dublin	52.8	71.9	126.2	66.3
Tipperary	24.2	30.3	43.6	24.8
Waterford	22.9	19.9	50.5	22.8
Westmeath	11.8	16.2	22.1	21.1
Wexford	19.5	29.4	46.3	26.0

	2016 €m	2017 €m	2018 €m	2019 (To end Sept) €m
Wicklow	15.0	11.9	42.1	31.4
Total	899.2	1,299.4	2,010.0	1,468.1

Local Authority Housing Funding

1165. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to each county for water upgrades in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45208/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The table below sets out the recoupment by my Department to local authorities each year since 2016 under the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme which includes Group Water Schemes, Group Sewerage Schemes, Individual wells (more commonly known as private or household wells) and on-site wastewater treatment systems (more commonly known as septic tanks).

Local Authority	2016	2017	2018	2019 (Up to 30/10/19)	Total
Carlow	€147,857.39	€161,267.25	€160,153.59	€117,838.53	€587,116.76
Cavan	€343,317.92	€560,417.53	€509,350.82	€42,378.52	€1,455,464.79
Clare	€277,895.48	€444,097.60	€847,605.61	€122,318.36	€1,691,917.05
Cork	€798,508.54	€1,023,935.76	€753,308.46	€527,449.59	€3,103,202.35
Donegal	€21,643.44	€283,121.48	€74,448.07	€81,987.50	€461,200.49
Dublin South	€9,994.91	€5,793.45	€13,190.32	€16,616.39	€45,595.07
Dún Laoghaire/ Rathdown	€1,095.00	€3,291.58	€4,747.21	€2,031.58	€11,165.37
Fingal	€0.00	€14,349.09	€0.00	€4,063.16	€18,412.25
Galway	€1,159,662.68	€802,733.13	€431,950.84	€350,849.21	€2,745,195.86
Kerry	€225,893.47	€286,332.81	€371,876.40	€386,887.33	€1,270,990.01
Kildare	€134,151.83	€73,612.31	€122,098.17	€102,462.56	€432,324.87
Kilkenny	€287,300.79	€505,017.99	€534,277.21	€137,381.21	€1,463,977.20
Laois	€498,123.21	€603,926.51	€394,288.88	€210,102.48	€1,706,441.08
Leitrim	€103,434.65	€124,984.23	€131,316.17	€44,203.43	€403,938.48
Limerick	€307,523.86	€350,369.56	€866,180.45	€662,995.37	€2,187,069.24
Longford	€56,618.17	€47,878.04	€4,000.00	€23,267.90	€131,764.11
Louth	€343,351.43	€342,245.23	€230,099.52	€146,925.83	€1,062,622.01
Mayo	€4,846,377.86	€5,576,990.75	€3,010,009.76	€598,911.77	€14,032,290.14
Meath	€449,476.30	€372,531.81	€616,617.57	€420,819.34	€1,859,445.02
Monaghan	€490,180.97	€362,067.00	€375,868.10	€10,478.43	€1,238,594.50
Offaly	€300,429.40	€389,803.69	€527,212.59	€121,504.52	€1,338,950.20
Roscommon	€426,724.88	€584,549.94	€572,778.34	€227,287.66	€1,811,340.82
Sligo	€22,432.69	€58,758.11	€30,259.84	€179,325.52	€290,776.16
Tipperary	€543,977.56	€605,619.42	€601,812.44	€171,168.96	€1,922,578.38
Waterford	€328,968.49	€221,054.12	€236,669.47	€170,207.99	€956,900.07
Westmeath	€76,549.49	€72,283.79	€163,009.91	€65,312.21	€377,155.40
Wexford	€438,526.36	€533,547.61	€717,762.96	€439,140.32	€2,128,977.25

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	2016	2017	2018	2019 (Up to 30/10/19)	Total
Wicklow	€346,665.77	€347,119.66	€238,515.98	€229,065.08	€1,161,366.49
Total	€12,986,682.54	€14,757,699.45	€12,539,408.68	€5,612,980.75	€45,896,771.42

Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels in relation to public water and waste water services.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Authority Funding

1166. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to each county for fire services in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45209/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Fire Services Capital Programme forms an important part of my Department's strategy to support fire authorities in the development and maintenance of a quality fire-fighting and rescue service. My Department provides capital funding for the construction/upgrading of fire stations and the procurement of fire appliances and specialised equipment.

The prioritisation and effective management of these resources is, in the first instance, a matter for each of the fire authorities based on their assessment of local needs and requirements. My Department works closely with fire services around the country to progress priority projects.

Funding provided to each county for Fire Services

	2016	2017	2018	2019 (to end October)
Carlow	€264,397	€534,002	€217,721	€0
Cavan	€100,256	€30,765	€287,530	€771,031
Clare	€8,118	€416,007	€1,007,850	€66,254
Cork	€1,010,049	€455,239	€8,118	€310,160
Donegal	€130,932	€363,806	€0	€452,294
Dublin	€179,969	€1,039,099	€666,493	€470,346
Galway	€502,297	€336,390	€1,952,309	€334,908
Kerry	€11,500	€0	€5,304	€188,737
Kildare	€55,903	€370,922	€61,896	€0
Kilkenny	€80,164	€1,122,984	€243,949	€84,102
Laois	€8,118	€106,239	€84,039	€56,246
Leitrim	€0	€0	€5,354	€0
Limerick	€64,151	€111,813	€109,074	€6,210

	2016	2017	2018	2019 (to end October)
Longford	€652,414	€297,123	€855,300	€6,210
Louth	€0	€406,393	€228,378	€84,475
Mayo	€242,282	€181,411	€50,345	€158,374
Meath	€20,295	€104,093	€207,456	€20,756
Monaghan	€406,252	€122,215	€137,167	€398,676
Offaly	€183,397	€850,581	€300,442	€323,795
Tipperary	€952,561	€790,896	€828,661	€331,178
Waterford	€5,412	€125,104	€87,909	€0
Westmeath	€1,407,200	€1,100,186	€352,929	€302,357
Wexford	€112,841	€0	€358,993	€0
Wicklow	€394,425	€71,832	€170,281	€187,756

My Department is also funding the Fire Services' CTrí (previously known as CAMP) project dealing with the Fire Services' 999/112 emergency call-taking service for the public. It is a nation-wide system, based in three regional communication centres in Dublin, Limerick and Castlebar. The CTrí Project will see the introduction of a new mobilisation system better linking the three centres. This will provide the opportunity to achieve an improved, more resilient service for the public. Funding of €1.62 million, €1.87 million and €2.7 million was provided for this project by my Department in the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively. This funding is ongoing and a further €3.1 million has been provided in the current year to date. Due to the nature of this project, which will benefit every county in the country, the funding has not been apportioned on a county-by-county basis.

Local Authority Funding

1167. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding approved to date for local authorities under a specific programme (details supplied); the projected allocations at year end; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45250/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Funding approval of almost €500,000 has been given to Cavan and Monaghan County Councils this year under the voids programme, based on the number of properties submitted by them. In recent weeks, Monaghan County Council has submitted additional properties for inclusion under the programme, which have now also been approved for funding subject to the conditions attaching to the programme.

While my Department is supportive of local authorities in bringing vacant social homes back to productive use under the voids programme, it is of concern if the increased level of submissions being made by them, arises from a reduced funding commitment on their part, to the maintenance and re-letting of their own housing stock. The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs, are matters for each individual local authority under the Housing Acts. To facilitate the early re-letting of social homes when an existing tenant leaves a property, it is vital that local authorities make provision in their own budget, for pre-letting works. I hope that Council members will support this important work in setting future budgets.

Home Loan Scheme

1168. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan who have been refused the authorised mortgage protection insurance can avail of private insurance; and if so, the criteria for approval of such own sourced insurance. [45251/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The local authority mortgage protection insurance (MPI) scheme has applied to all house purchase loans approved by local authorities after 1 July 1986, including the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan introduced on 1 February 2018. Mortgage protection insurance is charged at the rate of 0.555%.

It is obligatory for all local authority borrowers who meet the eligibility criteria to join the scheme, which is a group policy. Altering this condition would have a negative impact on the scheme and increase the cost for all existing borrowers.

A local authority housing loan applicant who is not eligible for the local authority MPI scheme must source a suitable comparable individual MPI policy from the market. The level of coverage/benefits provided under the alternative MPI should be similar to that available under the Local Authority Group MPI scheme.

The final decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its Credit Committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants.

Building Control Management System

1169. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on recent reports regarding defects and poor quality in some concrete products being supplied to the construction industry; and if his Department monitors the quality of residential and commercial construction in view of problems with aggregate and insulation in the Celtic tiger era. [45137/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The design and construction of buildings is regulated under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, in order to ensure the safety of people within the built environment. The Act provides for the making of Building Regulations and Building Control Regulations.

In relation to products, Part D of the Building Regulations sets out the legal requirements for materials and workmanship. It requires that all works must be carried out using “proper materials which are fit for the use for which they are intended and for the conditions in which they are to be used” and in a workmanlike manner to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations. Technical Guidance Document (TGD) D provides guidance on means of demonstrating products are fit for purpose, this includes products which bear a CE Marking in accordance with the provisions of the Construction Products Regulation (Regulation (EU) No. 305/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products and repealing Council Directive 89/106/EEC).

Under the Construction Products Regulation (CPR) manufacturers are required, when plac-

ing a construction product (which is covered by harmonised European standards or European Technical Assessments) on the EU market, to make a Declaration of Performance and affix the CE mark. In broad terms, this means that manufacturers are required to provide robust and reliable information in a consistent way for construction products. For many construction products, the application of the CE mark will require the involvement of a third party (known as a ‘notified body’) to undertake certain tasks as specified in the harmonised European standard. These tasks may include activities such as initial type-testing of products, inspection of factory production control and surveillance of factory production control.

In addition, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) has also produced additional guidance to some harmonised European standards in the form of National Annexes or Standard Recommendations, which set out appropriate minimum performance levels for specific intended uses of certain products in Ireland.

Currently, there are a number of harmonised European standards, and accompanying Standard Recommendations, in place in respect of insulation products, aggregates, as well as for precast concrete products and masonry products which may require aggregates for their manufacture.

In the first instance, it is a matter for owners, designers and builders, with responsibility for compliance with the Building Regulation, to specify the particular project specific performance requirements of products in the context of the conditions in which they are to be used. In addition, during construction such steps as are necessary should be taken to ensure that the products provided meet these specifications and are suitable for the purpose for which they are intended. Guidance is provided in relation to this in the Code of Practice for Inspecting and Certifying Buildings and Works, which is available at the following link:

https://www.localgov.ie/sites/default/files/2016-10-21_code_of_practice_for_inspecting_and_certifying_buildings_and_works_final_version-2016.pdf

Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts and who are independent in the use of their statutory powers. Building control authorities are also designated as the principal market surveillance authorities for construction products that fall within the scope of the CPR. Similarly, market surveillance authorities are provided with wide-ranging powers to ensure that construction products placed on the market comply with the requirements set out in the CPR. These include the issuing of a notice to require corrective actions and in the event of a serious risk being identified, powers that would lead to prohibiting or restricting a construction product from being made available on the market. Issues that arise in relation to products and materials, have been and continue to be dealt with by the relevant local authorities using the powers above, this has been the case in particular in relation to product such as aggregates, concrete blocks and insulation.

The National Building Control Office (NBCO), within Dublin City Council, provides oversight, direction and support for the development, standardisation and implementation of Building Control as an effective shared service in the 31 Building Control Authorities. My Department is working with the NBCO and other relevant authorities to strengthen the market surveillance function. For example, work is being advanced with Geological Survey Ireland, as a competent authority, to address quarried products.

Local Authority Funding

1170. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the fact that across local authorities there is less money available for local services in view of the fact the stated aim of the local property tax was to provide extra resources for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38987/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Local Property Tax (LPT) accounts for approximately 9% of the local government sector's current income, amounting to allocations of €503m in 2019. It supplements income from commercial rates, from the provision of goods and services and from government grants. Local authorities' cost and income bases vary significantly from one another, as do their LPT bases, and their abilities to raise revenue from other sources.

In 2019, 80% or €393.8m of the overall LPT allocation is being used at the discretion of local authorities to support the provision of local services which benefit citizens directly such as parks, libraries, leisure amenities, fire and emergency services, street lighting, maintenance and cleaning of streets. In addition, 20% or €109.3m of LPT is supporting Housing and Roads services in 2019, supplementing the considerable exchequer funding also provided for these important services. Apart from these specific self-funding allocations, it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities including how to spend its LPT allocation.

In 2020, I expect that LPT allocations will increase to €516.8m. The increase is accounted for, in the most part, by the decisions of 19 local authorities to increase their LPT rates above the basic rate for 2020. When a local authority decides to vary the LPT basic rate upwards (by up to 15%), it retains 100% of the resultant additional income collected in the local authority area. Likewise, when the rate is reduced, the authority forgoes the income that would have been collected. The 19 local authorities that voted to increase their LPT above the basic rate are expected to gain €19.7m in additional LPT income for their own use in 2020. The equivalent LPT gain over the basic rate for the same authorities in 2019 was €3.4m.

LPT allocations to local authorities for 2020 and previous years are published on my Department's website at the following links: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/category/housing/sub-topic/local-property-tax/sub-type/funding-allocation/topic/chargestaxes/type/publications?query> and https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/final_2020_lpt_allocations_after_local_variation.pdf.

Taxation policy, including in respect of LPT, is in the first instance a matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. In this regard, a 'Review of Local Property Tax' was published by the Department of Finance in March of this year and referred by Minister Donohoe to the Budgetary Oversight Committee for its consideration. Chapter 2 and Appendix B of the LPT Review provide a more detailed outline of LPT as a funding source for local authorities:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1e5c76-review-of-local-property-tax/>.

Building Regulations

1171. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for the continuation of SI No. 365 of 2015, Building Control (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2015, with respect to the discretionary opt-out for self builders. [45269/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In response to the building failures that have emerged over the past decade, Government has embarked on a three pronged Building Control Reform Agenda, which

is focused on:

1. Reform of the Building Control process;
2. Establishment of a National Building Control Management Project; and
3. Putting the Construction Industry Register Ireland on a statutory footing.

The Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 9 of 2014) require greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design and construction by registered construction professionals and builders, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates.

A Certificate of Compliance on Completion is jointly signed by the builder and the assigned certifier. This must be accompanied by plans and documentation to show how the constructed building complies with the building regulations and also the inspection plan, as implemented.

Under these Regulations, the owner of a building must assign competent persons to design, build, inspect and certify building works he/she has commissioned. They in turn, must account for their contribution through the lodgement of compliance documentation, inspection plans and statutory certificates. The roles and responsibilities of owners, designers, builders, assigned certifiers, etc. during building works are set out in the Code of Practice for Inspecting and Certifying Buildings and Works, which is available at the following link:

https://www.localgov.ie/sites/default/files/2016-10-21_code_of_practice_for_inspecting_and_certifying_buildings_and_works_final_version-2016.pdf.

This has brought clarity and accountability, a focus on compliance with Building Regulations and a new order to bear on construction projects.

S.I. No. 9 of 2014 was reviewed after 12 months in operation. Following this review, the were introduced. Under these regulations, owners of new single dwellings, on a single development unit, and domestic extensions may opt out of the requirements for statutory certification. This was introduced due to the perceived high costs of the S.I. 9 procedures for owners of such dwellings.

However, it is important to note, these regulations do not facilitate an “opt-out” of the requirements of the Building Regulations. Building Regulations exist to protect the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings, they apply to the design and construction of a new building and to an extension or material alteration of an existing building and include new single dwellings, on a single development unit, and domestic extensions.

My Department has published an information note for owners of new dwellings and extensions who opt out of Statutory Certification for building control purposes. This note explains the building control system, what the procedure is for opting out and provides general advice on the statutory obligations that rest with owners who opt out such as compliance with Building Regulations, planning, workplace safety etc. The information note is available at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/building-standards/building-regulations/information-note-owners-new-dwellings-and-extensions>

National Building Control Office (NBCO), within Dublin City Council, provides oversight, direction and support for the development, standardisation and implementation of Building

Control as an effective shared service in the 31 Building Control Authorities. Within this context, the uptake and use of SI No. 365 of 2015 is being monitored. Reviews of the building control regulations are undertaken by my Department, as necessary, as part of the ongoing Building Control Reform Agenda.

An Bord Pleanála

1172. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the outcomes of the 17 October 2019 fact finding mission by An Bord Pleanála to London on the best use of land for the building of houses; and his policy plans in relation to same. [45270/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I understand that the question is in reference to a Study visit to London organised by the Irish Planning Institute (IPI), that took place from 16 to 18 October 2019.

I should clarify that events such as this, organised by professional bodies such as the IPI, form part of a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme for those working in the planning or other technical-professional arenas, in both private and public sectors, and are open to all those who are members of the Institute and other relevant stakeholders. Therefore, the IPI Study visit was not exclusive to An Bord Pleanála and included officials from a number of different planning authorities and my Department.

The purpose of events such as these are to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practice. This provides a useful context for key officials, from both a development management and policy formulation perspective. While I am not in a position to provide an overall assessment of this event from the perspective of the IPI, my officials found it useful to see practical examples of varied forms of different urban regeneration and densification.

The topic of urban densification, was also the theme of a conference London Irish Town Planners Network, at which I spoke. The Irish delegates on the IPI study trip were also invited to attend this event, which provided a useful forum for discussion and information exchange and will assist in contributing to future policy development.

At the event, I outlined the principal policies of the Government in relation to the best use of land for the building of houses, including the importance of compact growth for regional, urban and rural development, are set out in the National Planning Framework and in the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs). The RSEs, are likely to be finalised by the end of this year, after which, a review of County and City development plans will complete the local policy context.

Housing Policy

1173. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on co-living accommodation developments as a method of urban densification in view of his speech to a group (details supplied); and the reason for the decision. [45271/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The speech referred to in the question was given at an event organised by the London Irish Town Planners Network on 17 October last, to which I was invited as Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to give an address on the theme of “Densification in an Urban

Context”.

Separate to the London Irish Town Planners network event, there was a study tour to London organised by the Irish Planning Institute (IPI) from 16-18 October, that included a visit to co-living development as part of the tour itinerary.

This may have given rise to some confusion, as delegates to the Irish Planning Institute study tour were also invited to attend the London Irish Town Planners Network event, at which I spoke on the subject of urban densification, but not on the subject of co-living development.

The address made was wide-ranging and touched on a number of related topics, while also acknowledging the need to compare and learn from practice and experience elsewhere. It also served as an opportunity to encourage the pool of qualified and experienced Irish Planners working in London to consider return to Ireland.

Under Project Ireland 2040, including the National Planning Framework, the Government identified the achievement of compact growth as a key mechanism to support the future sustainable development of our cities and towns, addressing issues such as regional development, urban sprawl, long-distance commuting, housing supply and climate action.

The densification of settlements is an important part of achieving compact growth, and events such as that in London, provide an opportunity to discuss and debate the issues.

Last year, under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), my Department published updated apartment planning guidelines and new building height guidelines in order to encourage compact, sustainable growth in our urban areas and to further support the delivery of apartment development.

The updated *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities* respond to changing housing need and a more dynamic urban employment market, including an aging, more diverse and internationally mobile population.

The updated guidelines also set out policy in relation to a range of apartment types needed to meet the accommodation needs of a variety of household types and sizes. This includes the introduction of the possibility of a ‘Shared Accommodation’ or ‘Co-Living’ format.

This format, which is only one element of the guidelines, is a particular form of development that may be appropriate where responding to an identified urban housing need at particular locations. However, co-living is not envisaged as an alternative or replacement to the more conventional apartment development.

While the apartment guidelines overall are designed to underpin compact growth objectives, the co-living format is intended to meet a very specific need.

In conclusion, the apartment guidelines stipulate that planning authorities strike a balance between the need to provide a particular format of accommodation to respond to a specific housing need in an urban location and the overall requirement to provide quality urban apartment development as a viable long term housing option. This is, of course, in the overall context of a range of urban and rural housing formats.

Irish Water Expenditure

1174. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount paid by Irish Water in respect of commercial rates in 2017, 2018 and

to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45294/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Section 12 of the Water Services Act 2014 provided that the property of the public water system was not rateable. Prior to this provision, some water assets were valued for rates purposes. Irish Water was therefore not liable to pay rates during the years referred to in the question.

This exemption was ended by section 61 of the Water Services Act 2017, which was commenced with effect from 18 October 2019, and Irish Water will therefore become rateable with effect from 1 January 2020.

In preparation for the recognition of water assets for rateability purposes, the Valuation Office earlier this year undertook a global valuation of the property of Irish Water in line with Section 53 of the Valuation Act 2001.

In order to ensure that the local authorities were not at a loss as a result of the previous exemption my Department has been recouping local authorities in respect of income lost for commercial water rates. The amounts paid to local authorities in respect of Irish Water's infrastructure is set out in the table below:

Year	Amount
2015	€46,345,050
2016	€46,022,371
2017	€46,566,814
2018	€46,812,124
2019	€47,179,658

Question No. 1175 answered with Question No. 1143.

Homeless Persons Data

1176. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of adults and children that exited homelessness in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by local authority area in tabular form [45318/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. While responsibility for the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, the administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis.

Quarterly performance reports are submitted to my Department by local authorities on a regional basis. These reports provide information on the numbers of adults exiting homelessness to a tenancy. Data is not currently available on the number of children that have exited homelessness to a tenancy.

The table below sets out the number of adults exiting homelessness to a tenancy from 2016 to the end of Quarter 2 2019.

Exits from homelessness (No. of Adults)				
	2016	2017	2018	To end Q2 2019
Dublin	1,833	3,225	3,572	1,940
Mid East	135	150	153	66
Midlands	185	185	177	73
Mid West	185	309	252	136
North East	49	77	113	49
North West	81	74	93	64
South East	186	179	178	105
South West	297	360	430	241
West	128	170	167	151
Total	3,079	4,729	5,135	2,825

Emergency Accommodation Data

1177. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of emergency accommodation per night per household by local authority area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45319/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

My Department does not fund any homeless service directly but provides funding to housing authorities towards these costs. Under the funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources. Housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of these funding arrangements with my Department. Therefore, the exact spend by housing authorities on homeless services, as well as the types of accommodation, are a matter for individual housing authorities in consultation with the Management Group of the relevant regional joint Homeless Consultative Forum.

Performance and Financial reports from each of the homeless regions, setting out data and expenditure on homeless services, including emergency accommodation, are published on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

Local Government Fund

1178. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the Local Government Fund has been cut by approximately €30 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45330/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Government is providing €156 million to support local authorities through the exchequer contribution to the Local Government Fund (LGF) in 2020

meaning that, on a like-for-like basis, local authorities are expected to be in receipt of €23 million more in funding in 2020 when compared to 2019. The extra €23 million represents an increase of 27% in exchequer support for local authorities to meet additional pay and pension costs arising from national pay agreements.

While there is a headline reduction on the 2019 budget allocation of €185m to the Fund, this is due to a reduction in the exchequer supports required by local authorities in 2020. The realignment of support for Local Government in 2020 is largely as a result of the valuation of Irish Water as a global utility liable for commercial rates from 2020. As a consequence of this, there is no longer a requirement for general water rates compensation in 2020 of circa €47m.

I expect that the local authority sector will collect a broadly similar amount through commercial rates as was received in previous years through exchequer funded water rates compensation. I expect that in some cases, individual local authorities will receive more in commercial rates than they received in compensation, and I accept that some local authorities will receive less. My Department is actively monitoring the financial impact of this transition on individual local authorities, in the context of their overall financial position.

It is expected that Local Property Tax (LPT) allocations of €516.8m will be made from the Fund in 2020 (an increase from €503m in 2019). The increase in LPT allocations is accounted for, in the most part, by the decisions of 19 local authorities to increase their LPT rates above the basic rate for 2020.

Departmental Legal Services

1179. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an outside legal firm was employed in the drafting of the Water Services Act 2013; and if so, the name of same. [45333/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In line with standard arrangements, the Water Services Bill 2013, enacted as the Water Services Act 2013, was drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, in close consultation with my Department. No external legal advice was procured by my Department in relation to the drafting of this legislation.

Building Regulations Compliance

1180. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if assistance is available for persons resident in a housing estate (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45343/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In July 2015, the then Minister directed that a review be undertaken by an independent fire expert to develop a framework for general application, in the interest of supporting owners and residents living in developments where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise. It included a case study based on the housing estate that the Deputy refers to.

The Framework was published in August 2017 and contains the following;

- an explanation of the statutory provisions in respect of fire safety, namely the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014 and the Fire Services Acts 1981 & 2003, and the respective respon-

sibilities of owners, designers, builders, occupants, local authorities;

- a range of actions that may reduce risk and improve the level of fire safety where deficiencies arise in dwelling houses, apartments and /or the common areas of apartment buildings; and

- a fire risk assessment methodology for professional advisors to prioritise the remedial actions, if any, that may need to be carried out on a dwelling.

The Framework is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. In addition to owners and occupants, the Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable the continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

The framework is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/framework_for_enhancing_fire_safety_in_dwellings.pdf .

It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control, it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters. It is not possible for the State to take on responsibility/liability for all legacy issues, nor would it send the right message to the industry regarding their responsibility for compliance.

In response to the many building failures that emerged in the last decade, my Department has been advancing a building control reform agenda in order to develop and promote a culture of competence, good practice and compliance with the building regulations in the construction sector. This agenda includes:

- the introduction of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which require greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification;

- working closely with the Local Government Management Agency on the oversight and governance of the local authority Building Control System to improve its effectiveness; and

- progressing primary legislation, the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill 2017.

Rent Pressure Zones

1181. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider amendments to the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 in order that the expiry date of all deemed and designated rent pressure zones can be reviewed prior to 31 December 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45344/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector recognises that rapidly increasing rental inflation is the most significant challenge to security of tenure in the rental sector and that there is a need for a targeted, time-bound and transparent policy response to the issue of rising rents. To address this, the Government introduced the Rent Predictability Measure. This measure, which

was provided for by the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, introduced the concept of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) to moderate the rate of rent increases in those areas of the country where rents are highest and rising quickly.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 was enacted on 24 May 2019 following extensive debate in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Given the ongoing housing and homelessness crisis, I have no plans to amend the expiry date of 31 December 2021 provided in the Act for Rent Pressure Zones to continue in force to provide rent predictability for tenants and landlords, alike, in the medium term.

The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation as Rent Pressure Zones in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

1182. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will publish a report regarding the tenant purchase scheme within local authority housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45375/19]

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

I intend to bring a comprehensive package of social housing reform measures to Government in the near future and the review of the Tenant Purchase Scheme will be published as part of that process.

Emergency Accommodation Data

1183. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent on a monthly basis on emergency accommodation in Dublin in each of the years 2011 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45389/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

My Department does not fund any homeless service directly but provides funding to housing authorities towards these costs. Under the funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources. Housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of these funding arrangements with my Department. Therefore, the exact spend by housing authorities on homeless services, as well as the types of accommodation, are a matter for individual housing authorities in consultation with the Management Group of the relevant regional joint Homeless Consultative Forum, in this case the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive. Exchequer funding for homeless services is provided through my Department to housing authorities on a regional basis. The

table below sets out the funding recouped to the Dublin Region for the years 2011 to 2018;

Exchequer funding for homeless services under the Housing Act, 1988 (Dublin Region)

Year	Funding
2011	€35,732,525
2012	€32,398,290
2013	€31,322,223
2014	€35,322,223
2015	€48,270,201
2016	€68,627,075
2017	€83,616,643
2018	€106,267,187

Financial reports, setting out expenditure on homeless services for each of the regions, including the Dublin region, are published on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness

1184. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homes delivered to date through the strategic housing development scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45399/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As part of the actions under the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (the Act) introduced new streamlined arrangements to enable planning applications for strategic housing developments (SHDs) of 100 housing units or more, or student accommodation or shared accommodation developments of 200 bed spaces or more, to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála (the Board) for determination.

As of end September 2019, the Board had granted permission for a total of 16,195 housing units (comprising 5,410 houses and 10,785 apartments) and 7,573 student bed spaces under the SHD arrangements. However, the recent review of these arrangements highlights that while they have generally been a success in providing a fast-track development consent process for developers of large-scale housing developments, the number of SHD permissions that have commenced development is less than might have been expected for the benefits being provided.

The Review Group noted that, of the 49 SHD permissions granted between January 2018 and 30 June 2019, only 18 (37%) had been activated in some way, either through enabling works or commencement of housing construction. While the majority of the SHD permissions granted are less than one year old, and this could be a relevant consideration regarding the current low activation rate, the Review Group recommended that the Department should continue to monitor the rate of activation of SHD permissions for a further period and if the activation rate does not increase, to circa 80%, consideration could be given to the introduction of a policy measure such as a “use-it-or-lose-it” provision to incentivise the commencement of works.

I have noted the finding of the Review Group regarding the lower than anticipated activation rates on foot of SHD permissions granted to date. Given the benefits for developers with regard

to time savings and consistency in decision making, and taking into account the significant public resources invested in the SHD arrangements, I consider it appropriate that developers should be sufficiently motivated to commence development on foot of an SHD permission, in order to ensure the objectives of the SHD arrangements are more clearly met.

Taking account of the relatively lower than expected activation rate of SHD permissions to date, and with a view to reducing the scope for the potential hoarding of sites with SHD permissions for the purpose of increasing site values, and notwithstanding the Review Group's recommendation to continue monitoring the activation rate for a further period, I consider that it would be timely to introduce a "use it or lose it" measure now. Arising from the introduction of such measure, developers in receipt of an SHD planning permission will be required to commence a certain level of development works within 18 months of the grant of permission, otherwise the permission will lapse. The necessary legislation to bring this into effect will be urgently progressed.

Local Authority Housing Data

1185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he can authorise construction starts on various local authority housing sites nationally, with particular reference to the need for a major surge in such development in view of the increased level of demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45472/19]

1189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of directly built new local authority houses allocated by the local authority to persons on the housing waiting list by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45476/19]

1192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authorities that have sought funding from his Department for the purpose of building or purchasing local authority houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45479/19]

1195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has sought or received from each local authority an up-to-date position in regard to the start-up of developments on various local authority sites nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45482/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1185, 1189, 1192 and 1195 together.

The delivery of new social housing is a priority for the Government as can be seen in the targeted delivery this year, of 10,000 new social homes through build, acquisition and lease, under Rebuilding Ireland. In addition, the Government's commitment to the delivery of social housing homes is evident from the National Development Plan 2018-2027, which provides for the delivery of 112,000 new social homes over the next decade, supported by capital funding of €11.6 billion.

All local authorities are being funded to significantly increase their delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland and a strong social housing construction pipeline is in place for local authorities and approved housing bodies. Social housing delivery targets for all local authorities have been set under Rebuilding Ireland to 2021 and are publicly available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-hous->

ing-targets-2019/. Progress against these targets is tracked on a quarterly basis, with details published on my Department's website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Details of the number of houses delivered in each local authority area, including construction and acquisition, are also available at that link. All such new social homes as they are delivered, are allocated to families and people of the social housing waiting lists of the local authorities.

The social housing delivery targets set for each local authority are in proportion to their waiting lists. Accordingly, as progress is made by each authority against their delivery targets, this will proportionally benefit those on individual waiting lists. The most recently available Summary of Social Housing Assessments relates to 2018 and, at national level, the number of households on the waiting list had decreased by 13,941 (-16.2%), compared to the previous assessment in June 2017, with 29 of the 31 local authorities reporting a decrease.

A strong social housing construction pipeline is in place, with a detailed breakdown of this contained in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is updated and published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 2 of 2019, is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/>. The Quarter 2 report reflected an increase in the scale of the social housing build programme, with over 1,500 schemes (or phases of schemes) in place, delivering over 22,000 new social housing homes. Of this total, over 7,300 new homes have already been delivered up to Quarter 2 of 2019, while over 6,400 additional new homes were under construction. Over 2,700 further homes were at the final pre-construction stage and the remainder were progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement.

The timing, delivery and tenanting of new social housing schemes is a matter in the first place for each local authority. I am pleased to see the progress being made on projects, building on what has been already delivered, but I am keen that all local authorities further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding is available to support their work in this regard.

Emergency Accommodation Data

1186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families including children in emergency housing accommodation by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45473/19]

1187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he can address the high number of families housed in emergency accommodation in lieu of local authority houses nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45474/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1186 and 1187 together.

My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The most recently published report, in respect of September 2019, shows that there were a total of 10,397 individuals in emergency accommodation, including 6,524 adults and 3,873 dependants (including 1,756 families). Data in relation to families and dependants are not collated on a county basis by my Department but are available at regional

level and are published on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_september_20191.pdf .

Supporting families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. In 2016, the Government published the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. Rebuilding Ireland is designed to significantly increase the supply of social housing by 50,000 homes in the period to 2021, double the output of overall housing to at least 25,000 homes per annum by 2020, support all tenure types (social, private and rental), and tackle homelessness comprehensively. In 2018, 8,000 new social homes were delivered nationally and this year, a further 10,000 new social homes will be delivered.

Budget 2020 has increased funding available to local authorities to provide homeless accommodation and related services to €166m, an increase of €20m on this year's budget. While the priority is to support families to secure a home, the Government is also committed to ensuring that appropriate emergency accommodation is available until a home can be provided. In this regard, the Government is providing funding to local authorities to develop and operate family hubs. To date, 29 family hubs have been developed nationally, providing almost 680 units of family accommodation.

Rebuilding Ireland is delivering significant results in supporting exits from homelessness. In 2018, 5,135 adults exited homelessness into homes, an 8.6% increase on 2017. I expect that the numbers of exits from homelessness will increase again in 2019.

Local Authority Housing Provision

1188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he has ongoing discussions with the various local authorities with a view to early action to provide permanent accommodation for families including children or lone applicants on the local authority waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45475/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In March of this year, I wrote to all local authorities setting out their social housing targets for 2019 across all delivery streams. These social housing targets are publicly available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-targets-2019/>.

Progress against targets is tracked on a quarterly basis. The most recent report sets out the position at the end of Quarter 2 of 2019 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/housing-statistics>.

I meet regularly with the Chief Executives of all the local authorities in relation to the advancement of social housing, in line with the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. I most recently met the Chief Executives in September, and that followed on from a Housing Summit, which I held with them in February.

Following my meetings with the Chief Executives, targeted sessions have been held between my Department and local authority senior management to specifically discuss social housing delivery.

I and my Department have ongoing and extensive engagement with all local authorities

across all delivery streams to ensure maximum delivery of homes for those who need them. The allocation of homes to those on the social housing waiting lists is, however, a matter entirely for the relevant Local Authority.

Question No. 1189 answered with Question No. 1185.

Local Authority Housing Funding

1190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding sought by each local authority for the purpose of providing local authority houses by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45477/19]

1197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which funding under the Rebuilding Ireland programme in respect of 2019 has been made available to or drawn down by Kildare County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45484/19]

1198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which his Department has directly funded the house building programme of Kildare County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45485/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1190, 1197 and 1198 together.

The implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is a key Government priority supported by significant annual investment. For 2019 alone, funding of €2.4 billion is being provided for all housing programmes with a further €2.63 billion available in 2020.

This investment will see the housing needs of almost 27,400 households being met in 2019, of which 10,000 will be new social housing homes delivered through build, acquisition and long term leasing programmes. In 2020, we are targeting delivery of over 11,000 homes through build, acquisition and leasing.

Below are details of both the capital and current funding my Department has provided to each local authority, including Kildare County Council, for the delivery of housing services under Rebuilding Ireland.

	2016 €m	2017 €m	2018 €m	2019 (to end Sept) €m
Carlow	12.0	17.7	22.5	20.3
Cavan	7.5	9.9	13.8	7.9
Clare	12.3	23.8	29.1	22.0
Cork City	58.2	47.5	86.3	63.2
Cork County	43.4	62.3	94.4	58.9
DL Rathdown	27.5	57.2	51.1	19.5
Donegal	12.3	23.0	25.1	16.0
Dublin City	230.0	301.8	439.9	303.3
Fingal	34.9	76.9	127.6	80.2
Galway City	13.4	20.5	28.7	23.9
Galway County	11.4	11.7	23.8	20.0

	2016 €m	2017 €m	2018 €m	2019 (to end Sept) €m
Kerry	17.1	25.4	45.5	28.5
Kildare	41.8	61.5	91.9	89.1
Kilkenny	16.5	24.4	42.8	31.3
Laois	10.4	17.0	13.4	11.5
Leitrim	3.7	2.9	5.0	4.0
Limerick	97.2	212.1	346.2	317.1
Longford	4.9	7.0	15.8	12.7
Louth	21.2	19.7	34.3	34.1
Mayo	14.7	15.1	18.0	18.3
Meath	27.7	30.2	64.4	38.1
Monaghan	8.9	17.2	16.5	15.3
Offaly	8.5	10.3	15.7	18.0
Roscommon	5.4	9.4	7.4	7.9
Sligo	12.2	15.2	20.1	14.7
South Dublin	52.8	71.9	126.2	66.3
Tipperary	24.2	30.3	43.6	24.8
Waterford	22.9	19.9	50.5	22.8
Westmeath	11.8	16.2	22.1	21.1
Wexford	19.5	29.4	46.3	26.0
Wicklow	15.0	11.9	42.1	31.4

The scale of the funding available has allowed us to approved a significant social housing build programme nationally, a detailed breakdown of which is contained in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is updated and published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 2 of 2019 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/>.

Local Authority Housing Funding

1191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the conditions applicable in respect of funding sought by local authorities for the purpose of providing directly built local authority houses in their functional areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45478/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Like all publicly-funded construction projects, the construction of new social housing must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF), the objectives of which are to ensure cost certainty, value for money and financial accountability.

There are nine stages of review in the CWMF, which my Department has streamlined to just four, for social housing construction projects. The working arrangement for this four-stage process means that local authorities forward design proposals and costings to my Department sequentially, as they advance the projects through their own planning work. As projects are being reviewed under one stage, work can continue on other stages of that project, as well as on other new build projects. To illustrate the non-onerous nature of this process, a summary of the

four stages is as follows:

Stage 1 – Forward Capital Appraisal to verify the business case and basic project suitability – *this is a light presentation of information; detailed designs and costs are not needed at this initial stage.*

Stage 2 – Forward Pre-planning outline design and cost check – *this involves the designs that are required for the Part 8 planning process and the outline costs; detailed designs and resulting costs are not needed at this stage until planning permission is obtained.*

Stage 3 – Pre-tender design and costs check – *this stage arises after the more detailed designs and cost estimates have been prepared by the local authority design team. If costs are consistent with the earlier stages, then this review will be swift.*

Stage 4 – Tender approval from Department – *the tenders have been received and assessed by the local authority and again, if costs are consistent with the earlier stages, this review will be swift.*

These stages are the minimum number to allow my Department's Secretary General - as Accounting Officer - to make the annual declaration regarding the proper management of public funds in terms of the CWMF. It also is what is required to meet the requirements of the C&AG on public funding oversight.

My Department also operates a single-stage approval process for smaller scale projects and a three-stage process for rapid build/modular build projects, where the contractor is delivering on a design/build basis. These arrangements demonstrate the Government's commitment to the accelerated delivery of new social housing.

My Department has no interest in unnecessarily prolonging the time involved in these approvals, other than to ensure compliance with Government-wide rules for capital project oversight. We will continue to work with local authorities to ensure that projects are progressed efficiently, while also delivering high quality design and good value for money for newly built social housing.

Question No. 1192 answered with Question No. 1185.

Vacant Properties

1193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the degree to which he can become directly involved in the upgrading, improving and reletting of local authority houses currently out of use and boarded up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45480/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs, are matters for each individual local authority under the Housing Acts. My Department is supportive of local authorities in bringing vacant social homes back to productive use and since 2014, under the Voids Programme, has provided funding of €145.5 million to support local authorities in returning almost 11,000 homes back to use. In addition, during 2019, further allocations of over €27 million were made to local authorities to assist in this regard.

While my Department will continue to support this activity with significant funding and in pressing the need for early re-letting of vacated social homes, elected Councillors also have a key role to play. It is important that Councillors oversee the work of their local authorities in this and other important housing areas.

Local Authority Housing Provision

1194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether procurement policies present an obstacle to the provision of much-needed local authority housing developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45481/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Social housing projects funded by this Department, like all publicly-funded construction projects, must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework, the objectives of which are to ensure greater cost certainty, better value for money and financial accountability. Also for such projects, the procurement procedures used need to be in line with EU and national procurement rules as appropriate.

To assist local authorities (and approved housing bodies) in this regard, a number of measures have been implemented by Government. These include the establishment of a framework for the provision of full integrated design team services (Architect-led) by the Office of Government Procurement in 2016, which has assisted local authorities (and approved housing bodies) across the country in reducing the time and cost associated with the procurement of design consultancy services, by offering a facility that has already been competitively tendered.

Similarly, the Office of Government Procurement established a framework of rapid build contractors (design & build) in 2017, which has also assisted local authorities (and approved housing bodies) across the country in running procurement competitions and advancing rapid build housing projects to site more efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, my Department has also worked with Dublin City Council on the establishment of a Design-Build Contractor Framework to deliver residential developments through the use of volumetric construction methods. This framework is now available to all local authorities and will open up additional opportunities to deliver volumetric/rapid delivery apartments for social housing use.

Public procurement arrangements are based on fairness, common sense and transparency and given the vast spending that is now happening for new social housing, it is appropriate that these approaches are followed. Properly applied, I do not believe that they present an obstacle in the development of social housing and I also believe that the use of various contractor frameworks, which have already been competitively tendered, is an effective way to accelerate the advancement of projects while complying with procurement procedures.

Question No. 1195 answered with Question No. 1185.

Local Authority Housing Funding

1196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department received applications for capital funding pending from the various local authorities for house building or renovation purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45483/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department receives social housing proposals from local authorities on a continuous basis, in the context of the delivery targets each authority is working towards under Rebuilding Ireland and in the context of the significant funding that is available to support this activity.

For 2019 alone, funding of €2.4 billion is being provided for all housing programmes, with a further €2.63 billion available in 2020. This investment will see the housing needs of almost 27,400 households being met in 2019, of which 10,000 will be new social housing homes delivered through build, acquisition and long term leasing programmes. In 2020, we are targeting the delivery of over 11,000 homes through build, acquisition and leasing.

The scale of the funding available has allowed us to approve a significant social housing build programme nationally, a detailed breakdown of which is contained in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is updated and published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to the end of Quarter 2 of 2019, is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/>.

We also have a range of programmes and initiatives available to local authorities to assist them to improve their existing social housing stock, for example, under the energy efficiency retrofitting programme for local authority social housing, where over 70,700 social homes have been insulated to date with funding support from the exchequer of some €139 million. The budget for this programme in 2019 is €25 million.

With the ready availability of funding and with each local authority working to deliver targets under Rebuilding Ireland, we will continue to receive and approve capital funding to the authorities on a daily basis and I have assured local authorities of the continued availability of this support for their work to deliver new social homes.

Questions Nos. 1197 and 1198 answered with Question No. 1190.

Water Quality

1199. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the recent recommendations from the EPA to Irish Water on considering installing ultraviolet disinfection to further ensure drinking water quality and the protection of public health at the Leixlip treatment plant. [45579/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): EPA audits of public drinking water supplies are an important way of checking how Irish Water and local authorities are performing in compliance with Drinking Water Regulations. These regulations provide the EPA with supervisory powers in relation to public water supplies.

I am aware of the EPA recommendation in its recent audit report in relation to the incident at the Leixlip treatment plant that led to the issuing of a boil water notice. The EPA recommended that “Irish Water should assess the feasibility of installing ultraviolet disinfection as an additional treatment barrier to *Cryptosporidium*/*Giardia* at Leixlip water treatment plant, and should submit the outcome of this assessment to the EPA”.

This was one of a number of recommendations made by the EPA following the incident and following an earlier audit from March this year, including the installation of pH correction, filter upgrade works and the installation of automatic shut-down systems. It will be a matter for Irish Water to comply with the recommendation to assess the feasibility of installing UV treat-

ment and to discuss the matter further with the EPA.

It should be noted that, in view of the scale and impact of the boil water notice and in the public interest, I have also asked the EPA to report to me on the conclusions of the latest investigations and any findings which may require a broader policy response. I will be meeting with the Managing Director of Irish Water and the CEO of Fingal County Council once I have received this report.

Water Quality

1200. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Irish Water and Fingal County Council failed to implement the main recommendations of a previous EPA audit of the Leixlip water treatment plant in March 2019, particularly relating to the failure to install automatic shutdown when critical plant alarms are not responded to; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this was a contributory factor to the recent incident which resulted in a boil water notice being enforced for over 600,000 consumers. [45580/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Leixlip water treatment plant is publicly operated by Fingal County Council through a Service Level Agreement with Irish Water. The EPA report of the audit of the recent incident at the plant, published on 30 October, found that the recommendations of the EPA's previous audit of the plant in March 2019 were not implemented. The audit noted that, in particular, the failure to install automatic shutdown when critical plant alarms are not responded to, was a contributory factor to the incident on 21 October which resulted in a Boil Water Notice for over 600,00 consumers supplied by the plant.

I am extremely concerned that the lessons and corrective actions required following the audit in March were not fully implemented. I have spoken directly with the Managing Director of Irish Water, the CEO of Fingal County Council, and the Director General of the EPA to better understand how this situation arose and ensure it does not arise again.

In view of the scale and impact of the boil water notice and in the public interest, I have also asked the EPA to report to me directly on the conclusions of the EPA investigations and any findings which may require a broader policy response. This report will include the EPA's view on the causes of the incident; if and how it could have been prevented; and its view on the response of Irish Water and of Fingal County Council.

I will be meeting with the Managing Director of Irish Water and the CEO of Fingal County Council once I have received this report. In the meantime, Irish Water and the Council must now respond to the EPA recommendations from the audit report arising from this latest incident.

It is important to note that once the problem at the water treatment plant was identified, the fault was quickly resolved. Since the incident, Irish Water and Fingal County Council have implemented automatic plant shutdown on high turbidity in clarified and filtered water and if there is a failure to respond to a turbidity alarm within 15 minutes.

Irish Water must now work closely with Fingal County Council to ensure there is no repeat of this type of incident.

Pesticide Use

1201. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the volume of a product (details supplied) used over the past ten years in the Burren National Park; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44521/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Glyphosate is the key ingredient in the product to which the Deputy refers. It is one of the most effective means of killing some of the most problematic invasive plant species, notably *Rhododendron ponticum*, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed and it is an essential herbicide in the control of other noxious weeds. Glyphosate is not broadcast-sprayed on any of our sites. It is used for spot spraying, with weedlickers and for treating stumps. Information in respect of the volume of the product used within the National Park is not retained.

I am advised that the use of glyphosate within our sites fully complies with the EU Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, which covers all aspects of pesticide use. The National Parks and Wildlife Service invasive species eradication programmes have, over many years mainly focussed on injection of herbicide into the plant, or application onto cuts made in the stems, rather than spraying, both of which greatly reduce the quantity used and human contact with the herbicide. There are other methods of removing smaller weeds being used in our sites, for example the Department is trialling hot water weed remover on some pathways in parks.

Commemorative Events

1202. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department will co-ordinate a range of appropriate State commemorative events to mark the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of St. Colmcille in December 2020 in co-operation with the National Museum, the National Monuments Service, an organisation (details supplied) and Donegal County Council; and if she will liaise with counterparts in governments internationally to mark the anniversary. [44379/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am aware of the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of St. Colmcille in December 2020. My officials have had initial discussions with Foras na Gaeilge regarding how the anniversary might be marked.

As yet, I have not received an approach from Donegal County Council or the organisation referred to by the Deputy on the matter, but I would of course be open to a discussion between my Department and either party to help ensure that this anniversary will be marked appropriately.

Earlier this year, the heritage of Colmcille was celebrated at a special event in the Music Room in Christ Church Cathedral on Saturday 8 June, the eve of the Feast of Colmcille. The event was part of a partnership programme between Foras na Gaeilge and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which promotes the use of Irish and Scottish Gaelic in Ireland and in Scotland and between the two countries.

Special Areas of Conservation

1203. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to allow bogland to be used for golf courses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44422/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, certain activities within special areas of conservation, special protection areas and natural heritage areas may only take place with my prior consent, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht or with the prior consent of the relevant public authority.

In assessing an application for consent, the consent authority would assess the potential impact of the proposed activity on the ecological integrity of the protected site or sites in question.

Therefore, any proposal for the development of a golf course within a protected site would have to comply with the relevant provisions of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, as applicable.

Information and Communications Technology

1204. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of computers in her Department that still use an operating system (details supplied) in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44707/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department undertakes regular technology updates and has replaced the vast majority of user pcs in recent years.

Of the 645 pcs deployed, 16 pcs have the operating systems to which the Deputy is referring. All such machines will be replaced or upgraded over the coming weeks.

Information and Communications Technology

1205. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department will not be forced to pay additional premium payments to a company (details supplied) once support for an operating system expires in January 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44723/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I understand that my Department has a small number of machines operating on the operating system to which the Deputy refers. All such machines will be replaced or upgraded over the coming weeks.

My Department will not be required to pay additional premium payments while these machines are being replaced.

Information and Communications Technology

1206. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to protect her Department in the event of a malware attack or security risks as a result of the failure to upgrade computers from an operating system (details supplied) in her Department and the agencies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44739/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department takes ICT Security extremely seriously.

I understand that there are a limited number of machines operating on the system to which the Deputy refers remaining on the Department's ICT Network and that these will be replaced over the coming weeks. My Department operates a layered security model which will protect the Department's ICT assets during this replacement process.

Departmental Staff Data

1207. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of full and part-time staff employed in her Department; the number of such staff being paid at the minimum wage rate of pay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44842/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am informed that the total number of staff in my Department as at end September 2019 is 692.

Of these, six are on part time contracts and the remainder are on full-time contracts. The Department's records show that seventy-nine staff are also currently availing of either the civil service work sharing scheme or of statutory parental leave and, therefore, work less than conditioned full-time hours.

The six part time staff in my Department are paid at the current national minimum wage of €9.80 per hour.

Heritage Council Funding

1208. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding provided to the National Biodiversity Data Centre in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [44888/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) is the name given to a programme established by the Heritage Council in 2006. It addresses the need identified by the Council that data on Ireland's biodiversity be collected recorded and fully accessible to the public. The NBDC is operated on contract under the aegis of the Heritage Council and receives funding from a variety of sources towards specific components of its work, including my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Environmental Protection Agency and Bord Bia. As the managing authority, funding provided to the NBDC is a matter for the Heritage Council.

Funding provided by my Department to the Heritage Council in respect of specific deliverables of the Programme is detailed below:

Date	Funding
2015	€377,828.75
2016	€460,000.39
2017	€447,158.00
2018	€444,000.00
2019 (YTD)	€168,727.50

Heritage Council Funding

1209. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding provided to the Heritage Council in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [44889/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The voted funding allocation to the Heritage Council each year is published in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Revised Estimates Volume. The funding provided from 2015 to 2019 is set out below.

Heritage Council Funding 2015-2019		
		Total
2015 Capital	2015 Current	
€1,688,000	€3,055,000	€4,743,000
2016 Capital	2016 Current	
€1,688,000	€3,555,000	€5,243,000
2017 Capital	2017 Current	
€2,688,000	€3,566,000	€6,254,000
2018 Capital	2018 Current	
€2,688,000	€3,689,000	€6,377,000
2019 Capital	2019 Current	
€2,688,000	€3,900,000	€6,588,000

Heritage Promotion

1210. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will consider relaunching the heritage town programme or similar to promote rural towns and villages and in effort to decentralise tourism; if consideration has been given to increasing the number of heritage officers and offices in rural towns and villages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44900/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I understand that the *Heritage Town Programme*, referenced by the Deputy, was an initiative promoted by Fáilte Ireland in the 1990s. As Fáilte Ireland is under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Tourism, Transport and Sport, he may be in a position to advise on any possible successor to that programme.

The Deputy may be interested in the *Historic Towns Initiative (HTI)* which is a joint undertaking between my Department and the Heritage Council. Historic towns include those of medieval and pre-medieval foundation, plantation towns, planned estate towns and those established around local industries. Each local authority is invited to apply in respect of one historic town with an indicative minimum population of 1,500 inhabitants. Priority is given to projects that are 'plan-led' and likely to make a meaningful contribution to the heritage-led regeneration of the town. On 27 February this year, along with the Heritage Council, I announced funding of €1 million, to be shared by six towns under the 2019 Initiative.

These towns are

- Kiltrush, County Clare
- Letterkenny, County Donegal

- Ballina, County Mayo
- Navan, County Meath
- Boyle, County Roscommon
- Nenagh, County Tipperary

I intend to retain this funding in 2020. While there are no specific plans at present to revise the scheme my Department is currently engaged in drafting *Heritage Ireland 2030*, the Government's commitment to a revitalised and refreshed National Heritage Plan. Any revision or extension of this particular initiative will be informed by this process.

My colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, also has programmes to assist rural development. His Department's Town and Village Renewal Scheme is a key part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and is part of a package of national and local support measures to rejuvenate rural towns and villages throughout Ireland. Applications can be made under this scheme for funding for the enhancement of heritage and/or other community assets.

In relation to the second part of the question, County Heritage Officers are employed by local authorities in partnership with the Heritage Council under the auspices of the Heritage Officer Programme, which was initiated in 1999. It is a matter for each local authority to decide whether to employ a Heritage Officer.

Creative Ireland Programme

1211. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the budget allocation for the Creative Ireland programme in each of the years 2017, 2018 and 2019; and the budget allocation for same in 2020. [45001/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As the Creative Ireland Programme is a whole-of-Government policy initiative, a number of departments and agencies provide financial support to activities that are encompassed by different pillars of the Programme. The work of the Creative Ireland Programme office is focused on Creative Youth, Creative Communities, the National Creativity Fund, and other supporting elements of the programme, and my Department provides an annual allocation to the Programme office to support these activities.

In 2017, my Department allocated a budget of €5 million directly to the Creative Ireland Programme office to establish and deliver a series of key objectives in its first year. A full expenditure breakdown of that 2017 budget allocation is available on <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/library>.

A budget of €5.3 million was provided directly to the Programme office by my Department in 2018 to drive its implementation at local level and fund specific projects, actions and priorities which further the wider aims of the Programme. As with the 2017 budget, a full breakdown of expenditure is available at the above website.

In 2019, my Department allocated a sum of €7.15 million to the Programme office. A full breakdown of this 2019 budget expenditure will be published online early in 2020.

The matter of funding allocations to the Programme office for 2020 will be examined in the context of the revised estimates published in December and have yet to be finalised.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

1212. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of contracts of €25,000 or more that have been awarded by her Department or bodies under her aegis that were found to be non-compliant with procurement guidelines in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45060/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department strives to ensure that there is an appropriate focus on best procurement practice and that procedures are in place to ensure compliance with all relevant guidelines to the greatest extent possible.

Where exceptions do arise, as provided for under the provisions of Circular 40/02, the Department provides the details of such instances to the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The details of instances that arose in 2017 and 2018 are included in the Statement on Internal Financial Control which forms part of the Annual Appropriation Accounts published by the Comptroller and Auditor General at <https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/2018/vote-33.pdf> and <https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/2019/Vote-33-Culture-Heritage-and-the-Gaeltacht.pdf> respectively.

Details pertaining to any instances which may arise for 2019 will be contained in my Department's 2019 Annual Appropriation Account which will fall to be published by the Comptroller and Auditor General in due course.

Procurement within the bodies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for which the bodies themselves are responsible.

Heritage Sites

1213. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the date on which the Hill of Tara conservation management plan will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45297/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Hill of Tara is one of Ireland's premier national monuments and is of international prominence and importance. In recent years, it has been subject to extensive research by the Discovery Programme, funded by my Department, through which our knowledge and understanding of the site has been greatly increased.

Against a background of high visitor footfall, my Department has been developing a conservation management plan for the state-owned lands at the Hill and is leading a working group of relevant stakeholders, including the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for day to day management, Meath County Council, the Heritage Council and the Discovery Programme. This work has been undertaken with the objective of securing consensus among stakeholders and progressing, completing and publishing an updated Management Plan.

The preparation of the Plan has included a monument condition survey to inform the conservation needs of the monuments on the State-owned lands. An online visitor survey, as well as a visitor profile, was also undertaken by the Dublin Institute of Technology at the request of the Discovery Programme and Heritage Council. My Department is now reviewing all relevant documentation to ensure the Plan fulfils its aim and primary focus with a view to bringing the

draft Plan to completion as soon as possible.

The Plan will focus on conservation issues and will inform a list of priority conservation and site management actions and measures to be implemented over its lifetime. It will also guide future interventions on the site, aided by the ongoing monitoring of visitor numbers by the OPW. It will concentrate on the lands that are in the ownership of the State and as such, it will not, nor is it intended to, address land use and planning issues in the wider environs of Tara.

Parking and traffic management, as well as visitor facilities outside the area of the State-owned lands, are matters for the local authority although the Plan may inform related deliberations and actions. My Department is available to advise and assist the local authority with any such proposals from the point of view of protecting the archaeology and amenity of the Hill of Tara itself.

Departmental Expenditure

1214. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenditure for her Department, both current and capital, to date; the expected expenditure by year end; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45439/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Details of expenditure by my Department and all Government departments are published by the Department of Finance on a monthly basis at:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b40401-fiscal-monitor-september-2019/>.

Expenditure for my Department to 30th September 2019 amounted to approximately €230 million; €38 million in capital funds and approximately €192 million in current funds.

While it is too early at this point in time to accurately forecast the full end of year outturn, I can advise that no significant savings are envisaged at present. All expenditure within my Department's vote will continue to be carefully monitored between now and year end to ensure the best use of available financial resources.

EU Directives

1215. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 37 of 19 September 2019, if there has been recent developments in respect of discussions with the REACH committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45440/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question No 37 of 19 September my Department is aware that the EU draft Regulation on the use of lead in gunshot could provide a range of difficulties to transition to new guns/gunshot for many gun owners in Ireland, including farmers and hunters, as many gun owners could have to make alternative arrangements, in many cases to purchase new guns. I am committed to ensuring that this matter is addressed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders and that all potential impacts are fully considered. This process of consultation is continuing. All proposals will be comprehensively evaluated, including extended lead-in times.

In this regard, my Department recently submitted a document for circulation to the REACH Committee of the European Union suggesting an extended lead-in time to enable hunters and

farmers and other stakeholders in the country to make the necessary arrangements.

Brexit Issues

1216. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the outcome of the most recent discussions she has had with her counterpart in the UK Government and with Departments and agencies in Northern Ireland in respect of issues that will arise due to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45487/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As I have previously advised the House in my response to Dáil Question No. 273 of 19 September last, negotiations on both the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement and political declaration on the framework for the EU-UK future relationship, were conducted on behalf of the EU27 by the EU's Chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, and the Commission's Article 50 Taskforce.

An agreement was reached on a revised Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration between the EU and the UK and was endorsed unanimously by the European Council on 17 October. It now requires ratification by the European and British Parliaments. On 28 October, EU 27 leaders unanimously agreed an extension to the Article 50 process, with a view to allowing for the final ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. This averted the risk of a no deal Brexit on 31 October, by extending the deadline to 31 January 2020. However, if the Agreement is ratified before then the UK exit could take place earlier.

We continue work to prepare for the UK's exit. Even with an agreement, it is still the case that the UK is leaving the EU and this will bring change. It is important that Ireland is ready for that change, both for our citizens and our businesses. We will continue our preparations for all scenarios.

As I have previously advised, in the course of my visit to London last year, in connection with the GB 18 Programme, I met with Matt Hancock MP, the then UK Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. I also met with Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs in the course of my visit to Glasgow in connection with GB18. At all of these meetings, while noting that Brexit negotiations are conducted between the EU and the UK, Brexit related matters were discussed in addition to other matters of mutual interest. While I again met with Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs earlier this year in Dublin, this was related to the launch of the *Words that Bind Us* project and did not include a discussion on Brexit or other policy matters.

In the interests of completeness I would also like to advise that following the visit of the then Aire Stáit, Joe McHugh T.D. to Glasgow in May 2018, Údarás na Gaeltachta in recognition of, and in preparation for Brexit, agreed a Trade Office arrangement with the Scottish Chambers of Commerce at the end of 2018. The arrangement, under which, reciprocal trade offices are being established to provide business support services to companies and facilitate investment and trade opportunities, will act as a valuable resource for SME's looking to expand their international business to business partnerships.

Wildlife Protection

1217. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of the activities of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in combatting wildlife crime; the successes in relation to same in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make

a statement on the matter. [45577/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2018 are the primary statutes designed to afford protection to the various species in the State and which set out the framework for dealing with wildlife crime. In addition, the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 include provisions affording strict protection to a number of species and habitats.

Wildlife crime takes many forms ranging from persecution of badgers, illegal hunting of deer species, illegal hunting of hares with packs of dogs generally known as lurchers, trapping of wild birds such as native finches for illegal trade, willfully disturbing or destroying the eggs or nests of wild birds, poisoning of raptor species and the illegal cutting of hedges during the nesting season for birds.

While much wildlife crime is local we should not underestimate the dangers involved in investigating it as many perpetrators have links with other more serious crime.

Within my Department, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has responsibility for the protection and conservation of Ireland's natural heritage, including species protection and biodiversity at national level. The NPWS is therefore dedicated to looking after our species and habitats and NPWS frontline conservation Rangers are deployed through a regional structure. Some of their work entails scientific research and survey work and the monitoring of compliance with national and European law in relation to nature conservation and wildlife crime across the country. The team also conduct patrols and site visits to enforce the various provisions of national and EU legislation and investigate reports of breaches of legislation including the various types of wildlife crime I have already described. My Department works closely with An Garda Síochána who are also specifically empowered under the Acts to investigate alleged wildlife crime offences and to prosecute as they see fit.

In the period 2013 to date in 2019 some 80 prosecutions were taken by my Department for breaches of the Wildlife Acts. As far as counties Leitrim and Sligo are concerned while there have been no convictions for breaches of the Wildlife Acts since 2013 in these two counties, it is a fact while bringing perpetrators of crime to justice is important, the success of dealing with wildlife crime cannot be judged on this alone, as ensuring compliance in the first instance is clearly of critical importance.

Given the concerns that I have surrounding the nature of wildlife crime, an internal Wildlife Crime Group staffed by field staff and senior Departmental officials meets regularly, most recently last week. The Wildlife Crime Group has pursued many important initiatives including the organisation of a major Wildlife Crime Conference last year which was attended by An Garda Síochána and representatives from organisations in Britain and Northern Ireland dealing with wildlife crime.

I am also committed to ensuring that we continue our covert actions with other agencies, including An Garda Síochána and the I.S.P.C.A to counteract these illegal activities.

Arts Funding

1218. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding that has been provided to arts and culture centres in counties Sligo and Leitrim; the capital investment that will be available in the coming years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45578/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The table below shows the funding provided by my Department to arts and culture centres in counties Sligo and Leitrim in the past 4 years.

Organisation	County	Grant allocated	Project details	Status of grant	Year
The Model Arts & Niland Gallery	Sligo	10,000	Exhibition Aisteach - the Avant-Garde Archive of Ireland	Fully drawn down	2018
Hawk's Well Theatre	Sligo	550,000	To refurbish and enhance the existing facility.	Not yet drawn down	2017
Teach Mór-ríon Out-reach Centre CCE	Sligo	7,550	Sound system/ Projector / Screen / Staging & storage	Not yet drawn down	2017
The Model Arts & Niland Gallery	Sligo	20,000	Projector, equipment and repairs to the floors and roof	Not yet drawn down	2017
Hawk's Well Theatre	Sligo	8,728	Lights / External steps	Fully drawn down	2016
The Model Arts & Niland Gallery	Sligo	10,000	Computers / phone upgrades / heating upgrades	Fully drawn down	2016
The Model Arts & Niland Gallery	Sligo	5,000	Redevelopment of website	Fully drawn down	2016
The Dock/ Leitrim County Council	Leitrim	128,337	Health & safety and development project of The Dock	Partially drawn down	2017
North Leitrim Glens Development Company Ltd	Leitrim	50,000	Repairs and refurbishment project at the Glens	Not yet drawn down	2017
Anaglyph Ltd (Leitrim Sculpture Centre)	Leitrim	20,000	Upgrading the centre	Not yet drawn down	2017

I am also pleased to state that I have just announced a new €4.7m capital investment funding scheme for arts and culture centres across the country. Applications are now open for the Cultural Capital Scheme which will run from 2019-2022 and focus on enhancing the existing stock of arts and culture centres throughout the country. It will also prioritise carbon footprint reduction in line with the Government's action on climate change. Projects that provide additional capacity for artists and artistic production particularly in arts centres will also be favoured. The Scheme builds on the success of the former Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018

which saw 134 organisations in 26 counties receive funding to refurbish and enhance their arts and culture facilities. The funding is part of my Department's commitment to a €40m capital investment in local arts and culture infrastructure nationwide contained in *Project Ireland 2040 "Investing in our Culture, Language & Heritage 2018-2027"*.

Applications are being invited under three separate Streams as set out below.

* **Stream A** will offer grants up to €50,000 for small enhancement/expansion/ refurbishment projects which may involve construction works to arts and culture facilities and/or upgrading of equipment.

* **Stream B** will offer grants from €50,000 up to €300,000 for larger enhancement /expansion/ refurbishment projects involving construction works to arts and culture facilities.

* **Stream C** will be a separate scheme aimed at the upgrading of visual artists' workspaces. Applications for this Stream will be invited separately.

Further information on the Streams A & B of the Cultural Capital Scheme 2019 – 2022 are available on my Department's website at <https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/grants-and-funding/>

Hare Coursing Regulation

1219. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason for lifting the total ban on hare net licences in view of her previous statements regarding the damage the RHD2 disease could potentially inflict on the hare population; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45087/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department issued revised licences for the netting and tagging of hares for coursing last month to allow the netting of hares on a managed and restricted basis and only in areas unaffected by the Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD2) virus. Revised licences have issued to the Irish Coursing Clubs with additional conditions permitting netting outside of areas where wild hares and rabbits have tested positive for the virus.

At the same time, it has been decided to carry our field studies at four coursing clubs, which will involve veterinary and virology expertise and input, in order to supplement existing knowledge of the prevalence and nature of RHD2.