



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 21 Samhain 2019

Thursday, 21 November 2019

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions

Roads Maintenance Funding

1. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether there is sufficient funding provided for maintenance and improvement of local and regional roads in particular; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48417/19]

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Does the Minister believe there is sufficient funding provided for maintenance and improvement of local and regional roads and will he make a statement on the matter? As he is aware, successive years of under-investment have left Ireland's regional and local roads at crisis point. Average spending in the last six years shows a deficit of nearly 40% in terms of the Department's own estimate of what is required, which is close to €600 million per year just to stand still. This figure does not take account of the many years of under-investment which have built up and left our roads in such a poor state.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I thank the Deputy for the question. The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is a statutory function of each local authority under the Roads Act 1993, as amended, with works funded by local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The current arrangements in place regarding retention of local property tax receipts mean that the four Dublin councils are largely self-funding for works on regional and local roads since 2015. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport provides supplementary grant assistance to road authorities and in recent years has supported local authorities in developing a road pavement management system, MapRoad, with a view to promoting effective asset management. My Department also continues to emphasise to local authorities the importance of prioritising investment in the road

network when allocating their own resources.

Analysis undertaken by my Department for the strategic framework for investment in land transport, published in 2015, estimated on a conservative basis that expenditure of €580 million per annum was needed to keep the regional and local road network in a steady-state condition. Updated analysis puts this figure at €630 million, the figure to which Deputy MacSharry referred. There were major cutbacks in funding for the road network in general during the recession. Project Ireland 2040 provides for a gradual increase in funding for regional and local roads and there has been a significant increase in Exchequer funding, particularly in the last two years. The €483 million allocated this year represents an increase of nearly 50% compared to 2017. However, the amount available is not sufficient to achieve steady-state levels of investment. For this reason funding continues to be directed primarily at the maintenance and renewal of the regional and local road network.

Within the budget available to my Department, the main regional and local road grant programmes are focused on specific policy objectives, such as surface sealing to protect the road surface from water damage, road strengthening based on pavement condition rating to lengthen the life of roads and a discretionary grant scheme which allows for a specified range of activities including winter maintenance. These three grant programmes account for most of the grant funding and are allocated taking into account the length of the road network and traffic factors in a particular local authority area.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: That really does not answer the question at all. We are currently spending €483 million per annum. By the Minister's own admission the updated figure for what we need to spend is €630 million. I do not like the air of passing the buck yet again, as if this was a matter for somebody else and the Minister was just a non-executive director for transport and really it was the local authorities' problem. We must manage this process, take responsibility for it and ensure that whether it is from the Minister's home of Enniskerry or my home of Strandhill, or whether it is Dún Laoghaire or Dunquin, local and regional roads form the very backbone of our economy. Some 94% of the road networks and around 54% of all road traffic are on local and regional roads. They are in a disastrous state. What is the Government doing about it? The Taoiseach in his manifesto, the programme for Government, said that Ireland's infrastructure lags behind other European countries. What has the Government realistically done?

Deputy Shane Ross: I thought I had specified a fair amount of this already to the Deputy. I will continue. Limited funding is also being made available for road improvement schemes. The national development plan provides specifically for the implementation of 12 road improvement schemes over the next number of years, subject to necessary planning and business case approvals. I am pleased to note that to date construction of three of these schemes has already been completed, namely the Dingle relief road, the Adamstown and Nangor road upgrades and the Portlaoise southern distributor road. Any additional improvement projects proposed by local authorities for grant funding will be assessed by my Department on a case by case basis. Projects submitted for consideration need to comply with the requirements of the public spending code and my Department's capital appraisal framework.

Progress is being made in terms of restoring funding, which has come from a low of just over €300 million to what the Deputy cited, €480 million, today. That is a 50% increase in the last two years. It will take more time to reach the levels needed for adequate maintenance and renewal of the network and this underlines the importance of the statutory road authorities'

funding contribution.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: We had a motion down last February calling on the Government to take urgent action to respond to the National Oversight and Audit Commission, NOAC, report. Has the Minister identified any change in the data that is collated by the road asset management system his Department uses to track the condition of the roads? We need to come up with a strategic plan that will increase this work to a level where we stand still. By the Minister's own admission, that will require €630 million. We cannot spend more years building to that level because the legacy position continues to worsen. What is the Government's strategic plan to get us up to speed, make the roads safe and reduce commuting times?

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy has asked the same question three times in a row.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: One answer will do.

Deputy Shane Ross: He wants a different answer to each question which is somewhat demanding and a little unrealistic. He referred to the National Oversight and Audit Commission, which each year publishes a local authority performance indicator report. The report for 2018 was published two months ago, in September. The data in the report are sourced from the map road asset management system for regional and local roads, the development of which the Department has supported for some years. The data include an up-to-date road schedule of public roads, a record of all payment-related works and information on road surface types and road pavement conditions. The 2018 report indicates a 5% increase in the percentage of regional roads with the poorest condition rating between 2015 and 2018, but also increases of 8% and 19% in the top two condition rating categories, respectively. In the case of local primary roads, there was a significant increase in the percentage of regional roads in the top two categories in the 2015 to 2018 period. NOAC, an independent body, did not arrive at the same conclusions as the Deputy. It found that the trend indicated an improvement in the condition of regional and local primary roads.

Public Transport Provision

2. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the upgrading of the northern commuter line; the details of the purchase of additional trains and carriages; when these will be operational; the long-term plans for the DART expansion on the route; and when such an expansion will be completed [48277/19]

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I am very fortunate to represent the constituency of Fingal which has a very fast-growing population. The area is served by the northern commuter line which is full to bursting, not only at peak times but nearly all the time. I use the train service. The alternative for many people who cannot use it is to use the M1 motorway. As the Minister will be aware, the M1 is like a car park for much of the time every morning. We desperately need additional transport to service the needs of my constituency, which is absorbing much of the housing need for north County Dublin.

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy is probably aware that there are three significant developments under way to expand capacity on the northern line. These are the expansion of the commuter rail fleet; the expansion of the DART fleet; and the electrification of the northern commuter line and its integration within the overall DART network.

In recent weeks, Government approved the purchase of 41 additional intercity railcars. These additional railcars will be added to the existing rail fleet and will benefit commuters across the greater Dublin area, including passengers on the northern line. I am informed that once these carriages have entered into service, capacity on the northern line will increase by approximately 20% as compared with today, which will be a very welcome boost to capacity on the line. It is expected that these railcars will begin entering service by late 2021.

The other two developments I referred to form part of the overall DART expansion programme, a programme which will roughly double the capacity of the greater Dublin area commuter rail network. The first of these developments is the proposed significant expansion of the fleet. In May this year, the National Transport Authority, NTA, and Iarnród Éireann commenced a procurement pre-qualifying competition. Its intention is to put in place a ten-year framework to purchase a minimum of 300 trains and possibly up to 600, if needed. This fleet will be a mixture of fully electric fleet and bi-mode, or battery electric, fleet. The inclusion of battery electric fleet will allow the trains to be deployed on the northern line in advance of the second aspect of the broader programme which is the subsequent electrification of the entire line up to Drogheda.

As to timelines, the process of having rail fleet built is a lengthy one and it will take between three and four years after the award of the contract before these new battery electric trains start to be delivered, probably at the end of 2023 or in 2024. It is not possible to confirm exact delivery dates until the fleet supplier is appointed. Timelines for the electrification of the line will be finalised as part of the development of the programme level business case which I expect to receive next year. As mentioned, additional capacity will be added to the line in advance of that aspect of the overall programme.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

I hope the Deputy can see that there are a number of very positive developments under way with regard to the northern line.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: There is a pressing need for additional capacity now. Passenger numbers are increasing by a minimum of 5% each year and capacity is already lagging behind. This is, therefore, a serious issue. A by-election will be held in my constituency next week and people are considering which candidate they will choose. Councillor Ann Graves and I have been knocking on doors. The by-election gives people an opportunity to think about where they live and what they want. The issue of transport is raised constantly right across the constituency. We have very low level of worker participation in the constituency, meaning most people have to leave the area in which they live to go to work. They do not have a choice because there is not much employment locally. People have to travel and are doing so in greater numbers. They need to travel into Dublin but cannot get on to the trains. I am already receiving reports of people becoming unwell on the trains because of overcrowding. I ask the Minister to confine his answer to what he might be able to do to assist these people in the short term because the need is current?

Deputy Shane Ross: I fully accept that there is overcrowding. That is absolutely undoubtedly true, not just in the Deputy's constituency but, as I have seen, at rush hour all around the greater Dublin area. The flipside of that is that public transport has become a great success. Publicly-owned transport, which would appeal to the Deputy, is working very well. It is correct that the numbers using it have mushroomed in recent years.

What I addressed in my reply were the short-term, medium-term and long-term ambitions. If we were running empty trains, the Deputy would be equally critical. What we are trying to do is to respond to the problems that are created by a successful and booming economy with near full employment and by the fact that public transport has become the vehicle of choice for so many commuters at this time. I am not saying that in a self-congratulatory sense. I am simply saying that these are the problems that will arise when one has a successful transport system. It will become overcrowded. What we are doing, which I have listed, is remedying the problem with a short-term, medium-term and longer-term plan. I have explained these plans to the Deputy but I will go into them in more detail when the Leas-Cheann Comhairle gives me a little more time.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister will have another minute to expand.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: With respect, the Minister did sound a little self-congratulatory, if he does not mind me saying so.

Deputy Shane Ross: Maybe it is.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: If the economy in Fingal was booming, people would not have to leave the area because there would be jobs available locally but that is not the case. The Minister is using a very odd measurement when he argues that the success of public transport is measured by the fact that it is overcrowded. That speaks to a lack of public transport capacity. The Taoiseach, who leads the Government, is fond of trying to out-green the Green Party, much as he protests that he is not. If we are to move away from cars, as people want to do because, God knows, nobody wants to be stuck on the M1 which is like a car park in the mornings, we need to start acting now. People need the option of public transport now. This problem is not just at peak times but all of the time. In the absence of a legal entitlement to family-friendly working hours, people are not in a position to vary their working hours and have to travel to Dublin on trains. People are becoming unwell because of overcrowding on the trains.

Deputy Shane Ross: We are talking about rail. Improvements were made to peak-time services last year and to off peak-time services, to which the Deputy alluded, this year. There are two fundamental constraints. One is the need to physically expand the fleet through the purchase of additional carriages, while the second is the need to improve the overall management of the network. We are moving on both those issues very quickly. On the fleet, I brought a memorandum to Government on the business case for the purchase of 41 additional intercity railcars, which it approved a couple of weeks ago. It is expected that the new fleet will be delivered by 2021.

Separately, in May, the NTA and Iarnród Éireann commenced a ten-year procurement framework for electric and battery electric units, which will massively expand the fleet. That expansion will include the northern line to which the Deputy refers. In the summer, the Government approved the development of a new national train control centre and contracts for this are expected to be awarded before the end of this year. In the medium and longer term, there is ongoing development of BusConnects, the DART expansion and MetroLink, each of which will increase capacity dramatically.

Transport Policy

3. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered establishing a transport security unit to tackle widespread and dangerous antisocial behaviour on public transport and at public transport hubs. [48418/19]

Deputy John Lahart: If a hallmark of decent, dynamic and effective public transport system is its ability to carry all the passengers who seek to use it, then of equal importance is that such passengers, especially those who abandon their cars in favour of public transport, must be safe and secure, particularly as we move to the welcome 24-hour bus services in Dublin. Recent figures show that the incidence of antisocial behaviour across the public transport system is escalating. We have raised this matter since before the 2016 general election. What progress has the Minister made in providing security services across our public transport fleet in the aftermath of our raising the matter on a number of occasions in the Chamber?

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputy for his question on a very serious and worrying matter that has increasingly come to the fore in recent times. I am glad to have the chance to clarify the facts surrounding this issue and to detail the ways in which it is being addressed.

The safety and security of public transport passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with antisocial behaviour, are important matters that, first and foremost, must be managed by every public transport company, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána where appropriate.

While the vast majority of public transport passenger journeys occur without incident, I am of course concerned to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of all passengers and staff.

Following representations from the National Bus and Rail Union, NBRU, in respect of this matter, my Department wrote to the three CIÉ companies, seeking their views both on the issue of antisocial behaviour and about ensuring the safety of passengers and staff. In their responses, all three companies stressed their strong and close working relationships with An Garda Síochána.

I also wrote to the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, to seek his views on how we could best address the issue of antisocial behaviour on our public transport system. It is important to note that the allocation of all Garda resources, including the manner in which Garda personnel are deployed, is solely a decision for the Garda Commissioner and his management team.

Last week, I received a response from the Minister for Justice and Equality outlining the recommendations of a report that he had received from An Garda Síochána on the issue of antisocial behaviour.

The letter advised that An Garda Síochána does not propose to establish a specialist or dedicated unit of the force to police the rail network and further stated that effective local community policing efforts can meet the policing needs of the rail network and its stakeholders.

The report by An Garda Síochána proposes that the Railway Safety Advisory Council, RSAC, will advise the Garda as to the priority rail locations, where the Garda Bureau of Community Engagement will facilitate meetings with local Garda management to ensure that an appropriate policing response is delivered.

Among the proposed strategies to be put in place by An Garda Síochána are: regular liaison with the RSAC; identification of priority hot spots; facilitation of local Garda management meetings with stakeholders; assignment of local community-policing gardaí; crime-prevention advice to transport service providers; and increased liaison at the planning phase of key events, such as concerts, sporting occasions and public meetings.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

The Minister for Justice and Equality has been advised by An Garda Síochána that the Garda superintendent of community engagement and public safety and the RSAC will keep the above actions under review and subject to an annual meeting.

I understand that An Garda Síochána met the RSAC to discuss the issue of antisocial behaviour on our public transport network and that further engagement and initiatives are planned. Following that engagement, I note and welcome the recent deployment of gardaí to public transport locations and to DART, Luas and commuter rail services under Operation Twintrack.

Deputy John Lahart: I thank the Minister for the response. It is not unexpected. Our position on this side of the House has been consistent. People who use public transport need to know that they can travel safely, whether on a bus, a DART, a Luas or an intercity train. A number of measures have been brought in by transport companies, including text alerts. The number of commuters who have used the text alert indicates an alarming rise in antisocial behaviour, ranging from menacing low-grade behaviour on buses to attacks and assaults on drivers and staff. Other jurisdictions have dedicated transport police so that passengers who take the train or anybody who is intent on carrying out any kind of antisocial behaviour knows that there is a possibility that an officer or member of transport police will show up at some stage on a route, whether on a tram or a train. We know that the Luas has security but they do not have the powers to search, detain and arrest. There has been a gradual creep across the public transport system. In my constituency, a stone was thrown through the window of a bus and bus services were withdrawn. The answer from the Garda Commissioner is not robust enough. What is the Minister's view on ensuring the safety of passengers?

Deputy Shane Ross: I will make my views clear. I will do everything that I can to facilitate a solution to the difficulties which the Deputy quite rightly underlines and to see that staff and passengers are properly protected. I have given an update on what I have done. I will facilitate anything the Garda Commissioner and Minister for Justice and Equality feel is necessary in any way that I can. It is a matter of the operations of the Garda and I must respect and support decisions made by the Garda Commissioner. I will not second-guess him or interfere with his decisions. He has decided that he will not introduce a dedicated unit, for all sorts of reasons that he has given. I have received a letter from the Minister for Justice and Equality about the measures which he is prepared to and is going to take to safeguard Irish citizens and the staff of all transport companies. I will make that letter available to Deputy Lahart.

Deputy John Lahart: Does the Minister, as is the case with his counterparts in other jurisdictions, have the ability to investigate the possibility of a dedicated transport police corps not under the Garda Síochána's remit - just like the airport police - but with exactly the same powers as the force? Two new bus routes will operate in Dublin on a 24-hour basis, which is very welcome. My constituents are already asking how we can guarantee the security and safety of commuters who use that service. Newspaper letters and columns are full of stories about people disembarking trams or buses because they feel unsafe, there is intimidation or there are

verbal assaults. We have heard of incidents involving staff too. Is there even a memorandum of understanding between the Garda and Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to include that gardaí on the beat would include hopping on and hopping off buses, trams, the DART and trains as part of their normal beat duty? Could the Minister establish such a memorandum of understanding?

Deputy Shane Ross: I will not answer that question immediately but I will consider it. The views of the gardaí would have to be taken into account, as to whether they feel it is appropriate. Irish Rail has done a fair amount to address the problem, which it recognises. I welcome that Dermot O’Leary of the NBRU has been constantly pointing this out and representing staff and passengers in a laudable way. The company’s annual spending on security rose from €4.1 million in 2017 to €4.5 million in 2018. Security patrols by Iarnród Éireann have been doubled. A central monitoring facility for CCTV has been established across the DART network.

11 o’clock

CCTV is now available on the vast majority of trains, there is a new text alert service, and a communication plan has been put in place. As the Deputy will know, Iarnród Éireann is introducing customer service officers on board all intercity routes. While the primary focus of these roles is customer service, they will ensure that customers can alert personnel on board to any issues and allow for security or Garda resources to be sought, as required.

I am not taking my eye off the ball on this issue. It is a serious problem and it will be continually addressed. Apart from Iarnród Éireann, the numbers are actually coming down in the other State companies.

Public Transport Fares

4. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has costed the introduction of fare-free public transport in view of the need to expand the use of public transport as part of actions against climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48416/19]

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: We all know the famous quote from the young climate activist, Greta Thunberg: “Act like your house is on fire”. Instead, we seem to have a Government that is standing with its arms folded. The second biggest cause of carbon emissions, after agriculture, in Ireland is transport. Agriculture will be a longer-term project to shift, but there are immediate things that could be done, and one of them is the introduction of free public transport. It has been done in 100 cities and in the country of Luxembourg. Dublin is now the slowest moving city in Europe. This will benefit people’s lives, as well as the environment.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputy for raising this subject, which is certainly worthy of debate. It will not surprise her that I am not going to announce free public transport in the House this morning, but it is a debate that is certainly worth having, and perhaps for longer than ten minutes.

The NTA has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of public service obligation, PSO, contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable. The NTA also has been given statutory responsibility for

the regulation of fares in regard to public passenger transport services. The funding of those services comprises both the fares paid by passengers and the subvention payments from the Exchequer. The main purpose of the subvention payment is to meet the gap between the income from fares and the cost of operating services. In 2019, the Irish Exchequer will provide just over €300 million in subvention for PSO transport services and rural transport local link services. We are also investing almost €480 million this year in public transport and active travel infrastructure.

The Deputy is asking about the likely cost to the Exchequer if public transport fares were abolished. A key factor to bear in mind when considering such an idea is that approximately €600 million in fare revenue is collected annually. This effectively means that the rough cost to the taxpayer of eliminating fares would be in the region of €600 million more every year, in addition to the amounts already spent on PSO and on capital investment. It is important to keep in mind also that this amount would only enable continuation of the existing level of service and does not account for one extra passenger journey because it does not factor in the costs of catering for increased passenger travel demand, which would undoubtedly arise. The figures also do not factor in the cost of providing the additional fleet, depots, drivers, and so on that would be needed to meet the likely resultant substantial increase in passenger numbers if fares were eliminated.

In summary, introducing free public transport for all users would require substantial additional funding by the taxpayer or from other sources. The Deputy has not indicated how she proposes that this would be funded. We all know that our country is facing challenges on climate commitments and on congestion, which this Government is determined to address. As such, it is clear that inroads must be made into reducing the dominance of the private car in Ireland's transport sector, and reducing the 52% of transport emissions that come from private car use is a key challenge, as the Deputy mentioned.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

The Deputy is correct that there is a need to reduce private car emissions within the State and that increased use of public transport can assist us in achieving our climate change goals. That is exactly the Government's objective as clearly set out in my Department's climate action plan, and that is why we are expanding our public transport fleet so that there are more buses, more trains and longer trams to carry more passengers. We are developing long-term solutions through metro and DART expansion. We are investing in well-planned integrated infrastructure and service improvements in all the main cities.

Our aim in expanding the carrying capacity and the attractiveness of our public transport and active travel networks is to provide a viable sustainable alternative to private car use for more people for more of their journeys. Under Project Ireland 2040, an indicative allocation of €8.6 billion is assigned to support sustainable mobility, ensuring that public transport and active travel become more available and attractive alternatives.

Our ambitions regarding modal shift are quite high, as are the costs associated with such a shift. However, our continued work on this front is essential if we want to reduce congestion and emissions. Promoting a continued move towards more sustainable forms of transport for a higher number of journeys will help reduce Ireland's climate change emissions.

Passenger fares are only one factor in meeting the costs associated with running the public

transport system. The State and the taxpayer are the main funder. Any proposal to abolish passenger fares and the resulting shortfall in funding would have to be covered by an increase in PSO funding from the taxpayer via the Exchequer.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I got some of those answers in response to the written questions I have asked. Is it not shocking that 52% of transport emissions come from private car use when only 4% come from public transport? It would make a massive difference to tackling climate change if we could get people out of cars. People would be happy not to be stuck in cars if there was sufficient public transport as an alternative.

In regard to the cost, €300 million as a public subvention is extremely small when compared with most countries. Yes, €600 million would be the cost of immediately abolishing fares right now, but that is not a lot and could be paid, for example, from a very small financial transactions tax, something that has been called for even by the EU and is not a radical socialist demand. Tax the multinationals to get their workers to work. How about that as novel idea? It would mean Google, Facebook and all of the other large corporations would actually pay the level of corporation tax that is due.

In Dublin West, which I represent, we have huge industrial parks where tens of thousands of workers are driving in and out every day because they do not have public transport available. Unfortunately, BusConnects, which the Minister lauds, is planning to take away direct routes from some of those areas into the city.

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy and I share a common belief that we want to reduce emissions, particularly from private cars. We probably part company after that. Like everybody else, I would love to see public transport free for everyone. It would undoubtedly produce, as the Deputy said, a big rush into public transport. The problem is that the €600 million only addresses the current issue. It would be an extraordinarily expensive operation suddenly to announce free public transport, which we could not do because we do not have the capacity. It would not work overnight. It would be a very long-term project which would cost vast sums of money in terms of extra vehicles, extra depots and extra drivers.

As the Deputy will know, we are determined to reduce emissions and to get people out of their private cars into buses, and there are very large-scale projects, such as the metro, BusConnects, the Luas expansion and the DART expansion. All of those projects are directed simply to getting people out of their private cars, which will, of course, reduce emissions, which are a common enemy.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I do not think anybody said this could happen overnight. However, in other countries, it has been planned within a year or two years to upgrade the public transport capacity to cater for it. Some of the positive benefits have included reduced numbers of road traffic accidents, cleaner air, less noise and faster emergency response times as traffic is not as clogged. There is also the abolition of ticket infrastructure, and we recall the queues at the toll booths on the M50. More people have started to use public transport, including the elderly, and more people go into cities and towns rather than being stuck in the suburbs, so isolation has decreased. For example, in Tallinn, Estonia, passenger numbers increased eightfold very quickly when free public transport was introduced.

Of course, there would have to be initial investment beyond the €600 million but we need that anyway. Let us not play the poor mouth. This is an extremely wealthy country. We had

the highest number of net worth individuals recorded last year, so the money is there. However, this is also necessary in terms of climate change. By the way, there was a boon to those cities in terms of tourism because of free public transport. Luxembourg, as a country, has just introduced this. We could employ more workers on decent rates of pay, not in the privatised services the Minister lauds. This is vital and should be done, and people should campaign for it.

Deputy Shane Ross: Again, I endorse the Deputy's ambition, although I do not necessarily endorse the path she wishes to take to it. We have laid out a strong, determined and clear path as to how we were going to do this and how we are going to get people out of their private cars.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: BusConnects is not going to do it.

Deputy Shane Ross: That is matter of opinion. I sympathise with what the Deputy says. It is not something I agree with but I can see her point of view. In the urban bus fleet, a clear path to low-emission buses has been outlined. Project Ireland 2040 contained a commitment that diesel-only buses will no longer be purchased for the urban public bus fleet from July, and that has been done. In preparation for both this immediate transition and the development of a longer-term low-carbon bus procurement strategy, my Department, together with the National Transport Authority, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann, has undertaken a comprehensive series of low-emission bus trials, which are expected to conclude in the coming weeks. Under the BusConnects programme, which the Deputy disapproves of, it is expected that approximately half of the public urban bus fleet will have moved to lower emitting alternatives by 2023, with full conversion by 2030. It is equally important to consider the potential contribution of electrified rail to the decarbonising objectives we are pursuing. A full metropolitan area DART network is planned for the greater Dublin area. This is part of the national rail network that carries over 75% of total rail passengers each year. We have high ambitions and we have laid out the targets and the paths in this regard. We will achieve them by providing low-emissions public transport.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask Members to keep an eye on the clock.

Anti-Social Behaviour

5. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will liaise with the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Garda Commissioner with a view to funding and establishing a dedicated Garda transport unit to ensure the safety of bus, train and tram workers and passengers in view of the upsurge in anti-social behaviour on the public transport network (details supplied). [48419/19]

Deputy Joan Collins: I ask the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, in light of the dramatic upsurge in anti-social behaviour on our public transport network and the aspirations of Government under the climate action plan, to encourage citizens to switch from cars to public transport, if he will liaise with the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Garda Commissioner with a view to funding and establishing a dedicated Garda transport unit to ensure the safety of bus, train and tram workers and passengers.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank Deputy Collins for her question, which has details supplied. I think I am to answer two questions together. That is fine, as long as the Deputy has got away with it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister is taking the Deputy's question-----

Deputy Shane Ross: I am taking her question. What I am saying is that the text of her question relates to two issues.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister is just answering Question No. 5.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes, that is fine. I thank the Deputy for her questions and a further opportunity to discuss the very serious issue of anti-social behaviour. As I said in my earlier reply to a similar question from Deputy Lahart, while the vast majority of public transport passenger journeys occur without incident, the safety and security of both public transport passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour, are important matters that, first and foremost, must be managed by every public transport company and, where appropriate, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána. While I am of course concerned to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of all passengers and staff, the allocation of all Garda resources, including the manner in which Garda personnel are deployed, is a decision solely for the Garda Commissioner and his team.

As I outlined earlier, the Minister for Justice and Equality has been advised in a report prepared by An Garda Síochána on this issue that it is not proposed to establish a specialist or dedicated unit of the force to police the rail network and that effective local community policing efforts can meet the policing needs of the rail network and its stakeholders. As part of this, An Garda Síochána's superintendent of community engagement and public safety liaises regularly with the chairman of the Railway Safety Advisory Council, RSAC, and will attend future meetings, as requested, of the RSAC, which includes representatives of the rail companies and trade unions. The superintendent has also undertaken to arrange meetings between local Garda management and public transport providers on any identified locations where significant crime and anti-social behaviour persist. Such meetings will enable discussion of the delivery of an appropriate policing response in collaboration with transport providers.

I have been advised that the superintendent will provide advice on community policing engagement, crime prevention, diversity and hate crime to management and staff of the main public transport providers, as was done in a presentation to Transdev, which operates the Luas, last January. The RSAC and the Garda have agreed to keep these actions under review and subject to an annual meeting between the RSAC and the superintendent of community engagement and public safety.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

The partnership approach between An Garda Síochána and the rail companies to promote high visibility and strong community engagement on the rail network resulted in Operation Twintrack on 13 September, whereby gardaí were deployed to 12 rail stations nationally along with high-visibility patrolling of rail stations and Luas routes.

I am pleased to say that overall incidents of anti-social behaviour and vandalism on Dublin Bus have decreased in recent years since the introduction of the exact fare system, CCTV and security screens at drivers' cabs. I am advised by Bus Éireann that incidents of anti-social behaviour to date this year are at a similar level to last year. It is vital that all public transport companies continue their strong and close working relationship with An Garda Síochána to address these incidents.

Deputy Joan Collins: The details supplied with my question asked whether the Minister would further acknowledge that the unacceptable levels of anti-social behaviour on parts of the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann networks and the continuous mayhem on parts of the railway network cannot continue, and that as part of a public transport undertaking, there should automatically be a funded Garda transport police. This has been an ongoing issue, as the Minister said, on which he has been contacted numerous times by the National Bus and Rail Union, NBRU. The figures the NBRU provided last year were quite startling. Over three years, 2016, 2017 and 2018, more than 1,000 incidents of anti-social behaviour were inflicted on drivers and staff. I think it was in response to this that the Minister said he would look at this area. On Friday, 13 September, there was a day of action whereby members of An Garda Síochána travelled on DART, commuter rail and Luas vehicles. There was concern that this was advertised and that a great many people who probably would have engaged in anti-social behaviour on public transport could have taken that day off because it was announced so publicly.

What the Minister said is not good enough. I think it has been noted previously that there is an airport police that has the same search and arrest powers as An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Shane Ross: As I said to Deputy Lahart, this is a matter for the Garda, not me, to enforce, but I will facilitate it in any way I can. I have been in touch with all the relevant companies about this and they are taking measures to address the issue very energetically. The Deputy is right about Iarnród Éireann - I will quote a number of figures to her - but what she says is not the case with the other transport companies. According to material received from Irish Rail, the number of recorded anti-social incidents has risen in recent years. In 2016 it was 492; in 2017, 680; in 2018, 789; and in 2019, up to October, 971. Irish Rail has been encouraging employees to report all safety-critical issues, including threatening and violent behaviour, and this appears to be coming up with some fairly unsatisfactory results as far as the number of incidents is concerned. Irish Rail has addressed the problem very energetically. On buses the trend appears to be downwards, which is encouraging. Dublin Bus, which perhaps I will go into in response to the Deputy's second supplementary question, has been taking a lot of measures as well. In Bus Éireann I think the numbers are also decreasing. Therefore, whereas Iarnród Éireann has a very serious problem which remains, the bus companies have responded to the actions that have been taken.

Deputy Joan Collins: The NBRU asked me to put this question to the Minister. There is a basis for reassessing this situation. Was there a report back from the 13 September action involving An Garda Síochána travelling on the DART, commuter rail and the Luas? A Deputy previously said we could also look at community police linking in and jumping on Luas trams and getting onto DARTs and buses as part of their beat. It is not good enough to say this must be left to the companies because many times they do not have the funding - or do they? Will the Minister provide the necessary funding to Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus for them to provide extra security or service workers who could link in with the Garda on any extraordinary events on their transport systems?

Deputy Shane Ross: I am not sure what the Deputy is referring to when she speaks of a report back from the action. I think she is referring to what was called Operation Twintrack on 13 September, which the Garda carried out. It was a partnership between An Garda Síochána and the rail companies to promote high visibility and strong community engagement on the rail network on that day. Gardaí were deployed to 12 rail stations nationally along with high-visibility patrolling of rail stations and Luas routes. If I can get any more information on this, which I think is what the Deputy is looking for, I will supply her with it. I am not sure that the

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Garda necessarily has reported to us on the operation, but it is reasonable to expect that it should give us feedback on it and how it worked. This does not necessarily mean the Garda intends to repeat the operation at very regular intervals, but I presume that a lot of lessons would have been learned from such an action.

I am pleased to say that overall incidents of anti-social behaviour and vandalism on Dublin Bus have decreased in recent years since the introduction of the exact fare system, CCTV and security screens at drivers' cabs. I am advised by Bus Éireann that incidents of anti-social behaviour to date this year are at a similar level to last year. It is vital that all public transport companies continue their strong and close working relationship with An Garda Síochána.

Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions

Road Projects Status

6. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of progress on the A5 project; the funding that will be made available for this project; when the funding will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47795/19]

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I seek an update on progress on the A5 dual carriageway project from Derry to Aughnacloy. I ask the Minister to clarify the funding commitment from the Government. How much has been spent so far and what is the funding commitment going forward? As the Minister knows, in 2006, as part of the St. Andrew's Agreement, the Government agreed to co-fund this project to a significant extent, along with the British Exchequer. It is essential that we continue that partnership and ensure that the road is built as quickly as possible. The A5 is absolutely essential to opening up the north west, and Donegal in particular. It is very important for our economy and our population.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Deputy for his question. This is a project in which he is particularly interested and he has raised it on numerous occasions. I will try to update him on what is a moving target but one that is not moving fast enough.

The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities.

As is the case for all such capital projects, the A5 upgrade scheme is subject to the planning assessment and approval process in Northern Ireland. Since 2012 there have been a number of legal challenges to approvals related to the scheme and this has led to unavoidable delays in the implementation of the proposed scheme.

A challenge in November 2017 to the decision of the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure to proceed with the A5 scheme resulted in that decision being quashed by the High Court at the request of the Department in November 2018.

Following the conclusion of that legal action, the Department for Infrastructure updated project environmental assessments and undertook a public consultation on a number of environmental reports, including an environmental statement addendum in 2019. The Department

announced in August that over 260 responses to the consultation had been received and that following on from consideration of the number and nature of the issues raised, the Department had concluded that a further public inquiry is required.

Earlier this month, the Department for Infrastructure announced that the planning appeals commission has been appointed to hold an inquiry into the A5 environmental statement addendum of 2019 and related environmental issues, along with the four updated draft reports, to inform an appropriate assessment under the habitats regulations prepared by the Department. It is understood that the inquiry will be held in February 2020.

The current funding arrangements relating to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and implementation plan, A Fresh Start. Under this agreement, the Government is committed to providing funding of £75 million towards the cost of phase 1a of the A5 upgrade scheme once the statutory planning process in Northern Ireland is concluded.

Allowing for the time required for the conclusion of the public inquiry and for a new decision to be taken on whether to proceed with the scheme, together with the possibility of a further legal challenge, the timeframe for the start of construction of phase 1a of the A5 project is uncertain.

In addition, it is envisaged that, as was the case for previous contributions, payments from the South will be based on an agreed protocol linked to the achievement of construction stage milestones. This means that there would be a time lag between the start of construction of the scheme and an initial payment by the South.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

In view of the current state of play regarding the A5 scheme and the timeframes involved, provision is not being made in the 2020 calendar year for funding for the scheme. The Government remains committed to the £75 million sterling contribution and the senior officials group established on foot of the Fresh Start agreement will continue to liaise in respect of the project with a view to delivering on that commitment.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: When funding for this project was initially announced as part of the St. Andrew's Agreement in 2006, it included a commitment of £400 million from the Government towards the overall cost of the A5 project and the A8 project from Larne to Belfast. The plan at the time was that A5 dual carriageway from Derry to Aughnacloy would be completed by 2015. Unfortunately, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then. It is now 2019 and the project has not even commenced. It has been plagued by planning difficulties and legal challenges which have given rise to delays. The project has also been delayed by the fact that there is no Government in place at Stormont. A legal workaround had to be found, which took some time. If there are no further delays or challenges, phase 1 could start in 2020.

I seek clarity on the Government's commitment to the project. In 2011, the Government withdrew its commitment to contribute £400 million. This resulted in the Derry to Aughnacloy section of the project being broken up into three phases. As the Minister has outlined, phase 1 from Newbuildings to Strabane is the only phase for which the Government has provided a clear funding commitment. Phases 2 and 3 are not progressing because no funding plan has been put in place for them. What are the Government's plans in respect of funding phases 2 and 3 in order that they can be progressed without any unnecessary delays?

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy is correct in saying that the original Government commitment was £400 million. This commitment was intended to cover a road infrastructure package, including the A5 and A8, to support the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive. However, for administrative reasons, it was decided that the funding would be paid out in respect of the A5. The funding to which we are now committed is £25 million per year for three years. Originally, this funding was earmarked for 2015 to 2017 but now it will be paid in the first three years of the project's construction. I wish to make it clear that the Government's commitment to this project is total. The delays that have occurred are not of our making and while they may be legitimate, they are very frustrating. We have committed the aforementioned funds and will pay them. There is absolutely no pullback on that whatsoever. The fact that there have been delays means that we have not paid any funds over to date but we will pay them when construction commences.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: There has been a significant pullback on the part of the Government *vis-à-vis* the overall funding commitment that was made 2006. As the Minister outlined, the only funding commitment that is in place is for £75 million for phase 1 of the A5 project from Newbuildings to Strabane. That funding will be provided in three lots of £25 million. The A5 project originally covered the full 58 miles from Derry to Aughnacloy but was broken up into three separate phases because of funding restrictions and, in particular, because the Government pulled back on its commitment in 2011. Phase 1 is the only element that is progressing. Construction will commence in the middle of next year if there are no further delays. The Government has committed funding to phase 1 but I have heard nothing from the Minister today about what funding the Government will commit in respect of phase 2, which runs from Strabane to Omagh, or phase 3, which runs from Omagh to Aughnacloy. An agreement needs to be reached by the Government and the authorities in Northern Ireland on the funding for the other two phases. In addition, there is a need for clarity on how much funding we are going to provide. Discussions need to take place now. We need a plan for phases 2 and 3 in order that the work can progress without undue delay. Given the delays to phase 1, we cannot wait for up to four years before committing to the remaining phases. A commitment needs to be provided now. I urge the Minister to engage with the Northern Ireland authorities and the British Government with a view to putting a plan in place for the latter phases of the project. Undoubtedly, there has been a pullback in terms of the financial commitment from the Government, if not in terms of the generic commitment. That commitment must be backed up by a clear plan which will see the entire project delivered in the best possible timeframe.

Deputy Shane Ross: It would be very wrong if the funding changes which happened as a result of the financial crisis were taken as an indication of a lack of enthusiasm for this project on the part of the Government. That enthusiasm has not been diluted in any way. The Deputy knows that because of the financial crisis that hit this country, the Government decided in 2011 that its commitment to provide funding for the A5 road project would have to be deferred. However, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform indicated that a commitment would be made to provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016. The Northern Ireland Executive decided to go ahead with the construction of two sections of the A5. It was envisaged at the time that the contribution of £50 million from the Republic of Ireland would go towards the construction of these sections. A legal challenge to the Minister for Regional Development's approval for the construction of the two sections was lodged in September 2012. In 2015, the Fresh Start agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of €50 million for the A5 project. It also committed an additional €25 million to ensure that phase 1 of the project, which includes new building to north of Strabane, could commence as soon as

possible, once the necessary planning issues are resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities. Those commitments remain absolutely undiminished.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I know this is an important project but I cannot be seen to favour it. We have to move on.

Deputy Shane Ross: I could go on.

Question No. 7 replied to with Written Answers.

Ports Policy

8. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has discussed the ownership of Rosslare Europort with his UK counterpart; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47710/19]

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the House, the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and the Minister for facilitating me in taking this question on behalf of Deputy Browne, who has been called away. We both represent the south east in Waterford and Wexford. Has the Minister discussed the ownership of Rosslare Europort with his UK counterpart? As we are all aware, Rosslare Europort's ownership status is complex.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank Deputy Butler for taking this question on behalf of Deputy Browne, who constantly asks me about this issue and pursues it with a welcome vigour.

Rosslare Europort is unique among the State-owned ports as it is not a commercial company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated on a commercial basis as a division of Iarnród Éireann. Technically, the port forms part of the Fishguard and Rosslare Railways and Harbours Company, which is a 19th century joint venture company, consisting today of Iarnród Éireann on the Irish side and Stena Line on the Welsh side at Fishguard.

The status of the port, and whether its current status potentially inhibits its development, was considered in a strategic review commissioned by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants. The report concluded that the creation of an independent port authority would be extremely difficult, given the port's complex legal structure. Instead, it was recommended that the port remain in public ownership and that the possibilities for increased private sector involvement be investigated. In order to assist Iarnród Éireann's overall consideration of how best to move forward, the company then engaged consultants to assess market interest. The assessment was largely positive in terms of the potential for increased private sector investment in the port. However, it did identify possible implementation issues due to the complicated legislative basis of the port. Following that assessment, the Department sought and received detailed advice from the Office of the Attorney General on the matter. That advice identified a number of legal issues with any such proposal and those issues are under careful consideration by my Department. If there are any new developments, I will consider them.

I have met my former UK counterpart, the then Secretary of State for Transport, Mr. Chris Grayling, to discuss Brexit matters on three occasions since mid-2017. Our discussions fully respected the mandate of the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier. Mr. Grayling outlined key areas of concern for the UK in relation to transport. While I did not specifically raise

the issue of ownership of Rosslare Europort, I set out the importance of continued transport connectivity between Ireland and the UK, including ports, aviation, road transport and cross-Border rail services. I wrote to the current Secretary of State for Transport, Mr. Grant Shapps, on 12 August congratulating him on his appointment and seeking an early meeting with him. I received a reply on 1 November indicating that it was not possible to arrange such a meeting during the current parliamentary session and suggesting that I make contact again when ministers are appointed following the UK general election on 12 December. I intend to seek such a meeting and will raise the issue of Rosslare at that meeting when arranged.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

I am satisfied that Rosslare Europort, as a division of Iarnród Éireann, is effectively managing operations at the port and looking at the potential of the port to develop further and take advantage of any new opportunities. The port is targeting growth and new business opportunities and has received the approval of the Iarnród Éireann board for a strategic plan to grow the port's business. Iarnród Éireann and Rosslare Europort briefed my Department late last year on the company's plans for strategic development of the port over the coming years. This includes plans to invest up to €25 million in customer facilities, port infrastructure and assets, and new technology. The port is engaging with a number of potential new shipping customers to supplement existing operators and offer greater choice to freight and passenger business.

Investment in the port is, in the first instance, a matter for its owner, Iarnród Éireann, which is a commercial State body. While EU state aid rules restrict the scope for direct State investment, the company is exploring appropriate investment possibilities in connection with its strategic development plans.

Brexit will have implications for a number of key ports and airports. Rosslare Europort continues to work closely with my Department and a range of other relevant Government Departments and offices in preparing for the additional border controls and other impacts that will arise from Brexit. In this context, my Department is in frequent contact with Rosslare Port management about the infrastructural requirements and other Brexit impacts on the port. I understand also that Rosslare Europort is actively seeking opportunities arising from Brexit to expand shipping services from the port to continental EU ports.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. He correctly noted that Rosslare Port is unique, and outlined its history and how it was established. It is a joint venture between Iarnród Éireann, which operates Rosslare Port, and Stena Line, which operates Fishguard Port in Wales. These companies are responsible for the management of their respective ports, with the profits and liabilities of each port remaining with the operating company. However, the overall company structure stems from the original UK legislation. I welcome the fact that the Minister will make contact with his UK counterpart after the British general election and that he met the previous UK minister on three occasions.

This area is extremely problematic for a number of reasons. First, the complex ownership structure of Rosslare Europort has very much harmed the port's economic development. While all other ports in Ireland are owned and operated by an independent port authority, or by a local authority in the case of smaller ports, Rosslare Europort's status is much less clear. Second, given the port's strategic importance to the island of Ireland, it would be wrong to leave it in the control of a foreign country, particularly as that country prepares to exit the European Union. I acknowledge that this is a very complex issue, but it is vital that Ireland regains control of this

port to ensure it plays a role in preserving our export capacity.

Deputy Shane Ross: I have some sympathy with what the Deputy says, although I do not think the way the port operates creates any great obstructions. The structure of the port is strange and dates back over 150 years. If Deputy Butler or Deputy Browne has any concrete evidence that that structure is causing problems, I would be happy to ask my officials to examine the matter with a view to introducing legislation both here and in the UK to change the structure, if it is beneficial to do so. At the moment, while it is somewhat archaic and anomalous, the fact that Iarnród Éireann is running Rosslare Port does not seem to be an immediate disadvantage. The Deputy will be aware that there is a master plan in place for investing a large amount of money in the port. That investment by Iarnród Éireann does not seem to be hindered in any way by the port's peculiar structure and is a vote of confidence in the future of Rosslare Port. It includes an investment of €1.6 million from profits in 2018, and other investments which I can go into further.

Deputy Mary Butler: I take the Minister's point that the port's structure dates back over 150 years but, unfortunately, with Brexit looming, the uncertainty around the future of the port must be addressed. I refer to another issue relating to the south east, which I also raised in the Dáil yesterday. The region has the highest unemployment rate in the country, according to the latest data from the Central Statistics Office. Unemployment in the south east stands at 7.3%, which is 2.1% above the national average. The importance of Rosslare and Waterford ports from an economic point of view cannot be underestimated. Waterford Port has a great opportunity to move forward because it does not trade with the UK directly and is not in competition with Rosslare Port. It is important to make that point. We need certainty on the future of Rosslare Port in light of Brexit.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am not unsympathetic to Deputies who make the case for the south east. Developments in the region are promising and I continue to encourage them in any way I can. The opportunities for Rosslare Port are recognised by the proposed investment of €25 million by Iarnród Éireann. That investment is a vote of confidence in Rosslare Port and its future. Brexit is not a completely negative story for every port in Ireland. I gather that Rosslare Port is looking for potential opportunities arising from Brexit. It is completing the final stages of a master plan, which includes investment of €25 million. Some €1.8 million will be spent every year for the next five years on general renewal and maintenance. A further €12.5 million will be spent on the extension of berths 3 and 4 from 190 m to 220 m, with a double link span to cater for longer ships in future and two-tier vessels. That sounds like confidence to me. Some €1.5 million will be invested in information technology and creating a smart and automated port which will include vehicle recognition systems, trailer tracking systems, compound management and check-in and check-out systems. A further €3.5 million will be spent on configuration for future requirements. That is an indication of the fact that Rosslare has a bright future.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

9. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will introduce a funding programme for the local improvement scheme, LIS, in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48137/19]

Deputy Brendan Smith: The LIS is of particular importance to rural communities and parishes. There is often a misconception regarding whom it benefits. In many instances, it is not

two family homes located along the road or laneway but, rather, up to a dozen. Unfortunately, when the Taoiseach was Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport he abolished the funding stream for the LIS. In recent years, some small-scale funding has been made available through the CLÁR programme, but it is not even nearly adequate. In light of the importance of the LIS to rural communities, I ask the Minister to put in place a funding stream for it in 2020 as was the case for many decades.

Deputy Shane Ross: The decision taken by the Taoiseach while Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport was forced upon him by financial circumstances. I have no doubt that he did not wish to make the decision he did. The Deputy is aware that the LIS is back in existence.

The maintenance of roads not taken in charge by local authorities is the responsibility of the relevant landowners. However, section 81 of the Local Government Act 2001 provides the statutory basis for the LIS. Under the scheme, funding can be provided to local authorities by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport for the construction and improvement of non-public roads, that is, roads not taken in charge by local authorities, which meet the very specific criteria set out in the Act. A contribution from the beneficiaries is required in all cases. Section 81 states that assistance by a road authority under the LIS is conditional on a financial contribution by the relevant parties. It further provides that after consultation with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and with the consent of the Minister for Finance, another Minister may make a grant to a road authority in respect of non-public roads in accordance with a scheme made by that Minister. As such, State assistance may be provided under the statutory LIS, and up to 2012 my Department provided ring-fenced funding for the scheme. However, due to the major cutbacks in roads funding arising from the financial crisis, it was necessary for the Department to stop providing dedicated funding for the LIS in 2012.

Although there was no separate allocation for the LIS from 2013 to 2017, local authorities could use a proportion of their discretionary grant for the LIS. The allowable proportion of discretionary grant was 7% in 2013. It was increased to 15% from 2014 onwards. This approach was taken because it was considered that councils were best placed to decide whether to concentrate the limited grant funding available on public roads or operate an LIS for non-public roads.

In September 2017, my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring, reintroduced dedicated funding for the LIS. He continues to fund the scheme. In light of the significant funding being put into LIS by that Department and the pressing need to direct resources into maintaining and renewing public roads, it was decided that the option of allocating a proportion of the discretionary grant to LIS would no longer apply from 2018. I am open to discussing the matter with the Minister, Deputy Ring.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I would very much like ring-fenced funding to be allocated to each local authority. The Minister referred to councils being in a position to use the discretionary funding. Deputies are aware that the non-national road budget has been cut back through the years and that the county and regional road networks take priority, which is understandable.

Rural regeneration involves encouraging people to live in rural communities. One of the basic requirements of so doing is that people have an adequate road to their home. We are depriving people of the opportunity to build new homes on sites that may be given to them by their parents or siblings.

The LIS is a great investment in rural communities. I appeal to the Minister to reintroduce the ring-fenced funding that was available in bad and better financial times through the decades. It would benefit many communities and individuals and is essential for service providers and emergency services. In many instances, the roads also lead to community facilities and tourist attractions.

Deputy Shane Ross: I understand what the Deputy is seeking. We have a situation which was probably not envisaged some years ago, namely, that another Minister has introduced funding for the LIS. I am open to discussions with the Minister, Deputy Ring, regarding the LIS and how it is being implemented. I must be conscious of the fact that funding for public roads remains below the level needed to achieve steady state. Almost €50 million has been allocated to the LIS by the Department of Rural and Community Development since 2017. As the Deputy will be aware, we are still funding the community involvement scheme. The fact that the Minister, Deputy Ring and I are in a position to fund the LIS means it would be useful for us to co-ordinate on this matter such that only one Minister distributes money in this way. It is of no comfort to the Deputy, but the intervention of the Minister, Deputy Ring, has released funds from my Department to be spent on public roads.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I would very much welcome an increase in funding, no matter what Department it comes from. We need a multiple of what is currently being allocated. In my county of Cavan, there is a ten-year waiting list. In the neighbouring county of Monaghan, there is an eight-year waiting list. There are people living in houses along laneways and roads that emergency services would not be able to access in the case of an emergency. I appeal to the Minister to ensure that the funding provided in 2020 is a multiple of what has been provided in recent years.

Deputy Shane Ross: The LIS has not gone away. In fact, it has been revived. Since 2017, the Department of Rural and Community Development has allocated significant funds to it. In 2017, €17.539 million was allocated, €20.8 million in 2018 and €10 million so far in 2019, giving a total of €48 million. A very substantial amount of funding has been allocated to the LIS. The Deputy stated that not enough has been provided and he does not care from which Department the funding comes. I do not particularly care from which Department it comes. It is a worthy scheme. I understand the point being made by the Deputy. It would be wrong to suggest or conclude from what he is saying that the LIS has been abolished. As he is aware, funding for the LIS has been distributed by a Department other than mine. I reiterate that this is an anomaly. I promise to discuss the matter with the Minister, Deputy Ring, and ensure a co-ordinated approach is taken.

Regional Road Network

10. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a substantial increase in funding for the non-national roads network in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48138/19]

Deputy Brendan Smith: As the Minister is aware, there is no rail network in south Ulster and a consequent total dependence on the road network. In many instances, the regional road network in counties such as Cavan and Monaghan is equivalent to the national road network in other counties. There should be a substantial increase in funding for the non-national road network in light of its crucial importance in rural Border counties such as Cavan and Monaghan.

Deputy Shane Ross: As I indicated in response to a previous question from Deputy MacSharry, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on these roads are funded from local authorities' own resources, supplemented by State road grants. Regional and local road grant allocations are finalised following the publication of the Revised Estimates Volume and take into account the expenditure outturn on projects and programmes in the preceding year.

As Minister, I have to work within the budget available to my Department. The 2020 allocations will reflect that. That being said and while the Revised Estimates Volume has not been published as yet, I anticipate additional funding for regional and national roads in 2020.

As in previous years, my objective will be to allocate funding to eligible local authorities on as equitable a basis as possible taking the length of the road network and traffic factors into account. The main focus of the grants will continue to be maintenance and renewal of the regional and local road network with a view to making progress towards steady-state levels of expenditure.

The allocations under the various grant programmes will be announced as early as possible in the new year.

In addition to increasing the moneys available for roads, it is important to manage those moneys effectively. In this context the Department reviews and updates its memorandum on grants for regional and local roads on a regular basis. This document seeks to ensure good value for money in respect of road grant expenditure.

In recent years, my Department has also supported a road asset management system, MapRoad, for regional and local roads. As part of this process, a road management office, RMO, was established as a shared service between the 31 local authorities. The RMO and the Department have been working with local authorities to ensure that the MapRoad pavement management system includes: an up-to-date road schedule of public roads; a record of all pavement-related works; and information on road surface types and road pavement condition.

The road pavement condition information generated by the MapRoad system forms the basis for the NOAC performance reports.

The objective of the MapRoad pavement management system and the NOAC reports is to provide the data needed for evidence-based prioritisation and management of both annual work programmes and multi-annual programmes by each local authority in their capacity as the statutory road authority for their area.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Minister. He is aware that the two counties I have the privilege to represent depend very much on indigenous business. Much of our employment is through small and medium-sized enterprises. Many of those enterprises are located along county and regional roads. To try to assist business in reducing costs in the very challenging time that lies ahead for enterprise in the Border region due to Brexit and other challenges, I appeal to the Minister, as I did in the past, to ensure that infrastructure is brought up to a better standard. As we know, good infrastructure helps to reduce costs for business and increase competitiveness. When deciding on the allocations for the non-national road network, I appeal to the Minister to take into account the particular needs of counties such as Cavan and Monaghan that have no rail network and are totally dependent on transferring goods and persons by road.

Deputy Shane Ross: I will take what the Deputy has said into account when considering these allocations. The good news obviously is that I anticipate an increase to be announced in January. I cannot make any specific promises about where that money will go, but obviously it is a matter of great importance for the Deputy's area and others.

We need to recognise that the size of the national, regional and local road network, at approximately 100,000 km, which is twice the European average *per capita*, will always create funding pressures for the Exchequer and local authorities. The funding cutbacks during the recession had a major impact on the maintenance and improvement of the road network. Overall grant funding dropped from €2.3 billion in 2008 to €753 million in 2015. Funding for regional and local roads dropped from €604 million to a lowest point of €320 million in 2015.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are under pressure of time. Deputy Brendan Smith has kindly forfeited his second supplementary question.

National Transport Authority Staff

11. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the NTA offers significantly higher salaries on average to external agency staff than it does to permanent members of staff; his views on whether this is appropriate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48146/19]

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask Deputy MacSharry to forfeit his 30 seconds and ask the Minister to answer the question immediately .

Deputy Shane Ross: Okay.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: It is question No. 11.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I have forfeited my 30 seconds to save time. The Minister should go ahead.

Deputy Shane Ross: My Department has been working closely with the NTA about strengthening its staffing position so that it is robust and sustainable. It is essential that the NTA is adequately resourced to successfully deliver its pipeline of key strategic infrastructure projects. These are large in scale and ambition, for example, BusConnects, MetroLink and the DART expansion.

The NTA is resourced by a mix of permanent staff and outsourced placements. At present, there are 148 outsourced placements in the NTA. Each of these people is an employee of one of the service providers that the NTA has engaged through public procurement procedures. As employees of a service provider, the salary, pension and any other payments to these personnel are matters for the relevant service providers and not the NTA.

The Deputy may recall that the NTA was established in 2009, during a period of great economic difficulty for the State. In this context, significant constraints were placed on the agency with regard to resourcing. Yet, while these constraints remained in place until 2018, the NTA's remit expanded significantly in the intervening period. For example, it assumed statutory responsibility for integrated ticketing including the Leap card scheme, regulation of vehicle clamping and local and rural transport, all of which put further pressure on the NTA

with regard to staffing levels. As a result, the NTA came increasingly to use outsourced placements to assist it in fulfilling its remit, particularly in the planning and implementation of major strategic programmes.

In 2017, my Department sought, and later received, sanction for increased staffing for posts that the NTA itself had identified as being a priority. My Department also encouraged the NTA to make a broader analysis of its overall staff resourcing position. This was so that the NTA would: critically assess its staffing position taking account of its existing and legacy position; identify its business needs into the future, especially having regard to the expanded investment programme it would be managing over the coming years; and develop a staffing plan that could successfully address these matters.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

This resulted in the NTA producing its strategic financial plan, which included a strategic staffing section outlining the NTA's requirements in terms of filling key posts to implement major transport programmes. The NTA set its plan over the period 2018 to 2023, and structured it over three consecutive phases. Overall, this plan involves a process of internalising a number of outsourced positions and ensuring that the NTA is adequately resourced to deliver on the key capital investment projects that it will be managing over the coming years, such as MetroLink and DART expansion.

Phase 1 of the plan for 2018-2019 has been sanctioned and is being implemented. Constructive engagement is ongoing with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and with the NTA about sanction for Phases 2 and 3. Phase 2 envisages 22 new positions and, in addition, internalising 42 currently outsourced roles. If approved, it is expected that these internalisations will result in a significant cost saving of €1.5 million in 2020 and €3 million in a full year.

Certain programmes will always require a number of skilled outsourced placements to supplement teams with specific skills, but the NTA's aim, strongly supported by Department, is to transition to a more permanent staffing model to deliver long-term stability. The aim is for the NTA to have sustainable staffing arrangements which leave it appropriately resourced to effectively and efficiently carry out its functions both now and into the future, and which are consistent with public service pay and numbers policy.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: The NTA has 114 staff who are being paid an average of €73,000. By the Minister's own admission, a further 148 staff are being paid €140,000, or twice as much. This is the organisation we charge with looking after major public transport schemes and we are throwing good money after bad.

Earlier we discussed the commute misery out to Fingal. The Minister actually said that public transport had become a great success. In what universe does the Minister live to think that? Back here on Earth, people see the reality of the commute misery every day while we double the price for external consultants at the same time as arguably paying a pittance to some of our own staff and the situation continues to get worse. The Minister just does not seem to get it. He does not get the public transport misery and nightmare we have while throwing good money after bad. What will we do to take control of the Department and stop wasting money in this fashion?

Deputy Shane Ross: I think what we will do is get back to topic. The NTA has a low

number of permanent staff with the biggest increase taking place in 2018 when 114 permanent staff were employed, compared with 91 for each of the previous years. In December 2018, the NTA received delegated sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for 140 permanent staff for 2019, an increase of 26 on the number of staff sanctioned for 2018. The NTA also has 148 outsourced placements from third-party service providers, necessary to deliver its strategic programme. Discussions on staffing requirements for 2020 are ongoing with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The high volume of outsourced placements, which make up 57% of the staff represents a significant cost for the NTA. On average an outsourced placement is double the cost of a permanent staff member. Within the premium cost of the use of outsourced personnel over direct NTA employees is VAT at 23%, which cannot be reclaimed by the authority. The resourcing changes planned for 2020-2021 will deliver a resourcing mix change over the five-year period from 2018 to 2023 from a ratio of nearly 43:57 to a ratio close to 68:32 in favour of NTA direct employees.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

12 o'clock

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Dara Calleary: Primary care is and should be the central part of our national health service. This morning, 506 people are on trolleys across the country. The Sláintecare report, which was shared and signed up to by every party in this House, emphasises primary care and investing in community services so that people can be more engaged in their own health and well-being. Pharmacy is a key part of primary care and community pharmacists constitute a key part of that. They are essential if we are to address the crisis in hospitals and in so many other aspects of our health service.

The Minister for Health gave very solemn assurances at the conference of the Irish Pharmacy Union last May that he would address the FEMPI cuts, which took 30% out of the incomes of our community pharmacists around the country. He said that he wanted to move beyond FEMPI to a higher terrain and to move discussions on a new pharmacists' contract. He said "Let's get that done this year." It was the usual practice from the Minister - tell them what they want to hear, run away and have no follow up. The reality for community pharmacists is that after the cut in their income of 33% the Minister then came along and said that the HSE had instructed pharmacists that as of 1 January, there would be a range of cuts to their income, services and fees aside from the new contract. For many pharmacies, this range of cuts could take between €30,000 to €35,000 out of their income, which will lead to redundancies in pharmacies and to pharmacy closures in so many areas. Again, it will undermine primary care services. Not only will dispensing fees be reduced, the practice of phased dispensing, which is a safer and more efficient way of dispensing drugs, will be made unviable for many pharmacies putting patients in danger. There will be a reduction in the high-tech care patient care scheme. This is a system that pharmacies have embraced for three years that reduces pressure on GPs and emergency departments. They have done this at a very basic cost that will be reduced even further.

We had fine words from the Minister. He keeps patting community pharmacists on the head and telling them they are doing a great job. He spoke about going to a higher terrain in his usual language but the reality is that if these cuts proceed, this higher terrain will be a marsh in which pharmacies, including community pharmacies, will sink. Why is the Government doing an absolute U-turn on the very solemn commitments given by the Minister in May? Why is it proceeding to take €45 million out of community pharmacy? Why is it targeting community pharmacists for these cuts unlike any other part of primary care?

The Tánaiste: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The Minister has said many times that he recognises the role community pharmacists play in the delivery of patient care and the potential for this role to be developed further in the context of health service reform and modernisation. Recognising that critical role, the Minister is committed to root-and-branch review of the pharmacy contract in 2020. Notwithstanding this commitment, any publicly funded pharmacy service expansion should address unmet public health needs, improve access to existing public health services or provide better value for money in terms of patient outcomes. Accordingly, the decision to provide such services should be evidence-based and I hope Deputy Calleary would agree with that.

The regulation governing the current pharmacy fee structure was made under section 9 of the Financial Emergency Measures in Public Interests Act 2009 and was set to expire at the end of this year. Under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, these regulations must be replaced on 1 January 2020 to maintain the statutory basis for contractor payments and to prescribe the fees available from that date. The fees to be set are determined by the Minister for Health with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. In keeping with obligations under section 43 of the 2017 Act, Department of Health officials have begun a process of consultation with the Irish Pharmacy Union as the representative body prior to the introduction of a new fee regulation. Department officials have met with the Irish Pharmacy Union delegation on two occasions and a detailed submission was received from the Irish Pharmacy Union on 8 November. This submission is being considered by the Department in the context of the statutory fee-setting process to which I have just referred. I have just been given a note to say that the Minister for Health is due to meet the Irish Pharmacy Union in the coming weeks to try to finalise those arrangements.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Two processes are under way. As late as 10 October, the Minister gave very solemn commitments about reversing FEMPI cuts. He told Deputy Brassil, who was a pharmacist in a previous life, that he would honour that, and that pharmacists are coming up with solutions and ideas. Why did the Minister give such a false impression on 10 October when he must have known that the HSE was planning on implementing €45 million worth of cuts to community pharmacies? The Tánaiste mentioned the regulations and the deadline of the end of December. Those same regulations apply to dentistry. The Minister has moved that on without any cuts ahead of 1 January yet the Government is piling €45 million worth of cuts on community pharmacies. The Tánaiste should go to his local pharmacy this weekend if he is looking for evidence. He should see how hard they are working, the hours they work and the extra services they provide that keep people away from GPs and emergency departments. I received an email from a pharmacist who stated that they feared for the profession of pharmacy and that all the good pharmacists would get tired of being the kicking boy of the PCRS and the HSE. That is how these professionals in primary care feel. I ask the Government not to introduce the cuts but to have the discussion around reversing FEMPI in a clear and honest manner and to respect community pharmacists.

The Tánaiste: I do not know whether the Deputy knows it or not but the Minister responded to a Topical Issue on this matter raised by Deputy Brassil yesterday. I would suggest that Deputy Calleary have a look at the detailed response given by the Minister. I know only too well how hard pharmacies work. My office on the main street in Carrigaline is within 20 yd. of two large pharmacies that I know well. As Deputy Calleary knows only too well, what is happening here is a process of negotiation to put a new contract in place, as has happened with other elements of the healthcare system, that must be led by the Minister for Health. He has to get value for money for the State and ensure that patient care is the first priority and that people are being reimbursed fairly for the work they do in terms of fee structure. That process is under way and as I have already said, the Minister will meet with the Irish Pharmacy Union in the coming weeks to try to progress that.

Deputy David Cullinane: A total of €18.4 million in cuts to councils in Dublin and Waterford are on the way due to the Government and Irish Water. This is because the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will no longer fund the commercial rate compensation scheme. Because of this, Dublin City Council will take a hit of €8.7 million while Waterford City and County Council will see a 13.5% drop in rates - €3.3 million - and is proportionately the worst hit council. South Dublin County Council will lose €4.1 million while Fingal County Council will lose €2.3 million. Let us be very clear. These are Government cuts plain and simple. They are not cuts by the councils themselves. Let us be equally clear that these cuts are unsustainable. They place a burden on those local authorities that cannot be met. We are hearing that from the CEOs of those councils but also from councillors across the political divide. The compensation from the Department that was in place is now abolished, leaving those councils, which are badly affected, high and dry. On Monday night, Dublin city councillors refused to pass a budget because of these cuts. How could they pass a budget which proposed, for example, increasing council rents, commercial rates on small businesses and toll charges? All of this would have a serious effect and negative impact on householders, older people in their homes and small businesses already struggling, as well as commuters forced to drive because of a failing public transport system. The chief executive of Dublin City Council said these cuts had to be made because the council was not being compensated by the Government, despite promises made. I have spoken to the chief executive officer of Waterford City and County Council and he has the same view. This is a Government cut. Promises were made to compensate these local authorities but they have been left high and dry.

In Waterford City and County Council, the proposed budget may include cuts in funding for housing maintenance, roads, festivals for local communities and an increase in commercial rates of up to 10%. That is unsustainable. People were told when they paid their property tax that the moneys would be used to fund proper services, yet people in Waterford and Dublin will see services cut through no fault of their own.

My simple question is this. We need obviously to have a debate on how we fund local government. In this particular instance, given that these local authorities have been so badly hit and given the impact this will have on people in Dublin, Waterford and other areas, will the Government commit to restoring the compensation given to local authorities to ensure they do not have to take the axe to services, which is what they are being asked to do? Sinn Féin councillors will not do that nor will they clean up the mess created by the Tánaiste's party. I implore him to do the right thing and restore funding to these local authorities.

The Tánaiste: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The background to this is that, between 2014 and 2019, compensation of the order of €47 million was paid annually to local

authorities in lieu of commercial rates from Irish Water. Irish Water is liable for commercial rates from 2020 and the need for compensation in lieu of commercial rates ceases. The apportionment of the valuation of Irish Water among local authorities from 2020 will be based on population, similar to that for other utility companies with national networks. It is expected the local government sector will collect a broadly similar amount in commercial rates, as was previously paid as Exchequer-funded water rates compensation.

Most local authorities are better off under the revised distribution effect of the income from Irish Water commercial rates as compared to the compensation amount. However, seven local authorities will receive less in commercial rates than they received in compensation. Waterford City and County Council is particularly impacted, losing 70% of the income previously received through Irish Water rates related compensation. It is far less equipped to deal with such a reduction in income compared to the other impacted authorities, namely, the four Dublin local authorities as well as the Wicklow and Kildare local authorities. The loss creates a gap for Waterford to deal with of up to €3 million for its 2020 budget.

Support for local government in 2020 has been realigned, largely as a result of the valuation of Irish Water as a global utility liable for commercial rates. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is monitoring the impact of this transition on local authorities and will, of course, take it into account. It is important local authorities have sufficient long-term sustainable funding to deliver critical services to local communities, rural and urban.

We are seeing a change in the way in which commercial rates will be allocated linked to Irish Water assets to ensure an appropriate distribution of those rates across local authorities. Most counties are gaining. Some counties, however, are losing as a result of that. Waterford is one of those. It is the job of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to make sure it works through those challenging arrangements with the Waterford local authority to ensure it is appropriately funded through the transition.

Deputy David Cullinane: I know the history of this issue. It is a legacy issue from Irish Water which is a complete mess and fiasco. It is not the fault of those local authorities in Dublin or Waterford that there was a global re-evaluation which has seen a massive cut in their funding. The Tánaiste said the local authorities in question have been asked to engage with the Department. They have done so for a long period and have been told that they may get funding for one year but that is it. After that, they are on their own and have to make the cuts. If the Tánaiste was watching this, Dublin City Council has proposed an increase in toll charges and rents for social housing tenants, for those who can least afford it, as well as cutting services and increasing rates. The same is being proposed in Waterford.

Solutions are not being provided other than the Tánaiste telling local councillors to take the axe to cut services because of a mistake made by the Government. That is not good enough. All the promises made as a consequence of the property tax have been thrown back in councillors' faces. Not only are they not getting additional services in those local authorities, they are now getting fewer services. It is not good enough. Compensation needs to be given fully to those local authorities to ensure householders and older people are not the ones who will have to pay the price for the Government's incompetence and mess.

The Tánaiste: I am sure the Deputy knows that the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, has met Waterford Oireachtas Members on this issue in recent weeks. Exchequer funding for local authorities has increased in recent years,

including the allocation for next year for Waterford City and County Council of just over €3 million. This is an increase of just under €700,000 in terms of this year's allocation moving into next year.

There is an issue, however, for Waterford City and County Council in the context of the reorganisation of the rates which would have been paid in the past from Irish Water assets. According to my note, the Department has an ongoing dialogue with management in Waterford City and County Council with a view of working through these issues. I am sure the Deputy is raising it in the Dáil today to make sure the focus stays on trying to resolve these issues in a way which is sustainable for Waterford City and County Council.

Deputy Alan Kelly: There are well over 1,000 for-profit hospital beds in this country. Advertisements on the radio constantly push private hospitals and clinics, claiming "because you deserve better". These ads turn my stomach. Who exactly deserves better? Do people with money for private healthcare deserve better than low-paid workers or single parents? The ads claim these hospitals and clinics have the most renowned specialists in the field. According to whom? Consultants in the public health system compete for senior positions and are engaged in constant professional development. Private consultants can just hire a suite in a private clinic and set up practice with nothing like the same rigorous oversight.

Private hospitals treating cancer piggyback on public multidisciplinary teams for opinions and reviews. Why are they not charged for this? Patients experiencing complications in the private sector are routinely transferred to the public hospitals for more advanced care. Is it right that private hospitals can do this without paying? When private hospitals are full, they send their overflow patients to public emergency departments. Is this not a serious dereliction of duty which makes a mockery of these adverts? How can they claim to be better on access when their emergency departments run on office hours and use the public hospitals as a pressure valve to deal with many issues?

The Government and the Fine Gael Party are wedded to an ideology of the privatisation of our healthcare system. The Government has allowed a wing of the new national children's hospital to be built for private beds. It buried the de Buítléir report on how to remove private practice from the public system. We also need to fully establish Fianna Fáil's stance on this issue as it is unclear.

Deputy Martin Kenny: It is the same as Fine Gael's.

Deputy David Cullinane: The Labour Party's is unclear as well.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Only the other day, a former health Minister, Senator James Reilly, was touting the development of a €50 million private hospital in Fingal which will charge the HSE to deliver public services. He was also happy to confirm that the Taoiseach met the developers and was happy to do so. When did this happen? The Taoiseach needs to explain the logic behind this. There is a false economy in the idea the private sector will build this hospital. It will get back every euro of the €50 million and more by making a profit on every outsourced operation and service the State should and could deliver on a non-profit basis. Already there are five private hospitals on Dublin's north side. Fine Gael is not serious about the Sláintecare report and the Government, through its actions, keeps reinforcing the public-private divide in healthcare.

When will Fine Gael finally commit to the investment needed to end the shame of Ireland

being the only country in the EU without universal healthcare? Why is the Government permitting the construction of more private hospitals, which runs totally against the implementation of the Sláintecare report? Will the Taoiseach explain why he met these developers in the middle of the process?

The Tánaiste: One of the first things the Government did from a healthcare perspective, within weeks of taking office, was to try to get agreement across all parties in the House to an approach to healthcare that would be consistent regardless of who was in government over the next ten years. We are committed to this process. Like other parties in the House, Deputy Kelly's party signed up and committed to an approach that we are now following. The Sláintecare vision is to achieve a universal single-tier health and social care system where everyone has equal access to services based on need and not ability to pay. The Deputy is trying to label my party as one that is pursuing healthcare with an ideological lens. I am not quite sure why he is doing so because the facts do not bear it out.

The implementation of Sláintecare reform is a priority for the Government and the Department of Health. We all recognise this is a long-term process but we need to continue to progress it. The Sláintecare action plan for 2019 includes a specific work stream on access and waiting lists. Sláintecare emphasises the need to invest in increased capacity, which is happening, while shifting the balance of care from hospitals to community services for better health outcomes and a more sustainable health service. Reducing waiting times for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. Obviously, the focus is on the public health system and not the private health system.

We have a challenge in terms of the transition, as the Deputy knows well. We need to make sure we use private hospitals and primary care facilities outside a hospital setting to ensure we can keep people out of hospital and when there is overcrowding in public hospitals that we have routes to try to deal with it in terms of waiting times and trolley numbers. This is what the National Treatment Purchase Fund is about in terms of sourcing bed capacity and operational capacity for much of the work that should be happening in public hospitals but cannot happen because of overcrowding or undercapacity. There is a role for private hospitals in the short to medium term. In future, there may also be a role for them if people want to pay more for a certain type of treatment. However, we must get to a point where, in terms of standards, healthcare provision is not linked to income or ability to pay for a different type of hospital experience. This is what Sláintecare is all about. It is what my party supports and, as far as I am aware, it is what virtually every other political party in the House has also supported.

Deputy Alan Kelly: What the Tánaiste has said emphasises what I said previously. He said that in the short to medium term we will move across to Sláintecare. I spent 11 months on Sláintecare. The Tánaiste would not be supporting the building of a new private hospital in Swords if he believed in what he said. We are practising health apartheid in this country as far as I am concerned. In his response the Tánaiste claimed to be implementing and supporting Sláintecare and that he is committed to it so let us test this theory. We know all complex medical cases are dealt with in the public health system, along with all major operations and all serious accident and emergency issues. Does the Tánaiste agree with me, on the record of the Dáil as a matter of fact, that the public health system has a much greater claim to enjoy the term "the most renowned specialists in the field of medicine in Ireland", as opposed to the private health system? Does he agree, and this would be a very important signal from the Government, that advertising by private hospitals needs to be regulated, if not banned, in the same way that we outlaw the advertising of prescription medicines directly to patients?

The Tánaiste: Advertising is regulated. If people are making claims that are not accurate, there need to be consequences. I accept that. I also accept we have to have a public health system that delivers the best outcomes for complex healthcare in all areas. We cannot have a situation where public hospitals are substandard compared with private hospitals. That is not acceptable. The whole point of Sláintecare is to achieve a universal single-tier health system where people, regardless of their background, income, where they come from, who they know or anything else, can expect to have the same standard of healthcare in terms of patient outcomes as anybody else. This is the point we need to get to and it will probably take us a decade to get there. I hope it will involve consistency of approach to the implementation of Sláintecare regardless of which parties are in government over that period.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Reference has been made to the possibility that Dublin City Council will decide to increase rents for council tenants. South Dublin County Council has already decided to do this. I want to ask the Tánaiste about what is quite an outrageous decision by his party, Fine Gael, together with Fianna Fáil and the Green Party, to support an increase in rents. There has been a cruel increase of €3 a week across the board regardless of income, combined with an additional €10 a week for a set of old age pensioners. This is a heartless attack on some of the most vulnerable people on low incomes. It is an attack, presumably supported by the Tánaiste, which underscores the nature of Fine Gael and the Government's housing policy as being to protect those who have it and attack those who do not.

Last Saturday, the Taoiseach, not for the first time, declared that opposition to the Government's position on housing and criticism of its approach on housing is ideological, unlike the Government's position. In the Dáil on Tuesday, he argued that anyone opposed to giving away public land to private developers has an ideological position, whereas the Government has no ideology at all. It is just a bunch of pragmatists doing their very best to resolve the crisis who have, by pure accident, stumbled into a situation where they preside over the greatest level of homelessness and housing crisis in the history of the State at the very same time as we have the highest levels of rents and profits for landlords and developers. It is an approach to ideology seen in the kings and queens who ruled the world in the past. They did not say they had a feudal ideology that justified why they ruled. They said they had a divine right to rule, just like the Government believes the market has the divine right to rule and landlords and developers have a divine and constitutional right to maximise their profits.

Those who benefit from the Government's ideology are extremely obvious. Last year, landlords received record rents of €13 billion. This was up from €5.5 billion in 2009. The largest corporate landlord in Ireland, Ires REIT, paid nothing in corporation tax last year on profits of €120 million. Developers continue to profit massively, with combined sales last year increasing by 25%. The losers are everybody affected by the housing crisis, including tenants affected by rents of more than €2,000 a month in Dublin, young people who cannot afford a home and families struggling to access mortgages. Now there are new victims. These are council tenants who will be hit by €156 extra in rent annually and the pensioners attacked by having to pay another €676 per year. Does the Tánaiste agree with this attack? Does he agree with attacking those on the lowest incomes in our society at the same time as protecting the landlords and developers? People will not accept it. They will mobilise on the streets on 5 December at 12 noon at the Garden of Remembrance. Council tenants should participate. I hope people will come along to the protest called by Solidarity for Monday, 9 December, at the council offices to build a campaign to oppose this attack as part of building a wider movement on the housing crisis.

The Tánaiste: Every time the Deputy takes to his feet in the House, he seems to be call-

ing for a new protest over something. I understand the frustrations and anger over the housing crisis. They are very genuine. I served in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and know this only too well. There are far too many people who are homeless. There are far too many families and children, in particular, affected by homelessness and whom I am sure are being scarred by it. The Government's response to that is to try to prioritise the issue from funding, policy and practical delivery perspectives. That is happening. We have changed the planning process and increased the numbers of protections for tenants. We have included what is effectively a rent cap or ceiling. We are building more social houses now than at any other time this century. This year, there will be more than 10,000 additional social houses on our social housing list. We are working with local authorities, particularly in our cities, where the pressure is most acute, to try to drive projects. In Cork city alone, the council is involved in 78 projects. The city chief executive confirmed to the Taoiseach and me last week that, in 2014, when there was no money being spent on social housing because there was not much money available, Cork City Council had one social house under construction. It currently has 1,000 under construction. That is what the Government is trying to do for vulnerable people who need the support of the State in order to get into social housing. We are seeing the progression of affordable housing units also. Again, we are focusing particularly on our cities, where the pressures are most acute. We will continue to take action to ensure housing is prioritised because it is a major issue for so many.

Next year, the housing budget will be over €2.6 billion. This represents a dramatic increase over the budget for recent years in terms of what the Government could afford. Therefore, we are not targeting anybody; rather, we are trying to help people who are in difficult circumstances. Many are in temporary accommodation that is not suitable in the long term. The objective is to get people into homes so they can have stable lives in them with the support of the State. We are making progress on that but there is still a lot of work to do.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Tánaiste did not even attempt to answer the question. It relates to whether, despite his talk of not targeting anybody, he agrees with the decision of his Fine Gael colleagues, together with their colleagues in Fianna Fáil and the Green Party, to increase council rents for individuals in the South Dublin County Council area. These are individuals on low and fixed incomes whom the Government is hitting with an across-the-board increase of €3 per week on a rent that is based on 10% of income. Now everybody is hit with a rise of €3 per week. Does the Tánaiste agree with hitting old-age pensioners with an increase of €10 per week on top of that? Does he agree with increasing their rent by €13 per week? If he does, how on earth can he say all this other stuff? When he comes out with the idea that this will be sorted, nobody believes him. When he says he is delivering more social housing than ever, it is a lie. It is not accurate.

The Tánaiste: It is not me who is saying it. It is in the statistics.

Deputy Paul Murphy: No, because the Tánaiste has reframed what social housing is. He believes that giving money to private landlords amounts to providing social housing. How many local authority houses is he building?

People are right to be angry. There are over 65,000 people in a Facebook group organising for the protest on 5 December. They are ordinary people. They are not organised in any political party. They are angry and right to come out to protest. It is the only thing that will force the Government to do anything to resolve the housing crisis.

The Tánaiste: I accept that there is anger. At times, protest is part of democracy. We respect and accept that. There have been many protests, understandably, in respect of the need to resolve what has been a housing crisis for a number of years. We are responding to that with a lot more money and policies that are actually working. The Deputy does not have to trust me on that; he should look at the CSO statistics on the numbers of social houses being built, affordable houses being built or in planning and the private houses under construction. There are dramatic increases.

Deputy Mick Barry: The Tánaiste should answer the question.

The Tánaiste: The issue of how local authorities deal with their tenants is one for those authorities to debate and discuss. I do not have the detailed rationale on why a decision may be made on modest increases in rent but I believe people have a right to ask the question.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It is €600 per year for a pensioner.

The Tánaiste: People do have a right to ask why it should ever be acceptable to ask for a modest increase in the contribution towards rental charges if they are seeing changes in conditions and investment by local authorities and so on but that is a matter for South Dublin County Council. I am sure that, like us, the Deputy has colleagues on that council who are well able to speak up and argue their points.

Deputy Paul Murphy: They voted to increase the rent.

The Tánaiste: The important point is that we are providing significantly more social houses year on year. More than 10,000 extra houses have been added to the stock this year. These are not fantasy numbers; they are very real.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: That relates to the housing assistance payment, not housing.

The Tánaiste: They will support families in a very real way.

Deputy Paul Murphy: How many local authority houses?

Ceisteanna ar Reachtaíocht a Gealladh - Questions on Promised Legislation

Deputy Dara Calleary: This morning, Fran McNulty, consumer affairs correspondent for RTÉ, relayed a story to the effect that more than 10,000 motor insurance policies in this country have been taken out from what are called “ghost brokers”. This has been discussed by the finance committee in the Oireachtas. Ghost brokers apparently falsify information, sometimes using stolen credit cards to pay for policies on the part of unsuspecting customers who believe they will be covered for motor insurance but who are actually not. They often only find out when they go to make a claim. What action is the Government taking on foot of this? Has he engaged with the insurance industry to ascertain the full extent of the problem and the controls being put in place by the industry to stop this from happening?

The Tánaiste: I heard about this issue only this morning, as I am sure the Deputy did. My understanding is that the matter is very much under investigation by an Garda Síochána. The Garda Síochána is liaising with the insurance industry as a whole to try to get a handle on the

extent of the problem, which seems to involve significant numbers. It is consumers who are vulnerable. They believe they are insured but are not in some cases. This is a criminal investigation that the Garda is resourced to and will pursue. We will, of course, keep in close contact with the Garda to determine whether it is appropriate, through policy or legislation, to give it more help that it may need.

Deputy Martin Kenny: I wish to raise the issue of the swine flu vaccine and the case in the courts yesterday. I received an email from a young woman in my constituency yesterday in respect of this. She explained what is happening very well. She stated that the Minister for Health and the HSE settled a landmark case in which one lady, Aoife Bennett, sued both the State and the HSE, and both bodies have now accepted responsibility in respect of this. Ms Bennett has developed a lifelong condition. My constituent stated said that she has also been diagnosed with the same condition as a direct result of receiving the vaccine. She stated it is a lifelong condition and that it is debilitating. She claims that she, too, plans to sue the State as she was told by solicitors that each case must be taken individually. She believes this is a travesty. She stated this one case alone has cost the taxpayer millions of euro and that the authorities are now willing to go through with 100 more cases of the very same nature. Can the Tánaiste assure me, on behalf of the 100 people, that he will not let them through the court in respect of this, find a mechanism to deal with them efficiently and effectively and ensure they are adequately compensated? I understand this is a legal-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Time is up.

Deputy Martin Kenny: -----but I believe we need to ensure that we do not set a precedent here, as happened in other circumstances.

The Tánaiste: This, of course, does involve quite a number of potential legal cases so I need to be careful about what I say. The State's approach to cases like this and others is to try to resolve them outside the court setting in a non-adversarial way, but there has to be acceptance of blame. I expect that there will be an effort to try to resolve genuine cases outside of court. I will get the Minister for Health to come back to Deputy Kenny with a more detailed response as I do not know any more than the Deputy.

Deputy Alan Kelly: There was a Labour Court recommendation in 2008 on a pension scheme for community employment, CE, scheme supervisors. I think the Tánaiste is well aware of it. A process was established in 2015 following discussions with SIPTU and Fórsa to bring the issue to a satisfactory conclusion. As Minister, I was party to that, and with the assistance of Deputy Brendan Howlin, we allowed for an *ex gratia* payment to be made through Pobal to deal with the issue in some way, but the process stopped when we left government. Will the Government now agree to kick-start a short time-limited process with the unions to address this recommendation which must be honoured? In fairness, we are talking about a small amount of money for people who do significant work that we all respect and admire.

The Tánaiste: We all appreciate the good work that CE workers do, but I am not in a position to confirm any time-limited commitment on a finalised decision on this matter.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The programme for Government talks about promoting fundamental rights and the rule of law. As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, is the Tánaiste aware of or concerned about the situation in Greece, an EU country where socialists in the Xekinimia organisation have told me about increased police repression and, in particular, attacks

on young people? Riot police, for example, raided a university and trapped and tear-gassed students. There was a cinema invasion to stop 16 year olds watching the film “Joker”, and night clubs have been stormed. On Sunday night a group of young people were arrested, two of whom I personally know because I met them when I attended an anti-racist summer event in Greece. Irini Eminidou and Zisis Sourlas are two of the young people who were punched, beaten and charged with really serious crimes. That was hours after any protest had taken place in Athens. As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, will the Tánaiste make representations about this to the Greek embassy? I ask other left Deputies to take up the issue. This is an EU country, not a so-called Third World country, where we are told police repression should not happen like this, but it is happening.

The Tánaiste: Like with a lot of other things, this is not a left versus right issue. it is a rule of law issue. Deputy Coppinger should send me the details if she has individual cases she would like me to follow up on and I will try to do that.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I welcome the announcement this week of a Jigsaw project for Tipperary based in Thurles. It has been long sought and we are pleased to hear of it. However, it will not be any use to towns such as Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel, Borrisokane and areas of north Tipperary unless outreach is provided in those towns and villages. The mental health situation in Tipperary is chronic, especially since the Government closed St. Michael’s in 2012. We do not have a single long-stay bed in the county for people suffering from mental health. We have a huge crisis, a drugs epidemic and associated issues. People are dying every week, and more often in some cases, due to mental health issues. We need the services to be developed in tandem with the Jigsaw project in Thurles. We cannot wait in those towns and villages.

The Tánaiste: I will ask the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, to come back to Deputy McGrath with the detail on that matter.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Yesterday, I raised the question of the new national maternity hospital and the fact that the Government is now in the invidious situation where it is awaiting the approval of the Vatican to proceed with the building of the much-needed new national maternity hospital.

Today in *The Irish Catholic*, a Rome-based Irish moral theologian has urged the Vatican to veto this proposal. Fr. Vincent Twomey is also reported as having urged the Vatican to stand firm. That has serious implications for the future of maternity care in this country. As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I would like to ask the Tánaiste if he is aware of the situation, whether he has been in touch with his counterparts in the diplomatic service in the Vatican, and what his assessment is of the likelihood of the Vatican giving approval to the proposal to alienate the site at St. Vincent’s, and what is the likelihood now of the national maternity hospital proceeding?

The Tánaiste: I simply have not been involved in this conversation as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. I am aware Deputy Shortall raised the matter in the House yesterday. I will have to get the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, to come back directly to the Deputy on it. If there is a foreign affairs element to it, I can be brought into the conversation but I am not aware there is at the moment.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony: In mid-October, a sinkhole occurred in Allihies in beautiful west Cork, and since then the road has been closed. While safety is paramount, it

is having a detrimental effect on local people. We have six families whose refuse has not been collected since it happened and five families who, instead of being able to walk a quarter of a mile to school, now have to take a round trip of six miles in a car. When does the Tánaiste reckon the sinkhole will be filled in because it is going on for too long?

An Ceann Comhairle: Who is the Minister for sinkholes?

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I will take that question. An incident did happen in west Cork which is being investigated by the Department. It is an old mine.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: Yes.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Are they looking into the hole?

Deputy Seán Canney: Engineering surveys are being carried out on it at the moment. It is a question of making sure that whatever engineering is done on it will mean it will not happen again. Cork County Council is also involved.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony: Does the Minister of State have a timeframe for the work?

Deputy Seán Canney: No, I do not have a timeframe but I will come back to the Deputy on that.

Deputy Mary Butler: Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna. The spiralling cost of insurance has been well discussed in this House. Today, I wish to focus on insurance costs for special schools. St. Martin's special school in Waterford is a state-of-the-art school that was opened in June 2018. It has 78 pupils with mild, severe and complex intellectual needs. The school employs two nurses. However, since the new building opened, insurance costs have been rising with more pupils and more staff. Currently, the school receives a capitation grant of €56,000, and 38% of that is now being used for insurance. That is putting considerable strains on the principal and the board of management and it is not sustainable. Already, the quote for the premium for next year has increased from €21,500 to €24,000, and the principal of the school is extremely worried about how he will fund it.

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I thank the Deputy for raising this important question. I think it was St. Teresa's in Roscommon that started this debate earlier in the year. What we have done in response to that issue is to work with the management bodies of the 125 special schools on a joint approach whereby a collective application would be made for insurance. Not all special schools have signed up to the plan but they are in the process. Intense communication and dialogue is ongoing between my officials and the management bodies to ensure that we are on top of this issue.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I might also direct my question, which is on education, to the Minister for Education and Skills if that is okay. Last Friday, my Oireachtas colleagues and I were at St. Aidan's comprehensive school in Cootehill. I hope it is a school with which the Minister is familiar. The school has a green flag and a Healthy Ireland flag. It is striking when one walks into the school that it is punching way above its weight in terms of the facilities it has. St. Aidan's has applied to the Department for more than 20 years for a very basic facility, namely, a gym. The school does not have a purpose-built gym or purpose-built canteen facili-

ties. It is a fact that good physical health in schools leads to good mental health. The school has more than 500 students and more than 50 staff, but there is no gym. The school has made numerous applications to the Department's building unit for a gym. We met Mary Ann Smith, a very vocal, active and passionate principal on behalf of her students and staff, who made a very passionate plea to us as Oireachtas Members to ask the Minister and his Department to please acknowledge its call for a gym. I urge the Minister to engage with the principal, Mary Ann Smith, immediately on the school's application for the very basic facility of a gym.

Deputy Joe McHugh: We will spend €620 million on schools in 2020. As Deputy Smyth is aware, there are many school extensions on the capital programme and a lot of new schools as well to keep up with demographic demands. Schools are making applications for gyms but it will not be until the latter end of the capital plan before we reach some of them.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: I also want to raise the issue of community employment scheme supervisors. The Labour Court has made a recommendation. I want to know if the Government will accept and implement that recommendation.

The Tánaiste: As far as I know, the Government is still considering the matter and it has not been finalised.

Deputy Robert Troy: I raised an issue yesterday with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Humphreys, regarding the extension of the deadline for the registry of business owners. She was to come back to me yesterday evening but did not do so. The Tánaiste might raise that with her.

I want to raise another matter. The Tánaiste will be aware that 16 people were found in the back of a truck on a ferry destined for Rosslare Europort this morning. Earlier this year, the annual trafficking and persons report for the second year in a row downgraded Ireland to tier 2. The authorities here failed to initiate for human trafficking any prosecutions in 2018. The report has identified chronic deficiencies in victims' identification, referral and assistance. I think this matter falls under the remit of the Tánaiste, as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. What is he doing to ensure that we meet our international obligations in respect of human trafficking and do not become a destination of choice for people engaged in the dreadful trafficking of human beings?

The Tánaiste: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. It is a breaking story that 16 refugees have been found in the back of a truck on a ferry on the way to Rosslare from France. They are all alive and in reasonable health. That is my understanding from reading media commentary on it. I understand the Garda will be waiting for the ship when it arrives. The Government is fully committed to addressing human trafficking under Irish and EU legislation and the principal international conventions. The second national action plan to prevent and combat human trafficking in Ireland was launched in 2016. The action plan identifies six priorities, namely, prevention; training, awareness raising and evaluation; reduction of vulnerability; data collection; demand reduction; and enhanced co-ordination and co-operation. Action continues on a whole-of-Government basis in line with this plan. An Garda Síochána has committed significant resources to the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking. A specialist Garda unit, the human trafficking investigation and co-ordination unit, has been established to co-ordinate delivery of this national strategy. This is criminal activity that does not respect borders.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: Hear, hear.

The Tánaiste: The Garda is working closely with the PSNI in respect of very tragic cases that have been reported from the UK and is also working with other police services in different parts of the EU. We will continue to do that in this case also.

Deputy Barry Cowen: The budget made provision for ring-fencing the increased carbon tax revenue and gearing it towards regions that have been unfairly affected, especially following the decision by the ESB not to proceed with the Government policy of co-fuelling two of its plants with peat and biomass. Notwithstanding the difficulties arising from that decision for the Government and its repercussions in terms of its responsibility to respond to it, when can we expect legislation to give effect to those measures before the House?

The Tánaiste: Is that in respect of just transition?

Deputy Barry Cowen: It is in respect of legislation. It is about providing legislation to ensure that the funds promised to be geared towards just transition, among other initiatives, are provided for in legislation.

The Tánaiste: Certainly if there is further legislation required beyond the Finance Bill, we will provide it. That is an absolute commitment from the Government and there will be no issue with that. If there is separate and specific legislation required to bed that down, I assume the Government will proceed with that. I will get the Minister, Deputy Bruton, to confirm that to the Deputy.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: Page 44 of the programme for Government contains a commitment to increase the budget for local and regional roads by 50%. This morning, I will focus on class 3 local roads, often referred to as culs-de-sac, which are listed as council roads in each local authority's road schedule. That schedule legally obligates the local authority to maintain these roads, yet they have been ignored for years as regards repairs and road surfacing. My blood boils when I hear that residents living on these roads, many of whom have no resources, are being advised to apply for funding under the community involvement schemes. As I have said before, these people living on third class roads are being treated as third class citizens with no equity. Will the Government and the Minister responsible encourage or advise each local authority that fairness and equity prevail in respect of road allocation on local roads? These people must be treated in a fair and equitable way. They are entitled to be able to go about their business but they are not able to do so in many of these culs-de-sac which are council roads.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I am speaking on behalf of my colleagues in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and of the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring. There are two schemes, the local improvement scheme and the community involvement scheme, which are funded, one from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and one from the Department of Rural and Community Development. Both have seen significant increases in funding in the last few years. I know the point the Deputy is making in respect of homeowners or landowners having to contribute. The reality is that until those schemes were introduced by the rainbow Government in 1995 or 1996, cul-de-sac roads had no money spent on them-----

Deputy Declan Breathnach: Not true.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: -----because the traffic and through traffic on them would obviously be significantly lower than on through roads.

Deputy Barry Cowen: The Minister of State is chancing his arm.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: I am not. It is a fact. I was a member of the council shortly afterwards and this scheme-----

Deputy Barry Cowen: I was a member of the council at the time.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: Funding for the scheme has been increased in the last couple of years. It was during the time of the recession that it was parked.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: Can we get an answer to the question?

Deputy Barry Cowen: It is a function of the Minister but we have to get them out from their coffee breaks.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: Funding has been increased and more funding is planned in this budget.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: My colleague, Deputy Michael McGrath, has raised the issue of the flat rate expenses with the Minister for Finance, Deputy Donohoe, as has Deputy Cassells in respect of the Tara Mines workers in particular. Can the Tánaiste give us an update? There is considerable fear among the teaching profession and, I am sure, many other professions about what the impact of this particular review of flat rate expenses by the Revenue Commissioners will be. Has the Government made a decision on the matter? Has the Minister for Finance made representations on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of taxpayers who will be affected? Has the Minister for Education and Skills got involved on behalf of teachers?

The Tánaiste: As the Deputy knows, this is primarily a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. I will get an update from the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, for him.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: This is a question for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. As he well knows, it is two months now since the beef protests stopped across the country. Despite the commitment to get a beef task force up and running, which led to the protests being stepped down, some two months later there has been a total failure to do so. The Minister and Government have failed to ensure that happened. There is an onus on the Minister to deliver that commitment. What is the status of the beef task force? Unless we want to see these protests commence again, the task force needs to get up and running. Given that we have seen little change in prices or behaviour by the factories since then, it is essential that the task force gets up and running and that many of the issues it is supposed to address are dealt with comprehensively.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I share the Deputy's anxiety that the task force would meet at the earlier possible date.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Deputy Creed is the Minister.

Deputy Michael Creed: As he is aware, we convened a meeting of the task force but unfortunately due to events that are well known and have been previously aired in this House, that meeting did not get under way. Every effort is being made to ensure that every party to the task force is in a position to attend a meeting at the earliest possible date.

Deputy Michael Collins: I raised a question with the Tánaiste last week in respect of play-

schools facing closure in west Cork and throughout the country due to regulation enforcement. The Tánaiste promised to look into the issue if I furnished him with the details, which I did. Yesterday, Tusla informed me at a meeting that it was going to give an extension to these play-schools until July 2020 to meet the regulations. I thank the Tánaiste and Tusla for any help they gave in this matter. I asked for two things last week if we are to save these preschools going forward. They are non-profit playschools run solely for the benefit of children. One request was for an extension of time, which has been given, and the other was grant aid. Would the Tánaiste help in getting the message across to the Minister that grant aid is urgently needed for these preschools?

1 o'clock

The Tánaiste: Clearly, we need to keep community-based playschools open. Whether they are not-for-profit or privately-operated for a modest profit, the standards have to be consistent with those set out by Tusla. That is what this is ultimately about. We will, of course, assist if we can with the organisations that are trying to be compliant with the standards set out for them. I do not want to give any commitments on grant aid. That is ultimately a matter for a different Minister.

Deputy Eugene Murphy: I thank the Ceann Comhairle. Ta píos páipéir i mo lámha anseo. It is a letter from the HSE in reply to a question I put down to the Minister for Health about a seven year old boy whose parents are seeking an appointment with the autistic spectrum disorder, ASD, service in Athenry. I will refer briefly to a couple of lines from it. The letter stated that it wished to advise that the boy was referred to the Galway-Roscommon ASD service in Athenry by Roscommon early intervention services on 13 August 2019 and placed on the intervention waiting list. He is currently 193rd on that waiting list. It stated also that the Galway-Roscommon ASD service does not provide a prioritisation system other than the date referred to the service and that at this time the Galway-Roscommon ASD service cannot provide a date for the commencement of intervention support for him.

Both the parents and I made more inquiries. The family of this seven year old boy has been told it will possibly be four years before he can get any treatment. If the Minister for Health is watching this on his monitor, would he please deal with this case? This is utterly shameful. Can the Tánaiste intervene?

The Tánaiste: I simply do not have enough information on this case to make an informed answer. It sounds like a very difficult case. I will pass it on to the Minister for Health.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The patient safety Bill is promised legislation and given the importance of this issue and in view of recent public commentary, can the Tánaiste state when it is likely to come before the House and become law?

The Tánaiste: The pre-legislative scrutiny has taken place, so I presume it will be progressing soon.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: Last week I raised the issue of a psychiatrist for the deaf community in the southern region. The Minister for Health was in the Chamber and confirmed that he would come back to me within a day or so, but we have heard nothing since. This is outstanding for a long time. Many people within the deaf community and their families have been in contact with me. We have been trying to resolve this. No consultant psychiatrist has been appointed for some time. Can the Tánaiste use his offices to get an answer for me? What

is the likely date or is there any intention to appoint a consultant psychiatrist for the deaf community in the southern region?

The Tánaiste: I believe I was here when the Deputy raised that issue and when the Minister for Health responded and said he would come back to him. I will certainly remind him of that and we will see if we can get him an answer.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I will direct my question to the Minister for Education and Skills. As we know, 4,000 children are currently trapped in emergency accommodation. This is having a direct impact on education as teachers feel unsupported. They have raised this issue, as has Focus Ireland. It is crucial to provide these children with support because we have to ensure they are able to reach their potential, as stated in the Education Act 1998. In addition, we have to ensure we help them so that they do not become trapped in a cycle of disadvantage. Will the Minister consider setting up a dedicated post for home school liaison officers, specifically for children in at national school and post primary levels who are living in emergency accommodation? We have to act urgently or this situation will become worse.

Deputy Joe McHugh: This is a very important issue. Officials in the Department of Education and Skills sit on a cross-departmental group and we take this issue very seriously. We have targeted support for DEIS schools. Initially when the DEIS school support system was set up it, it was not primarily on a geographical basis, but invariably it is on a geographical base. We are reviewing that and are looking at how we can have a more graduated and targeted intervention. Children who do not have homes will form part of that. We are in the middle of the review and we are already on record saying that we need to further enhance the €120 million funding we have for DEIS support and see how we can build on that in the future.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I refer to the Sláintecare report and the issue raised by my colleague, Deputy Calleary, about potential cuts to community pharmacies. Can the Tánaiste explain why vulnerable medical card holders will now have to pay €10 per month to have their medicines separated into the daily dosage? This service was provided free of charge heretofore. The family of a vulnerable individual living on disability allowance with an intellectual disability received a letter from its pharmacy effectively saying that either it takes the medicines in bulk, where it will be up to the family to allocate those medicines on a daily basis. These are people who would be taking a multiplicity of medications, and clearly would not have the capacity to separate the medicines into the daily dosage. If they are not able to do that and they want to pharmacy to do it, the suggestion is it will cost the family €10. That is a bit callous and maybe it is something that the Tánaiste might reflect on with the Minister for Health.

The Tánaiste: This is the first time I have heard of this but I certainly will get the Minister for Health to come back to the Deputy on this. I suspect that this is a decision that has been made by the individual pharmacy, so I am not sure if we can control that.

Deputy Dara Calleary: The HSE have cut the funding for dispensing.

The Tánaiste: One does not necessarily require the other. If there is a Department of Health or HSE issue here, I will ask the Minister to get back to the Deputy.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: The 2019 Environmental Protection Agency report reveals that raw sewage is being released into the environment every day, with coastal areas being the worst affected. In County Louth six areas have been identified and need investment badly. These are Blackrock, Castlebellingham, Dunleer, Omeath, Tallanstown and Dundalk. Omeath is still

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without a wastewater treatment plant. Blackrock and Dundalk are not meeting their legal requirement. Rivers and waterways are also under pressure. What plans does the Government have to combat this? This is not acceptable in these times. Can the Tánaiste please let us have an update on the situation in County Louth.

The Tánaiste: On this issue generally, our plan is to invest billions of euro in wastewater treatment facilities through Irish Water, and to do that efficiently. As we speak, that is transforming Cork Harbour, for example, which was one of the most negatively-impacted marine environments in the country regarding raw sewage. Irish Water is spending more than €90 million in putting in place a very comprehensive wastewater facility for the harbour. I presume it will also get to other parts of the country. It is not acceptable to be pumping raw sewage into marine environments. Wastewater treatment facilities are expensive and take time. Irish Water has a very significant capital expenditure programme over the next five to six years to address many of the issues the Deputy outlined.

Supplementary Estimates for Public Services 2019: Leave to Introduce

The Tánaiste: I move:

That leave be given by the Dáil to introduce the following Supplementary Estimates for the service of the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2019:—

Vote 9 — Office of the Revenue Commissioners (*Supplementary Estimate*).

Vote 12 — Superannuation and Retired Allowances (*Supplementary Estimate*).

Vote 17 — Public Appointments Service (*Supplementary Estimate*).

Vote 26 — Education and Skills (*Supplementary Estimate*).

Vote 30 — Agriculture, Food and the Marine (*Supplementary Estimate*)

Vote 38 — Health (*Supplementary Estimate*).

Question put and agreed to.

Supplementary Estimates for Public Services 2019: Referral to Select Committee

The Tánaiste: I move:

That, subject to leave being given to introduce the following Supplementary Estimates for the service of the year ending on 31st December, 2018, the Supplementary Estimates be referred to the following Select Committees, as appropriate, pursuant to Standing Orders 84A(3)(c) and 182(3), which shall report back to the Dáil by no later than 12th December:—

Vote 9 — Office of the Revenue Commissioners (*Supplementary Estimate*) — Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach.

Vote 12 — Superannuation and Retired Allowances (*Supplementary Estimate*) — Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach.

Dáil Éireann

Vote 17 — Public Appointments Service (*Supplementary Estimate*) — Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach.

Vote 26 — Education and Skills (*Supplementary Estimate*) — Select Committee on Education and Skills.

Vote 30 — Agriculture, Food and the Marine (*Supplementary Estimate*) — Select Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Vote 38 — Health (*Supplementary Estimate*) — Select Committee on Health.

Question put and agreed to.

Hospital Overcrowding: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Stephen Donnelly on Wednesday, 20 November 2019:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes:

— that so far this year, more than 100,000 patients have gone without a hospital bed, waiting on trolleys in emergency departments;

— that to the end of October this year, 13,466 people over 75 years of age have endured emergency department waits of more than 24-hours, a third more than for the same period in 2018;

— that October was the second-worst month for hospital overcrowding since records began;

— the warning from the master of the Rotunda Hospital that it is ‘only a matter of time’ before newborn babies are injured or die as a result of overcrowding;

— the increase in the mortality rate from sepsis;

— the numbers presenting to emergency departments are rising;

— that emergency department overcrowding is linked to increased mortality and poorer outcomes for patients; and

— that delays in emergency departments result in poor patient experiences, with some patients enduring horrendous experiences, while others leave without being seen;

agrees that:

— the Health Service Executive (HSE) National Winter Plan 2019-2020 provides for no additional acute beds or frontline hospital staff;

— emergency medicine staffing levels are below international comparators, and

below the agreed safe staffing levels;

— healthcare professionals in emergency medicine are under unprecedented, unsustainable and unacceptable pressure; and

— there is no funded workforce plan in place to reach agreed safe staffing levels;

acknowledges that:

— hospital bed occupancy rates average 97 per cent, and are 104 per cent in model 4 hospitals, compared to the recommended safe occupancy rate of 85 per cent;

— delayed discharge is significant and linked to a growing waiting list for home care support;

— there is a significant shortage of hospital beds relative to the capacity review; and

— there is no definite timeline for the provision of the additional acute beds needed; and

calls for:

— a clear funded timeline for the provision of additional acute beds to meet 85 per cent occupancy levels, and for step down beds, as set out on the capacity review;

— an immediate assessment of the number of acute inpatient psychiatric beds required;

— increased access to diagnostics for emergency medicine;

— implementation of the recommendations made by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) in their 2012 report;

— HIQA to investigate the impact of overcrowding on the health of people presenting to emergency departments;

— urgent progress on achieving safe staffing levels in emergency medicine, to include:

— ending of pay disparity for consultants;

— ending of the de-facto hiring embargo for nurses and midwives;

— a funded workforce plan; and

— an overhaul of human resources practices to improve working conditions for healthcare professionals; and

— investment in general practitioner (GP) services, including:

— funding chronic disease management;

— expansion of GP out-of-hours services; and

— appropriate access to diagnostics.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

“notes that:

— the population aged 65 and over has increased by 35 per cent since 2009, with the result that there have been increasing levels of demand for health and social care services;

— there has been an increase of 29,000 attendances and 2,600 admissions to emergency departments in hospitals in 2019, as against the same period last year; and

— the Health Service Executive (HSE) has published its National Winter Plan 2019-20, which identifies mitigating actions to bring down the number of patients on trolleys, and reduce waiting times in emergency departments, notwithstanding the growing demand for its services;

acknowledges:

— the allocation of an additional €26 million to fund the implementation of the National Winter Plan 2019-20 to support egress from hospitals;

— the establishment of nine Winter Action Teams aligned to Community Healthcare Organisations and associated acute hospitals which have prepared integrated winter plans that will focus on demand management and reduction;

— that an additional investment of €52 million has been made to bring the total funding for home supports to €487 million in 2020;

— that over the last two years an additional €45 million has been provided to the Nursing Home Support Scheme (NHSS) budget, and in 2020 the NHSS will see a further investment into its budget of €45 million, bringing the total annual budget for the NHSS to €1.03 billion;

— the sustained focus in recent years on reducing delayed transfers of care and enabling patients to be discharged from hospital in a timely manner;

— the increased investment of €210 million per annum to be made by 2023 in general practitioner (GP) services set out in the Agreement on Contractual Reform and Service Development of May 2019;

— the establishment of a fully-funded chronic disease management programme to be delivered by GPs from January 2020;

— the commitment to comprehensive patient care on the part of GPs including the improvement of out-of-hours services;

— the steps being taken to introduce diagnostic facilities at community level;

— that the Minister for Health is engaging with the Rotunda Hospital, RCSI

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Hospital Group and the HSE in relation to the scope of interim works necessary to address the infrastructural challenges in the Rotunda Hospital, pending its relocation to Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown;

— the increased investment in the health services, including the increase of over 250 whole-time equivalents of medical and dental staff and over 370 in-patient and client personnel since the beginning of 2019, and 800 nurses and midwives since September 2018;

— the HSE has established a Medical Workforce and Patient Safety Oversight Group to agree and oversee implementation of actions in relation to recruitment of consultants and non-consultant hospital doctors;

— that engagement with the consultants' representative bodies has commenced and further engagement is planned;

— that Project Ireland 2040 provides €10.9 billion for health capital projects including 2,600 acute hospital beds and 4,500 social care beds

— that the Government will provide record levels of funding of €18.3 billion in revenue and capital funding for the health services in 2020; and

— the publication of the Sláintecare Action Plan 2019 progress report this week which will show that the Government is on track with its implementation; and agrees:

— with the Sláintecare vision of a universal single-tier health and social care system where everyone has equal access to services based on need and not ability to pay;

— that as part of the Sláintecare Action Plan 2019 reducing waiting times for patients in hospitals and for community services is a key priority for the Government;

— that the Government, through its policies and funding for the health services, is addressing the issue of capacity in the healthcare system by enhancing community services, improving patient flows and providing additional capacity in line with the recommendations of the Health Service Capacity Review; and

— that the most effective way of achieving the Sláintecare vision is by backing the Government's continued implementation of the Sláintecare Action Plan 2019, which has the support of all parties."

-(Minister for Health)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to amendment No. 1 to the motion regarding hospital overcrowding. On Wednesday, 20 November 2019, on the question that amendment No. 1 to the motion be agreed to, a division was claimed and in accordance with Standing Order 70(2), that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

Dáil Éireann

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 39; Níl, 66; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	
<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	
<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	
<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	
<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Stanton, David.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	

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	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	
	<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Seán Kyne and Tony McLoughlin; Níl, Deputies Michael Moynihan and John Lahart.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I move amendment No. 2:

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

“notes:

- that so far this year, more than 100,000 patients have gone without a hospital bed, waiting on trolleys in emergency departments;

- that to the end of October this year, 13,466 people over 75 years of age have endured emergency department waits of more than 24-hours, a third more than for the same period in 2018;

- that October was the second-worst month for hospital overcrowding since records began;

- that Fine Gael have had eight years to address the overcrowding crisis, but the number of patients on trolleys have gotten worse year on year, as follows:

- 2012 - 66,308;

- 2013 - 67,863;

- 2014 - 77,091;

- 2015 - 92,998;

- 2016 - 93,621;

- 2017 - 98,981;

- 2018 - 108,227; and

- 2019 (to date) – 100,000 plus;

- that in four of these years, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, Fianna Fáil have been in a confidence and supply arrangement with the Fine Gael Government, and have agreed and facilitated Fine Gael Budgets which have had a catastrophic impact on the health service;

- the warning from the master of the Rotunda Hospital that it is ‘only a matter of time’ before newborn babies are injured or die as a result of overcrowding;

- the Irish Association of Emergency Medicine has calculated that there could be between 300 and 350 excess patient deaths each year due to the trolley crisis and emergency unit overcrowding;

- the increase in the mortality rate from sepsis;

- the numbers presenting to emergency departments are rising;

- that emergency department overcrowding is linked to increased mortality and poorer outcomes for patients; and

- that delays in emergency departments result in poor patient experiences, with some patients enduring horrendous experiences, while others leave without being seen;

agrees that:

- the Health Service Executive (HSE) National Winter Plan 2019-20 provides for no additional acute beds or frontline hospital staff;

- a recruitment moratorium in the health service was brought in by the then Fianna Fáil Government in 2007, two years before any other sector in the public service and the damage done by that policy is at the root of many of the problems in the health service to this day;

- emergency medicine staffing levels are below international comparators, and below the agreed safe staffing levels;

- healthcare professionals in emergency medicine are under unprecedented, unsustainable and unacceptable pressure;

- pay inequality for new entrant consultants and the failure to fully unwind the Financial Emergency Measures in Public Interests (FEMPI) for consultants has crippled the public health system and caused gross staff loss, demoralised current staff, and has left the health service with around 500 consultant vacancies across different specialties, many in emergency medicine;

- there are over 1,300 nursing and midwifery vacancies in the public health sector as a direct result of the HSE's recruitment freeze;

- in order to deal with the shortage of staff, the health service has an over-reliance on costly agency staff, with nearly €2 billion being spent on agency staff since Fine Gael entered Government eight years ago;

- there is no funded workforce plan in place to reach agreed safe staffing levels; and

- the staffing crisis has created a severely challenging working environment, where nurses and doctors routinely work beyond their contracted hours in order to ensure patients are cared for in hospitals, at a significant physical, mental and financial cost to themselves and their families and friends;

acknowledges that:

- hospital bed occupancy rates average 97 per cent, and are 104 per cent in model 4 hospitals, compared to the recommended safe occupancy rate of 85 per cent;

- Ireland had the second lowest number of hospital beds in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) leading to a lower than average hospital stay, 6.2 days, compared to the OECD average of 8.2 days;

- in the past decade acute hospital in-patient bed numbers were cut when they should have been increased in line with the country's growing and aging population;

- unions representing workers in the health service have been highlighting the issue of a chronic lack of capacity in the health service and how it contributes to hospital overcrowding for almost a decade;

- delayed discharge is significant and linked to a growing waiting list for home care support;

- delayed discharges constitute one of the biggest financial wastes of money and resources in the health service and cost the health service nearly €600 million since 2016;

- the freezing of home help hours has contributed to delayed discharges as patients who are fit to return home are left stuck in hospital with the result being that many of the 7,225 elderly people on a waiting list for home help hours are stuck in hospitals;

- there is a significant shortage of hospital beds relative to the capacity review;

- there is no definite timeline for the provision of the additional acute beds needed; and

- Fianna Fáil facilitate this Government and that the Minister for Health only holds that office because Fianna Fáil abstained in a no confidence vote in him in February of this year; and

calls for:

- a clear funded timeline for the provision of additional acute beds to meet 85 per cent occupancy levels, and for step down beds, as set out in the capacity review;

- an immediate assessment of the number of acute inpatient psychiatric beds required;

- all hospital beds closed during the austerity years to be reopened;

- increased access to diagnostics for emergency medicine;

- the implementation of the recommendations made by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) in their 2012 report;

- HIQA to investigate the impact of overcrowding on the health of people presenting to emergency departments;

- investment in co-locating general practices and acute mental health services next to emergency departments so those patients who do not need emergency department care can be treated in a more appropriate setting;

- increased investment for transitional care beds, adequate step-down facilities, home care packages, and home help hours to ensure that all patients who can be moved home, or to a more appropriate care setting, are given that opportunity;

- the speeding up of the move towards primary and community care ensuring that all primary care centres are adequately resourced with new staff and funding;

- urgent progress on achieving safe staffing levels in emergency medicine, to include:

- the ending of pay disparity for consultants and the full unwinding of FEMPI for consultants;

- the ending of the *de facto* hiring embargo for nurses, midwives, doctors and other staff across the health service;

- genuine investment in recruiting more staff to the health service, while simultaneously addressing the key issues for existing and prospective staff of working conditions, facilities, supports, training opportunities and pay;

- a funded workforce plan; and

- an overhaul of human resources practices to improve working conditions for health-care professionals;

- investment in general practitioner (GP) services, including:

- funding chronic disease management;

- expansion of GP out-of-hours services; and

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- appropriate access to diagnostics;
- a commitment to put in place a plan for piloting salaried HSE employed GPs in both rural and urban areas; and
- the full implementation of all the recommendations in the Sláintecare Report.”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 20; Níl, 88; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Aylward, Bobby.</i>	
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Bailey, Maria.</i>	
<i>Broughan, Thomas P.</i>	<i>Barrett, Seán.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Breathnach, Declan.</i>	
<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Burton, Joan.</i>	
<i>Healy, Seamus.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Byrne, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	
<i>Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.</i>	<i>Cassells, Shane.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.</i>	
	<i>Coveney, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Curran, John.</i>	
	<i>D'Arcy, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Deering, Pat.</i>	
	<i>Doherty, Regina.</i>	
	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
	<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	
	<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	
	<i>Doyle, Andrew.</i>	
	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
	<i>English, Damien.</i>	

Dáil Éireann

	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	
	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
	<i>Gallagher, Pat The Cope.</i>	
	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
	<i>Harty, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	
	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
	<i>Kyne, Seán.</i>	
	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	
	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Finian.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
	<i>McHugh, Joe.</i>	
	<i>McLoughlin, Tony.</i>	
	<i>Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.</i>	
	<i>Murphy, Eugene.</i>	
	<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	
	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	
	<i>Neville, Tom.</i>	
	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
	<i>O'Connell, Kate.</i>	
	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
	<i>O'Keeffe, Kevin.</i>	
	<i>O'Loughlin, Fiona.</i>	
	<i>O'Rourke, Frank.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Jan.</i>	

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	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Penrose, Willie.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Rock, Noel.</i>	
	<i>Ross, Shane.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Stanton, David.</i>	
	<i>Troy, Robert.</i>	
	<i>Zappone, Katherine.</i>	

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

Amendment declared lost.

Motion put and declared carried.

Sitting suspended at 1.30 p.m. and resumed at 2.10 p.m.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 29A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Fergus O'Dowd - to discuss provision of further resources to tackle drug abuse in the Drogheda and east Meath area; (2) Deputy John McGuinness - to discuss the availability of High Court judges in Kilkenny; (3) Deputy Catherine Murphy - to discuss the special permissions required for medical professionals when moving into self-employment as general practitioners; (4) Deputy Denis Naughten - to discuss home care funding, which causes delays in the discharge of patients from the National Rehabilitation Hospital; (5) Deputy Thomas Pringle - to discuss respite services in County Donegal for children with additional special needs; (6) Deputy Joan Burton - to discuss the proposed transfer of the Rotunda Hospital to Blanchardstown, Dublin 15; (7) Deputy Mary Butler - to discuss the rising costs of insurance for St. Martin's special school, Waterford; (8) Deputy Michael Moynihan - to discuss funding for the regeneration of Kanturk Town Park, Cork; (9) Deputy Thomas Byrne - to discuss the constitutional right of all children to access education on World Children's Day; (10) Deputy Mattie McGrath - to discuss the Government's efforts to reduce costs of insurance and increase its availability; and (11) Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin - to discuss the lack of second level school places in Newbridge and Kildare town.

The matters raised by Deputies Fergus O'Dowd, Joan Burton and Michael Moynihan have been selected for discussion. The matter raised by Deputy McGuinness was also selected but is to be replaced.

Supporting Children out of Emergency Accommodation and into Homes: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I thank the House for the opportunity to speak again on this important issue, which I think touches everyone's heart. It is important that we focus on it here in the Dáil and in committee, which I know has happened recently. It is timely that we are having this discussion again. The last time we had a debate on this matter was last May. A great deal has happened since, including the publication last week of two reports on child and family homelessness by the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs. Deputy Jan O'Sullivan was probably the main person behind the former report, so I am glad she is here for this debate. I have read through both reports and there are many recommendations in them, which we will study. Some reflect the work that is ongoing and perhaps changes and tweaks to it, and then there are some other new recommendations and changes to legislation. We will look at all that. I did not read all the submissions to the report but I read some of them. There was some acknowledgement during those discussions that in certain areas we are making a little progress but that we must make a lot more and try to continue with this. We always say in these debates that we all accept that until we have ended the situation in which people are living in emergency accommodation long-term, we must keep our focus on this and keep making all the changes possible.

Resolving homelessness is one of the most important challenges facing the State and is, without doubt, one of the key priorities for my Department, the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, all our colleagues in the Department and the Government. The Government welcomes the publication of the reports. As I said, we will examine them. Both reports show that the number of families and children who have need of emergency accommodation remains far too high. I welcome the opportunity to outline to the House the measures that have been put in place across Government to tackle this issue. We will go through and try to deal with the recommendations at a later stage.

The initial response to this, for the first couple of years, is about Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. We must ensure that this does not happen again. I refer Deputies to Project Ireland 2040 and the long-term commitments contained therein. I am conscious that some of the submissions to the various committees - certainly those from Mike Allen of Focus and the Ombudsman for Children - referred to when the next crash will come, what will happen then and whether we will have changed anything. We do not intend for that to happen ever again. I strongly believe that if this House sticks to the plans we have put in place, with long-term planning, management of housing and commitment to delivery of social housing, that will not happen again. Governments will come and go, but I hope that when it comes to housing policy, we stick to long-term thinking and plans which involve managing State lands and resources and delivering housing at a steady, sustainable pace, not a boom-and-bust pace, and that we will build plenty of social housing in good years. It does not matter how, where or why, but we are in this situation because of a mismanaging of housing in general for a many years. If we manage it properly, that will not happen again. That is why it is important that, apart from the initial Rebuilding Ireland response, money is set aside for the next ten years to bring over 12,000 or 13,000 social houses on stream every year. We need to continue and build on that because if we keep at that pace, there will not be a social housing shortage in the long

term.

From the point of view of housing construction in general, a key part of Rebuilding Ireland is that we would have a sustainable construction sector and that we would deliver those 28,000 or 30,000 houses every year for the next 20 years, not 90,000 one year and 10,000 the following year. That is the important part. I hope that will do away with the fear that this could happen again. It should not. Financial crashes and other events can happen worldwide, but this country should be able to manage its housing stock regardless of such occurrences.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, we have set out a commitment to deliver 50,000 new social houses into the system across all the various streams while availing of approximately 87,000 housing assistance payment, HAP, supports, including through the rental accommodation scheme, RAS. I recognise the calls in some of the committees that we not rely on the private sector for our housing. This is only a short-term reliance. Naturally, as we rebuild social housing stock we should not have to rely on the private sector through HAP and so on. However, if we had not had it in recent years, we would have a major problem. People would not have had homes to go to. I hear a lot of commentary to the effect that people do not like HAP, but where would those making such comments expect 50,000 families to live if we did not use HAP in the short term? Naturally, we do not want to stay with it long-term. I recognise that Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, who is here, and the former Minister, Deputy Burton, made some changes to the rental scheme at the time to bring in HAP, which I believe is a better scheme because it encourages people to go back to work if at all possible rather than penalising them, which was the case in the past. By the end of this year more than 100,000 households will have had their housing need met under Rebuilding Ireland through all the various schemes. The numbers on the housing list have fallen from 91,600 to 68,000, which is a 26% reduction. It is a little bit of progress - no one is saying it is not - but we still want to go a lot further.

I am speaking about people on the housing list whereas the focus today is on those who are homeless, but both are linked in various ways. Delivering more social homes is the key to this. Last year over 8,000 were delivered. We have just finished a round of negotiations with the local authorities. We will be over the 10,000 mark this year, which is a good step up from where we were two or three years ago. It does not give us enough housing to give a house to everyone who is homeless or on a waiting list, but the trend for the delivery of housing is going in the right direction and we need to continue it. However, the trend for people becoming homeless and the prevention of homelessness is not right, and that is what we want to focus on today along with the child aspect of it.

In the Dublin region, where family homelessness is particularly challenging, important work is being undertaken in the area of homelessness prevention. For every two families who presented to homeless services in the first nine months of this year, one was found a home immediately without the need to enter into emergency accommodation. That is the key part. If those families presented two or three years ago, we would not have been able to do that; they probably would have entered emergency accommodation. Today we can find a house straight away for 50%, or at least one out of two. Then, sadly, the other family would enter emergency accommodation. We are trying to ensure that that is for a shorter period. I am conscious that individuals who become homeless and families presenting as homeless have different needs, and these are addressed in both reports. Some are economic, some are rental, but the breakdown is roughly half and half. Others are social and so on, but rent pressures and the inability to access private rented accommodation are causing about half the problem. This is well recorded in those reports. We are intervening much earlier now to prevent this in the first instance. It is

important that we continue to do this while we deal with families who become homeless and enter emergency accommodation.

The number of families presenting to homeless services in Dublin remains high but is falling. In fact, it has dropped by 9.5% in the first nine months of this year compared with 2018. Again, the figure is far too high, but at least if we can stop it rising and then reduce it gradually, we will be on the right track. That is the case in Dublin. I recognise that the figure is going up in other areas. The figures started high in Dublin and then went up in other places, so it makes sense that one would seek to bring the figure back down in Dublin, which would eventually have an impact outside the city. We must remain focused on this. Over the same period, 786 families have exited hotels, hubs and bed and breakfast accommodation and moved into their own homes in Dublin. This is a 48% increase on the exits recorded during the same timeframe in 2018, which proves that we can do this if we focus all of the necessary resources on it. The issue is being able to reach all of the affected families. It is not enough to only enable a certain number of people to exit homelessness; we must do more and get to the rest as well.

One of the key priorities for my Department is preventing the flow of families and children into homeless services. We know that many of the families presenting as homeless have previously resided in a private rented property and we are committed to strengthening and improving security of tenure for tenants. The key focus of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act which became law in May is to deliver on a number of commitments flowing from Rebuilding Ireland and particularly the commitments made in September 2017 to provide the RTB with additional powers and resources to deliver enhanced protections to both tenants and landlords. That will certainly have an impact in the months ahead. The key measures and reforms are designed to enhance the enforcement powers of the RTB, provide greater security of tenure for tenants and further underpin the operation of the rent pressure zone arrangements.

The HAP place finder service is playing a vital role in helping families out of homelessness and in housing families who find themselves in emergency accommodation. It is a key service and additional staff have been appointed as place finders to help people. In the past, people presenting might have been handed a HAP pack and told to find a house but that is not the answer for a lot of people. Some people need a little extra help to find accommodation and that is what the place finder provides. It is important work because for certain categories of family it can be very hard to find HAP accommodation. Issues like family size as well as other reasons are relevant and that is where we have to intervene. I have heard a lot of commentary from certain front-line organisations about HAP. They do not like the scheme and do not encourage people to use it. That is fine if that is their view but that can have a negative impact on families because we do not always have vacant social houses that are suitable and those families might not be next on the waiting list. HAP must be used as a short-term solution for many families but sometimes families are discouraged from using it, which is a shame. In the majority of cases, the HAP scheme works quite well. I accept that it does not always work and I am sure everyone here has stories of families for whom it did not work but over 40,000 families are using the scheme quite successfully. It is important to see it as a short-term solution for some families which is far better than living in family hubs or hotels.

Through the aforementioned place finder service, all local authorities are now provided with the option of paying deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP scheme. The place finder positions are funded by my Department and are in place in 23 local authorities. More than 9,300 households had been supported by the homeless HAP scheme nationally up to the

end of quarter three of 2019. It is having an impact but I stress again that while we do not view it as a permanent solution in the long term, it is helping in the short term.

Housing authorities also oversee and fund a range of homeless prevention and tenancy sustaining initiatives. A number of ongoing public awareness campaigns, including those by the RTB, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, DRHE, are all playing an important role in making households aware of the supports that are available. When it comes to children that are homeless, we work across Departments and agencies. There is an interdepartmental homeless agency team working together on all of the different interventions that are needed. Some do a good job on that, through the various agencies. I accept the reports calling for more interventions which we will go through in the course of today's debate but we are responding to needs as quickly as possible. The issue of children being born into homelessness was highlighted earlier this week. Again, there are extra protections and services available to homeless women who come forward and are pregnant. We have specific accommodation available to address their needs. We wrap services around such women and work very carefully with families in that situation to help them in what is a very difficult time. We also provide ongoing supports thereafter. If there are individual cases of which Deputies are aware, I ask them to let us know and we will make sure that the services are provided. We respond to that need in a different way because we accept that it is a very difficult situation.

I have run out of time. I am happy to stop now and come back in at the end of the debate.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. The Oireachtas Joint Committees on Children and Youth Affairs and Housing, Planning and Local Government have spent a lot of time on this issue. They interviewed a large number of advocacy groups and those working in the area, including the Ombudsman for Children and Focus Ireland, among others. The resulting report, which was launched in the audiovisual room last week, contains 20 recommendations. As I said at that launch, the committees operated like yin and yang. The housing committee looked at the issue from a practical and mainly legislative point of view. It asked what needs to be changed through legislation to enable progress to be made or to overcome roadblocks to exiting homelessness. The children's committee on the other hand looked at the issue from a very child-centred perspective and offered practical solutions for children.

I will now draw attention to some of the more sensible solutions put forward. We discussed the issue of homeless families in emergency accommodation and the difficulties they faced in filling up the long summer days. One practical suggestion was the provision of Leap cards for all children so that they could travel with their parents. I would love to see that practical solution delivered. Another solution proffered was providing free access to Office of Public Works sites. There are many fabulous OPW sites all over the country. If families had Leap cards, they could leave their emergency accommodation and visit various sites. Families could have a very valuable day out. Homeless children would be no different from other children enjoying a day out with their families and finance would not be a barrier.

We do not want to see homeless families with children having to self-refer for accommodation. We spoke at the committee about local authorities and the need for empathy. When parents present to the local authority homeless service, they are asked questions in a box-ticking manner about whether they have children, how many children they have and so on. The appropriate number would be filled in and that would often be the end of the conversation but we

do not want the conversation to finish there. There must be real engagement and understanding of the needs of these children. They need to continue to attend school, be involved in their communities and maintain their relationships with their friends. We all know how important the formative years are in children's lives but homelessness breaks stability. School is the one constant for many families. Parents do their best to keep their children at their local school and to ensure that nobody knows that they are homeless so that they can hold on to their pride. This is why we must try to move away from self-referral and one night only accommodation for homeless families with children. When the local authorities are addressing issues for homeless families, they must listen to the voice of the child. They must include questions about school, involvement in clubs and so on. We need to see more empathy.

The committee also had a wide-ranging discussion on family hubs, not all of which was negative by any means. Indeed, it was a very balanced conversation. The main issue with hubs is how long families can expect to be in them and what is acceptable in that regard. Families do not want to find themselves institutionalised. There must be a timely pathway out of hubs. There are 26 hubs in operation and they are a mixture of good, bad and ugly. We heard various stories about them but the Ombudsman for Children and Focus Ireland were very fair in their assessment of the hubs. The main recommendations regarding hubs is that they are inspected regularly and that all adults using family hubs are Garda vetted to reassure parents that their children are in a safe environment. We also recommended that efforts be made to involve children in the local community and to provide them with good outdoor space.

Finally, there is a significant role for the Department of Education and Skills in this area. It could provide additional funding to schools to enable them to provide a hot meal and a snack before children go home and to provide spare uniforms. The latter would make a real difference when families have difficulties with washing clothes and so forth. Children's pride is very important here so involvement in this regard should be limited to the class tutor and the school principal. The aforementioned committees have put forward practical suggestions that would not cost an awful lot but would make a world of difference to homeless children.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: Homelessness is a national scandal scarring our streets. Having a secure roof over one's head is the cornerstone of a decent life. It is the basic starting point for every family, but has been denied to many. Unfortunately, children are bearing the brunt of this failure, which has been caused by Government policy. If we are to solve this problem, we must change the Government's mindset on housing, which insists that the market will deliver the solution to the problem and that deep down, homeless people are responsible for their own misfortune. It has allowed vulture funds into our economy unregulated, and that mindset in every other part of Government policy has meant the strong get stronger and the weak in our society despair of any kind of fair deal from the State. The result is that 10,000 people are homeless, almost 4,000 of whom are children. This cannot be allowed continue. We must embrace a housing first approach and ramp up the direct build of social housing. A legislative right to housing should be put in place to clarify people's entitlements and prioritise tackling delays. The Government must stop blaming local authorities and slash the red tape to get to grips with the problem.

The number of homeless people in Ireland has grown from 2,858 in December 2014 to 10,000 today, which is a 360% increase. These are unprecedented levels of homelessness. Despite this, the Taoiseach told us some months ago that the figures were not the worst compared with other countries, which was a scandalous attempt to normalise something that should be unacceptable in our country. This again points to the prevailing mindset of this Fine Gael-led

Government. Under Fine Gael, the balance of spending shifted from capital investment in new units to rental subsidies for the private market. Fianna Fáil has tried to reverse that with pressure under the confidence and supply agreement. We need a housing first approach if we are to address this crisis. That means getting homeless people into appropriate accommodation with adequate wrap-around services for their needs, as Deputy Rabbitte outlined in her contribution.

Fianna Fáil supports a legislative right to housing and is progressing a Bill on this issue that is designed to ensure people's legal entitlements are clear and prioritised by local authorities. This Bill is based on best practices in Scotland. Rather than announce a policy shift to speed up social housing provision, the Minister threatens to strip local authorities of some of their powers when they have too many homeless families in hotels and bed and breakfasts. The root of the problem is that the Government is failing to develop social housing. The Land Development Agency, LDA, has been discussed since Rebuilding Ireland was launched in July 2016. However, the Bill to place that body on a statutory footing is still going through pre-legislative scrutiny. There are serious questions over whether the LDA will be on or off the balance sheet, which has a direct impact on its ability to invest in land. The housing departments of local authorities have been mired in delays over the lack of departmental guidance on the required cost-effectiveness analysis. The Department sets up hurdles but does not inform local authorities on how to deal with them. The Department continues to control spending, yet blames local authorities for not building. In budget 2019, it was agreed to raise the discretionary threshold for local authorities' spend on housing from €2 million to €6 million. Reducing the four-step approval process for developments to a single stage would reduce the current 59-week pre-construction stage by two months, but this change has been resisted by the Government.

We have managed to have a significant impact on Government policy since the February 2016 election. We set a target of 45,000 social housing units. We have achieved first-time buyer support, the revamp of the rent-to-buy scheme and the strengthening of tenants' rights. We have managed to treble the social housing investment from €430 million to €1.5 billion, and establish an affordable housing scheme. This demonstrates that there are answers to this complex problem. However, without the will and a change in the mindset about which I have spoken, it is hard to be hopeful about a solution to the homelessness problem this side of a general election.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: I am sharing time with Deputy Mitchell. I am always reluctant to discuss homelessness, and particularly child homelessness, in this way because it means it is accepted. We must first state that it is totally unacceptable, disgraceful and completely unfair. Those words are not even strong enough for the kids growing up in bed and breakfast accommodation, hotels or the family hubs about which we hear so much. There are no family hubs in my constituency but there is emergency accommodation in hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation. I also think of the children living in overcrowded and difficult circumstances, who are staying with family or friends, and living in sitting rooms or five to one bedroom. That is not a normal existence for children. Most of us in this House are parents or have nieces or nephews, and we would not accept or want that life for our children or families. We should not accept it for other children.

We can have this discussion every week, month, or year, but the figures keep increasing time and again. We need to look at the solutions. It sounds ridiculous as it is so sensible, but the solution is to build houses. We should be doing whatever we have to in order to ramp up and speed up that process. This has gone beyond a crisis. It is an emergency situation. It is hard to believe that we are facing into 2020 and are still having this discussion.

I also want to talk about domestic violence because a number of children are in refuges with their mothers who have had to flee very difficult and dangerous situations. They are not even counted in the homelessness figures, and neither are the children growing up in sitting rooms or with six or seven of them in one spare room. The figures are therefore far worse than what we see. I do not know how often we can say it, but this is completely unacceptable.

We need to look at short-term measures to get people out of emergency accommodation, as well as longer-term measures such as building houses. However, we also need to address the people who fall into that middle category, where they do not qualify for social housing support and are paying such high rents that they cannot even think about saving for a deposit for a mortgage. The councils used to have a scheme that provided people with mortgages on a 3% deposit basis. That was changed in 2016 at the height of the housing emergency and child homelessness crisis. It is absolutely unbelievable that we changed that. That rate has now increased to 10%, which means the councils are no different from a bank or building society. The Government is tying the hands of local authorities, and progressive local authorities in particular. They are very active, and are doing their best to address this situation and deal with very difficult individual cases every day, particularly in the run-up to Christmas. Council staff are going home every day thinking about how they want to get this family or that one sorted before Christmas. We are tying their hands by doing things such as changing the mortgage scheme. We need rent freezes and rent controls like they have in other countries. There are rent controls in New York city, which is one of the most capitalist cities in the world, yet our Government cannot seem to accept that as a viable solution. The reality is that there are too many landlords sitting in this Chamber. We need to get real about that.

It is difficult to know what else to say on the issue because, as I have said before, coming into this House to talk about homelessness is like Groundhog Day. In the run-up to Christmas, children are writing their letters to Santa, getting excited about Christmas, and wondering whether they will still be in a hotel or sleeping on their granny's sitting room floor or couch on Christmas Day. That is just totally unacceptable. Are we actually going to address this issue and change it, or will we just keep having statements on it every week, month or year? We always talk about this issue around now because it is an emotive time of year, but we need to start addressing it. The solutions are there. An all-party Oireachtas committee specifically about housing and homelessness was created in 2016 where those of all parties and none were represented and agreed a set of proposals. It is nearly four years later and those proposals are not being implemented. It is not as if the solutions are not there. It is not a question of funding, because the Government has told us time and again that the funding is there. What is the problem here? We cannot talk about statements on child homelessness as if they are a normal thing, though that is what is happening.

For children in rural areas, there might only be one form of emergency accommodation available, which is far away from their schools or family supports. What measures are available? I have heard much reference to wrap-around and additional supports but I know of no family which has received supports such as extra money for childcare or to feed children while confined to a hotel room. What supports are available? I ask the Minister of State to outline what the supports are, who receives them and how one can access them. I do not think they exist. Like many things, they exist as a plan on paper but they are not available to people, and certainly not those in rural constituencies.

Deputy Denise Mitchell: I could have copied and pasted the speech I gave last year on this issue because the only change since then is that the number affected has increased. There are

now almost 4,000 homeless children in this State. That is the Ireland the Government has created, where the better off prosper while those who must do without suffer. The figures do not account for the homeless families who self-accommodate or those who double up with family or friends. Thousands of children are sleeping two or three to a bed in a single room in the home of a relative, while their parents sleep on the floor. No one knows what effect this is having on young children. Homelessness is stealing the developmental years from thousands of children. More important, it is robbing them of their childhood. The Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, of which I am a member, recently launched a report on the impact of homelessness on children. Homeless children are more likely to have poor school attendance, poor diet, inadequate rest and poor living conditions. Numerous studies have shown the detrimental impact of homelessness on children's physical, mental and emotional health.

I believe all Members will agree the State is actively harming children by denying them a home of their own. For what? So that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil can enrich and empower the better off in society, the elite who they have always striven to put to the top of the pile while forgetting about everybody else. Fine Gael crowed about how it brought Ireland through austerity and rebuilt the economy and it now tells us it is rebuilding Ireland. No one in areas of my constituency such as Darndale, Coolock and Baldoyle would agree that it is doing so. Those living in a family hub, where families are crammed in like sardines, would not agree it is rebuilding Ireland. Hannah, aged 8, who was referenced in a report compiled by the Ombudsman for Children and entitled "No place like home", would not agree that Fine Gael is rebuilding Ireland. She described the hub in which she was living as a jail for children. She was worried because her five-year-old brother had tried to run away on several occasions. According to Charlie, aged six, "[Living here] makes me feel sad. There's nothing nice about how I feel." Rachel, aged ten, stated, "Some days I didn't even want to wake up because I didn't want to face this day". The report quoted Thomas, aged 16, as stating, "I don't tell people I live here, it's a homeless hub ... it's embarrassing. It's horrible, it's not nice."

The Minister of State will claim that the Government understands. He will mournfully state that it is doing all it can and that no child should experience such horrible circumstances. That is all well and good but what is the Government doing about it? It has done nothing in recent years. The homeless numbers have been increasing since Fine Gael took office. Month on month and year on year, more people have been entering homeless accommodation.

Sinn Féin tabled a motion of no confidence in the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, in September of last year. He survived the motion thanks to the inaction of Fianna Fáil. Those speaking on behalf of Fianna Fáil would do well to remember that it is only its cynical support for a Government it claims to oppose that is keeping Fine Gael in power. Fianna Fáil is directly supporting the Government and its shameful record in addressing the housing crisis that plagues this State. Perhaps Fianna Fáil Deputies will reflect on that.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: We are again discussing child homelessness in the House. Something needs to happen. We need progress and a change of policy but there is no evidence of those. The most recent figures available were compiled at the end of October and show that 25 more children were living in emergency accommodation than was the case the previous month. Children make up the biggest group of homeless people in the country. New figures will be released next week. I have no great expectation that they will show an improvement in the situation. We normally receive the statistics at the end of the month. Nothing seems to be changing for the better.

I have before me a leaflet produced to promote Rebuilding Ireland, which was launched more than three years ago. Pillar 1 of the plan regarded addressing homelessness. Although it laid out very fine intentions, the situation has consistently worsened. Something must be done to break the cycle. I wish to explore whether there are specific proposals to which the Government will agree. I acknowledge that the Minister of State, Deputy English, who is present, is genuinely concerned about homelessness and homeless children, but we need changes in policy, as was noted by previous speakers.

One measure which must be undertaken is to speed up the construction of affordable homes and, in particular, social homes using State land. In spite of the fact that we are told that money is no object, local authorities have indicated that schemes which must go back to the Department are being delayed. The local authorities are not totally blameless either. Information was released today or yesterday regarding funding allocated for Traveller accommodation not being spent by several local authorities and I do not exonerate local authorities either. The Department and local authorities cannot continue to bat developments back and forth between them while more and more children become homeless.

I am aware of several relatively large families from a Traveller background which are in homeless accommodation and some of which have been in hotels for a long time. The Minister previously acknowledged that there is a particular difficulty in respect of large families. Surely, something can be done about that. I ask the Minister of State, Deputy English, to give that issue specific consideration. Most local authorities do not build four-bedroom or five-bedroom accommodation and that needs to be addressed. Construction takes time. I would not normally advocate the usage of funding to acquire houses but we need to quickly intervene on behalf of larger families. The purchase of larger homes is one practical measure that could be taken to reduce the number of homeless children. I know of several large families which are being housed in hotels. It is difficult to find long-term accommodation for them because the local authority does not have large enough homes. That is one of the practical things that needs to be done. It is a very broad issue. I do not know exactly how many of the nearly 4,000 homeless children come from a large family but I suspect it is a fairly large percentage. That is one proposal I ask the Minister to consider.

All Opposition parties support the introduction of a rent freeze. Fianna Fáil has recently come on board with that idea. The only party unwilling to implement a rent freeze is Fine Gael, which is the party of Government. Such a freeze was previously imposed in 2015 or 2016. Another speaker referred to it being done in other parts of the world. Berlin recently froze rents for five years. It can be done. Many of the families who become homeless are coming out of the private rental sector. It is either because their rents have been increased or they have been given notice of termination. While the Bill we dealt with recently makes some improvements, the Opposition proposed a number of measures that would have reduced the number of families who are kicked out of their homes, particularly where they are being put into homelessness because of the sale of a property. That needs to be tightened up and families need to be protected.

The Minister of State mentioned a place-finder service but in my experience, those HAP place finders are doing a limited amount. I understand that there is a restriction on how much extra money can be allocated to keep people in their homes. I am not advocating putting a pile of extra money in the pockets of private landlords.

Prevention of homelessness is key. Other countries require local authorities to intervene and there is an obligation on them to be informed very early on when a family is given notice.

A certain amount of that goes on in Ireland but the system is not sufficiently tight. Also, the intervention does not happen early enough. Those are some of the practical things that can be done to prevent children being forced into homelessness with their families.

As I have mentioned several times, I produced a Bill on behalf of the Labour Party. It went to the committee for pre-legislative scrutiny a few months ago. I thank the members of the committee - I am not a member of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. The Bill had good pre-legislative scrutiny and the committee was very supportive of it. I got communication back indicating that the Minister has a certain amount of time in which to consider the Bill before it goes to the next Stage. I strongly urge that the Bill proceed. It will not solve all the problems, but it will oblige housing authorities to take into account the needs of a child as a member of the family, rather than to just treat children as dependents of homeless adults. Organisations like Focus Ireland believe that subtle difference will make a difference in ensuring that they are given absolute priority and that, for example, families are not sent to Garda stations or told to go off and find their own accommodation. If that legislation goes through, it will make a difference.

While that measure would help, Opposition parties have agreed on the right to housing. A number of us were involved in the Raise the Roof campaign, which called for a right to housing, which exists in more than 80 countries. The Ombudsman for Children has advocated for that, as have a number of other human rights organisations. We have seen no movement from Government on that measure.

All of these things make a difference but no single one will solve the problem. What is happening at present is not solving the problem, which is getting worse. We should not have to come back to the House to debate these issues time and again without seeing some progress and seeing the figures going in the opposite direction. I do not believe that will happen unless some of these measures are implemented. Other Members have made proposals similar to mine. We need to see action on the part of the Government. We need this to be treated as the emergency that it is.

I welcome the work of the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs in publicising the human cost. Deputy Mitchell cited some of the individual children and their situations. At a conference about two years ago I heard Kitty Holland, a journalist with *The Irish Times*, describing the effect on individual children she had spoken to who were living in hotels. We have all met in our clinics people whose children are not able to have any kind of normal childhood when they are living in these circumstances.

We are approaching the end of November 2019. We need to see a shift that changes the statistics so that month after month we will not be saying that more children are homeless. I hope we can get some practical outcome from this debate.

Deputy Mick Barry: I am sharing time with Deputies Paul Murphy and Boyd Barrett.

Almost 4,000 children are living in emergency accommodation. Where is the Minister? He should be here for this debate. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil politicians and the capitalist market are responsible for blighting the lives of thousands of young children. That is no exaggeration. A Royal College of Physicians report indicates that a child in emergency accommodation is more likely to be bullied, less likely to see his or her friends, more likely to have asthma, an infectious disease, suffer poor nutrition or be obese and twice as likely to be hospitalised. It

notes what it refers to as clinically significant levels of mental health and behavioural issues in 40% of the children surveyed. With 3,873 children in emergency accommodation, 40% of that number is more than 1,500.

It gets worse. This morning we read that 119 child-protection notices were made to Tusla by managers at emergency accommodation centres in the first eight months of this year, which is more than were made in the entire year from December 2017 to December 2018. Of these, 52 related to emotional abuse, 28 to neglect, 26 to physical abuse and 13 to sexual abuse. These figures under-represent the number of children at risk of harm in homeless services because they only represent the cases covered by mandatory reporting for the managers of the centres.

These horrors are directly related to the policies being pursued by the Minister of State, Deputy English, the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and the rest of the Government. I could give many examples, but I will give one. Time and again the Minister of State has been offered the chance to support a policy of banning evictions into homelessness. He knows that the majority of these children were previously in private rental accommodation and that such a policy change would have spared them from the horrors of homelessness. However, the Government chose not to support such a policy. It chose to defend the property rights of the landlord class rather than support the rights of vulnerable children thereby supporting the greater good. How the hell do the Minister of State and the Minister sleep at night? I ask that in all sincerity.

I conclude by making two appeals. My first is to the voters of Cork North-Central, Wexford, Dublin Mid-West and Dublin Fingal. I appeal to them not to give their votes to the parties that have allowed nearly 4,000 children to be homeless. Those parties are Fine Gael, which leads the Government, and Fianna Fáil which props it up all along the line.

My second appeal is to the general public and working-class people in particular. I call on them to join the protest in Cork and Dublin on 5 December to protest against homelessness in the State. We need a total change in housing policy and to get that change we need to start with tens of thousands of angry people on the streets.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I find it very difficult to listen to the Government repeat its excuses about the very worst aspects of child homelessness.

3 o'clock

We hear them regularly at this stage. This is presented as a terrible natural disaster, which everyone is working very hard to try to sort it. That obscures the reality that this is an unnatural disaster, one that has been created by the Government's policies. We have children and families in homelessness, which will affect them for the rest of their lives, and we have the flipside of that coin, which is those who benefit from the Government's policies, namely, the one in three landlords on the Government benches and the developers. There are winners and losers from the Government's right-wing, neo-liberal approach to the housing crisis. The number of landlords receiving rent has almost trebled since 2009. Corporate landlords pay nothing in tax while the top 50 construction companies recorded sales of €8.4 billion last year, a 25% increase. They are the winners and the direct consequence of them winning and the policies designed to allow them to win is the horrendous crisis of child homelessness and homelessness in general.

How can Government members sleep at night? I think it is because they are utterly out of touch with the reality of ordinary people's lives and do not care. I thought it was revealed very callously and brutally by the answer given by the Tánaiste during Leaders' Questions when he

described the rent increase for council tenants as modest. The Tánaiste thought that an increase of €13 per week for old age pensioners on low and fixed incomes is modest. He clearly thinks that an increase of €3 per week for everybody else is nothing. That is the cost of a latté for the Tánaiste but the reality is that for those families, that is the cost of school lunches for almost a week. The Government simply does not care and is completely out of touch.

I want to put a human face on this with a case with which my office has been dealing this week. It involves a young mother who was living with her family in completely overcrowded accommodation. She was sharing a room with her children and her younger 11-year-old brother was sharing a room with her parents. The situation became worse when she became homeless after family tensions meant she had to leave her family home. The costs of that crisis are immense and include mental health distress and familial breakdown. That left the mother and her children in a very precarious situation. They were not originally considered homeless by the council because they had lived in the family home. She then had to go to a homeless centre to be considered homeless meaning she had to stay away from her community indefinitely and her children's school indefinitely. That is the real cost of the Government's policies, for which it is responsible. It is also responsible for the winners and the profits they are making.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The report by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland on the welfare and mental health of children living in homelessness could be summed up by simply saying that the Government is guilty of child abuse. There is no other way to describe it. Its failure to put a secure roof over the heads of 4,000 children means that the State is guilty of abuse. The lifelong consequences for many of those children rest firmly on the shoulders of the Governments that have precipitated and presided over this crisis. In 2011, when Fine Gael and the Labour Party came into Government, the programme for Government promised to end homelessness by the end of the term of that Government. The opposite happened. By the end of the term of that Government, we had reached the worst level of homelessness and child homelessness in the modern history of the State and this has continued to get worse under this Government.

It is important to say that there are winners out of this and they are very conscious of it. IRES REIT, the biggest landlord in the State, declared at the beginning of this year that its portfolio was worth €921 million, just under €1 billion. Its share price had jumped 13% and its net rental income had jumped 13.5% on the previous year. Margaret Sweeney, the CEO of IRES REIT, summed up the situation when she said the following:

Rental demand remains strong and, whilst it is beginning to increase slowly, the supply of residential accommodation remains constrained. The prospects for growth in the Irish market remain good.

That statement sums it up. What is bad for the children living in homeless accommodation, whose welfare is being destroyed and whose futures are being stolen, is good for IRES REIT and it knows it. It is lining its pockets. The worse the crisis is, the more profit it makes. That is true of Cairn Homes, the largest owner of zoned building land in Dublin, which drip feeds housing on to the market to keep prices high and shares out the profit bonuses to its directors each year. It is shameful.

The Minister of State said the Government is improving the situation but the truth is that more than two thirds of its social housing plans rely on HAP, which is paid to private landlords. Even if its plan succeeds, which is doubtful, the net result will be that the vast majority

of people will continue to be prey to the IRES REITs of this world, which will continue to line their pockets, and will periodically be evicted into homelessness causing the sort of hardship and suffering pointed out by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. It is shameful.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy never reminds me that I am not watching the clock.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Sorry.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Despite my efforts and those of my colleagues on the left, I am ashamed to be part of a system and a Dáil which think it is okay to have 10,397 people, of whom 3,873 are children, in homelessness as of 29 October. We do not even have the up-to-date figures. I am deeply ashamed of that even though I have done my best. I listened to an eight and a half page speech from the Minister of State. He is a very logical and reasonable man who is very helpful. However, he is here when the senior Minister should be here. He is here trying to defend something that cannot be defended. A Government with a little sense would say at this point, when 10,397 people are homeless, that it is doing something seriously wrong. It would forget ideology and simply say that it is doing wrong. It is not okay to normalise or institutionalise homelessness. We are trying to get over our history of institutionalisation and, once again, the vast majority of people in these institutions are women and children, and some men.

As I speak, 306 families in Galway are homeless. We do not have the figures for children. As of this week, the CEO of Galway City Council told Galway Bay FM that 90 families have been served with a notice to quit. I welcome the Minister of State's comment that HAP is a temporary measure but that is a sleight of hand and is certainly not correct because the change introduced in 2013 by Fine Gael and the Labour Party was a fundamental change in housing policy. In the language used locally to us, we were told that it was the only game in town. Not one house was constructed in Galway city from 2009 onwards. The Minister of State has acknowledged this. The reason no houses were constructed is because money was used for other items such as HAP rather than on building houses. It is not accurate, therefore, to describe HAP as a temporary measure. It was a permanent policy change and therein lies the crux of the problem.

We then saw the use of HAP increase exponentially. More than €500 million is now spent on HAP, not to mention the rental accommodation scheme, RAS, and long-term leasing. The Government's policy is to actively support a market that has utterly failed in every aspect of housing. There is a place for landlords and the private market but the Government must be *i lár an aonaigh*. It must be in the middle of the fair. It must send a message to the market that a home is not a commodity to be traded. It is a place to live - the most basic requirement before anybody can live a healthy life and participate in a democracy. That is the message the Government must send out.

Regarding the terrible housing crisis in Galway city, people have been waiting 15 years for a house during which time they have never been offered one. I would like the Minister of State to take this on board. How can it be that somebody on a waiting list for 14 or 15 years has never once been offered a social house? What is wrong with that system?

In response to the crisis, the Government finally set up a task force which I welcomed. It put senior people on it, although some of them had presided over the failure to highlight the

housing crisis in the first place. Be that as it may, we have heard nothing from that task force. The announcement of its establishment was made to great fanfare - inappropriate fanfare I might add during a housing crisis - but we have still heard nothing. No minutes have been published. There is no evidence of meetings being held. Most importantly, there is no plan for a city which has no overall housing plan. The Minister of State's colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Coveney, agreed with me that Galway has, once again, developer-led development. There are acres of land around Ceannt Station and the docks, as well as other public and institutional lands. However, we have no overall master plan to build public housing for everybody and for the common good. Everybody should have a right to public housing, if that is what he or she wants, with a controlled rent. That sorts out the whole problem of stigma and the utter nonsense of who should live beside whom. Public housing must be built. There is any number of precedents across the world.

I was at my wits' end listening to an eight-page statement which did not reflect on the seriousness of the problem or offer to change policy.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I agree with Deputy Connolly that the title of this debate is shameful for the Oireachtas and the country. It is particularly shameful for the Minister of State and the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government that there is a debate on supporting children out of emergency accommodation. Children should not be put in emergency accommodation in the first place. If it were completely necessary, it should be for a short time and then they should be rehoused into permanent and secure accommodation the following day. In the UK, there is a six-week time limit on homeless families being kept in unsuitable temporary accommodation such as hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation. In Scotland, a seven-day time limit applies.

Babies are now being born into homelessness. Focus Ireland reported recently during the launch of its Christmas appeal that 140 babies of families with which it is working were born into homelessness. Focus Ireland has seen increases in the number of families it has helped but that only 9% of the children it works with have a child support worker. I have raised this issue many times with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy Zappone. At the end of September 2019, 3,873 children were kept in emergency accommodation, of whom nearly 3,000 were in Dublin.

Many colleagues have quoted from the report from the Royal College of Physicians about the shocking impacts of homelessness on children. We have all seen it in our constituency offices. These children are fearful and shaking at the prospect of losing their homes. The Minister of State must know that too, yet he has failed to take the requisite action. The European Observatory on Homelessness referred to the shocking lack of privacy, the lack of space for children and nowhere to bring home friends. Most importantly, there is the stigmatisation that children suffer. Going to school from homeless accommodation puts an incredible burden on these children at primary and second level which I see in my constituency. Just because of the Government's ideological background, it has failed to address this issue.

Fifteen years ago, long before this Government came into office, FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, defined child homelessness as the most extreme form of child poverty. As Deputy Boyd Barrett rightly said, it is also a form of child abuse being practised by the Government, for which it may be held accountable many years from now. When we look across the EU, of course, we can see the situation allowed to develop in Ireland is among the worst examples of family homelessness in the 28 member states.

The most recent study from the European Observatory on Homelessness at the end of 2017 found several countries such as Denmark and Portugal with low numbers of homeless families with children. Even states like North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany and Flanders in Belgium show proportionately how much worse the levels of child and family homelessness are in Ireland. Sweden effectively has no long-term homeless children because most homeless families are found long-term accommodation almost immediately. There is the Housing First policy in Finland where its Government will not allow people to become homeless and takes direct action by creating the necessary social housing. The UK, which we resemble most and constantly copy, after nine terrible austerity years under a savage Tory Government, has been a model for the disgraceful conditions which have been allowed to develop in parallel in this country. Yet Ireland's GDP *per capita* is higher than almost all of the other 27 countries. Even when we count our national income as GNI*, Ireland is still among the wealthiest countries in Europe, yet the Government has permitted 4,000 of our children to become homeless and remain in emergency accommodation for up to and over two years. The bulk of the Government's housing solutions are based on the housing assistance payment. The delivery of social housing by the Dublin and Fingal local authorities has been at a snail's pace.

I commend the recommendations of the housing committee's report, including the right to housing to be enshrined in the Constitution. Our group has a Bill before the Dáil on this. The committee also recommended a statutory duty be placed on housing authorities to regard the best interests of the child as paramount.

While all the report's key recommendations are worthwhile, the problem is that the Minister of State has no intention of implementing them. Hopefully, in the forthcoming general election we will substantially address this matter.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: To say I am happy to speak on this important issue would be wrong. Like Deputy Connolly and others, I agree it is a shocking situation.

Last week, the Oireachtas housing committee released its report on family and child homelessness. It is a stark and sobering assessment of the damage being perpetrated on children by the current homelessness strategy. Like previous speakers, I have no axe to grind with the Minister of State, as he is doing his best. However, it is a scandal and a disgrace that the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, is not in the Chamber for this debate. If it was opening an envelope or turning a sod for the third time on the same site, he would there with his hard hat. *Cá bhfuil sé inniu? Níl sé anseo.*

The housing committee intensively engaged on this issue for some considerable time. It heard from all the main stakeholders and its assessment is pretty damning. What is clear is that the current approaches are simply not working. That is why the committee made 14 recommendations aimed at bringing improvements and, more importantly, relief for families and children into the equation. The Minister of State must know from his constituency clinics about these desperate situations. We have them every day of the week in our offices but we cannot do anything for them. The committee recommended the Housing Act 1988 be amended to place a statutory duty on housing authorities to regard the best interests of the child as paramount, as well as to have regard to the needs of the family and to make provision of suitable accommodation for the family unit to ensure its effective functioning. A family cannot function if it is sleeping on the street or in emergency hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation. The Minister of State is a family man himself and knows no family could do it.

We need to urgently limit the amount of time a family can spend in emergency accommodation in order to minimise the risk of long-term adverse outcomes. This is why we are calling for the Housing Act 1988 be amended to place a limit on the amount of time. It is entirely unacceptable that we continue to allow a broken system to persist. It is a system that is destroying the well-being of children and creating permanent damage to families in every town and village in the State.

The April homeless figures provided by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government show the total number of homeless families at 1,729, which includes 3,794 dependants. Figures issued in May by Focus Ireland show that a total of 94 families with 137 dependent children became newly homeless in Dublin alone in April. What is going on? This morning, the Tánaiste spoke about his record in housing. Is Deputy Eoghan Murphy the sixth or seventh Minister with responsibility for housing? Would we be better off if we never had a Minister with responsibility for housing? We all welcomed it and thought it was great but there is such inertia and inability. It is a shame the Minister of State does not have colleagues with him to support him and the Minister is not here either. It is shocking.

In a briefing note to the committee, Focus Ireland made a number of clear points. It noted that the latest Government figures exclude families who have been assessed as homeless by local authorities, are receiving homeless support funded by the Department with responsibility for housing, or are living in emergency homeless accommodation that has its own front door. The figures are being manicured day in day out. There are all kinds of nuances there and the figures are wholly and entirely deceptive.

Focus Ireland has called for the number of families living in own-door emergency accommodation to be published each month along with the headline figure. Until we get this honesty, clarity and direct assessment and see the real figures, we are going nowhere. If we cannot do this, it is a sad state of affairs. Focus Ireland advises this is the practice in England and Scotland, where similar properties are used to accommodate homeless families. It gives a clearer picture of the nature of the problem for policymakers and services. If they can do it in England and Scotland, why are we hiding? It is the same in Northern Ireland. If a house becomes vacant, it is let again within six weeks. Here, we have them closed for three years. They are an absolute blight on our towns and villages but it is an absolute scandal when there is such a need for houses.

Focus Ireland research shows that even a short period of homelessness often has a very negative impact on families and their children. Could any of us imagine not having a home? More than 40% of the families who are homeless in Dublin have been in emergency accommodation for more than a year. Emergency accommodation is for a week or two and not for 12 months. I do not know where Fine Gael's moral compass has gone. I knew it was never really interested in the ordinary little people, but my goodness, the figures we have now are shocking. I take great umbrage at the script read out by the Minister of State because it was waffle. He knows himself that-----

Deputy Damien English: You did not even hear it. You were not even here for it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Sorry?

Deputy Damien English: Were you even here for it?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I was here.

Deputy Damien English: Did you hear all of what I said?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Of course I was here.

Deputy Damien English: Do not tell lies. You were not here for it.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I was here for the start of it and I watched it in my office. Okay?

Deputy Damien English: You were up and down and around but you were not sitting and listening to me.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I heard your thing and I read it. It could be used in a different part of this building. Focus Ireland also said the current situation would be much worse without its work as it helped more than 400 families, in partnership with the State, to secure a home last year. It did not do it on its own. I salute it, Fr. Peter McVerry and all of the other groups. Those 400 families were helped to move on from homelessness. The charity stressed that much good work is being done but the crisis will continue without a substantial increase in social housing provision and a move away from a reliance on providing more emergency accommodation and hubs. That is what we have to do. We built them in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1970s and 1980s. When we had no cranes or equipment we built houses by the hundred.

The greatest con is being perpetrated on the people as the Government moves figures around and moves announcements. The Government thinks it is conning the people but it is not. It might be coddling some people in this Chamber but it is not coddling the people outside this Chamber. They are fanacht libh. They are waiting for the Government to come to the door. I am sure they are getting it in the by-election campaigns already. As I have said, we must move away from the reliance on emergency accommodation. It is huge money.

Focus Ireland has called for a number of key actions to be taken by the Government to help ease the crisis, but will it take them? It has called for the introduction of a specific substrategy to address the needs of homeless families, given the scale of the crisis. It has also called for the setting of time limits, whereby no family or person will be homeless for longer than six months. This will require new measures to prevent men, women and children losing their homes and improved measures to help those who are already homeless. Of course, the Government will not bring in these measures because it would mean upsetting its friends in the banks. It will not stop the banks. Fine Gael had its former MEP out the other morning with mealy-mouthed words. He could not condemn the CEO of KBC Bank when he wanted to close the page on tracker mortgages. That is the arrogance. Fine Gael sent in its former MEP to be the spoofer for the banks. He is getting a fine remuneration. He could not even condemn the words. He said they were unfortunate. That is the thinking Fine Gael has. That is the respect it has for the people who are homeless.

Focus Ireland has also called for a commitment to building more social housing in sustainable communities, but the Government will not do this. It tells us it is building houses in Tipperary, but we cannot find them. Focus Ireland also called on the Government to ensure that local authorities publish guidelines for their staff setting out what a child first approach to homeless families would involve. I salute Tipperary County Council front-line staff who are at the coalface every day of the week in Clonmel, Nenagh and elsewhere. Focus Ireland also called on the Government to ensure a stream of social housing is made available for vulnerable people leaving care who would otherwise face homelessness.

We need to have respect. The Government should cut out all of the codswallop and spin and make meaningful efforts. We speak about fast-tracking and various schemes introduced by the Government. They are all Ponzi schemes and the Government knows it. They are not accessible. For example, the home purchase loan schemes in Tipperary are just not working. The system is broken and the Government is unable to fix it. It cannot even face the people. The Minister of State is here on his own with not another Fine Gael or Independent Alliance member. The Minister of State should hang his head in shame and send a message to his boss, the Minister, that he is hiding. He cannot hide from the people with their pinn luaidhe when they go to vote. The Government will have no place to hide when the people write uimhir 1, uimhir 10 or uimhir 0 on the paper. The Government cannot hide from the people because the people have found it out. Its contempt for the people is just staggering.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: We are discussing a very grim topic, and by bringing it into the House we are almost normalising it and saying it is something that is a common occurrence. Of course, it is all too common these days. Homelessness is a national scandal that blights our streets and communities. Having a safe and secure home and a roof over one's head should be the cornerstone of a decent life, but many people are deprived of this. Children are bearing the brunt of the failure of many Government policies. Almost 4,000 children are now experiencing homelessness, and this is absolutely appalling. We need to do far better in the House and in the communities we serve. We need to embrace a housing first approach and ramp up the direct build of social housing. A legislative right to housing should be put in place to clarify people's entitlements and prioritise tackling delays. The Government has to stop blaming local authorities and slash red tape to get to grips with the crisis that confronts us.

In the House we speak a lot about housing and homelessness. On the Government side there is an awful lot of superficial activity. There is a lot of talk and commentary, and there are a lot of announcements, ribbons being cut and yellow hats, but there is an extremely lack of tangible action such as the creation of supply, which absolutely means building. I have to hand a litany of commitments and supports promised by successive Ministers. I also have a litany of Government failings in respect of developing social housing. This is where the real problem lies.

The Land Development Agency, LDA, has been talked about since the Rebuilding Ireland launch in July 2016. It still has not come to fruition and the legislation is still subject to pre-legislative scrutiny. There are serious questions over whether the LDA will be on or off the balance sheet. It would have a direct impact on its ability to invest in land.

On red tape, Ministers are always talking about local authorities and what they should be delivering. From dealing with Kildare County Council on an ongoing basis, I can state honestly that the hurdles set up for local authorities are in many cases insurmountable. There is red tape and there is a lack of departmental guidance. There should be a far more effective and streamlined process.

On spending thresholds, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government continue to control spending, yet they are blaming local authorities for not building. They have refused to raise discretionary spending from €2 million to €6 million. That should be done. In budget 2019, it was agreed to raise the discretionary threshold for local authorities, reducing the four-step approval process for developments to a single stage. This would reduce the current 59-week pre-construction stage by some two months but this has been resisted absolutely by the Government. The biggest crime of all is over-reliance on the private sector. Fine Gael has overseen a shift away from building

homes towards pouring money into the private sector. The amount spent on rent supplement and HAP payments, as opposed to bricks and mortar, is appalling.

I would like to consider the impact of homelessness on children in education. As Chairman of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills, I can attest that the committee devoted a lot of time and effort to this. There are 105 adults in Kildare who are homeless today and 145 children. That is 250 homeless in emergency accommodation in my county. A recent survey by the Irish Primary Principals' Network found there are children experiencing homelessness in 27% of primary schools. The impact is very negative in terms of school attendance, adequacy of diet, and motivating and supporting children. A report issued yesterday by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland states research has proven that 38% of homeless children have significant mental health, developmental or behavioural disorders. That is absolutely frightening. There is no Government policy to cater for the educational needs of children living in emergency accommodation. These children are not mentioned in either the action plan for education or the statement of strategy of the Department of Education and Skills for the period 2019 to 2021.

Many children experiencing homelessness do not attend DEIS schools so do not have access to the supports that students in DEIS schools are provided with. This is a great anomaly and it needs to be addressed by the Minister of State, Deputy English, and the Minister for Education and Skills.

The future of our society depends on our ability to foster the healthy development of the next generation. We are failing the next generation of homeless really badly. Toxic stress has been described by academics in many universities examining the impact of stress on children. There can be no greater stress than when a child and his or her family have been made homeless.

We are all shocked when we hear the homelessness figures that emerge. New figures are due next week and I do not expect them to show an improvement. Many of those affected are in the greater Dublin area. Interestingly, however, we heard that the percentage increase is actually higher outside Dublin. Homelessness has increased by 11.5% outside Dublin. The significantly negative experiences of the children are shocking. When a child loses his or her home, he or she loses a sense of place and, in many cases, a sense of identity. It is absolutely awful because he or she also loses his or her primary source of support.

Families lose their houses for many reasons. If they are renting privately, they may have been evicted. This is happening all too often because of the great increases in rents. Family homes can be lost in circumstances involving domestic violence or family break-up. The reason does not really matter because people in homelessness suffer on many levels. We must determine how we can best help them and their children.

Last year, I met a number of families with children who were sitting State examinations. I recall a girl who was sitting her leaving certificate examinations. Her parents were heartbroken and felt they were failing her. Parents suffer when they are unable to give their children security, routine, predictability and the ability to form and develop friendships. In such circumstances, a school often has to take over to offer support. The affected individuals should be given supports because sometimes school is the only safe place where a child can enjoy a routine that he or she may have been used to.

Being homeless affects every aspect of a child's education, including behaviour, attendance,

educational attainment and social response. The lack of cooking facilities in emergency homeless accommodation can mean children do not get proper breakfasts and that they are unable to bring proper lunches to school. Schools have not received any communication or correspondence to support them in dealing with such circumstances. No more than parents, teachers in schools are doing their best to support the children. A cross-departmental approach, involving extra funding for non-DEIS schools and home-school liaison, is needed. Society continues to fail these children at many levels. Teachers, schools and parents want to do the right thing. It is up to us in the Oireachtas, including the Minister, to provide the children with the supports they need.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I will try to touch on some of the issues. I can address more through correspondence. In the past few minutes, Deputy O'Loughlin outlined best why it is so important that we focus on solutions. I said in my opening remarks, which not everybody present heard, that this subject touches everyone's heart. It is a matter we all want to address. It is important that the Houses respond and have debates like this to focus on what we are trying to do and what additional steps we can take.

The Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, could not be here today. He is out of the country. He sat down with me last night and we went through the issues concerning this debate. When I speak here today, I speak on behalf of him, my Department and our Government. He tries to be here as much as he possibly can. He has contributed to the past two debates on this matter. He is very much involved in driving the change we are trying to bring about. We are bringing together all the relevant Departments.

Deputy O'Loughlin was correct that there has to be a cross-departmental approach to tackling all forms of homelessness, especially child homelessness, and to providing all the various services. The authorities responsible for education, social protection, Tusla and so on are all involved in this. They are all around the table. That is what Rebuilding Ireland was about. It is to bring everyone together to focus in on this. They are all trying to make the necessary changes and do more.

It is absolutely the case that not enough is being done if there are still close to 4,000 children in emergency accommodation. We all recognise that. I started my opening statement by saying we know that not enough is being done here. It is untrue to say there is nothing being done, however. Not enough it is being done. Until everybody is out of homelessness and has a house, we cannot stop. There is no doubt about that but one can only fix this action by action and piece by piece, not by waving a magic wand or hoping it will go away. It will not go away. We must focus every day and every week on what needs to be done across every Department. As Ministers, our job is to ensure that is being done, to track it, follow it, put the money behind it and to change policy if need be. Change will happen as we go along.

It is not true to say that nothing is being done or that the Government is blaming the local authorities. We are not. That is the media commentary; we did not say it. Earlier this week I complimented local authorities on their response and the turnaround in delivery. I want to be very clear on that. We have gone from only 75 houses being brought forward at the end of 2015 to more than 10,000 social houses being brought into the system this year. Approximately 6,400 houses are direct builds. We met with all the local authorities in the past two months to check all the figures, as we do on a weekly basis, to make sure they are on track. They are on track. I compliment the delivery of housing, which has completed turned around. It is not being held

back by red tape or a lack of funding. No local authority CEO has ever asked me to change the €2 million in funding to €6 million, which Fianna Fáil keeps harping on about. That is not the issue. If it were, I would hear about it from them because they are the ones we ask to do it, and they are doing it. We asked them to do more and to put more of a pipeline in place in the future.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: They are all too cosy.

Deputy Damien English: Let us be clear on that. I get a sense from some of Fianna Fáil Deputies that they believe this is an attack on the LDA. I spoke at the outset about the importance of making sure this situation does not happen again. At the presentation of both of the reports we are discussing today, some speakers, in particular the Ombudsman for Children, talked about this happening again when the next crash occurs. It cannot happen again. That is why we must put in place long-term plans. I will not go back over my entire speech, but I made the point that we have made long-term plans to prevent housing difficulties such as we are experiencing now and to prevent the situation from ever happening again. The LDA is part of the long-term solution. It is not mentioned in Rebuilding Ireland as part of the short-term solution in the first couple of years. It is charged with managing the State land to deliver more than 150,000 houses over the next 20 years.

Other speakers, including a Fianna Fáil Deputy, referred to mindset. They said it is the mindset of the Government not to provide social housing. I did not make political points in my opening statement, but I remind people of why we are here. When 90,000 houses were built in this country in 2007, only 4,000 of them were social houses. That is approximately 4% of activity. We have not built enough social housing in the past and that is the reason we have difficulties today. Thankfully, this year, more than 30% of the delivery of more than 20,000 houses will be social housing. That is how we must address this in the future in order to prevent it from happening again. Members should not tell me about mindset: this is not about mindset. It was in the past, but that is no longer the case. It is about how quickly we can deliver houses. In fairness, Deputy Funchion touched on this. The solution is housing. The Deputy referred to what the committee asked for in 2016. Number one of the committee's many recommendations was the delivery of 10,000 social houses a year. That will happen this year. Next year we will build 11,000 houses, but it must happen every year, not just when Fine Gael or Labour are in government but no matter who is in government. All parties must commit to that and hang on to it. I have not heard those commitments from everybody else. Very few solutions were outlined today. The two reports contain recommendations and we will implement most of them. It is not correct of Deputy Broughan to say that we will not. We will look at the recommendations and if they are worthwhile, we will implement them.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan asked a specific question about whether we would buy large houses for families who are caught in emergency accommodation. We are doing that. There are large families, in some cases Traveller families, who find it very hard to find a solution through the rental market. We do step in and we will use money to buy housing for them. Local authorities have been asked to do that. There are many other solutions. People asked about the hubs and the training of staff. I wish to be clear: all staff in family hubs are vetted and linked in with the various agencies as well. We provide services through the Departments involved as well. I could go back through it all here, but I will send messages on that as well. To be clear: there is no reason for someone to be in emergency accommodation long term. Thankfully, the majority of people now are in emergency accommodation for fewer than six months. I remind Members that of every two families that present, we find at home for at least one of them immediately. In the past, we could not, but now we are. It is still not enough and I do not say it is but it is going

in the right direction.

While we are building and replenishing the housing stock we must work with the private sector. There is no choice but to use the HAP scheme because, without it, 40,000 families would not have a home tonight. However, people on the front line who claim they are operating with the best interests of families do not recommend HAP as a solution. It is a solution in the short term and it is better than a family hub or hotel on the journey to a permanent house. I cannot be any clearer in my message on that as well.

Message from Business Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Business Committee has completed its consideration under Standing Order 27AC of the request by the Minister for Health to waive the requirement to give the general scheme or draft heads of the Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2019 to the relevant committee (under Standing Order 84A), and has agreed thereto.

Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection has completed its consideration of the Social Welfare (No. 2) Bill 2019 and has made amendments thereto.

Mental Health: Statements (Resumed)

Deputy James Browne: I wish to share time with Deputy Butler.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy James Browne: There are no staff to care for children who suffer from disabilities such as autism or Down's syndrome and who also suffer from a mental health illness in three health areas, CHO 1, CHO 3 and CHO 6. These children with disabilities are four times more likely to suffer a mental health issue and are least able to cope when they receive the worst mental health care services of any mental health service. Meanwhile, the number of children admitted to adult units was 68 three years ago but was 84 last year. The number is clearly going in the wrong direction.

I wish to refer to consultants not on the specialist register but who practise as psychiatric consultants. The appointment of junior doctors who are not on the specialist register as consultant psychiatrists has rightly been condemned as scandalous by the President of the High Court. It clearly unsafe and may even put lives at risk. The Mental Health Commission confirmed yesterday that it will not allow such consultants to sit on mental health tribunals. Some patients have had their involuntary detention orders overturned because they were signed off by unqualified consultants. That is a scandal.

Only 1% of all mental health services in Ireland are regulated. I am concerned about the potential for serious risk to arise in some such facilities which ought to be regulated. Given the breaches of regulation highlighted in reports by the inspector of the Mental Health Commission

into regulated facilities, one must worry about what is happening in the unregulated facilities. Similar facilities for disability care and physical health are regulated by the Health Information and Quality Authority but not those for mental health.

The abolition of the role of director of mental health in the HSE has been decried by all in the mental health community. That was a backward step. The Mental Health Commission stated that as the highest level of our mental health services workforce, it is both noteworthy and disappointing that the HSE removed the post of national director for mental health. The removal of this core leadership position sent out a clear and unambiguous, although perhaps unintended, message that mental health is not a priority. It is also evident to the commission that this has negatively impacted on the delivery of services nationally. That action must be reversed because it is clearly having a very detrimental impact on mental health services.

We are now 13 years into the ten-year national mental health strategy, *A Vision for Change*, yet the update to it has still not been published. The independent review group published its proposals for updates to the Mental Health Act 2001 in 2013 and we still have not seen the heads of a Bill. In 2013, the independent group charged with monitoring progress and implementation of our national mental health policy was disbanded and has not been re-established. There is much work to be done in areas of mental health policy reform.

I refer to the situation that arose in St. Luke's in Kilkenny. This year, our mental health services had to suffer the ignominy of its first ever prosecution in the courts. St. Luke's in Kilkenny was prosecuted because of the lack of care for some of our most vulnerable people. No mental health facility should ever be allowed to fall so low that it needs to be prosecuted. There is clearly a lot to be done in order that people across the country have fair and equal access to mental health services. The key points I have highlighted reflect only some of the many issues I could have highlighted if I had sufficient time. I hope we will have time to discuss them in the future.

Deputy Mary Butler: As the Minister is well aware, the department of psychiatry at University Hospital Waterford, UHW, has been in the news for all the wrong reasons in the past month. As a result, confidence in the unit by patients, staff and the general public is at a low ebb. The catchment area for UHW covers Waterford and Wexford. I was appalled when I read the report from the Mental Health Commission which found that the department of psychiatry at UHW had a mere 57% compliance rate this year. The report's findings are extremely worrying and serve to highlight the serious issues within our mental health services. Over the past three years, compliance levels have fallen from 64% in 2017 to a record low of 57% this year. It is obvious that no structures were put in place in 2017 to halt the decline, which is worrying.

The report raised issues with regard to the fact that children were being admitted to adult settings despite the fact that not all staff had received training in the context of the Children First guidelines. Children did not have access to age-appropriate advocacy services and facilities. The conditions at the unit also raised red flags. The report described two toilets as malodorous with overflowing bins, discarded cigarette butts and thick cobwebs. Also of great concern was the fact that residents' general health was not monitored and assessed by their specific needs. This is very worrying. Physical examinations were inadequate and did not consistently include an assessment of residents' body mass index, weight, blood pressure, smoking status or dental health. For anyone who is long-term in the unit, that is particular a concern. Anyone with a loved one in the unit would be rightly concerned. I have no doubt that the staff in the wards are doing all they can to give the best care and attention to the residents. However, severe

staff shortages are undoubtedly having an impact. The Psychiatric Nurses Association of Ireland, PNA, has highlighted concerns with senior management, the HSE and the Mental Health Commission and felt compelled to hold a two-hour stoppage recently to raise awareness of the conditions.

In 2010, St. Senan's in Wexford was closed and the department of psychiatry at UHW was deemed suitable for Waterford and Wexford inpatients. No extra capacity was provided and hence the issues arose. The question is why standards are slipping so drastically. The issues highlighted are simply not acceptable and must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Recently, images of overcrowding with patients sleeping on chairs and floors were circulated on social media. These are deeply distressing and completely unacceptable. However, they came as absolutely no surprise to anyone working within this unit. I have met and spoken with three residents who were in the unit this year and they all confirmed that overcrowding with patients sleeping on the floor is an ongoing issue and was not unique to the bank holiday weekend as was stated. One very brave young woman, Shauna is her name, spoke with me today on WLR radio outlining the many challenges she faced, the conditions in the unit and the severe overcrowding. At one stage over the October bank holiday weekend, an additional ten residents were facilitated. This meant that there were 54 people in a 44-bed unit. Health and safety rules and regulations were obviously ignored as capacity was well exceeded. The reports from UHW are absolutely damning. Not only is the treatment of patients there unsafe, it is inhumane.

I thank the Minister of State for meeting Deputy Browne and me the week before last and for agreeing to visit the unit in the near future. I have been informed by the hospital management that a deep clean has taken place and that the aspects in the report in respect of malodorous smells, overflowing bins and cobwebs have all been dealt with. However, I am appalled that the conditions were allowed get to that state and I know the Minister of State is, too. It is well recognised that additional capacity is required with a figure of 20 beds being the general consensus for the Waterford-Wexford region. The fact that these beds will not be achieved in the short term is further evidence of a hands-up approach to mental health issues in Waterford and Wexford. Kate Killeen-White, chief officer with South East Community Healthcare, said she could not defend the situation in Waterford. John Farrelly, the chief executive of the Mental Health Commission, has admitted that the conditions are unacceptable. Next March, registration is due again for this unit and a meeting will be held in the coming weeks. The Mental Health Commission has warned that significant improvements and changes need to be made for the centre to be permitted to re-register. Unless a clear, agreed, corrective plan is put in place, implemented and adhered to, I would be extremely concerned. We cannot afford to lose this unit from Waterford.

Deputy David Cullinane: I am sharing time with Deputy Ellis. I welcome the opportunity to have this debate. A number of us tabled a Topical Issue matter on the Waterford psychiatric unit some weeks ago. The Minister of State was not in a position to be here, which was unfortunate because this was not just a scandal in Waterford or the south east. It was seen as a national scandal to have patients being treated the way they were. We all know that child and adolescent mental health is important but it is in disarray and crisis. There is oversubscription, underfunding and understaffing. We hear from the trade unions representing the staff who do their best on a constant basis to provide the services that the system is under fierce pressure. In Clondalkin, there is a campaign to save services. Councillor Mark Ward of Sinn Féin is involved in that. In Wexford, there was also a protest in recent times. Mental health is a big issue.

The issue regarding Waterford is extraordinary, particularly because it was allowed to hap-

pen. For what has been reported in Waterford to be allowed to happen in any psychiatric unit in the country is extraordinary. What is terrible about this is that everybody knew about it. It is not the first time the Mental Health Commission has shone a spotlight on the psychiatric unit in Waterford. It does not blame the staff. They are not to blame, they are doing their best. The Mental Health Commission blames capacity. I want to give a flavour of what it found in its report, which makes for very depressing reading. It found that residents' general health needs were not monitored, nor were they assessed in line with their specific needs. It found that eight children had been admitted to an adult unit in the past 18 months. These children did not have access to their appropriate services. The general health needs of adult residents were not monitored and assessed on the basis of their specific needs. They did not have access to a supply of appropriate emergency personal clothing; there was only old clothing, which was stored in a disorganised manner. It was unclear what was available concerning size and gender-specific clothing. No emergency underwear was available to residents. Bins were overflowing in both the male and female communal toilets. Discarded cigarette butts were found in the sink of the ladies communal toilet. Thick cobwebs were observed on the skylight in the Brandon unit. Brown staining was observed in the assisted bathroom. In addition to the report and all it contains, there is photographic evidence of patients lying on floors. When the management of the unit were asked about this, they said it is a regular occurrence because it is over-subscribed. When I spoke to the trade union officials on this, they said the unit needs more capacity. There is a difficulty because a previous Government, I think it may have been a Fianna Fáil Government, took the decision to close St. Senan's in Wexford which had disastrous consequences because all the patients there are referred to Waterford with no additional capacity. However, the real problem here is A Vision for Change. It is in the community. That is what the unions are telling us. It is in the community, in primary care and in proper residential care facilities for people with psychiatric needs. It is across the board.

I do not know if the Minister of State has visited the Waterford centre yet or when that visit is going to take place. This needs to be taken very seriously. This has been allowed to happen time and again, year after year, when we had several reports from the Mental Health Commission. I am sure the Minister of State read the report. I am sure he took the time as I, Deputy Butler and Deputy Browne did when we tabled a motion on this issue. I am sure the Minister of State must have been as horrified as I was considering the state of the unit, the massive overcrowding on an almost daily basis, the lack of capacity, patients being sent home with no proper treatment and no plan in place for some patients. The pressure is coming about because there has not been investment in primary care and people are being sent to the acute psychiatric unit, maybe sometimes unnecessarily. All of that is down to not implementing A Vision for Change in full.

It is easy to dump it all on the Minister of State. He is one individual but he is the Minister of State with responsibility in this area. If he has read that report, he has to be as outraged as we and the people of Waterford and the south east were. There has to be change. We cannot come back here in six months or a year and hear the same stories. What I want to hear from the Minister of State is what it is that the Government is going to do to make sure we do not see this happening again in the future.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: While some progress is being made with regard to mental health services, it is a slow process and not something for which the Government should take credit. I thank Mental Health Reform and its CEO, Dr. Shari McDaid, who is moving on, for their tireless work in highlighting and pressurising the Government to act.

4 o'clock

People, young and old, are talking more openly about their mental health. It has taken time to break down many of the old prejudices which in the past stigmatised mental health and those with mental health issues. The credit for such progress is down to individuals who have personal experience of mental health issues themselves or within their families and communities. Their initiative and passion resulted in many local support groups being founded. It was because of such local community initiatives that so many others in our communities found that they were not alone and had somewhere and someone to turn to when they needed help.

Mental health issues do not discriminate. They affect everyone regardless of gender, sexual orientation or demographics. Austerity has also had a major impact on people's mental health. Mental health is linked to socioeconomic circumstance and people have not recovered from the long years of austerity and in fact many people in the communities I represent have not felt any recovery from austerity at all. Mental health issues can affect a family member, a work colleague, a close friend or a neighbour. These issues know no bounds. Statistics show that one in four of us will experience mental health problems. Studies also show that many people live with the symptoms of mental ill-health for long periods without accessing mental health advice or treatment.

Mental health is not a priority for the Government. If the Government was serious about making mental health a priority, it would give the Department the resources and funding to develop a new mental health Act to meet the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities treaty requirements.

There is clearly a crisis in mental health. There is an inadequate provision of services and a lack of proper resourcing for existing mental health services. There are insufficient staffing levels and mental health services are haemorrhaging staff at an extraordinary rate. These people are not being replaced. In fact, there are more than 2,600 fewer staff working in mental health services than the Government's recommended staffing level.

More people die by suicide each year in Ireland than on the roads and yet only a fraction of the Government's budget is spent on suicide prevention. In 2008, for example, €45 million was spent on road safety and accident prevention measures while only €4.5 million was spent on suicide prevention in the same period. The introduction of 24-7 crisis intervention services is slow and behind schedule. No extra funding for the development of such services was included in the budget. The absence of 24-7 intervention services will actually cost lives. Mental health crises do not occur during set hours or on a nine-to-five basis, they are, by their very nature, unpredictable and unexpected. If someone is experiencing a serious mental health crisis, he or she has few options available. A person can go to the Garda or to the accident and emergency department. Neither of these would offer the appropriate care that is required for someone experiencing a mental health crisis. Statistics show that more than one in five individuals are repeat attenders for self-harm. Most are sent home after a few hours and will have received little care.

In general, mental health services are available Monday to Friday on a 24-7 basis, but a major anomaly is that they are not available around the clock on Saturdays and Sundays. We also have had many situations where people with suicidal ideation are being turned away from accident and emergency departments. The Government made a commitment that there would be psychiatrists available in accident and emergency departments 24-7. Those with mental health

issues who present at accident and emergency departments generally have to wait a number of hours before being seen by a psychiatrist. At that stage, it can be the case that the individual's psychotic condition has changed or that he or she may show improvement while waiting. This can lead to an inaccurate view of the individual's true mental state being formed. That also can happen when an individual presents at a Garda station.

If it is really serious about tackling the crisis in mental health, the Government must put in place fit-for-purpose mental health services as a matter of urgency.

Deputy Mick Barry: I have had hundreds of discussions about mental health and the mental health crisis in the past two weeks because Solidarity decided to make the mental health issue one of the top issues in its campaign in the Cork North-Central by-election. We adopted this approach after an internal discussion in which many of our younger members said that we should do so. We consulted widely with supporters and listened, in particular, to the views of younger supporters and decided to do that.

I regard myself as being fairly well in touch with the concerns of my constituents but even I have been slightly surprised by the extent to which, on going to people's doorsteps and provoking a discussion on mental health, this has prompted a response and a willingness from people to talk about how this has affected their own households, friends and the communities in which they live.

Broadly speaking, the points that have been raised with us on the doorstep fall under two headings. The first one is the issue of mental health services and how people across the board see them as falling well short of what is needed, despite the valiant efforts of workers in the mental health sector and volunteers within the communities.

A common report back when we have our debriefing in the office at the end of the canvas is where someone says that they met someone tonight who went down to the accident and emergency department with their son or daughter. The then waited patiently to be seen, got the best possible treatment available from the people who work there, but in reality were brought into a room where they had a brief conversation, a glass of water and a pill, and were sent home. They are waiting for services now and went on a list to queue for that service. The waiting times have been long. I am not the first Deputy who has raised the point on the numbers on the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, waiting lists in the Cork and Kerry area. The figure is more than 400, more than 100 of whom have been waiting in excess of 12 months.

One idea that we have raised on the doorsteps is the idea that there should be 24-7 crisis centres and these should also be in the communities. If one has a mental health crisis, irrespective of the day or time, one can go and be seen and at least have an initial contact with mental health professionals, with perhaps a team being available from that centre to go out and make a quick visit in one's own home or to a place where one would like to meet them.

We have pointed out to people that in the UK, for every £100 spent on the National Health Service, £13 are spent on mental health services. The comparable figure for the HSE in Ireland is that for every €100 spent, €6 are spent on mental health services. We have openly said to people that they have been betrayed by successive Governments which have failed to put the resources and the services in place that their children, friends and neighbours need. We have a young generation that suffers from greater levels of anxiety, depression and even suicide than perhaps has been the case in the past. There are clearly not sufficient services to cope with that

situation. We need a national health service. That would involve a massive increase in spending on mental health services. It should be immediately doubled, with subsequent significant increases each year.

The second point that has come up frequently is the pressure that people feel from society bearing down on them, challenging and damaging their mental health. The current economic system of capitalism is negatively impacting on people's mental health in a wide variety of ways, including precarity of employment. There has been an end to the idea of a job for life and the opposite has happened, with people surviving on 12 or six-month contracts and dealing with the associated uncertainty. Precarity of accommodation is an issue, especially for renters who know that they are just one note under the door away from a notice to quit, telling them to leave by a certain date, leaving the threat of homelessness hanging over them. There is a struggle to make ends meet with low pay for the working poor and the pressure they feel they are under. Mental health is a complex issue with genetic, biological and a wide variety of other factors. Without a doubt, the pressures of 21st-century capitalism with its precarity and its drive to maximise profit at the expense of working people, the stresses on their lives etc. are a significant factor in the mental illness epidemic in this country.

I read in the newspapers today about a report from the Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, and Trinity College, stating that most 20 year olds still live with their parents and that they are preoccupied with the housing crisis. They ask if they will ever own a house or be able to afford to rent. One in four of those young people already shows signs of depression. Other issues mentioned by young people surveyed about things that concern them include a new phrase that I learned recently, eco-anxiety, the question of climate change and thinking about what the world will be like 20 or 25 years from now. Poverty has not gone away, which is a key point raised in the survey.

As a socialist, I am in favour of pushing back against capitalism and its agenda which is, as I say, an agenda of precarity, inequality and discrimination. In pushing back against capitalism, people who are a part of that pushback are also part of the pushback to defend and to improve mental health in this dog-eat-dog society.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is Deputy Connolly sharing time with Deputy Nolan?

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Yes, with five minutes each. I have checked back on speeches and I am looking at one I could read out again to the Minister of State. It is my own, from April 2017, over two and a half years ago. We do not need to reinvent the wheel and give personal anecdotes of all of our experience with mental illness and mental health services. I come from Galway where, unfortunately, there is a group of people who feel that they have to conduct suicide patrols of our waterways. I come from a city where a brand-new psychiatric department has at least four delayed discharges, that is, patients who are ready to be discharged but there is no money. I understand that there is a broken door. I have brought all of these matters to the attention of the Minister of State and want to move on to general matters. It is a symptom of what is happening in our mental health services, yet at the same time we seem to be returning €12 million. The Minister of State might tell me that I am totally wrong about that. I have a background in this area, so forgive me if I am a little impatient.

In 1984, we had the Planning for the Future report, which was a recognition that we needed to do something about our mental health services and we did. Such was the slow pace of change, however, that we brought in the A Vision for Change strategy in 2006. Everybody,

including the Mental Health Commission, has said that it is a brilliant document that comprehensively set out exactly what was needed. It addressed every area, including the importance of carers of families and getting rid of the stigma associated with mental health and the high rates of suicide in 2006. Not only was the document excellent but those who were behind it stated that as they did not trust the Government of the day or any Government, an implementation body would be needed and an independent implementation body was set up. It did its job so well in two three-year periods that it was abolished. After it was abolished, we have played linguistic games with regard to A Vision for Change. It is appalling to use the word “refresh”. The review should be about the appalling failure to implement A Vision for Change. Some progress was made and the Mental Health Commission acknowledges that but there has been an utter failure to implement it in total.

After 2016, when the allotted years ran out, we decided to set up an evidence-based, desktop review of the literature. That was done speedily when it sat and it reported in July 2017. The implementation of A Vision for Change was due for January 2016 but it took until July 2017 to get an evidence review that looked at literature. That literature told us that prioritisation of mental health is a major societal issue. Can the Minister of State imagine that we needed a review to tell us about primary prevention, positive mental health, social inclusion and recovery, mental health services and their importance, as well as governing and financing? If that was not insulting enough, we now need another refresh of A Vision for Change, when all we needed was for the independent monitoring mechanism to be set up again to implement A Vision for Change.

At the time, A Vision for Change talked about money and there is no parity of esteem. We cannot have health without mental health, yet we have absolutely no parity of esteem. I know the Minister of State agrees with this on a personal level but he is not here today on a personal level. He is here as a Minister of State. He has to tell us why A Vision for Change was not implemented. Will he put back in the independent monitoring system that was there? It worked very well. The proof in the pudding is that the Government abolished it because no Government, not just that of the Minister of State, wants to hear the truth. When the A Vision for Change strategy came in, it talked about a certain percentage of GDP going to mental health. It made that comment in the context of the mental health spending that had declined considerably in the 20-year period leading up to A Vision for Change.

There is no parity of esteem between mental health and general health, even though both are inextricably linked. There is no independent monitoring and money is returned when we have delayed discharges, among many other things. Most importantly, because this might get through to the Government, the economic costs are set out in the review. The economic costs of mental health issues are enormous, with figures suggesting that it may amount to as much as 4% of GDP in some countries. In Ireland, the most modest estimate of the GDP lost is 2%. This does not include the health costs. I will stop because my five minutes are up. I appeal to the Minister of State to answer as to whether the Government is putting back the independent monitoring system.

Deputy Carol Nolan: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil do Teachta Connolly a thug an t-am dom chun labhairt inniu. It is alarming to see that demand for acute CAMHS is increasing. More than 2,500 young people are waiting for an initial appointment. Hundreds have been waiting for assessments for more than a year. This situation is unacceptable. It concerns all of us. We hear from families in our offices who are desperately seeking solutions and support and all that we can do is write letters to the Minister, Ministers of State or to the services directly. We

need more action in this regard as it is getting worse by the day, unfortunately. The worsening crisis is leaving more vulnerable children at risk. I have seen cases involving children whose anxiety is so bad that they have had to leave the school they are in and to apply for home tuition. That should not be the case. If the preventative measures were in place, it would not reach that point. We need to take stock of what is happening and put actions in place. It is shameful that preventative mechanisms and supports or services to deal with mental health problems before they become serious in children, teenagers and adults are not in place. Very often, the wait for children and teenagers is too long and they can be in distress for over 12 months. It is not much different for adults, who are also being put on long waiting lists for appointments.

It is unacceptable to have these waiting lists when we now know so much more about mental health. We have never had as many reviews and as much emphasis and people are coming out and speaking about it. However, in the absence of action, we are going nowhere with regard to getting to grips with this issue. It is worrying that doctors who have not specialised in the area of mental health are also trying to fill the gap. This needs to be investigated and dealt with.

The escalating crisis is a national scandal. It is a failure of our system that children, the most vulnerable in our society, are being admitted to adult wards, which has been happening for years because there are not sufficient beds. This has to change. I have met many distressed families who are worn out trying to fight for vital basic services for their children. They feel frustrated and feel they are doing this against the odds, with little or no support and in desperation at times.

If we did not have organisations such as Jigsaw and other voluntary mental health services, as well as the many GAA clubs throughout the State, which have also done their bit in regard to mental health, this crisis would be far worse. Thank God, we have all those people in place to help and play their part. I take this opportunity to commend all of those in these organisations, in many communities. These organisations are filling a gap left by the absence of other adequate services and supports in our system, which is failing children. Many organisations find it difficult to continuously fill that gap and many have told me they are stretched to the limit, so we need more HSE intervention.

Adults living in remote rural areas who experience social isolation have also been failed to a degree by the lack of support. It would be worse only for people in their communities who are active on this issue, such as key community activists, as well as organisations such as the Men's Shed, a fantastic initiative which came from Australia. I attended the briefing on it here a few months ago and was amazed at what it has achieved in such a short time. If it were not for those organisations stepping up to the mark, we would be in a far worse situation today.

We need Government-led initiatives in dealing with all of the problems across society for both young and old, men and women. We have to deal with the problem through preventative measures. We need to respond to the crisis we face in a timely manner. By doing so, we will prevent the heartache and distress that has already been experienced by too many families and individuals throughout this State. We need urgent and meaningful action. The recent reports are a wake-up call. They show we have an increasing number of teenagers and young adults experiencing anxiety and taking antidepressants. Surely that is the wake-up call we need to take this urgent action once and for all to make sure we are serving and protecting them as best we can.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important matter. I

acknowledge the genuine attempts that have been made by the Minister of State, Deputy Daly. We now have a newly designated Jigsaw service in Thurles, which I warmly welcome. However, I am worried about the timelines. We need to see it set up and it is already five years late. That said, I have expressed my concerns and the Minister of State will know they are shared by Fr. Michael Toomey, who he has met and for whom he has great respect. Fr. Toomey has done tremendous work. The morning after the Minister of State's visit on Tuesday morning, he was on radio with Joe Leahy and another speaker, and those three people are at the coalface. While they welcomed Jigsaw, they want to see it rolled out in other towns like Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir, and in villages like Kilsheelan and Ballyporeen, and right up to Tipperary town and west Tipperary, which is in a bad state regarding mental health services, and on to north Tipperary. It is a big county and those areas need it.

Fr. Michael Toomey officiated at a mass last week for my closest neighbour, Paul Ryan, who ended his own life after suffering for 40 years with mental health issues. He was a tutor in Cluain, a voluntary organisation for people with certain disabilities. He was a wonderfully skilled craftsman, a potter, and we can see his last pottery and all the work he had done in the midst of his mental illness. We could see the profound sense of shock and sadness in the church that afternoon, with all the service users of Cluain and his colleagues there. The man thought he was only going to have a few at its funeral and he made a request that the few who were there would be asked back to the pub. The pub could not hold them. The biggest church in Clonmel could not hold the crowds, such was the impact. He was a wonderful man, gone too early from his wonderful wife and two daughters. It is so sad. It is an epidemic. I can only think of what he went through. As I said, we never had a nicer neighbour in our lives. He was a lovely, wonderful, helpful man. He helped so many people and it came back to him in spades, but he thought he was in such a dark place that nobody wanted to have any interest in him, although thousands had. It is so sad.

We now have interventions and organisations in Clonmel like Jigsaw and C-Saw, another wonderful group which has a quiz tonight in the Hillview Sports Club. Former councillor, Joe Leahy, and May Walsh, who works in my office, and many volunteers are out fundraising every night to support these services, such as drop-in services and confidential lines. The people out there want to do this. The Minister of State heard about a service in Nenagh, which I am ashamed to say I have not seen yet but I must visit, as should the Minister of State. Again, this is run by volunteers from the bottom up.

As Deputy Connolly asked, what happened to A Vision for Change? We had the vision, we got the change and we closed all of the beds, but we got none of the state-of-the-art services we were promised. As I said to the Minister of State at the meeting, we were not badly burned in Tipperary, we were scalded. We lost St. Michael's unit and the Minister of State has admitted it was wrong to take it away from us. We do not have a single long-stay bed. The crisis houses are struggling to get two extra beds and the HSE and the Minister of State have accepted there is a difference of at least 20 beds. We need ten of those in south Tipperary and ten in north Tipperary. North Tipperary patients have to go to Ennis. I will not even mention what happened in Kilkenny. Above all, I cannot understand for the life of me, with a new 40-bed modular unit about to open in St. Joseph's unit at South Tipperary General Hospital, Clonmel, why we cannot have a room there so people do not have to sit through the trauma and disturbance of a mad accident and emergency unit, which is over-packed and crazy, with all of the staff under pressure. Fr. Michael Toomey told us eloquently last week about visiting there and waiting with a patient. I salute him and the other clergy of all denominations. He waited and waited but there

was no bed for a patient who was on a trolley. It is not acceptable that these people have to be put through such suffering. I want to highlight these concerns.

There are many people who have worked tirelessly and collaboratively over the last seven years to ensure we have a service like Jigsaw. The Minister of State was at pains to point that out, although some politicians could not wait to have it announced. It is not about announcements. It is about the duty of care to our fellow human beings. This is a positive outcome. I acknowledge the concerns that are emerging in terms of the accessibility of the Jigsaw service because the county is so big and, while there is good access from Dublin, there are poor transport networks throughout the county. That is why it is vital that outreach hubs are developed in parallel with the development of the main unit.

We know Jigsaw caters specifically for young people between the ages of 12 and 25 who are experiencing difficulties with mental health. These are the groups who are being particularly affected by the scourge of rampant drug use and misuse in our county, and it is vital they have accessible services. I know the Minister of State will agree with me about social drug taking, in particular the taking of cocaine by people of all types as recreation at weekends - our own equals as well as those we would not associate with. It is now very common, which is shocking and frightening. It has to be tackled. We know the violence and the abuse that goes on with drug cartels and gangs. It is not all right to take cocaine as it is supporting mobsters and gangsters, who should be taken off our streets. They are raining terror on the country, including Clonmel and the other villages in my county. This is why I hope the Jigsaw service can be expanded throughout all the towns and villages. We need them from north to south, whether they take the form of a mobile service or whatever else. I do not know how we might do it but we just cannot have that long distance because people will not and cannot travel it.

Last February, the report on St. Luke's psychiatric facility in Kilkenny was published. It revealed a litany of appalling hygiene and service provision failures. I do not even want to repeat them here. The HSE was fined and brought to court. It admitted liability. That is like rubbing butter on a fat cow's you-know-what. Who is paying the fine? The taxpayers. It means nothing. Can anyone in the HSE be held accountable? I said this to the Minister of State the other day in the building in which we had the meeting. My wife was a nurse in the former St. Luke's Hospital. I used to visit it with the chairman of the council. I was there for Christmas parties. It is all closed now. There were a couple of hundred patients there at the time. St. Michael's, on the other side of the main hospital, contained the short-term and long-stay places where people had to go. People with these issues, sadly, will need places from time to time in their lives and ongoing treatment. Now all of St. Luke's is offices, offices and more offices. We had to run the health service when we did not have those offices. They were hospitals. Up the road, in Cashel, €22 million was spent on Our Lady's hospital before it was closed down. What is in it now? Not one bed. It is a patient-free zone. It is just offices, offices, offices. That, again, was a functioning hospital. I had my appendix taken out there. I was there a few times when I was young. They took even the lift out of it to ensure that no patient could go upstairs. It is desecration and vandalism, and this is carried on by the HSE. We had that big hospital, the 300 patients in St. Luke's, the 40 or so beds in St. Michael's, and Our Lady's. That adds up to probably 700 patients. We did not have all these offices and management to run those hospitals but we had the matrons, and my God should we bring them back. The hospitals were clean. When the matrons were in charge, there would not have been a report such as came out on St. Luke's. We can do nothing in here only attack the clergy and the Vatican and whoever else day in, day out. These people gave us our education and our health service. They were visionaries who

went all over the world and looked after people, set up field hospitals and did wonderful work, and all we want every day in the midst of our housing crisis and our mental health epidemic is to attack the people and institutions that served us all so well. I hope to God people might realise sooner rather than later the folly of their ways.

Getting back to the services, I will make a contrast with the Minister of State. The Minister, Deputy Harris, came down and saw the situation in Cashel. We saw offices - plush offices, I might add, with colour-coded carpet and the finest of paintings on the walls - yet we do not have a bed for a patient suffering a psychotic attack tonight. Such a patient must be left sitting on a chair. The Minister of State told us we cannot have trolleys, and then there is what happened in Waterford recently. We have all these offices and officials and so on and no services. There is something rotten in the system. When these were functioning hospitals, we had nurses, doctors, attendants and so on - very good people. Now we have legions of staff - I will not call them battalions because they do not go to battle - and what are they doing? They are pushing paper from here to there to wherever else and pushing it back again. That is what is wrong. There is nothing else wrong. The Minister of State talked about the funding increasing from €700 million to €1 billion but it is being gobbled up by administration. It is sad. The HSE has many good people, but many of the chiefs are self-serving and cannot see what is going on on the ground. There are none so blind as those who do not want to see at all. It is so sad.

In Clonmel, we have the likes of Fr. Michael Toomey and the other priests in the area, C-SAW and the volunteers. I should also mention the River Suir Suicide Patrol and TaxiWatch. I was out late in Clonmel last Friday night, at 3.20 a.m., and met three women going off to walk the quays to ensure people were kept out of the river. It is so sad. They have to do it. We have all this administration using all this money yet no services. I know that the Minister of State is doing his best and will soon retire from politics, but the system is badly broken. A Vision for Change was to be the Bible, according to John Moloney, who was Minister of State at the time, and the former Minister of State, Kathleen Lynch, but it all collapsed. The book was closed and left there. All the services were taken away with all the hospitals closed. The Government told us the doors of these Dickensian places would be opened up and all the patients let out - to hell or to Connacht. Then no services - absolutely zilch - were put in in Tipperary. I salute the front line, the Psychiatric Nurses Association of Ireland, the nurses and the other groups, including the community care services. There is something very badly wrong, though, and someone needs to fix it.

Deputy Tom Neville: In 2019, €55 million was allocated to mental health services, bringing spending on those services to in excess of €1 billion. However, a reply to a parliamentary question I tabled on 22 October stated that €33 million had been drawn down, with €10 million to be sanctioned and €12 million not to be spent in 2019. I am seeking clarification as to why that €12 million will not be spent in 2019, given the report by the Joint Committee on the Future of Mental Health Care, the scale of deficiencies in the system, which we highlighted at the time, and the requirement for funding. It seems we are repeating now something that happened a number of years ago. Given what was highlighted through that report, I am looking for accountability and clarification from the HSE as to why this money is being left unspent. Is it a matter of systems or recruitment? If so, what changes have been made to the recruitment process or recruitment flow since the joint committee report was published? What changes have been made to the IT, business and reporting systems since then? There was a recommendation in the report that over three years the IT, business and reporting systems be changed in order that the HSE might highlight or be able to manage this and get out in front of any issues that

would arise with funding or the lack of spending of funding. I am seeking clarification as to what the HSE has done on this. Like every other Member, I want that €12 million ring-fenced for mental health services. I want the necessary improvements to be made to allow us to keep spending that because the Government is supplying the money but it is not being spent. Where is the blockage, and what is happening? Are the reporting functions up to scratch to allow the HSE to report back to the Government as to what exactly is going on? My fear is that they are not. When I highlighted this in a meeting of the committee 18 months ago, I was unable to get straight answers on funding and specific subspecialties, hence my point about the reporting systems. A total of 60% of funding was drawn down by October 2019. There are two months left in the year for another 40% that is in swing. I do not understand the mechanisms of accounting for this, but, again, I seek clarification on that as well. Why is the 60% not drawn down in June or July to front-load the funding and give the Department four or five months to draw down the remaining 40%? What is going on behind the scenes?

I have tabled a number of parliamentary questions on the pathfinder programme. On 25 May 2018, I was told that the Departments of Education and Skills and Health were “working with DPER to resolve some technical issues with the above proposals” and that “a timeline to full implementation can not yet be agreed as the participating departments have not received final approval from DPER”. On 19 July 2019, I was told that at the end of May the Minister of State had a constructive meeting with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, and his officials on the proposal. The Minister of State said they were very supportive of the proposal. Subject to resolving the outstanding matters, the Minister of State said, his officials were in regular contact with their counterparts in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. He said he hoped to make substantial progress on the matter in the coming months. I would like an up-to-date statement on the position regarding the pathfinder programme, of which I am a major supporter. I know that many groups are also pushing for that integration within the various Departments to bring all these ideas into the education sphere and into the schools and to use them to help the teachers themselves to try to work to bring these ideas forward. I refer in particular to the way technology and communications are moving. Yesterday the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, of which I am a member, discussed social media, communication, interaction and so on.

During the week I attended the launch of the My World Survey carried out by the UCD School of Psychology. One of the conclusions concerned social media use. The researchers’ findings indicated a significant relationship between time spent online - specifically, more than three hours - and higher levels of depression and anxiety and lower levels of body esteem. These findings concern adolescents. The researchers found several explanations for the potential link between time spent on social media and mental health issues among adolescents and young adults. For example, they stated there is some evidence that time spent engaging on social media might displace other more important activities that protective of mental health such as sleep or face-to-face time with friends. Another explanation was that a major motivating factor for using social media in general involves escapism and diversion from everyday life. Indeed, they stated, the current research shows that young people who reported spending more than three hours online showed significantly higher levels of avoidance-based coping than their peers who reported spending less time online. It is also important to note that the research does not suggest a causal relationship between time spent online and poor mental health. For instance, a young person who is feeling depressed may turn to social media to try to alleviate his or her negative mood or depressed symptoms, to connect virtually with others or to escape from his or her problems. Findings from current research suggest that many adolescents and

young adults are using social media to build and extend their social connections in real life and that there may be some benefits to spending time online. Adolescents and young adults who reported spending less than two hours online per day had lower levels of support-focused coping and lower levels of perceived social support from friends than those who spent two to three hours online. Further research is needed to examine the context and content of social media use. The data provides evidence for both the potential risks and protective possibilities of social media engagement. We need to get ahead of this in terms of research on social media because the landscape is fast moving. As a society we need to get on top of this. This report suggests that we need more data and research on both the negative and positive aspects of social media.

I have tabled numerous parliamentary questions on CAMHS and I welcome the decrease in the waiting lists for the service, particularly in CHO 3. In July 2018, there were 294 people on the waiting list but by October 2018 the number had dropped to 245. Recent figures show that the waiting list stood at 124 in August 2019, which is welcome. In an ideal world there would be 124 fewer people on that waiting list. I acknowledge the initiatives being undertaken to provide a 24-7 access line and on referral pathways. I have spoken to the Minister of State at length on this issue and welcome her work in this area. I want early intervention to continue because, as outlined in the My World Survey report launched earlier this week, adolescents reported higher levels of depression while the number reporting severe anxiety has more than doubled. We do not know why that is the case and we need to do much more research on it. It may be related to social media. In adolescence, there is a decrease in the ability to cope well with problems and to talk about them, which is very worrying. Another finding of the survey was that young adults were increasingly self-harming without necessarily wanting to take their own lives. I have not read the report in full but had a quick look at it prior to this debate.

Deputies Mattie McGrath and Connolly mentioned suicide watch groups, of which there are two in Limerick, namely the Limerick Treaty Suicide Watch and Limerick Suicide Watch. I went out with members of the latter group one night for four hours and saw the great work being done. There is a need to develop a closer relationship between such groups and the Department of Health, the HSE, local authorities and gardaí. The knowledge and experience of people in such groups is invaluable. I volunteered with Limerick Suicide Watch and it was a very humbling experience. During the four hours, we came into contact with people who were down, rather than distressed. There was one intervention on the night that I was out but I was not involved in it. As a volunteer walking around, I was nervous. While I was talking to others in the group, I was on edge and had butterflies. I was watching and waiting and felt like I was on the front line. It put me, as a public representative, on the front line and gave me an insight into what emergency service staff, including gardaí and nurses, as well as volunteers have to deal with every day. I commend them on the work they do. It is special, vocation-like work and we need to attract more people into it. This brings me back to the argument around recruitment. We need to identify the bottlenecks and address them. I worked as a recruiter for eight years all around the world. We headhunted people for high-level positions globally and always found them. We proactively went out and found them. We need to get to the bottom of the problems with recruitment.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: The waiting list for CAMHS in CHO 1, which includes Cavan and Monaghan, has increased. This demonstrates that the system is failing children with mental health issues. It is shocking to learn that in one month alone, the waiting list grew by 17, which may not sound like a lot. However, in CHO 1, a total of 282 young people were on a waiting list at the end of September 2019. This represents 15% of the overall national list, which is clearly

not good enough. Unfortunately, regional imbalance and inadequate mental health services are a hallmark of the system, as evidenced by the CAMHS waiting lists. The neighbouring CHO, which covers Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, has only 17 people on its waiting list. When one area has a waiting list of 282 and another has a waiting list of 17, it is clear that something is fundamentally wrong with the system.

Over the past decade children and young people have faced new pressures from social media and online engagement. We should broaden access to mental health services rather than limit it. We are letting our young people down because CAMHS is not up to scratch. In fact, we are failing them abysmally. The system is failing children with mental health issues. What is needed is the implementation of a strategy that will bring CAMHS up to scratch but that has not been happening.

We all receive emails on a daily basis from our constituents on various issues but I received one on 17 June last, which left me stuck to my chair. It provided a striking and profound insight into mental health services in Cavan and Monaghan. The writer began, "Dear Niamh, I read with interest your parliamentary question regarding CAMHS data for Cavan/Monaghan" and then drew to my attention the worrying revelation that she, as an adult mental health service user, was potentially taking up a therapy spot for a child. One might ask oneself how that might happen. The e-mailer found this practice "highly unethical" and expressed her concerns to the relevant HSE personnel only to be informed that the ethics of the decision to continue seeing an adult service user once a psychologist has changed posts from adult services to child and adolescent services were not the concern of the service user, in spite of one child fewer being seen as a result. The writer said that she felt she was being stonewalled on the issue. She was awaiting a response to letters sent to the HSE on 3 and 4 May, detailing her concerns. To date, she has not received a response.

I ask the Minister of State to convey my concerns to the HSE regarding this unjust and unethical scenario. I was so struck by the email that I phoned the young woman and met her over a cup of tea. She is a very articulate and concerned young woman who has been using mental health services in Cavan/Monaghan for a number of years. She is very much aware of international models of best practice but has had to battle with the HSE for a service suited to her needs. She is very articulate and has a clear understanding of what will meet her needs. She has articulated in a very clear, understandable and educated way to the HSE that the methodology it is using will not serve her best. What she finds most worrying is that her clinical psychologist, her one-to-one therapist, has taken up a new job with CAMHS. That psychologist moved to CAMHS but took her workload and cases from the adult mental health service with her. She had to carry that work over to CAMHS, which means that she cannot see the children she is meant to see. This adult service user finds that completely unethical and she is correct. She has brought this issue to the attention of the HSE but has not received any concrete answers. I have submitted parliamentary questions on this but have not received a satisfactory answer either. This issue must be examined. We are told that there are recruitment and staffing problems. Why should this woman who has taken up a job with CAMHS, as she is entitled to do, be expected to take her workload from the adult mental health services with her? The Minister of State met representatives of the mental health services in Bailieborough and so he knows the wonderful work Seán McKiernan and his volunteers are doing there. They are part of a voluntary group which is doing fantastic work. I have heard much about Jigsaw and Fiona Gilmore and Seán McKiernan are championing the idea of bringing Jigsaw to County Cavan. That is a specific service which is not available everywhere in the country. I encourage the Minister of

State to engage with us on that because we want it provided in Cavan.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I welcome to the Public Gallery Daniel Philpott, a transition year student from Presentation Brothers College in Cork who is here on work experience for the week. His people hail from Kanturk. I wish him the best of luck.

Much has been said about mental health in the last while. The issue is now very much to the fore and we need to have more engagement on it. As a public representative, I have had much engagement, particularly in the past two or three years, with people seeking help with addiction, trying to get into addiction centres or seeking referrals to such centres. There is a high level of addiction among younger people as well. While there are many strands of mental health, we should focus on young people and the pathways and lifestyles that lead to addiction in early adulthood. Betting is now a phenomenon as well, and many people are being referred to addiction centres for betting. In Ireland we tend to think of addiction in terms of alcohol, but many more issues need to be addressed. When discussing mental health we must also look at those centres.

Various initiatives have been taken in this area over the years, for example, the former Minister of State, John Moloney, who was from County Laois, introduced decongregated settings. Much more work needs to be done to ensure the best possible mental health services are available in the public system. The vast majority of people we deal with as public representatives, who seem to be in the most trouble, are those dealing with the public mental health services. They do not get what they need from them. They might get a referral to the accident and emergency department, from where they are sent home. That is not enough.

There are also many suicide prevention initiatives and organisations in Ireland, such as Pieta House. Deputy Neville spoke of being on the suicide watch in Limerick as well. Large numbers of people are falling victim to suicide and leaving families behind them. Some of those families are doing amazing work in trying to keep the memories of their loved ones alive by preventing more suicides, encouraging people to talk or working with initiatives such as Tree of Hope. That is to be welcomed and encouraged.

If we are to be taken seriously, we must accept that numbers have increased. The Government will answer that the recent mental health budget is the largest we have ever had. While that is true, there are many lacunas in services and many areas are not getting enough funding. We are not opening up enough to the various scourges out there. I had a lengthy discussion only last Monday about the lack of contentment in society and the challenges people face, such as social media and the way society has developed around it. We can bemoan social media and cite its negatives, but it is part of society just as television or radio were two or three generations ago. The question is how we will adapt to it. We must put initiatives in place through the HSE, the health services and the various Departments to empower our young people as we go forward. In my time as a public representative, I have never encountered as many addiction issues as I have in the past two or three years. The problem seems to be growing and that trend is a cause of major concern as we move into the third decade of the century.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I thank all the Members who contributed to this debate. It is much appreciated. I have always appreciated their collective and non-partisan approach to mental health, insofar as that is possible. I am happy to be accountable to any Members of this House on this issue but I also appreciate the constructive

approach people bring to it.

I am obligated to point out some of the positive developments in this area. It is important that we instil confidence in service users to reach out for help and make sure they know that help is available. If we continue the narrative that there is no help available, which I am not suggesting Members are doing, it will disincentivise people from reaching out. We have to get the balance right and be responsible.

The building of the National Forensic Mental Health Service hospital in Portrane is a major development in the delivery of mental health services. It is a brand new central mental hospital, for which we will receive the keys in the next number of weeks. That is a €170 million project which is on budget and on time. It will significantly transform treatment for some of the sickest forensic patients in the system and the environment in which they receive it. They will be moving there from the outdated Dundrum facility. The hospital will also include a 30-bed rehabilitation unit which is very important, as we need to put more emphasis on rehabilitation for people who are mentally unwell. The complex will have 170 beds overall.

The refresh of A Vision for Change, which will come before the Government in the next number of weeks, has been referenced a number of times. I disagree with Deputy Connolly's assertion that it is not important. It is vitally important that, as we learn more, understand more and more academic research is conducted, we revise what we do and how we do it. That will happen in the next number of weeks.

We are also updating the Mental Health Act and the heads of a Bill have gone to the Mental Health Commission for comment. The Taoiseach will launch a new mental health phone line next Thursday. For the first time, more than 1,000 different mental health services throughout the country will be covered under one phone number. A crisis text line will also be established before the end of this year. Digital online telepsychiatry, which I have talked about a number of times, will make it easier for people to access mental health services online. We are using technology to bring those services closer to the people.

As Deputies have noted, the budget will not be the solution to these problems in and of itself. However, it has increased by 45% - almost doubled - since 2012. For a number of those years, there was not much money available for anything. We have significantly increased the budget but I would be the first to say that more money is not the solution. It is about how we do things and implementing structural reforms. Last year, we hired 130 psychologists for primary care for young people. Previously, €2 million or €3 million would be thrown at the system to reduce the waiting lists and as soon as the money was spent, the waiting lists would shoot back up. Last year, we introduced a level of psychology infrastructure for young people in primary care in the community. That is now paying real dividends, and the number of people on CAMHS waiting lists has reduced by 20% so far this year. If we did that in any other area of healthcare, we would be very proud. It is important to recognise where we are making sustainable progress. We have more to do but real improvements are happening. We have also increased the number of training posts for psychology nurses. Deputy Mattie McGrath and others mentioned staffing. Some 130 additional psychiatric nurses will be available from next year onwards. This increase will help.

The number of children in adult mental health wards continues to disappoint. However, the number of children being admitted to adult wards in the latter half of this year has reduced significantly. I commend the Linn Dara child and adolescent inpatient unit on making excep-

tional progress in the treatment of extremely sick young people under 18 who must be admitted to an inpatient unit. There is now much less reliance on using adult units for young people. Furthermore, fewer younger people are going abroad for treatment as a result of the significant improvement in services at Linn Dara. The number of admissions to the centre has almost doubled this year, increasing from 57 last year to 120 so far in 2019, and successful treatments are taking place.

5 o'clock

I commend it for that.

Next Thursday, we will launch the phonenumber which will transform the delivery of mental healthcare services. It will advise people of the most appropriate service in their area. It is confusing to decide whether one should contact Alone, Aware, Jigsaw, Pieta House, CAMHS, the Samaritans or some other organisation. The phone line will be a referral pathway, which is a positive development.

I hope to launch a €3 million community health fund on the following Monday. Many Deputies referred to the very good services being provided in the community. Deputy Smyth referred to Jigsaw. There are other similar groups. The fund will support work being done on the ground by such groups. They will not have to go through the HSE to access the funding as it will be a separate fund to support bottom-up community-led initiatives that try to be more proactive than reactive in the delivery of mental healthcare. I look forward to continuing to engage with Members on this issue.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Drug Treatment Programmes Funding

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Catherine Byrne, to the House to again discuss the serious drug addiction problem in Drogheda, County Louth. As my colleague, Deputy Smyth, who is present, is aware, today we learned of serious and significant problems being experienced by community drugs services in the areas. It is a very difficult situation, particularly for the voluntary groups which run and administer those services. There is a crisis in funding and confidence which needs to be addressed at a meeting with the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, and the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris. All Deputies and Senators who represent counties Louth, Meath, Cavan or Monaghan know this is a matter of extreme urgency. I will follow up the matter with a written request. My primary reason for tabling this Topical Issue matter is that there is a significant, serious and urgent need for further resources to tackle the prevalent drug problem in Drogheda and east Meath in light of increasing drug seizures.

In the past month alone, €5 million worth of drugs have been seized in the county by the Garda. We are thankful for its intervention. Two weeks ago, €1.3 million worth of cocaine was seized 2 miles outside my home town. Those in our community who are dependent on cocaine are seeking further supply or, alternatively, treatment and help. However, they have nowhere to go; there are no support services and that is at the heart of the problem.

I very much welcome the decision of the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, supported by the Taoiseach and the Government, to significantly increase the number of gardaí in Drogheda. An additional 25 full-time permanent gardaí have been stationed there as a result of the crime and other problems caused by the drug war and problems. That step has been very relevant, important and successful. At least 14 people have been arrested and brought before the courts. They will be tried in due course.

The issue is that there has been no parallel increase in drug treatment services. Thankfully, the criminal justice system is working very well and efficiently. However, the HSE and the health board are not. The Minister of State visited the Red Door project three times and is very much aware of the problems there. A former colleague of the Acting Chairman, Deputy Broughan, and mine, Senator Nash, noted that if visits by Ministers to the Red Door project meant it was getting money, the service would have millions in funding. Unfortunately, its budget has not been increased. I acknowledge the interest and awareness of the Minister of State in the project and her concern for it, but its budget has not changed. It is unacceptable to the people of Drogheda and those running the Red Door that there has not been a determined and resourced fight to meet the needs of those who require treatment and supports. According to the family addiction support network for the north east, including County Louth, the region suffers from long waiting lists, a paucity of community treatment, insufficient counselling services, a lack of dual diagnosis in mental health services, insufficient methadone prescribing GPs and very few family support services. It further notes that participants spoke of a perceived lack of professional standards, accountability and transparency among some treatment services. There is a real crisis which needs to be addressed through proper funding from the Minister of State and her Department.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I thank Deputy O'Dowd for raising this issue. I understand that the issue of drug abuse is of great concern to him and the local community. I share many of his concerns. I have visited the north east on several occasions and met service providers there. I know they are working in partnership locally to address these serious issues.

Expenditure by the HSE on drug and alcohol services across the country increased from €94 million in 2016 to more than €100 million in 2018. The funding is used by the HSE to deliver a wide range of services, including early intervention, treatment and rehabilitation. In addition, the Department supports the drug and alcohol task forces. It provides €28 million to them each year through various channels of funding, including the HSE. This funding supports more than 280 community projects prioritised by drug task forces in local areas and communities throughout the country. The North Eastern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force receives almost €928,000 of this funding.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to secure additional funding of €1 million to implement key actions in the national drugs strategy. From this funding, the Department of Health provided the North Eastern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force with an additional €20,000 to support its work, 50% of which is recurring on an annual basis. The funding can be used to enhance services and meet operating costs. The Department is also providing an additional €190,000 over a three-year period for rehabilitation and aftercare support for users of drug and alcohol services in the midlands, Louth and Meath community healthcare area. This initiative will enhance services for people who have dual diagnoses of mental health challenges and substance abuse or who have experience of trauma.

Recent data from the Health Research Board indicates that there were 10,274 cases availing of drug treatment services in Ireland in 2018, an increase of 1,300 or 15% on 2017. The proportion of new cases presenting in 2018 was 39%, up from 37% in 2017. The increase in the number seeking treatment is encouraging from a public health perspective.

The HSE and the North Eastern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force support two front-line drug services in Drogheda, namely, HSE Donore Road and the Red Door project. HSE services recently relocated to the Donore Road, Drogheda, following a €425,000 capital refurbishment. This has led to an improvement in the physical environment for service users and staff located there. A community methadone programme, a substance use service for teens and a social inclusion service are currently provided from the location.

The Red Door project receives funding of €149,000 per year and aims to provide confidential assistance and services to individuals, families and communities affected by drug and alcohol use. The project provides access to a community links worker, a drop-in service, a special rehabilitative community employment scheme and a sexual health screening clinic run by HIV Ireland. It also hosts group therapy programmes and Merchants Quay Ireland utilises it to provide a needle exchange service.

The HSE also supports other services such as the family addiction support network, the ISPCC and Turas Dundalk. The HSE constantly reviews its budget. In recent weeks, it provided additional funding of almost €85,000 to projects in the area, including the Red Door project, Turas, the family addiction support network, Dundalk Simon Community, the ISPCC and Merchants Quay Ireland. It has appointed a senior counsellor to provide governance of counsellors and counselling services.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I accept that certain things have changed. Some €650,000 has been spent on the Donore Road facility. My information is that up to two weeks ago nobody was in that facility. I have since been informed that three public servants are there but that there are no new services. The Minister of State indicated that a methadone programme has commenced. I ask her to provide a follow-up on what exactly is there.

The Deputies from Louth, Meath, Cavan and Monaghan met members of the regional drugs task force this afternoon. All of them said the support they are getting is inadequate and the budget is insufficient. The Deputies from Cavan-Monaghan can speak about it, but I understand there is a very serious crisis in that area, with one of the significant community support services about to close owing to inadequate funding. I repeat that there is a real crisis. Notwithstanding the funding increases the Minister of State mentioned, the service goes nowhere near meeting the demand.

A meeting with the Minister of State and the Minister was requested in order to discuss a plan of action for support for regional drugs task forces. Those involved feel that the power and money is being taken away from them. They pointed out that when Pat Rabbitte was Minister of State with responsibility for the drugs strategy, there was a bottom-up approach. In other words, the money came locally and moved up the system. At present, the money comes through the HSE and does not get to the task forces in the amounts they are seeking.

The Minister of State spoke about the drugs problem in County Louth. In a reply to a parliamentary question, I was advised that in 2018 there were 45,000 needle exchanges in County Louth. That gives some idea of the number of people who depend on injections.

The Minister of State and the Minister need to meet these people. The Government needs to fund the service adequately. The Minister of State will have my support and that of all the Deputies for Louth, Meath, Cavan and Monaghan to ensure that the people get the services they need and demand. What is outlined in the report from the family support network is absolutely unacceptable. It basically points out that no decent services are available. It is shocking, disgraceful and shameful, and it must change now.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I have a closing statement but I will not use it; I will speak directly to Deputy O'Dowd and respond to the issues he raised and the remarks he made.

I am steadfast in my commitment to the national drugs strategy, as Minister of State and implementation lead for the strategy on the oversight committee. In recent weeks, a significant number of people have been addressing this issue, not only because of the reviews of the task forces on the ground but also in general. I acknowledge that money for the national drugs strategy has not been forthcoming for some time. When we launched the strategy two years ago, €7 million was allocated to its implementation. I want to work in partnership with the HSE and the drugs task forces. Nobody is falling down in the context of providing leadership - not my Department and certainly not the Minister. I spoke to him in recent days about the relevance of drug addiction and how important it is to get to the heart of communities in order to try to understand the issues that are arising, not only with criminal activity but also in terms of understanding what is happening in people's homes.

With my background, I am very familiar with the issues. I have seen addiction as a big destroyer of lives from an early age. I have no problem meeting anybody. I have an amount of money to give to people. With the support of the drugs task forces money was reallocated to specific projects. Thirteen drugs task forces came back with specific projects they wanted to pursue. We funded them and two of them have been in the Drogheda area.

I will relay to the Minister the message about meeting these people. It is not necessary to put it in writing; I have no problem meeting them. If we give out money to task forces or the HSE, the most important thing for me, as Minister of State, is the governance of task forces and the HSE and their accountability. In recent weeks I have received ten different letters outlining issues people have with distribution of funding among task forces on the ground. I need to deal with them as the Minister of State. I will not stand over giving money to projects if the money is not used specifically to deal with young people and all people in addiction. This money should be going into addiction services. As far as I am concerned, when money goes to a task force it needs to be focused on those people on the ground.

I will without doubt meet the people the Deputy mentioned. I will raise the possibility of doing so with the Minister. I cannot vouch for his attendance at any meeting, but I will certainly meet them.

I reiterate that I am committed to the national drugs strategy. My leadership of it is beyond doubt. As stated previously, I regret that nine former Ministers wrote a letter without coming to me to ask what is happening out there. We must work in partnership. It is not about the HSE, the partnerships or the Department of Health. We all have to work as one to resolve the issues in our communities because drugs are killing people. I get the message that Deputy O'Dowd is sending.

Maternity Services Provision

Deputy Joan Burton: I appreciate that many of the things the Government is involved in are beset by confusion, lack of budgets and lack of management, as highlighted in the discussion on the previous matter.

What exactly is happening with the Rotunda, the biggest and oldest maternity hospital in Ireland? It seems like another country since 2015 when the then Minister for Health, and now Taoiseach, announced that the Rotunda would be relocated to Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown as part of a six-year health capital programme. Based on what the Taoiseach outlined at the time, we should be in the middle of the planning if not heading towards the construction of a new maternity hospital in the north-west Dublin to allow the Rotunda to continue to provide the best of care to mothers and babies for another 100 years. All I can find are really sad stories from the Rotunda of the hospital being overwhelmed and not properly resourced by the HSE.

When the announcement about the Rotunda relocation was made, there was a timeline and a sense of planning regarding what would happen. Since then, a number of studies have been undertaken. However, no capital allocation has been made. I will not go into the difficulties besetting its sister hospital in Holles Street in moving to the campus at Elm Park. I just want to concentrate on the Rotunda and the impossible conditions that the leadership in the hospital, including the Master, Professor Fergal Malone, have outlined, such as, for example, the dangers for newborn babies and babies who require intensive care.

With the Blanchardstown project now seemingly placed on the long finger and with the facilities in the Rotunda getting older, more worn and increasingly overcrowded by the day, there have been several serious outbreaks of infection. There has been harm and illness to babies. We have even had an argument by the master that a new urgent care facility for newborn and premature babies needs to be developed. We cannot get any answers out of the Government that make sense and that offer a budget, timeline and, most of all, hope to the families who are looking forward to having a baby, the women who will have a baby, and the babies that will be born, it is to be hoped, in conditions of maximum safety.

I know the Minister of State is sent in to the Chamber to answer questions that are not her direct responsibility as a way of deflecting the issue. What exactly is the Minister for Health for if he is not looking out for the care of mothers and babies with regard to maternity services? What is he for? I do not know what he is doing with his time. He seems to be down in places like Wicklow with schoolchildren launching the national broadband plan, which will cost €3 billion. This is an overpriced project if ever there was one. Could some of those billions not have been redirected to our maternity services? It does not seem like a difficult thing to do.

What is happening with regard to the Rotunda? When will the move to Connolly Hospital take place? Are the interim facilities that have been indicated for the west side of Parnell Square in the form of intensive care unit facilities for newborn babies being progressed or have they vanished?

Deputy Catherine Byrne: The Minister for Health cannot be here and I have been asked to take this Topical Issue matter on his behalf. I will refer back to some of the issues raised by the Deputy. On behalf of the Minister, I thank the Deputy for raising this important matter today. First, I would like to provide some background information on the decision to relocate the Rotunda Hospital to the Connolly Hospital campus. I am very familiar with the Rotunda

Hospital where my mother, a number of my children and other relatives of mine have had their children. I know the history of the Rotunda and its expertise and I know the master very well.

In line with best international practice, it is Government policy that stand-alone maternity hospitals should be co-located with acute adult hospitals to provide optimal clinical outcomes. This commitment is reaffirmed in the national maternity strategy, which was published in January 2016. As the Deputy will be aware, the new children's hospital was originally planned for the Mater Hospital site and it was proposed, as recommended in the KPMG report from 2008 entitled Independent Review of Maternity and Gynaecology Services in the Greater Dublin Area, to redevelop the Rotunda Hospital on the Mater Hospital site.

In 2012, the Government decided to locate the new children's hospital at the St. James's campus. A detailed review was undertaken by the Department of Health, which considered a number of potential host sites for both hospitals. This review examined a range of factors, including demographics, a range of clinical criteria, planning risks and site capacity. In addition, the Department engaged with a number of divisions within the HSE and with the then masters of both the Rotunda and the Coombe as part of the review process.

In June 2015, the Government decided that the Coombe would be relocated to the St. James's Hospital campus while the Rotunda would be redeveloped on the Connolly Hospital campus. More recently the Minister for Health has also engaged with the master of the Rotunda, the RCSI hospital group and the HSE regarding the relocation of the Rotunda to Connolly Hospital. This included holding a meeting with these parties in July of this year.

In terms of funding the Rotunda relocation project, Project Ireland 2040 provides €10.9 billion for health capital developments throughout the country, including funding to support implementation of the national maternity strategy. The relocation of the Rotunda Hospital is one of the key infrastructure projects that will be funded under Project Ireland 2040. However, it is important that we carefully plan all capital projects to meet population health needs and achieve value for money. As I understand it, this work is ongoing.

While the Minister for Health is not in a position to outline the year-on-year provisions for any individual maternity hospital project at this stage, this will be considered through the process of the determination of service priorities and in the context of health capital planning. I can assure the House that the Government is committed to implementing its policy to co-locate all stand-alone maternity hospitals with adult acute hospitals. As the Deputy will appreciate, the Rotunda relocation project is at an early stage and will be required to progress through appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established. I have been advised that the project briefs for the relocation of the Rotunda, as well as the Coombe and University Maternity Hospital Limerick, to acute hospital campuses will be progressed in 2020.

Deputy Joan Burton: This is an incredible reflection on the Taoiseach, who as Minister for Health made an announcement in 2015 concerning the Rotunda Hospital, which we all know is a very venerable hospital in old buildings that has provided centuries of care to women and babies in Dublin. According to the Minister of State's reply, it now looks as though it will just get a wave of the hand and be left to carry on in the really dangerous situation recently described by the master of that hospital in respect of neonatal care and infection risk. The Minister of State's reply basically stated that this Government has not allocated a cent or euro to the Rotunda Hospital project. Not only that, it has not even brought together a design team

to begin to put together the details of what the plan for the Rotunda would be. The Minister of State said nothing about the current situation in the Rotunda and its problems, particularly with regard to infection risk and the need for a new neonatal intensive care unit outlined by the master. Her reply implies that the Connolly Hospital project seems to have slipped the Taoiseach's mind once he made a few announcements about it, and neither he nor his Government has done anything more. The Minister for Health does not even bother to come in here today to answer a question that is vital for many women, not just in Dublin but in the rest of the country and in particular their babies.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I refer back to Deputy Burton's charge that the Minister and the Government do not care about women and children. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is why we are building a state-of-the-art national children's hospital for the first time. Children from the Coombe, the Rotunda and the National Maternity Hospital in Holles Street who are very vulnerable and sick are brought to Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin. We all know that we need a new national children's hospital.

Regarding the relocation of the Rotunda, I wish to make one thing very clear to the Deputy. She was in government with us back then and she knows what we were left to pick up when there was no money to put anywhere, never mind into a capital plan. For the first time with the development of Project Ireland 2040, we have an opportunity to plan, reach out and have a vision of what we want for maternity services in this country. Nobody in this House can tell me that this Government does not care about women and children, because we do. We have had a problem with funding but we are back on track in many ways.

I will convey to the Minister Deputy Burton's disappointment that he could not be here and her contention that there has been no plan, design and tender. I will relay her concerns to him, but I will not stand here and be told that this Government does not care about women and children. Nothing could be further from the truth. As a representative of the Government, I will stand here and defend our record at all times. I apologise for being over the top about it but I believe we have excellent maternity hospitals, including the Rotunda, the Coombe and Holles Street. All of their buildings have gone past their sell-by date, however. I know in my heart and soul that the Rotunda, Holles Street and the Coombe need to be relocated. It is not down to the staff or the masters. It is down to the fact that in the past these hospitals were not kept up to a certain standard to keep them running. We are now faced with the dilemma that all maternity hospitals need to be relocated and redesigned.

I will bring Deputy Burton's views back to the Minister about how she believes nothing is being done to forward this plan. It is in Project Ireland 2040.

Home Care Packages Provision

Deputy Denis Naughten: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for giving me the opportunity to raise this important issue. Cathy Mahon from Lisacul, County Roscommon, occupies a rehabilitation bed in the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire, that would allow another patient to finally leave hospital. Despite the fact the 51 year old has been ready for discharge for the past six months, following excellent treatment at the hospital after a stroke that left her as a quadriplegic, no home care support has been secured, meaning she cannot return to her family home. Helen Grace has been trapped in St. Vincent's hospital in Dublin for a year while she waits for access to the same bed Cathy Mahon occupies in the National Rehabilitation Hospital.

It effectively means that Cathy Mahon, through no fault of her own, is occupying the only suitable bed that would allow Helen Grace to move out of St. Vincent's hospital.

Cathy Mahon spent months in University Hospital Galway before being transferred to the Mater Hospital in Dublin and later on to the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire, where she is today. She has been cared for in the only bed in the country that is equipped for a patient who has her level of disability and needs the support of a ventilator to help her to breathe. Cathy Mahon has made remarkable progress and was ready to be discharged in May, but only if she received an intensive home care package. However, she is still in the National Rehabilitation Hospital while awaiting a package that would include skilled home care staff and therapy. Her home is ready. Her husband is keen to have her go home. He has carried out extensive work to their small cottage to accommodate Cathy.

Helen, on the other hand, who is also quadriplegic and on a ventilator, has for the past 12 months occupied a specialised bed in St. Vincent's hospital, Dublin, waiting to be transferred to Dún Laoghaire as soon as Cathy Mahon can return home. The Mahons have made absolutely no progress in securing the necessary home care support they require to ensure Cathy can leave Dún Laoghaire and return to Lisacul in County Roscommon. By doing so, it would allow Helen Grace to move from St. Vincent's hospital to the specialised bed in Dún Laoghaire.

I know there are plans to put a second specialised bed in Dún Laoghaire. However, it is pointless having a bed there and a patient in it who does not need that level of care just because we cannot put specialist supports in place to allow her to live with as much dignity and independence as possible in her own home in Lisacul, County Roscommon. Will the Minister of State take on and progress this specific case? Will he engage with the HSE and ensure it has the funding made available to it from the national coffers to community healthcare organisation, CHO, 2 to ensure Cathy Mahon can return back to County Roscommon?

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I thank Deputy Naughten for raising these cases as well as for giving me the opportunity to outline the position on the provision of home care packages for people with disabilities being discharged from acute hospital settings. I can assure the Deputy of the Government's commitment to providing services and supports to people with disabilities that will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, as well as enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in A Programme for a Partnership Government. It is guided by two principles, namely, equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

In 2020, more than €2 billion will be allocated to the HSE's disability service programme, an increase of 7%. This will fund the provision of a wide and complex range of services and supports to people with disabilities, including the provision of home support packages.

The HSE funds the National Rehabilitation Hospital in the region of €29 million annually under section 38 of the Health Act 2004. Services are provided through a service agreement that is reviewed annually. There are 242 patients awaiting admission to the National Rehabilitation Hospital inpatient services across its brain injury, spinal cord injury, prosthetic-amputee and paediatric programmes. Approximately 90% of referrals are generated in an acute hospital setting. There are also several delayed transfer of care patients in the spinal programme and in the brain injury programme.

Personal assistant and home support services are provided either directly by the HSE or through a range of voluntary service providers to support individuals with a disability to maximise their capacity to live full and independent lives. In 2019, the HSE will deliver 17.9 million home support hours to 53,000 people, along with intensive home care packages delivered to approximately 235 people, which comes to 360,000 hours delivered in the full year. Services are accessed through an application process or through referrals from public health nurses or other community-based staff. Resource allocation is determined by the needs of the individual, compliance with prioritisation criteria and the level of resources available.

As with every service, there is not a limitless resource available for the provision of home support services. While the resources available are substantial, they are finite. The number of hours granted is determined by other support services already provided to the person or family. While the majority of people in receipt of home care packages are aged 65 years or over, approximately 85%, a small portion of the target hours are delivered to people with disabilities that may include those suffering the effects of acquired brain injury.

In addition, in 2020 the HSE will be providing new and additional resources in terms of providing intensive in-home transitional support packages as a positive measure to support people with disabilities. Details of this measure will form part of the national service plan to be agreed for 2020. On the particular cases the Deputy raised, I will engage with the HSE and CHO 2 as well.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I acknowledge the last comment of the Minister of State. With all due respect, however, both Helen's family and Cathy have been forced to go public. Helen is in her 70s and stuck in an inappropriate bed in St. Vincent's hospital, Dublin, for the past 12 months. How many more people are in other hospitals throughout the country waiting to be treated in that hospital bed in St. Vincent's? Cathy, a young woman of 51 years of age, has been stuck inappropriately in Dún Laoghaire for the past six months. The Minister of State gave the numbers of people around the country who could be treated in that specific bed but who are waiting for access to it.

I have given the Department the details of these two cases. They are already in the public domain. I am disappointed I did not get a response to the specific issues I raised, however. The Department looked for specific information from me regarding the individuals in question. I provided it with that information. With all due respect, however, the response today from the Minister of State is a generic reply to a generic issue. This is not a generic issue.

Two specialist beds have been tied up for the past 18 months. Two women are being accommodated inappropriately in specialist beds who should not be in them. There is a young woman from County Roscommon who wants to go home. Her husband has carried out changes to their cottage in Lisacul, County Roscommon in order that she can return home and have her dignity and as much independence as possible. I plead with the Minister of State to take on this issue and come back to me with a detailed reply and commitment to provide funding to unlock the two beds for the two women mentioned and anyone else who might need them.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Of course, I agree that the issue is not generic. I have listened very carefully to the Deputy as he outlined the two cases. To answer one of his questions, 242 patients are awaiting admission to the National Rehabilitation Hospital.

On the broader issue, the HSE funds the National Rehabilitation Hospital to a figure of

approximately €29 million annually under section 38 of the Health Act 2004. Services are provided under a service level agreement which is reviewed on an annual basis. The HSE is committed to protecting the level of personal assistant and home support services available to persons with disabilities. In its 2019 national service plan the HSE's priority is to provide 1.63 million personal assistance hours for more than 2,500 people with a disability, which represents an increase of 170,000 hours on the 2018 target of 1.46 million hours. The HSE will also provide 3.08 million home care support hours for adults and children with a disability, which represents an increase of 150,000 hours on the 2018 target of 2.93 million hours.

Resource allocations are determined by the needs of individuals, compliance with prioritisation criteria and the level of resources available. Like every service, limitless resources are not available for the provision of home support services and while the resources available are substantial, they are finite. In that context, services are discretionary. The number of hours granted is also determined in the context of the other support services already provided for the person or family concerned.

There is a need for increased services. I will take on that issue. The HSE will continue to work with the agencies to explore various ways by which they can respond in line with the budget available. These are genuine cases that deserve our support. I will agree to engaging with the HSE and taking on these cases. We all accept that we have to do more to provide services for people with disabilities.

An Ceann Comhairle: I expect we will hear more from Deputy Naughten about this matter.

Deputy Denis Naughten: By God, you will.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for giving me the opportunity to raise this matter. Before I go into it, I am also aware of somebody in the National Rehabilitation Hospital who is awaiting the provision of funding for a homecare package. It is very frustrating, to say the least. We will return to this issue at a later date.

An application has been made via Cork County Council on behalf of Kanturk and District Community Council under the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme which is run by the Department of Rural and Community Development under the leadership of the Minister, Deputy Ring. I raise this issue because an application for CLÁR funding for the regeneration of the town park in Kanturk was made by Cork County Council earlier this year. The local authority was under the impression that if it prioritised its CLÁR applications, they would be guaranteed to be funded. Only three of its 16 applications were funded and they were all outside the north Cork region.

I am looking for funding under the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme for the regeneration of Kanturk town park which has been developed by local people over many decades. It has been kept up to date and improved during the years, but there is now a need for massive redevelopment. It is a fantastic park in the middle of the town on the banks of the river. Great credit is due to those who spearheaded its development in decades gone by. We are at a juncture when there is a need for massive redevelopment. In recent weeks we have finally seen funding

come through for the construction of the relief road in Kanturk. The local authority will move very quickly to try to make sure boots will be on the ground and the project developed.

The total cost of the town park project is €140,000 and under measure 2 of the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme funding of €112,000 is sought. I hope the Minister of State will take back to the Minister and the Minister of State, Deputy Canney, the importance of the scheme and making sure Kanturk will be successful in its application. We need to make sure we will have a vibrant town park. It is picturesque, but the replacement of the old pathways and landscaping is needed. Many people speak about the benefits of sensory gardens. The park will include one. There will be biodiversity, in the context of climate change, into which all communities are buying.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the voluntary work that has been done by the Tidy Towns committee and the community council in recent months, particularly the voluntary efforts made on Saturdays and Tuesdays by the Tidy Towns committee which has done fantastic work in the community. Kanturk is a vibrant town and has a unique status in the country.

I ask the Minister of State to make sure the contents of this debate are carried back to the Department; I am not raising the issue just for the purposes of speaking about it. I ask the Department to look seriously at it. The park ticks many boxes with reference to environmental issues. Kanturk will be enhanced by having a sensory garden, a picnic area, seating and benches in the park. An awful lot of work at local authority level has been put into putting the application together. The local LEADER company, all vested interests and partnership groups have bought into the scheme. I ask the Minister of State to outline the Department's thinking on the application.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I thank the Deputy for raising this very important issue. I know of his personal commitment and dedication to serving the the people of Kanturk.

I understand the Department of Rural and Community Development has received an application for funding for Kanturk town park under measure 2 of the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme. This application is under consideration and an announcement will be made by the Minister, Deputy Ring, in due course. I have also been informed by the Department of Rural and Community Development that an application was received under measure 2 of the CLÁR programme which was, unfortunately, unsuccessful. Almost 500 applications were received across all measures, of which more than 300 were made under measures 1 and 2. The level of funding sought far exceeded the available budget and it was not possible to fund all of the project applications received. The selection of the individual projects had regard, *inter alia*, to the range, mix, quality and impact of the project proposals submitted. Almost €6 million has been allocated for 179 projects across all measures under the CLÁR programme this year. It includes funding for eight projects in total in County Cork, to a value of almost €300,000.

Funding for regeneration is also available through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which seeks to support ambitious and strategic projects which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities. The Government has committed €1 billion over ten years to the fund. A total of €315 million has been allocated to the fund for the period from 2019 to 2022.

I am informed by the Department of Rural and Community Development that an application for funding for Kanturk town park was not submitted in the second call for the fund. However,

the Department did receive an application for phase one of the Kanturk regeneration plan. The Minister awarded funding of €619,500 to Cork County Council for the project in a recent announcement. The project will unlock the potential for further regeneration opportunities in Kanturk and is one of a series of projects set out in the Kanturk town framework developed by Cork County Council in consultation with local community stakeholders. The development and enhancement of the town park in Kanturk is one of the six transformative projects set out in the Kanturk regeneration plan that may be submitted in future calls for funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund or future calls under other funding support schemes, if appropriate, for example, town and village scheme funding.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I thank the Minister of State for the reply. I am glad to see that my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, is here. I noticed that the antennae went up straightaway when Kanturk was mentioned. The Minister of State might have a word with his ministerial colleague about this application. He said the selection of individual projects had regard to range, mix and quality. What has been put forward for the regeneration of the town park in Kanturk is fantastic. It contains everything possible, including landscaping, a sensory garden and biodiversity, which is so important and into which all communities are buying. There are to be picnic areas, seating and benches.

This is an important project for the town park in Kanturk and the people of the entire Duhallow region. I ask the Minister of State and his colleagues to lobby in every way possible to make sure the funding for it will come through. The project is vital for Kanturk. We do not want to be disappointed again, as we were in seeking CLÁR funding recently. There is great ambition for the town among its residents and those living in the greater Duhallow region. Thankfully, there is a lot of very good work being done. The project must not be overlooked on this occasion. We were overlooked in the allocation of CLÁR funding, as the Minister of State outlined. A great amount of work has been done by the local authority and LEADER groups, into which all communities have bought. More importantly, the community of Kanturk has bought into it. We are looking forward to an announcement by the Minister for Rural and Community Development to ensure the Kanturk regeneration project will be included. As I said, there is an application and the total cost of the project is €140,000. Funding of €112,000 has been sought and I look forward to it being allocated. I hope the Minister of State will pass on my comments to the Minister and the Department and outline the urgent need for funding for the project.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I share the Deputy's great ambitions for the people of Kanturk. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Creed, is very committed and will work very closely with the Deputy to deliver, as he has done in the case of many projects for many years. The project set out in the Kanturk regeneration plan will guide and support the future growth and development of the town. Phase 1 of the plan is crucial in achieving that aim. Towns and villages are the heartbeat of rural areas, providing a focal point for economic, cultural and social activity. Their continued vitality is key to our goal of achieving balanced regional development. The funding of projects such as the Kanturk regeneration plan will ensure the rural regeneration funding programme will deliver significant and sustainable regeneration in rural towns and villages across Ireland. I will pursue the matter with the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring, because we all need to work together on excellent proposals like this for the people of Kanturk. The Minister, Deputy Creed, is committed, just like the Deputy whom I wish all the best.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is great to see such collegiality among the honourable Members

from County Cork.

Report on Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill 2017: Motion

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I move:

That Dáil Éireann shall take note of the Report of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine entitled 'Detailed Scrutiny of the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill 2017', copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 8th November, 2018.

As a member of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on the report. The Chairman of the committee, Deputy Deering, is unable to be here to propose the motion and as Deputy Martin Kenny who proposed the Bill is no longer a member of the committee, he cannot make the opening remarks. Therefore, it has fallen to me to do so.

Deputy Michael Creed: The Deputy is well qualified.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I will take do happily.

In 2014 the sub-committee on fisheries examined the challenges in coastal and island fisheries. In its report, Promoting Sustainable Rural Coastal and Island Communities, 2014, the sub-committee recommended that the Government examine the feasibility of issuing heritage licences by the Department for rural coastal and island fishing communities. That was recommendation No. 10. Following on from that recommendation, the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill 2017 was initiated in Dáil Éireann by Deputies Ferris, Martin Kenny and Doherty on 12 July 2017. The Bill was read a Second Time on 1 February 2018 and referred to the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine. As part of its work programme, the committee decided to undertake detailed scrutiny of the Bill, the objective of which is to provide a heritage licence for fishermen based on the islands who use traditional and/or small-sized methods for fishing in order that they may fish inshore waters. This will support island communities through the provision of an income stream from fishing.

One specific action is sought, namely, a small allocation of quota to be set aside for fishermen resident on offshore islands. It is envisaged that the allocation would be in the region of 0.5% to 1% of the overall quota for the country. The proposed mechanism is a heritage licence which would entitle the holder to access the additional quota. To hold a heritage licence, one must already be licensed to fish as per the current regulations.

At its meeting on 17 April 2018 the committee decided to seek a number of submissions from interested parties and held public hearings on 1 May and 12 June 2018 to explore the relevant issues and possible solutions. During the hearings the committee engaged with the sponsors of the Bill, departmental officials, seven fishing organisations and academics. I thank all those who appeared before the committee and submitted evidence for their valuable insight and engagement on the topic.

I will now walk through some specific issues and key recommendations made in the report. In concluding its detailed scrutiny of the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill the committee recommended that consideration be given to renaming the proposed heritage licence. It suggests naming the instrument a heritage fishing opportunity licence, HFOL, may be more

appropriate.

The committee also recommended that an allocation of 0.5% to 1% of the national quota be set aside for heritage and traditional fishing which would only be accessed through holding a HFOL and that consideration be given to further detail regarding appeal procedures, review processes and provision for offences, sanctions and enforcement powers. These points may be addressed by incorporating these aspects of the HFOL into the current licensing system, recognising that it as an additional instrument intended to allow access to the additional quota.

Further recommendations are, noting recommendation No. 10 of the 2014 report of the sub-committee on fisheries, that the HFOL be introduced for island communities on a pilot basis; that consideration be given to expanding the scope of the Bill to include certain coastal communities that experience particular disadvantages; and that the requirement for a vessel to be licensed and entered in the polyvalent register be continued. The latter requirement protects the integrity of the register and the safety of the fleet.

It was also recommended that provision be made for the requirements related to track record to be set aside for quotas allocated under the HFOL but that similar requirements for ordinary quota remain in place; and that provision be made to allow for the transfer of the right to avail of or benefit from a HFOL between a number of named beneficiaries who were fishers who used the same licensed vessel.

The committee considered four categories of policy implications in the report: environmental, economic, social and legal. It recommends that the current system for allocating quota be reviewed and evaluated in terms of the economic benefit to every fisher with a registered and licensed vessel. In particular, the committee believes a system with an imbalance in quota allocation must be avoided. It recommends that consideration be given to putting a structure in place to ensure specific issues may be addressed at a higher level and that the need for consensus on issues at regional inland fisheries forums level be reviewed to account for island-specific issues. It also recommends that consideration be given to a cross-sectoral study of island communities in order to understand the overall losses to island communities, not just in terms of population and economic opportunity but also in terms of cultural impacts and opportunities for sectors such as tourism and infrastructure.

The committee acknowledges that the Bill has significant potential to improve the lives of island fishers and that there is scope for expansion to coastal fishers in extremely disadvantaged coastal regions. I refer to rural coastal fishers. The committee also acknowledges that the traditional fishing sector has less of an impact on the marine environment and that supporting it should be encouraged. However, the Bill should have due regard to the limits set by quotas under the CFP and suggests additional quota allocations for islanders pursuant to existing initiatives be explored.

The committee believes its recommendations provide a pathway for aligning the Bill with the overall policy objectives for fisheries at European and national level, as well as making some suggestions on how the wider policy framework for fisheries in Ireland can be improved to provide additional support for island fishers. However, some wider questions remain about the method of allocation of quota and the requirements to be met in terms of licensing and capacity.

6 o'clock

The committee notes that the Department held a public consultation in April 2018 on trawling activities inside the six-nautical mile limit. The committee received correspondence from the Minister in January 2019 informing the committee that following this process all trawling activity by vessels over 18 m inside the six-nautical mile limit will end from the beginning of 2022.

Deputy Michael Creed: It is 2020.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I accept that. It was a typographical error.

On completion of its Detailed Scrutiny of the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill 2017, the committee recommended that the Bill would progress to Third Stage, provided the scope is clarified to ensure that island and rural coastal communities are appropriately balanced.

That is what the committee report stated but I wish to add some further comments of my own on how things have progressed since then. This is a very important issue and I am aware the Minister and the Department have a particular view on the Bill, in particular that it might require a money message. Having looked at the reasons given for the money message, I think it is an excuse to block the Bill rather than there being a real need for a money message. That is a separate issue that has been debated widely in this House.

The island communities have worked very hard to try to sustain their livelihoods and life on the islands. It is very difficult to survive on the islands. The State should make sure that traditional island life is made as easy as possible given the difficult circumstances that prevail. In reality, the success of Ireland as a nation will be how we treat people that do not have the same advantages as people living in Dublin, for example, in Dublin 4. We must support traditional methods of fishing and ways of life in a respectful way that allows them to progress and to provide a livelihood for themselves and their families on the islands. I am sure the Minister will agree that life on an island is difficult enough without having to fight constantly against officialdom to ensure that one can survive.

Fishermen have constantly battled but they probably have not been as effective as farmers in terms of fighting their case for a livelihood in this country. Fishermen are diverse as well. Island fishermen are probably the weakest sector in the fishing community and they must be defended. We must ensure they can survive and continue to work using their traditional methods. Island communities landed 0.85% of the national quota in 2018. That is a minuscule amount. Increasing the quota allocation for island communities to 1.5% of the national quota would make no difference to larger fishermen but it would make a difference in terms of the survival or death of island communities. That is well worth pursuing.

The Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation, IMRO, has done a lot of work in the meantime to try to ensure it can survive and continue. It has tried to meet a lot of the grounds the Department has insisted it must meet in order to be recognised as a producer organisation under the Department's requirements. However, IMRO has hit a brick wall because the Department has said it is a mandatory criterion for recognition that 30% by weight of the total production should be landed into a major port. That is fair enough but IMRO has never come across such a requirement anywhere. The view is that it was introduced at the last stage when IMRO thought it was getting places. That is the problem.

The Minister and his departmental officials will say the last thing they need is another producer organisation to deal with, but the reality is that IMRO is a producer organisation that is

working on behalf of the fishermen it represents, while some producer organisations are so big and there are so many different sectors within it that they do not speak with one voice. IMRO is a group that would be speaking with one voice and it is vitally important to support it. It behoves the Dáil, the Government and the Department to facilitate people as much as possible. That is the road we should be going down. I urge the Minister to consider meeting with IMRO to explain the criteria it must fulfil. It has gone a lot of the way towards trying to meet the requirements and it might be able to go the rest of the way if the Minister were to meet with IMRO and explain the situation to it. That might go some way towards progressing the issue, which is vitally important.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the committee's report on the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill 2017. I wish to reassure the House that both I, as Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Government recognise the value and importance of maintaining vibrant rural, island and coastal communities. That was the motivation for the Action Plan for Rural Development, Realising our Rural Potential, which was launched in January 2017 as a whole-of-Government strategy aimed at delivering real change for people living and working in rural Ireland. More recently, the Government Chief Whip and Minister of State with responsibility for Gaeilge, Gaeltacht and the islands, Deputy Kyne, has been asked to assist with the formulation of a national islands policy. To that end, the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, has already established an interdepartmental committee to identify the key stakeholders and to prepare a consultation paper to provide a framework for the development of the policy.

As regards the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill, it is already a matter of record that the Government is opposed to this Bill due to its incompatibility with existing EU legislation, namely, the Common Fisheries Policy regulations. The current sea-fishing boat licensing legislation and procedures already allow residents of Ireland's offshore islands to enter the fishing fleet in the same manner as any other applicant. The European Union regulation does not allow for a scheme of sea-fishing licences for individuals separated from the commercial sea-fishing boat, as proposed in the Bill.

In April this year I wrote to the committee Chairman and to Deputy Martin Kenny to advise them of the Government's reasoned response to a request for a money message for this Private Members' Bill. For the benefit of those present in the Chamber, I will read the letter into the record:

Dear Martin,

On the 2 nd April 2019 the Government approved a reasoned response to the request for a money message in relation to the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill 2017.

The reasoned response (copy attached) sets out why a money message should not be issued for this legislation and includes:

1. The Bill is not compatible with existing EU legislation, namely the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) regulation and related regulations.
2. The recent Policy Directive 1/2019 introduces restrictions on the trawling activities by fishing vessels over 18 m in length overall inside Ireland's six nautical mile limit and is expected to improve fishing opportunities for smaller vessels.

3. As outlined in my letter to you on the 31 st January 2019, improvements have been made in the communication of quota availability to the inshore sector.

A further recent development in terms of small scale fishing activities is the launch of the Inshore Fisheries Strategy which was developed by the National Inshore Fisheries Forum in partnership with my Department, BIM, the [Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority] SFPA and the Marine Institute. I hope that the implementation of the Strategy will lead to further sustainable development of the small scale inshore sector and in this context I have asked BIM to work closely with the [National Inshore Fisheries Forum] NIFF to deliver the objectives set out in the strategy.

Finally, I continue to encourage any inshore fishermen and fisherwomen, islanders or otherwise, to work through their Regional Inshore Fisheries Forum to develop, advance or influence policies they feel can contribute to their inshore fisheries communities.

Yours sincerely," etc.

The reasoned response was laid before the Houses so I will not read that into the record now. In a previous letter on 31 January 2019, I advised Deputy Martin Kenny of policy developments of relevance to the rationale being used for this Bill. I will also read this letter into the record:

Dear Martin,

I am writing to you in relation to policy developments concerning fisheries management and particularly how these address issues which the Private Members Bill, "Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill 2017" appears to have been influenced by. On 21 December 2018 I announced the outcome of a review on trawling activities by fishing vessels inside Ireland's six nautical mile limit which has culminated in the decision to restrict trawling activity by vessels over 18 metres in length overall within this zone.

By way of background, in April 2018, I launched a public consultation on the issue of trawling activities inside the six nautical mile limit. This consultation followed initial analysis of [this] issue by both the Marine Institute and (BIM(and also preliminary feedback from the fishing producer organisations. The consultation document put forward three potential options in light of the initial analysis. There was a wide diversity of views expressed in the [approximately] 900 submissions received and all of the submissions are available on the Department's website.

The BIM analysis highlighted that the exclusion of trawlers over 18 metres in length would likely lead to a reduction of 2.6% (€5.5 million) of their overall landings. [I make that observation in the context of the point made by Deputy Pringle about increasing the quota from under 1% even to 1.5%. This initiative is getting to 2.6%.] This small proportion of landings being foregone by larger vessels will provide opportunities to smaller inshore and island fishermen which would represent a potential increase of 62% in the value of their landings. I recognise of course that this potential figure may not be fully realised by the smaller vessels but the percentage gains for those vessels that will take up these opportunities will be significant. Additionally, the increase in availability of sprat and herring to smaller vessels would represent a diversification opportunity as these species are found in bays and coastal areas during the winter.

The Marine Institute report identified that trawling by large vessels can have a more

detrimental impact on the environment than smaller trawls. Coastal waters provide nursery grounds for a number of commercial fish species and mixed species trawls can capture higher proportions of smaller fish inshore. Thus the new measures will provide additional protection for [those] nurseries. The National Inshore Fisheries Forum (NIFF) made a submission on the proposals during the public consultation process. The NIFF is the representative body for the inshore fleet and is supported by a network of Regional Inshore Fisheries Forums (RIFF). Island groups are among the multiple stakeholders represented on the ... forums, including at national level. The [national] submission by the fisheries forum] was in favour of the option which has been approved to exclude vessels over 18 metres using trawls.

I believe that a compelling case for excluding trawling by large vessels in coastal waters inside six nautical miles has been made. I am of the view that there are enough opportunities for vessels over 18 metres outside of the six nautical mile zone. For just over 1% of these vessels, sprat constitutes a high proportion of the value of their landings. For this reason over 18 metre vessels will continue to be allowed to trawl for sprat only inside [the] six nautical miles until 2022. This phased process addresses the transitional period required by [those] vessels to adapt and I have asked BIM to work with the vessel owners and others toward a smooth transition. A total allowable catch of up to 2,000 tonnes, reflecting a reduction on recent years, will be permitted for these vessels during 2020, reducing to 1,000 tonnes in 2021. All trawling activity by vessels over 18 metres inside the six nautical mile limit will end from the beginning of 2022.

I am convinced these measures will provide for further sustainable development of the small scale inshore sector which the Government committed to in [its] “Programme for a Partnership Government”.

My officials have advised that a further key issue which emerged during consideration of the Bill related to communication about the opportunities which ... exist for inshore and island fishers to exploit quota-controlled stocks. I understand that this has also been addressed through the provision of figures on quota availability and fleet policies to the Inshore Fisheries Forums. The National Inshore Fisheries Forum has a representative [on] the Quota Management Advisory Committee and I continue to encourage inshore groups to seek updates through the Inshore Fisheries Forums so that the messages about quota availability continue to be disseminated throughout the industry.

In relation to the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill itself and the Joint Committee Report on the matter, it is worth noting that the restrictions on trawling by vessels over 18 m will benefit all coastal inshore fishers, whether island-based or not. This is, I believe, in the same spirit as the Joint Committee’s suggestion to extend the concept of a heritage licence beyond just islanders. Another important issue I feel needs to be addressed is the concept of a specific licence being envisaged to assign quota opportunities. This is not the current practice for quota management and the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006 already provides regulatory tools in the form of notices and authorisations which are actively used to manage opportunities to take up quota across the fleet at present. Introducing an additional licence for this purpose may prove counter-productive to adaptive quota management and transferring opportunities between eligible fishing vessels.

I trust from the foregoing that it can be seen that many of the issues which gave rise to the aforementioned Private Members Bill have been addressed. You may wish to reflect on

whether or not to continue with the legislative process in view of these developments.

Is mise, etc.

I am a firm believer in getting stakeholders involved in the development of measures that will affect their sector. It is for this reason that I regularly meet industry representatives from the various sectors my Department works with, including the fishing industry. The NIFF and regional inshore fisheries forums were established to develop and facilitate implementation of policies and initiatives relating to the sustainable management of those fisheries. The regional forum members include inshore fishermen, environmental interests, marine leisure, marine tourism and other marine stakeholders, including islander interests. In February of this year I was very pleased to launch the first industry-led strategy for the inshore sector. The Strategy for the Irish Inshore Fisheries Sector 2019-2023 sets out a vision for the future of the inshore sector, that it “will have a prosperous and sustainable future delivered through a united industry with a strong and influential voice.” Key issues to be addressed through the strategy include enhancing business skills across the sector, sustainable management of fish stocks as well as attracting and retaining talent, all with a view to maximising the potential of the inshore sector to support Ireland’s coastal communities.

Inshore fishing boats currently make up more than 80% of the fishing fleet and support an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 jobs. This economic activity is vitally important to the coastal communities around Ireland, including the island communities from which these boats operate. The national and regional forums are supporting initiatives that seek to protect the collective interests of the inshore sector in Ireland including on our islands. The NIFF has been effective in its participation on the quota management advisory committee, advocating on behalf of all small-scale fishers to influence how Ireland’s uptake of quota is achieved.

One of the recommendations in the joint committee’s detailed scrutiny report is to extend the notional licence to others in coastal communities experiencing disadvantage. The existing system is established in national legislation and reflects EU requirements under the Common Fisheries Policy for each member state to licence all commercial sea-fishing boats, small scale or otherwise, and to maintain its fleet within certain limits. The licence system proposed in the Bill would apply to “small scale coastal fishing”, a narrow subset of fishing that can only be undertaken in vessels of less than 12 m overall length and which must not use towed gear. Small-scale coastal fishing is commercial sea fishing and is regulated in that context. There are also quota available for a number of relevant species to licensed fishermen using smaller fishing boats. Communication on the availability of these opportunities has been improved and the NIFF is now involved in the quota management advisory committee, which makes recommendations to me on the uptake of the State’s fishing opportunities. I stress that the existing legislation in this area provides an independent licensing process for sea-fishing boats and contributes to managing Ireland’s fishing fleet within EU rules. The existing legislation and procedures are available and apply to islanders.

If the Bill progressed and licences were issued to individuals to operate in parallel to the existing system, to walk onto various vessels and bring mobile, separate entitlements, this would present a significant challenge to Ireland in demonstrating compliance with various Common Fisheries Policy regulations. Article 16 of the Common Fisheries Policy regulation explicitly requires Ireland as a member state to manage its fishing opportunities in the context of allocations to vessels flying its flag. This is a serious responsibility for Ireland to manage carefully and responsibly, particularly in the interests of achieving maximum sustainable yields for the

stocks under quota management. I also believe it would impact on the principle, which has been part of the Common Fisheries Policy since its foundation here of quotas being a State rather than a private asset. That is a point worth reflecting upon.

The Government cannot support this Bill because it is not compatible with the Common Fisheries Policy regulations. This Bill is well intentioned. I appreciate Deputy Kenny's initiative has focused a debate on a sector that was long excluded from broad fishing consultation. The development of the National Inland Fisheries Forum, NIFF, and the regional fora, and the exclusion of people outside of the inshore sector now for large boats are all positives.

The Government is committed to implementing meaningful and supportive policies that accurately reflect the needs of island communities. I have set out the improvements in communication and engagement when it comes to fishing quotas and the significant policy changes that demonstrate that this Government is responsive to those needs and to the needs of the communities.

Deputy Willie Penrose: I am glad on behalf of the Labour Party to avail of this opportunity to contribute once again to the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill. This is a Private Members' Bill from 2017 produced by Deputy Kenny, among others. We in the Labour Party unequivocally supported that Bill on Second Stage, not just in terms of its objectives but in the underlying sentiment around it, and we continue to support it following its scrutiny by the committee, of which I am a member. We now have the report emanating from the joint committee, which has been presented by Deputy Pringle to the House this evening and which pertains to a focused and detailed scrutiny of the Bill. I made my views and those of the Labour Party known in the course of the Second Stage debate in this Chamber prior to the referral of the Bill to the joint committee for detailed scrutiny. I endorse again all of the sentiments I expressed at that stage.

I reiterate that the overall aim and thrust of the Bill is essentially to facilitate the continuation of traditional fishing on Ireland's offshore islands and thereby fundamentally to provide for sustainable fishing communities on the islands for the future. The licence would help to achieve sustainability by reversing the population trend decline that is evident, and it would help sustain many of the offshore islands.

The Government has already indicated, and the Minister, Deputy Creed has reiterated again this evening, that legal the advice is that the Bill is not compatible with EU law or the Common Fisheries Policy and is inoperable in its current manifestation. The Government has also reached once again for use of the money message, which is fast becoming discredited, but the Minister, Deputy Creed, did not refer to it this evening. It is difficult to fathom how it might apply in the context of this Bill. Indeed, the reverse of the request to expend money would be likely to arise as the maintenance of viable and sustainable communities would more than likely generate additional revenue and resources for the Exchequer.

The Government asserts that fishing licences are attached to fishing vessels, not to individuals, and that all of the applications for such fishing licences are decided by the sea fisheries licensing authority, an independent authority, and not by the Minister, which is fair enough. The genesis of the Sinn Féin Bill can be traced directly to recommendation No. 10 of the Joint Subcommittee on Fisheries report of 2014 on promoting sustainable rural coastal communities that urged the examination of the feasibility of heritage licences to be issued by the Department for island and coastal communities, which would facilitate fishing practices in conjunction with

the establishment of a producer organisation to represent the smaller fishery vessels in these specific areas.

I have read the Minister's reasoned response to the Bill, specifically referring to sections 1 and 2 and to the advent of recent policy developments, which it is suggested have a material bearing on the matter set out in the Bill, something he reiterated this evening. The Bill defines small-scale coastal fishing as being carried out by fishing vessels of less than 12 m in length and not using towed gear such as trawls or dredges. Section 2(4) envisages that the licence could not be transferable, but in our scrutiny review, we recommended, correctly, in my view, that provision must be made to enable such licences to be transferred that clearly would be consistent with the current system applicable to sea fishing boat licences. This was one of the Minister's objections, which we have dealt with.

On section 2(6), which deals with regulations underpinning the non-transferable island quota, the committee recommended the allocation of up to 1% of the national quota to be set aside for heritage and traditional fishing that can only be accessed if a person holds a heritage licence and if it is used on board a licensed sea fishing boat. Article 17 of the Common Fisheries Policy enables a member state to formalise support for the islands and ensure a fairer allocation of fishing opportunities. Paragraph 20 of the policy preamble states that small offshore islands that are dependent on fishing should, where appropriate, be especially recognised and supported to enable them to survive and prosper.

The Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation, IIMRO, gave some figures to me for 2018, which were obtained independently from the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority and that make for interesting reading. I am not an expert in this area and would know more about inland fisheries, so I defer to my colleagues in the Chamber who are more expert. Ireland's uptake in respect of vessels under 12 m and species type of demersal and pelagic, as Deputy Pringle said, is less than 0.85%. Regulation (EU) No. 1380/2013 provides that small offshore islands dependent on fishing be especially recognised and that preferential access be given to small-scale fisheries. In other words, empower small-scale fishery areas.

Small-scale fishing is less damaging on the marine environment as these traditional boats do not tow trawls that damage the seabed and do not collect or catch huge quantities. This activity could also promote the use of traditional fishing methods that are environmentally sustainable. Fishing families would benefit from higher wages and prices achieved from the new situation. Indeed, families would be more likely to remain in the island communities all year, resulting in a more vibrant community. It would assist in keeping traditional ways of life alive and could lead to an increase in the number of tourists to the area. This would lead to increased spending in the area with a better and more sustainable future. There could be all of the attractions of local heritage in this type of fishing, with heritage boats, currachs, which we all learned about when we were going to school, and an increase in tourism activity. There are a great number of things that would lead to a viable future.

Why is there always in evidence a bureaucratic opposition or resistance to a Bill such as this? Every conceivable objection is dredged up to show incompatibility with this or that regulation or system. We would rather that the Minister adopted a more facilitative or accommodating mode that would enable laudable legislation such as this Bill to be amended so that it can become the law of the land and help out a group of people who are playing a positive and protective role in respect of our heritage, language and a unique way of life.

The excellent research unit in the Oireachtas Library has been of great assistance in helping to identify appropriate international comparisons. Other countries have already gone to the trouble of positively devising policy options to help sustain small-scale fisheries. Many case studies have used some of these policy options to help conserve sustainable local coastal communities. A number of these were detailed in the Grieve report of 2009 on environmental and social criteria for allocating access to fishery resources, three of which are the Koster-Vadero fjord, Sweden, the Shetland Islands off Scotland, and the Lira marine reserve in Spain.

The Koster-Vadero fjord was Sweden's first national marine protected area, and local trawling found a co-existence. It is part of a government-developed co-management initiative for managing Sweden's inshore fisheries. Under the initiative, continued access to northern shrimp and Norway lobster resources was allocated to a limited number of local fisheries. The Shetland Islands, 50 miles off the coast of Scotland have traditionally been one of the most fisheries-dependent communities in Europe. To protect their way of life, they developed a community quota scheme, which included ring-fenced quotas and quota pools. In Spain, the marine reserves are protected by fisheries legislation. Spanish marine reserves are primarily used as a fishery management tool. Their primary goal is the enhancement of fishing resources and maintenance of sustainable, traditional, artisanal fishing in the areas. Over the years, conservation of marine biodiversity in general became one of the core objectives, and the primary focus remains on fisheries and protection of these reserves from users outside the census of traditional artisanal fishermen. The most widely recognised maritime protection areas, MPAs, in Spain, where fishermen are involved in the declaration and implementation of MPAs, are in Lira and Cedeira, both off the Atlantic coast of Galicia.

It can be done. I have watched here in 27 years - starting my 28th year next week - where every bureaucrat in the place is wheeled out. The definition of a bureaucrat is to find a way to block. The definition of somebody who wants to do something is to find a way to accommodate and facilitate. That is our job here. The people in the Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation, IIMRO, which Deputy Pringle and others are very familiar with, are not fools. This Bill is only about allowing access to a small percentage of relevant national fishing quota species for small island boats under 12 m using untowed fishing gear within the six-mile limit. We have discussed the six-mile limit *ad nauseam* in the House in respect of the London Agreement. Quota uptake for the year 2018 for under 12 m boats, which make up over 60% of the Irish fleet, stands at 0.85% of the national quota that has been allocated, as Deputy Pringle has stated. This access to a small amount of the quota will enable the reinstatement of the seasonal fisheries system around the offshore islands that obtained in the past. Fishers will be required to be aboard their own registered vessels while fishing. Boats will be registered island vessels, with appropriate tonnage, kilowatts and polyvalent general licences.

There will be no increase in fishing as a result of the Bill. The Bill is fully compliant with the requirements of the Common Fisheries Policy. That has been confirmed by the European Commission. Why do the Minister's officials contradict this? Why do the Minister, his officials and the European Commission not have a round-table discussion to see if we can make some progress. The administrative allocation of a small amount of relevant quota of the existing national quota will not impose any additional cost on the Exchequer, so forget about the money message. More than 2,000 boats and Irish fishing vessels were registered in 2018. Only 70 boats are on the islands polyvalent general register. I rest my case, as somebody who comes from the bogland, the heartland and the midlands of rural Ireland. I cannot understand why something that I watched on television, read in Peig Sayers book and so on will be lost because

of the intransigence of bureaucrats who advise the Minister.

Deputy James Lawless: I thank Deputy Connolly for letting me in ahead of her. I am under a bit of pressure for time. I welcome the report. My party supported this Bill on previous Stages and we support the report today. We recognise that this is an excellent initiative to maintain sustainable, traditional fishing methods while facilitating a format to manage docks and quotas while having minimal interference on the total allowable catch under European rules. I commend the committee that prepared the report, including Deputies Martin Kenny, Thomas Pringle and others, as well as my colleague, the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher, who has spoken on the subject many times. I bow to his superior knowledge on the issue and he highly recommends that we endorse this initiative. As always, there are some technical amendments that may be tabled if this Bill proceeds to Committee Stage. All of these issues and concerns that have been raised can be tackled on Committee Stage. Where there is a will, there is a way, and I am sure the way can be found.

I know the Minister has read into the record a number of letters to the committee, particularly to Deputy Martin Kenny, outlining the reasons why a money message may be put forward. I do not necessarily accept those reasons but I welcome the fact that the Minister wrote to the Deputy, because I have introduced many Private Members' Bills that did not get any letter or response from the Government. A letter to say no is better than no letter at all. I commend the Minister on that. Maybe he will ask his colleagues to take up a similar approach to other matters. Deputy Penrose is from the midlands more so than I but, as Deputy Martin Kenny said in previous debates, we all have an affinity with coastal communities, fisherman and traditional ways of life. I grew up in a coastal community, in Courtown Harbour in County Wexford, where boxes of whelk, periwinkles, mackerel or even sea bass on occasion were never too far from the house or home or indeed the kitchen table. My grandfather was very fond of fresh seafood and ran a hotel in Courtown Harbour. It is certainly an industry that I had some familiarity with as a child, if not today. Fisheries have always been part of Ireland's economic well-being. This Bill contains provisions on quotas and allowable catches. It is fair to say that our agricultural sector was protected, preserved and boosted but at that this was at the expense of our fisheries sector.

Deputy Michael Creed: It is a myth.

Deputy James Lawless: An undue focus was probably placed on it at the time for a variety of reasons. In 1976, Fianna Fáil, in Opposition, tabled a Bill to the effect that quotas would be revisited and that the Common Fisheries Policy would be reviewed. In the round, it did not happen and that has often been said. The Law of the Sea is an excellent academic work on the subject and the prelude to that would suggest the same. Much has been said and there is certainly some truth in the suggestion that when we open up the Common Fisheries Policy, considering the size of the seabed and the offshore resources available to us, we perhaps did not negotiate as well as we might have. We did a better deal with regard to agriculture. There may be swings and roundabouts in that regard.

There has always been pressure on our stocks and from the boats coming in. On the flip side, we have always gone out. If one listens to people from coastal communities such as those in Greenland, Labrador and Newfoundland, one will find Irish accents, dialects, names and, I am sure, DNA if we were to dig deeper, because we have always travelled. The story of fishing is a story of migration around the world. It is said that when Columbus allegedly discovered America and claimed it for the Kingdom of Spain, he either did not notice or did not report home that several Basque fishing boats were ahead of him in some of the estuaries and had been

going there for centuries. That did not suit the narrative at the time. Often politics regarding fishing in other areas is subject to the prevailing wisdom of the day. British colonial policy towards Ireland was to support, in ports such as Hull, Grimsby and Aberdeen, industrial superports and its own fishing industry while trying to keep the Irish fishing industry weak because it was seen as an economic threat. Part of that was done via a policy of divide and conquer. Rather than having an investment in scale, it was to support a myriad small jetties, wharves and piers, which were not really sustainable. There is a need for economies of scale and investment in these matters.

The report before us today makes a lot of sense. It is a way to preserve that coastal tradition and economic imperative. It needs to be carefully phrased and managed. Some of the questions posed during debates that have taken place at the committee about how to ensure it is an island resident and that the fishing measures are legitimate and reasonable, but there are measures in the Bill, which have been debated at the committee, to mitigate that. This can and should be done. I hear the Minister and his officials say that it is in breach of EU law. I am certain that if it is, the impact would be so minimal that it can be addressed through amendments on Committee Stage.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. I thank my colleague, Deputy Pringle, for outlining the situation and the report from the committee. I will not repeat what he said but I will place the matter in perspective. Less than two months ago, on 17 September, the Dáil passed a motion which I had the privilege of moving, regarding development of a policy for the islands. The Minister mentioned that but he failed to mention the effort that had to go into getting that motion passed. I cannot remember whether the Minister voted for it but it passed by an overwhelming majority. It highlighted the absolute lack of policy for the islands. That is why we were forced to table that motion on 17 September. When speaking on that night, I pointed out that, going back to 1996, a report was published of the interdepartmental co-ordinating committee on island development, a strategic framework for developing the offshore islands of Ireland and so on. There were many good ideas, none of which were enacted. There was another interdepartmental committee in 2019. I welcome it but it was certainly not what my colleagues or I wanted. It certainly does not have proper representation. The Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, used unfortunate language when he said: "Having islanders on this committee could be contrary to what Members wish for because I do not believe there will be openness among officials regarding the preparation of their plans." That was the statement on the night. That seems to be a significant problem in officialdom. Listening to people and then taking on board what they are saying appears to be problematic.

The Minister has given us the background. I read the recent opinion and I see some of the difficulties with the Bill as it stands but these can be rectified. I mentioned the original report from 1996. In 2014, we had a detailed report which again set out recommendations. Deputy Pringle has referred to recommendation 10, that we should explore the feasibility of a heritage licence to be issued by the Department for rural, coastal and island fishing communities. Deputy Pringle has pointed out that we are not just focusing on island communities. We hope it would be developed for coastal communities too. That is the background from 2014. Another committee then looked at this, as Deputy Pringle noted, in November 2018. Nothing has been done in a hurry. Everything has been slow and tortuous. In the meantime, the population of the islands is declining and it is difficult for people to have hope. I notice one of the submissions to the committee came from Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann, which is from Galway West, which I represent. It is a huge constituency with huge variation, and includes the three Aran Islands

and Inishbofin. We had somebody from Inishbofin make a presentation, as well a person from the Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation. I recognise both of the names, and one is from Inisheer in my constituency.

In addition, I see a contribution from Dr. Ruth Brennan, who pointed out the difference between equality and equity and forced me to think about that. I hope the Minister will also be forced to think about that point, namely, what is equality and what is equity? She gave a very good anecdote that explains it. Equity means a lot more than equality. When we look at the islands, we want to deal with them in an equitable manner. All this motion is asking for is that we let the Bill go to Committee Stage, and that we look at the difficulties in the Bill and work them out, in recognition of what the islanders have asked for over an extraordinary length of time. Why? It is because it is very good for the economy to have islands that are functioning, with people living there on every level, which I went into on the last occasion I spoke about this issue.

It strikes me as a little arrogant that the Minister talked about the Bill being well-intentioned but ill-informed. Perhaps there might be ill information on the Government side as well. I am only quoting the committee, which had the experts in. Its report states:

Recitals 19 and 20, Common Fisheries Policy (Regulation 1380/2013)

...Small offshore islands which are dependent on fishing should, where appropriate, be especially recognised and supported in order to enable them to survive and prosper.

Recital 19 states: "Member States should endeavour to give preferential access for small-scale, artisanal or coastal fishermen." In addition, the Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation very helpfully pointed out that the preamble to the Common Fisheries Policy states, at paragraph 20: "Small offshore islands which are dependent on fishing should, where appropriate, be especially recognised and supported in order to enable them to survive and prosper." Equally as helpful, page 4 of the committee report tells us there are precedents for doing this, and it points out a number of international case studies where local communities have found ways to sustain their traditional fishing methods. It mentions, in particular, the Shetland Islands, the Koster region in Sweden and Lira in Galicia, Spain. It would appear that the absence of information is on the Government side in regard to policy. There is a very limited interpretation of regulations to suit the fact it does not want this Bill to go through.

The Minister mentioned policy changes and I welcome those that have happened in regard to the exclusion of certain boats within the six-mile limit. Of course, it begs the question why it took up to now to do that when it could have been done before, in recognition of what fishermen have been saying for a long time. The second point the Minister itemised was in regard to communication, which he said had improved. That again begs the question of why communication could not have improved many years ago. We do not need to go back too far but certainly back to the 2014 report, which made certain recommendations.

I have no hesitation in supporting the motion, although I foresee problems with the legislation. I read the reasoned opinion but I think there is a much bigger picture and a challenge to the Government to make a reality of its words. If we want a sustainable island community, we urgently need a policy. In the formation of that policy, we need to hear the voices of the islanders. If they cannot sit on an interdepartmental committee, then that committee is not right and we must change it so we have the people who matter. Every report I read in preparation for

this debate and the debate last September said the voices of those who are going to live on the islands are the most important voices. That is who we should be listening to.

In regard to the producers' organisation or the group that attempted to comply with the rules and play by the regulations, it did not succeed and it was refused on 20 September 2019 because of the criteria. I understand there might be mandatory criteria that would have excluded it if it did not reach that level but, at the very least, that should be all very apparent to any group that is coming forward to form an island fisheries producer organisation. At the end of the day, we want small groups, small businesses and co-operatives on the ground. They are the backbone of any country.

I hope the Minister is listening and I hope, at the very least, this Bill will go to Committee Stage and that the Minister will meet the groups on the ground. He mentioned forums. Clearly, they are not adequately reflecting the opinions on the ground. The Minister is shaking his head, but we would not be here at 6.45 p.m. on a Thursday unless we were reflecting what people are telling us on the ground and asking us to say it in the Dáil.

Deputy Martin Kenny: I thank the committee, its Chairman, Deputy Pat Deering, and its staff for the work that has been done. The report is an excellent piece of work and it sets out many of the issues we expected to come out. I thank Deputies for their contributions to the debate. In truth, the Minister's response is somewhat disappointing. I acknowledge that he wrote to me. Given that others who have had problems with money messages did not even get that acknowledgement, I appreciate it. I also appreciate that he is engaged and interested, and he is trying to come up with a solution in this respect. However, it is falling well short of where we need to be.

Others have spoken about the island fishing communities and people living on the islands. The few times I have visited an offshore island, it struck me that while they were so much a part of the nation, they were also apart from the nation in a very physical sense. We can all say we are isolated in rural areas and we cannot get to places and so on, but nobody is as isolated as a person who is a couple of miles across the sea. There has to be an acknowledgement of that huge disadvantage experienced by people who live on the islands. Deputy Connolly mentioned equity, which is at the core of this. Sometimes, in order to achieve equity, we have to treat a group in an unequal manner and give them an advantage that others may not have because they exist in such disadvantage. That is at the core of this issue. This was recognised by the previous committee in its 2014 report and it was in response to that report that this Bill is with us.

There has been some positioning, in particular in regard to the Department stating that every fishing vessel has to have a licence already and it should not need a second licence. If the Government was to change the term and call it something else, such as a "fishing opportunity" or otherwise, that is fine as we are not hung up on words. The opportunity to do all of that would come when we get to Committee Stage of this legislation.

The issues have been brought forward by the various groups who came before the committee. I thank all the organisations that gave evidence and which were, in general, very constructive. Many of them come from their own set positions because they are looking after their own corner but, at the same time, many were generous enough to recognise and understand that island communities need that little bit of special attention and that extra advantage they do not have at present.

I have got very friendly with one man who now lives close to me but who was born and grew up on an island. He says the one thing they always knew they had was a bit of fishing. They had nothing else because there were no other opportunities to make a few pounds, but they could always go out on the boat and get some fish. The other point he always drives home to me is that the way those fish were caught, and the tradition of doing it that way, is something that had a unique selling point which was separate from the fish that were caught by a super-trawler in a big net. I have spoken to some of the celebrity chefs about this idea, the niche market for fish caught in this manner. If this were done properly and marketed properly, there would be a story to the food. I think we have often talked about this from both an agricultural and a fishing-----

Deputy Michael Creed: It is in the strategy-----

Deputy Martin Kenny: It is in the strategy, and that is exactly what we need to do. My point is that this legislation feeds directly into that strategy and into how to do this if we can do it properly.

The big stumbling block we have is that the Minister and the Department say this is in breach of EU legislation and that we cannot do it because it is illegal. However, and as others have pointed out, the European Union has clearly said this is not the case. In fact, Commissioner Vella was asked the question, “Can the Commission clarify if EU regulations can provide for Member States such as Ireland to implement a licensing system that would allow for heritage licences to be issued to island fishermen conducting small-scale and artisanal fishing [...] in order to facilitate the continuance of traditional fishing practices on Ireland’s offshore islands, with specific reference to fishing within the six-mile territorial limit, including the baseline?” The answer he gave was as follows:

In line with Article 6 (1) of Regulation (EU) 1224/2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy [...], a Union fishing vessel may be used for commercial exploitation of marine biological resources only if it has a valid fishing licence, [which all such vessels have and must have in order to do this in the first place].

Fishing licences referred to in Article 6 of the Control Regulation shall be issued, managed and withdrawn by Member States for their fishing vessels in accordance with this regulation (2).

Indeed, small-scale and artisanal fishing, including by island fishermen using traditional fishing practices on Ireland’s offshore islands, is to be considered commercial exploitation.

Therefore, it is up to Member States to decide whether they wish to put in place a licensing system such as mentioned by the Honourable Member. In any case, the issuing of licenses must comply with the ceilings set out in the Annex II and Article 23 of the Basic Regulation on the common fisheries policy.

This relates to the quota system. We are therefore on exactly the same page in this regard. The Commissioner says one must have a licence and access to quota to have a boat and go out fishing and that it is up to the member state as to how it divides that quota and works out the solution. That is what we need to be able to do. This is not some kind of Rubik’s cube that we are not able to solve. We can come to a solution here if we can sit down and work it out. Unfortunately, however, because of the notion that a money message is needed for this, we are blocked. Are there 2,700 people currently living on the islands? We are talking about a small

portion of the Irish population who need a special advantage because of their isolation and their special status within our economy and our society.

I think we have it within us, we have the genius within us, to work out a solution here. I appeal to the Minister and the Department to go back and try to find a solution. This legislation is not perfect, and I am not suggesting it is. None of the speakers tonight suggested it was perfect. However, it is enough to build on in order to provide a solution which will help those people who so need help. It was pointed out in various reports and by various witnesses who came before the committee that the island population is in continual decline and that the only way or the only chance they have of being able to sustain themselves is for something unique to be put in place for them. I absolutely respect and understand that coastal communities, particularly small-scale fishers in those communities, have similar problems, but they have other options that the islanders do not have. That is what sets them apart and makes them different.

In the context of all that, I appeal to the Minister to go back and reconsider the money message. Perhaps the Ceann Comhairle could advise and assist us in that respect. There are a lot of those money messages and we need to come up with a solution to them. In this case the burden on the State in providing this mechanism to give that advantage to a small sector of people who are so very disadvantaged would be so tiny that it is not worthwhile putting a block in its place, as the Government has done.

I acknowledge that the Minister's commitment to and understanding of the fishing sector is probably greater than mine - he is much closer to the sea than I am - yet we find ourselves on two opposite sides of this issue when we should not be. We should be together on the one side to work out a solution and move forward to ensure we can deliver for this small sector of people. If we can do something that will work for them, we will be able to look at the small inland fishing communities that are also under strain and stress and see what can be done for them. However, there needs to be a unique solution for the unique set of people who live on the islands.

I offer my appreciation and great thanks to Seamus Bonner, Enda Conneely and others in the island organisations who have done so much work and put so much pressure on in order to drive this forward.

Finally, I ask the Minister again, as others have asked him, to sit down with and meet the island fishery organisations, talk to them about this and come up with a solution. I ask him to bring his officials to those meetings not from the point of view of what they cannot do but from the point of view of what they can do. If we enter into this with a can-do attitude, I think we will be able to come out with a solution.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I welcome all the contributions. I wish to make just a few observations in response to points that have been raised.

Deputy Kenny in his concluding remarks and, I think, Deputy Penrose laid the blame in a way on bureaucracy. The line Deputy Penrose used was that our job was to "find a way". From the engagement I have had with all the officials in my Department, I believe there is an absolute commitment and an ongoing endeavour to maximise the opportunities for the smaller players in the fishing industry. The evidence for this is there from both them and my own commitment in this regard.

Initially, all my engagement with the fishing industry was with the established producer organisations. Deputy Pringle will be very familiar with them as among the most powerful of them is in his own back yard. In fairness, one of the last acts of my predecessor was to establish the NIFF and the RIFFs - the National Inshore Fisheries Forum and the various regional fora that feed into it. Participants in the regional fora are the island people. As a consequence of the voice they have been given, they now sit around the table as equal partners. That is as it should be because in numerical terms, in terms of boats on the water, they are far more significant, but in terms of the economic opportunities that were available to them they are minuscule in comparison with the larger established producer organisations. I accept that both have a legitimacy, make a living in a difficult environment and operate within pretty well-established circumstances, regulations, laws, directives, the Common Fisheries Policy and so on. There is absolutely a willingness on the part of the officialdom with which I have engaged in my Department, personally and with my predecessor to maximise the opportunity.

Deputy Pringle knows that the NIFF and the RIFFs represent - if the House will pardon the pun - a sea change in terms of the voice that sector now has. Following public consultation, which some in this Chamber strongly resisted, this has given rise to a significant increase in opportunities for the smaller fishermen, including island communities, on a par with other smaller fishermen in the inshore sector. They now have a multiple, financially and in terms of fishing opportunity, of what they previously had. In overall terms the figure is an increase of 62% in the opportunity they now have because of the decision taken to exclude the large boats from the inshore sector. That, by any stretch of the imagination, is really significant in both volume and value terms. If the House wants further evidence of commitment, I refer to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, EMFF, and the fisheries local action groups, FLAGs, which are the marine and coastal community equivalent of the LEADER groups. They are delivering significant financial opportunities and assistance to the inshore sector and to the island communities. There is also the scheme of assistance operated through BIM for smaller fishermen to invest in their own storage capacity, gear, etc. That is targeted at supporting the smaller sector. There have therefore been a range of initiatives, which I believe have stemmed from the fact that the inshore sector, through the NIFF, is now an equal partner.

7 o'clock

I really do not want to get into the points made by Deputy Lawless about being sold out in 1973 except to say that our industry today is multiples of the size of the industry that existed in the 1970s before we joined the European Union. In fact, in the context of Brexit, there are serious challenges for the fishing industry but one of the benefits of being a member of the European Union is the access to other waters that we now have. In the pelagic sector, 60% of the opportunities we have are in UK territorial waters. One of the benefits of being a member of the EU is that the Common Fisheries Policy provides access to community waters. Almost 40% of our second most valuable stock comes from UK waters and while that is a serious challenge, it also reflects the fact that the EU gave us opportunities. Our industry, prior to joining the European Union, was largely an inshore industry.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: It was not.

Deputy Michael Creed: Maybe that is an overstatement but it was substantially an inshore industry. It is now a very different industry. In both value and volume terms, it is much bigger than it was prior to joining the EU.

21 November 2019

I have concerns about the Bill on a number of fronts. I do not intend to go into all of them here but one issue is of particular concern. As a nation we take a different view of the Common Fisheries Policy to that of many other countries. We have steadfastly resisted the idea of privatising our quota. We have steadfastly resisted that and I am somewhat surprised by some of the contributions that I heard this evening.

Deputy Martin Kenny: The Bill does not seek to privatise the quota.

Deputy Michael Creed: Deputies spoke about privatising the quota and this would be the thin end of the wedge.

Deputy Martin Kenny: It would be a community quota.

Deputy Michael Creed: Deputies spoke about giving quotas to individuals. They should be careful what they wish for because many in the industry, as Deputy Pringle knows well, would love to see the quota privatised but that is something that every Irish Government, since we joined the EU, has steadfastly resisted. It would be a dangerous foot in the door.

Deputy Martin Kenny: We are not talking about privatising the quota but about ring-fencing part of it.

Deputy Michael Creed: If the provisions of this Bill were adhered to, it could lead to the privatisation of our quota opportunities.

I wish to take issue with Deputy Connolly's comments on the Government's review of islands policy and so on. An interdepartmental group and all of the relevant actors in various Departments will go to the island communities and listen to them, which is as it should be. That is the whole purpose of the review. There will be cross-departmental engagement with the island communities. It will not be, as Deputy Connolly suggested, a question of people talking to themselves. In fact, the consultation is being launched on Sherkin Island this weekend and the island communities will be listened to.

In terms of my own Department, the Common Agricultural Policy and support for island communities, there has been a very significant increase in financial support for island-based farmers. Significantly higher payments are available to them than to their colleagues on the mainland, which is as it should be given the additional costs involved. Our record is defensible in that regard. I appreciate the debate that this Bill has generated. It has brought into sharp focus the needs of the smaller man or woman in the fishing industry. In the debate that it has generated, it has delivered real and tangible results of which I am quite proud as Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

The Dáil adjourned at 7.05 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 26 November 2019.