

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Road Projects Status

7. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated and drawdown to date on the M50 enhancing motorway operation services project; the status of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48179/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. However, under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, construction and operation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the Local Authorities concerned.

I would also like to stress that I fully recognise the demand pressures on the M50.

Demand management measures.

TII, along with other relevant stakeholders, has completed a number of measures on the M50 to manage demand and optimise operational efficiency, including:

- enhanced vehicle recovery services;
- establishment of an Inter-agency Incident Coordination Group;
- changes to merging and diverging layouts at junctions;
- establishment of signed Emergency Diversion Routes; and
- improved access for incident support and emergency services.

[Enhancing Motorway Operation Services (EMOS)]

TII has also commenced a project entitled 'Enhancing Motorway Operation Services (EMOS) to which the Deputy refers. This project will include Variable Speed Limits, referred to as VSLs and Lane Control Signalling.

[Variable Speed Limits (VSLs)]

The VSL regime on the M50 is intended to improve the operational efficiency of the motorway by

- smoothing traffic flow,
- improving journey time reliability, and
- reducing the number of traffic collisions.

As I mentioned, lane control signalling will also be installed as part of the project which will allow the rapid closing off of lanes.

Status of the project.

With regard to the status of the EMOS project, my Department is progressing the legislative arrangements to provide TII with the powers to operate VSLs. The legislative proposals will be contained in the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. A General Scheme of the Bill has been approved by Government for formal drafting, subject to two items being examined further.

These two items - for graduated speeding penalties and the carrying of driving licences - have now been examined in detail at Cabinet Committee and I shall be referring them back to Government shortly. In the meantime, work on drafting the other provisions of the Bill is under way in the Office for the Attorney General. I hope to publish the Bill before the end of the year.

I am also advised that, in order to progress this important measure, TII is extending the motorway traffic control centre at Dublin Tunnel to cater for the additional workload from introduction of VSLs. Phase 1, which includes the new Control Room, is expected to be handed over before the end of this month (November 2019). Tender competitions to procure the management systems and hardware for the operation and roll-out of VSLs for the M50 are progressing. Tenders for the software were returned at the end of last month (October 2019) and the tenders for the hardware are due back this week.

All the preparatory technical and logistical frameworks will need to be put in place by TII before VSLs can be introduced and become operational. As I have just explained, this work is ongoing and I expect that the first phase will be completed in mid-2020.

Public Transport Role

In addition, Project Ireland 2040 identifies a number of key public transport priorities including the BusConnects programme, MetroLink and the DART expansion programme. These will be delivered by the National Transport Authority (NTA) progressively and steadily over the short, medium and long term, to deliver a comprehensive public transport network that will match transport demand, alleviate congestion, provide an alternative to private car use and deliver a range of benefits over the next decade, all of which will have a positive effect on the M50.

Funding allocated and amount drawn down to date.

In 2019, TII provided an allocation of €16.75m to progress this project.

Approximately €12m has been drawn down to-date in 2019.

I very much support this project and look forward to its introduction.

Questions Nos. 8 to 11, inclusive, answered orally.

12. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he anticipates the tourism sector to expand in the coming year, including the identification of new markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48140/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Revenue from overseas visitors to Ireland reached record levels in 2018 and the tourism sector continues to perform strongly this year following 8 consecutive years of growth. Overseas visitor data released by the CSO for the first half of 2019 show that spending in Ireland by overseas visitors was €2,276 million, up 0.3% on the same period in 2018.

In Budget 2020, I secured an allocation of €186 million for tourism, up 10% (over €17m) on the 2019 allocation, which puts the sector in a strong position to grow next year. The additional resources in 2020 are primarily directed at tourism product development, including Greenways, and build on the €35 million increase in 2019. Furthermore, €7 million is being provided in a 2019 supplementary budget, to support accelerated tourism marketing initiatives aimed at mitigating the impacts of Brexit. Budget 2020 also provided for an additional €40 million contingency fund in the event of a No-Deal Brexit.

Fáilte Ireland recently unveiled its plans for 2020 which focus on helping to sustain and support the tourism industry region by region.

Tourism Ireland will launch its 2020 marketing plans in early December. These plans will be consistent with the tourism commitments under the Government's Global Ireland Strategy. Under this Strategy, we are committed to developing tourism from new and emerging tourism markets with potential for Ireland. In Budget 2019, I provided almost €4 million in additional funding to Tourism Ireland to enable it to commence the implementation of strategies for growth in these new and emerging markets.

As the Deputy may be aware, in July of this year, the Government adopted new Tourism targets out to 2025. The headline target is revenue from overseas tourists of €6.5 billion (in real terms) by 2025. Secondary targets have also been set and they are: employment in the sector increasing to 310,000; and 11.6 million overseas tourist visits by 2025.

Rail Network

13. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the extra carriages planned for 2021 will be provided for the northern line; the way in which the carriages will impact on frequency; if the existing platform infrastructure is capable of servicing extra carriages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48150/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I can confirm to the Deputy that the 41 additional InterCity Railcars recently approved by Government will benefit Northern Line commuters, as well as commuters on the Maynooth and Kildare Lines.

As the Deputy is aware Government has approved this project which will provide a 34% increase to capacity across the GDA commuter rail network in advance of the much bigger increases which will be delivered under the DART Expansion Programme.

This increase in capacity will be provided principally through lengthening existing trainsets, but also through providing some additional services. I am not aware of any infrastructure works required as a result of the proposal, although the overall project cost does include compatibility works associated with the integration of the new carriages with the existing rail fleet.

I understand final contracts will be exchanged in the next few weeks and as the Deputy has already referred to, delivery will commence by late 2021.

The specific benefits for Northern Line commuters are considerable with a projected 20% increase in capacity once the project is completed. As mentioned some of this additional capacity will be delivered through moving current 5-car sets to 6-car sets or other extended configurations.

However the Northern Line will also benefit through the provision of two new additional services in the morning peak, which will be very welcome to those commuters who rely on the Line to get into work each morning.

As the Deputy is also aware, this is an intermediate measure ahead of a much bigger expansion of services on the Northern Line which will be delivered through the DART Expansion Programme. That Programme will see a massive expansion of fleet through the purchase of a minimum of 300 battery-electric or electric units, with the potential for that to increase to 600 units over a ten-year period, while the Programme will also electrify the Northern Line as far north as Drogheda.

These are all very welcome developments and I look forward to their implementation.

Road Traffic Legislation

14. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which the new regulation on the law of dangerous overtaking of cyclists will be enforced; the data being recorded on the matter to inform policy reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47909/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 (Statutory Instrument Number 495 of 2019) builds on the previous legislation in relation to dangerous overtaking. These regulations divide the offence of dangerous overtaking to make it a separate offence to dangerously overtake a pedal cyclist. This will specifically target those drivers who put cyclists at risk.

Since 12 November 2019, the offence of dangerously overtaking a pedal cyclist carries a fixed charge of €120 and 3 penalty points. The increase in the fixed charge to €120, which is significantly higher than most fixed charge amounts, is contained in the recently signed Road Traffic Act 2010 (Part 3) (Fixed Charge Offences) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 (Statutory Instrument Number 548 of 2019).

The aim of the new legislation is to improve the behaviour of those drivers of mechanically propelled vehicles who put cyclists at risk when overtaking. In addition, the associated Road Safety Authority's campaign aimed at educating road users and in particular, motorists, has and will continue to heighten public awareness of the potential risks involved when overtaking cyclists.

Enforcement of the new dangerous overtaking of a pedal cyclist legislation, as with the existing legislation regarding dangerous overtaking and indeed all Road Traffic legislation, is a matter for An Garda Síochána. It is my understanding that data in relation to the enforcement of this new offence will be recorded on the Garda PULSE system and that statistical information will be eventually be available to assist in any future review of this particular legislation.

As is the case with all Road Traffic legislation, which will now include this new offence,

my officials keep the legislation under frequent review as priorities and the necessary resources allow.

Tourism Policy

15. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will fund initiatives to make Halloween-Samhain an international attraction for tourists on an all-island basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48176/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of developing national tourism policy, while our tourism agencies – Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland – have operational responsibility for the implementation of this policy. Although it provides funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in festivals and participative events, my Department has no role in the administration of related funding programmes. These are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority.

With regard to tourism agency initiatives relating to Halloween/Samhain, the most recent key development has been the creation of a new three-day festival, Púca, which I launched this year with the aim of positioning Ireland internationally as the home of Halloween. Developed by Fáilte Ireland in partnership with Meath and Louth County Councils and promoted overseas by Tourism Ireland, the Púca festival comprises of multiple events in three towns in these two counties. It builds on an existing community celebration in Meath and leverages the strong historic, prehistoric, archaeological and mythical connections of that specific geographical area to ancient Celtic traditions around Samhain.

I would expect that any plans to expand this festival to other locations would have regard to factors such as authentic connection to Samhain, international visitor demand, cost benefit analysis, access and accommodation capacity among other factors.

I welcome the recent cooperation between Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland on the "Taste the Island" initiative which highlights the many unique and exciting ways holidaymakers in Ireland can enjoy local produce and food and drink experiences.

Public Transport Initiatives

16. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of disability groups do not support and have reservations regarding the concept of a proposed new centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48135/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network. I am aware that the NTA has already responded to the Deputy in this matter.

I am advised that the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) is proposing the construction and development of a state-of-the-art, indoor, accessible transport training centre, to empower people with access needs when preparing for and during their journey using public

transport.

I understand that the primary goal of the National Transport Training Centre (NTCC) is to provide short-term comprehensive instruction, designed to teach people with disabilities how to travel safely and independently using public transportation. Training will also extend to transport agency staff and other key stakeholders. According to the NTA, the NCBI considers that such a centre has the potential to be transformative in enabling people who would not otherwise be able to become independent transport users, to gain familiarity and build their confidence in a supervised training facility.

The NTA has confirmed that following a review of the potential benefits of such a facility, it informed the NCBI in July of last year that it was willing to support the NCBI proposal and would be prepared to grant aid the delivery of a National Transport Training Centre if the training facility was open to other groups with disabilities. The NTA considers that the centre can perform a pivotal role in expanding the use of public transport by users with disabilities.

The NTA has informed my Department that the NCBI have confirmed that it had been, and continues to be, their intention to make the facility available to user groups across the disability spectrum.

I am also advised that while the NCBI has been in contact with a small number of disability groups, it intends to undertake a more comprehensive consultation process when it finalises arrangements for a potential premises.

Road Projects Status

17. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Bonagee link road project in County Donegal; when the project will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47794/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, construction and development stages of individual road projects is a matter for

(a) the relevant road authority (i.e. local authorities) in relation to local and regional roads, or

(b) Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Background

The National Development Plan (NDP) provides the strategic and financial framework for the national roads programme for the period from 2018 to 2027. In the ten years, over €11 billion will be invested in the overall road network.

Having consulted with TII, I can provide the following information and update to the Deputy on the Bonagee Link Road project, also referred to as the Letterkenny Relief Road:

The Bonagee Link project, as referenced, is a legacy project proposal. All work on this historical scheme is now superseded and any development progressed previously, has been overtaken by newer project appraisal and project management requirements.

The concept and goals of the ‘Bonagee Link Road’ have been included and developed as an integral part of Section 2 of the current Trans European Network-Transport (TEN-T) Priority Route Improvement Project.

The N56/N13/N14 Letterkenny to Manorcunningham scheme is the current project dealing with the N56/N14 link across the River Swilly.

In 2016, Donegal County Council commissioned a Corridor Needs Study on the TEN-T Comprehensive network within Donegal. This network extends from the Leitrim County boundary in the south of the County to the County border with Derry in the northeast and includes the N14 Letterkenny to Lifford road.

The Donegal TEN-T project is an important project for the entire County and indeed for the whole northwest region. It involves completing three new sections of National Road Network in Donegal under the collective heading of the TEN-T Priority Route Improvement Project, as I have mentioned.

Essentially the overall TEN-T project includes :-

Section 1: N15/N13 Ballybofey – Stranorlar Bypass;

Section 2: N56/N13/N14 Letterkenny to Manorcunningham including the upgrade of the Dual Carriageway as well as a new N56 link road crossing the River Swilly (**locally referred to as “Bonagee Link” or part of the Letterkenny Relief/Ring Road**);

Section 3: N14 Manorcunningham to Lifford Realignment Scheme including the link to A5/ Western Transport Corridor in Northern Ireland.

The objectives of the three schemes are consistent with the National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040 and the core National Strategic Outcomes and priorities as stated in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 to 2027. The projects themselves are individually listed in the NDP.

Current Status

The Donegal TEN-T project is well advanced through the route selection phase. The Emerging Preferred Route Corridors were presented to the public on all three Sections earlier this year. It is anticipated that the **Options Selection Report** will be finalised before the end of 2019.

Further design, including site investigations, surveys and more consultations with affected landowners will continue through 2019 and 2020.

It is intended to complete preliminary design and be in a position to request approval to **publish the Compulsory Purchase Order and Environmental Impact Assessments Report for the entire project by mid 2021.**

Expected Benefits:

The TEN-T Priority Route Improvement project will have many benefits including:

- Improved road safety;
- Improved journey times;
- Improve the local environment through urban bypass;
- Significantly improve local and regional connectivity and address infrastructure deficit for

regional growth and development distribution.

Funding

TII has provided an allocation of €2.5m in 2019 to Donegal County Council to progress planning and design work on the TEN-T project.

In addition, with the support of DTT&S and TII, Donegal County Council was recently recommended for co-funding, under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Transport 2019 call for proposals, for its TEN-T Priority Route Improvement Project. The total eligible value of the project stage (design and development to EIS/CPO) is €8.67 million, of which 50% or €4.335 million has been recommended for funding under CEF. The Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA) will shortly finalise and sign a grant agreement with the Council.

Sports Capital Programme

18. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the sports capital funds allocated for 2019 are sufficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48145/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) closed for applications on Friday 19th October 2018. By the closing date, 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. This was the highest number of applications ever received. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. 619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May. The final allocations for capital works were announced in the last week with a total of €39.5m allocated to 1,009 projects. This means that over €56m was allocated to sports projects under this most recent round which I believe represents a very significant step in improving sports facilities right across the country.

In view of the fact that the total amount sought by all applicants was €162 million, clearly not all applicants could receive the funding they sought. In relation to how individual grants were decided, the full scoring system was published in advance of assessment work commencing. The main considerations in assessing applications included the level of disadvantage in the area, the likelihood of the project increasing participation, whether the facility would be shared with other organisations and the level of SCP funding previously received by the organisation.

In relation to future assistance, Minister Ross and I will continue to make the case for enhanced investment in sport infrastructure in the years ahead to ensure that all of the objectives set out in the National Sports Policy are met. My Department will now undertake a full review of the 2018 round of the SCP to consider any further improvements to the application and allocation process. This Review will also consider the timing and scale of the next round of the Programme but I fully expect that a new round will open for applications in the coming months.

Rural Transport Programme

19. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policy he has to radically improve rural transport particularly for commuters from rural areas to the regional cities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48009/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. I do not have responsibility for the day-to-day operations of public transport services.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of Local Link services funded under the Rural Transport Programme.

Public transport in rural areas of the country is primarily provided by bus and coach services, as well as rail and small public service vehicles (SPSV) services, which include Taxi, Hackney and Local Area Hackney services.

The National Planning Framework commits to provide public transport infrastructure and services to meet the needs of smaller urban centres and rural areas. It also commits to provide a quality nationwide community-based public transport system in rural Ireland which responds to local needs under the Rural Transport Network and similar initiatives.

The National Development Plan (NDP) was published alongside the National Planning Framework. While the NDP is a capital investment plan, it recognises the importance of investment in public transport services outside of the cities and commits to continued investment in such services over the lifetime of the NDP. Subject to the availability of operational funding support, it is intended to introduce new town bus services in certain large towns to enable their development growth and provide a public transport option for residents and visitors.

Modal shift from the private car to sustainable means of transport remains central to the transport sector's response to climate change. Investment in public transport resulted in 269 million passenger journeys across all public transport operators on PSO services in 2018. That's an increase of 16.3 million, or 6.5% compared to 2017.

The bus and coach services include Public Service Obligation (PSO) services operated by Bus Éireann and other operators, Bus Éireann Expressway services, licensed services provided by commercial operators and Local Link services.

Local Link services comprise conventional fixed services with regular routes, stopping places and timetables and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services which respond to local demands and which constitute the vast majority of Local Link services.

I am committed to the further development of bus services in rural areas and that is why funding has been increased over the past number of years, for both PSO and Local Link services in rural areas.

The Deputy has specifically asked about commuter services and the increased funding has enabled the introduction of over 66 new commuter services into the Local Link network, operating five, six or seven days per week, as well as demand-responsive services. Key features of these new services include greater integration with existing public transport services and better linkage of services between and within towns and villages.

The NTA is also continually working with Bus Éireann to provide improvements on its contracted services. The scope and scale of the changes implemented recently, or planned to be introduced shortly, include improvements to its city and town services and non-urban networks.

The changes being implemented on Stage Carriage services focus on delivering enhanced frequency throughout the day with earlier and/or later departures, more frequency and increased weekend services including on Sundays/Public Holidays.

Road Improvement Schemes

20. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps being taken to allow for greater safety for motorists turning on and off the N22 between Macroom and Ballincollig, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48142/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, improvement and upgrading of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

In the overall context of Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 (NDP) has been developed by Government to underpin the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF). This provides the strategic and financial framework for TII's national roads programme for the period from 2018 to 2027.

In the ten years covered by the plan, over €11 billion will be invested in the overall road network.

The National Development Plan (NDP) identifies two categories of national road improvement projects

- the first category covers projects to advance to construction, subject to the satisfactory outcome of the project appraisal and development consent approval processes;
- the second category relates to projects at pre-appraisal and early planning stage which are being assessed with a view to developing a pipeline of suitable projects for development.

Background

Following the economic downturn and the subsequent reduction in the availability of exchequer funding, Project Ireland 2040 now provides for the gradual build up in funding for the roads network but, it will take time to restore funding to the levels needed to maintain the road network in a 'steady state' condition, and allow for investment in new road improvement schemes.

This is marked by the Government's recent approval of a number of key major road infrastructure projects around the country and for the Cork region, such as the Ballyvourney to Macroom, and the construction contract has been awarded and the formal signing is scheduled for the 29th November 2019.

Safety assessments

TII assesses the current condition and performance of the national road network on an annual basis, considering aspects such as capacity, traffic volumes, level of service, road pavement condition, condition of structures and safety. In addition, they carry out a collision analysis of the entire national road network, in compliance with the EU Road Infrastructure Safety Management (RISM) Directive. The purpose of this exercise is to identify locations that

have high concentrations of collisions.

N22 between Macroom and Ballincollig

Having consulted with TII, I can provide the following information and update to the Deputy on the N22 road between Macroom and Ballincollig:

The N22 Ovens to Macroom major scheme, which links the N22 Ballincollig Bypass to the N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom scheme, is a legacy project proposal. This scheme was suspended some time ago, at which time it had been developed to the stage of route selection. This scheme remains suspended and has not been identified in the NDP among the projects to be progressed. There are, therefore, no current plans to progress the planning and design of this project.

Traffic calming measures, Safety feasibility Report and pavement strengthening.

However, while there are no plans to progress a major scheme, traffic calming measures have been carried out at several of the junctions along the existing National Road in recent years.

In relation to one of the remaining unimproved junctions, the N22/R585 junction at Castlemore, Cork County Council are progressing the preparation of a HD15 Feasibility Report. Once completed, it will be issued to TII's Safety Section for review and consideration for funding.

In addition, pavement strengthening proposals are also being considered.

Light Rail Projects Status

21. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the works taking place in relation to Metrolink; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48151/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware earlier this year the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) held a public consultation in relation to what is known as the 'Preferred Route'. It followed last year's consultation on then then 'Emerging Preferred Route'. I understand that the NTA and TII are preparing a report of the submissions received during this year's consultation.

As you can appreciate an infrastructure project of this size requires extensive preparatory and exploratory work so, in addition to the extensive consultations held, I understand there has been an ongoing programme of works around the city related to issues such as geotechnical surveys etc.

That programme of works will inform the development of the required environmental reports and also of course the development of the project's business case. As required under the Public Spending Code a business case will be developed by TII as the sponsoring agency.

The Public Spending Code requires all projects with projected expenditure in excess of €100million to be submitted to Government for its approval at the appropriate decision gates and I expect therefore to receive a business case in relation to this project next year. I can assure the Deputy that my Department will ensure appropriate and rigorous analysis of the business case as one would expect for a project of this scale involving a significant investment of taxpayer funds.

Greenways Development

22. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the planned greenway from Athlone Castle to Eyre Square, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48011/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In 2018 I asked Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) to manage the development of the Dublin-Galway greenway project which includes the Athlone Castle to Eyre Square section. Since then progress has been made on certain sections of the route and also on various other matters in relation to the project. For example, the section from Maynooth to Athlone has been completed and an underpass has been constructed in Athlone that will permit the completion of the sections east of the Shannon in 2020.

Funding of €3m has been allocated for continued planning and design works for the Athlone to Galway section of the Galway to Dublin Greenway for 2020. A project office to progress the Athlone to Galway section is being established. The procurement process of the technical advisors will be completed around the end of this month and both the technical advisors and local authority staff will be based at the Ballinasloe project office from the new year. In addition officials are working with TII and other stakeholders to develop a Code of Best Practice for Greenways as set out in the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways.

I am committed to progressing this project and finding an agreed route that has the support of local communities and that will, once completed, provide a world class piece of infrastructure enabling people, from both home and abroad, to cycle and walk from coast to coast.

Transport Policy

23. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for future investment in the primary routes of County Meath. [48149/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, development and construction of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The National Development Plan (NDP), which has been developed by Government to underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework, provides the strategic and financial framework for TII's national roads programme for the period from 2018 to 2027. The focus of TII's activities over the coming years is, therefore, being directed towards the development of the major national road improvement schemes that are listed in the NDP.

Following consultation with TII, I can provide an overview of national road developments in County Meath, to which the Deputy refers.

Major Schemes

The proposed **N2 Slane Bypass** is included amongst a number of major national road schemes that are identified for development during the period of the NDP. The scheme is also contained in the National Transport Authority (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area.

The bypass is intended to alleviate traffic congestion in the village and to reduce the potential for serious road traffic accidents due to the steep approaches to the very narrow Slane bridge and high number of commercial vehicles using the route.

The project is currently at Phase 2, route selection stage. Meath County Council has also commissioned a supplementary assessment of East-West options in relation to Slane to assess the N51 traffic implications. In that regard, Meath County Council held Public Consultation No. 3 (Emerging Preferred Option) for the scheme in Slane only last week (14 November 2019). Following consideration of the Public Consultation on the emerging preferred option and the feedback and information gathered, the Options Selection process will be finalised. This process is well advanced and it is anticipated that the preferred route option will be selected later this year. Once the preferred route is identified, the scheme will be progressed through planning and design. A Business Case will then be prepared for the approval of both my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. In addition, the statutory documentation will be prepared, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). Meath County Council has indicated that the scheme is intended to be lodged with An Bord Pleanála in 2021, post the adoption of the new County Development Plan.

TII has provided an allocation of €1m to Meath County Council for the scheme this year.

The proposed N2 Rath Roundabout to Kilmoon Cross scheme is also included amongst a number of major national road schemes that were identified in the NDP for progression through pre-appraisal and early planning during 2018. In this regard, the Project Pre-Appraisal for the proposed scheme has been approved by my Department.

This approximately 6 km scheme will address the existing operational and safety problems on this section of the N2, which has an annual average daily traffic of circa 16,000 vehicles per day and experiences considerable peak time congestion.

Meath County Council has engaged the services of Technical Advisors to commence the planning and design of the scheme. This year, TII has provided an allocation to Meath Co. Co. of €250,000 to progress the scheme.

I am advised that it typically takes three to five years from this point through Phases 1 – 4 of the Project Management Guidelines, in order to have a scheme ready to submit to An Bord Pleanála for planning approval.

Minor Schemes

The N51 Dunmoe Phase 2 scheme comprises the construction of approximately 4 km of single carriageway and associated ancillary and consequential works, including the provision of side roads, accommodation works/roads, junctions, from the townland of Blackcastle Demesne to the townlands of Cruicetown and Pighill in County Meath. An Oral Hearing was held on 12th July 2018 and An Bord Pleanála confirmed the CPO for the scheme in October 2018. Meath Co Co are currently progressing the final design and tender documents and intend to go to tender for this scheme in 2020. TII has provided an allocation to Meath Co. Co. of €150,000 for the scheme this year.

The proposed N52 Grange to Clontail improvement scheme involves the realignment of approximately 3 km section of the existing N52 route. The scheme will commence at an appropriate tie-in point at the Townland of Grange to the west and extend to an appropriate tie-in point at the Townland of Clontail. The expected benefits for the scheme are -

- to reduce the occurrences of road collisions on the N52 by, for example, providing increased lengths of overtaking opportunities;

- to reduce journey times on the N52; and
- to adequately cater for projected increase in traffic volumes.

The scheme is currently progressing through the early planning and design stage and this year, TII has provided an allocation to Meath Co. Co. of €100,000 for this work.

Bus Services

24. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress in the review of the 233 bus service in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48141/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Organisations

25. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the creation of an all-island soccer league; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48177/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The organisation and delivery of sport in Ireland is mainly a matter for National Governing Bodies of Sport. The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish Football Association (IFA) are the respective Governing Bodies for soccer on the island. They are independent and autonomous bodies and any proposals regarding an all-island soccer league would be a matter for those two bodies.

The organisation of sport on an all-island basis has worked very successfully for a number of sports, most notably in the cases of rugby and hockey. I am very supportive of cross-border sporting initiatives and collaborations between sporting organisations. Such approaches have excellent potential to enhance relationships on both parts of the island of Ireland. In that regard, the Unite the Union Cup was a very welcome addition to the sporting calendar on the island of Ireland this year.

I am aware that proposals for an all-island league were presented in recent months and that, thus far, it has not been possible to progress such proposals. It is important to respect the autonomy and positions of the National Governing Bodies in this matter however personally, I believe there is serious merit in such proposals. I would encourage the bodies to continue to facilitate opportunities for cross-border cooperation and competition.

Bus Services

26. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the disability community were not consulted by the NTA in

relation to BusConnects which is in contravention with Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. [48136/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the BusConnects programme.

I am aware that the NTA has engaged in extensive consultations since the BusConnects project was first initiated and continues to proactively engage with all relevant stakeholders and citizens generally.

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

Rail Services Provision

27. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when approval will be given to Iarnród Éireann to purchase new rolling stock in view of the critical shortage of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48010/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Government recently approved for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann to proceed with the proposed purchase of 41 additional InterCity Railcars to increase capacity on the rail network. This additional stock will cost approximately €150 million and is expected to commence entry into service by end 2021.

The Deputy may also be interested that, in May this year, the NTA and Iarnród Éireann commenced pre-qualifying in relation to a 10-year procurement framework for a minimum of 300 electric and battery-electric units with the potential for that to increase to 600 over the life of the procurement framework. This proposals forms part of the DART Expansion Programme and I expect to receive a business case in relation to the overall programme next year.

Railway Stations Upgrade

28. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the urgent need for the provision of funding for necessary upgrade works of various facilities at Thomastown train station, County Kilkenny (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47938/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The operation of the rail network and stations on the network, including any proposals for upgrading of the station referred to by the Deputy, and in the context of plans to facilitate the event referred to, is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance.

In view of Iarnród Éireann's responsibility in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the company for a direct and detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consultations and plans for BusConnects for the H1, H2 and H3 spine routes, for D1, D2, D3, D4 and D5 branch spine routes and the 290 local route in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47912/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the BusConnects programme.

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

Rail Services Provision

30. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the rail carriages in storage will be brought into service; the manner in which this is likely to benefit commuters in north County Kildare and throughout the greater Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48139/19]

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when rail carriages currently in storage will be redeployed to alleviate current overcrowding on the commuter rail service from Kilcock, Maynooth, Leixlip, Confey, Celbridge and Sallins with particular reference to identifying the most serious deficiencies in this regard with a view to early solution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48505/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 30 and 221 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The procurement and or refurbishment of rolling stock is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance who, in consultation with the National Transport Authority (NTA), continue to examine how best to source additional rolling stock as efficiently and effectively as possible and ensuring value for money for the taxpayer.

In this regard and as the Deputy is aware, an option considered by Iarnród Éireann / NTA to increase fleet capacity was the proposed refurbishment and reintroduction of older train sets back into service. This option was ruled out following market consultations which returned costs far in excess of those originally expected and which meant the option did not represent value for money.

However, as the Deputy is aware Government recently approved for the NTA and Iarnród Éireann to proceed with the proposed purchase of 41 additional InterCity Railcars to increase capacity on the rail network including north County Kildare. This additional stock will increase capacity by around 34% on the Kildare, Maynooth and Northern lines in the morning peak time and is expected to commence entry into service by 2021.

Furthermore and for the Deputy's information, in May this year the NTA and Iarnród Éireann commenced pre-qualifying in relation to a 10-year procurement framework for a minimum

of 300 electric and battery-electric units with the potential for that to increase to 600 over the life of the procurement framework. This proposal forms part of the DART Expansion Programme which will see both the Maynooth Line and the Kildare Line (to Hazelhatch) electrified and I expect to receive a business case in relation to the overall programme next year.

Haulage Industry

31. Deputy Marc MacSharry asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the specific measures planned to assist hauliers in view of the higher operating costs and considerable negative impacts that Brexit will create for the industry. [48143/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The haulage sector plays an important role in our economy and I recognise that it faces particular difficulties in the context of Brexit.

My Department has maintained close contact with road haulage stakeholders in the context of Brexit and continues to work with the industry representative bodies to keep hauliers and businesses informed of developments, in keeping with our long-established practice. My officials held meetings on a number of occasions this year with representatives of Freight Transport Association Ireland and the Irish Road Haulage Association to discuss Brexit and the whole-of-Government preparations and, importantly, preparations by industry. I addressed an FTAI event on 29 August and emphasised the ongoing need for the transport and logistics sector to prepare for Brexit.

My Department hosted a Brexit Freight Maritime Forum with key road transport and maritime stakeholders, including haulage industry representative bodies, in January of this year. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine were also in attendance and addressed the Forum. My Department was represented at a number of the Irish Retail Grocery and Distribution Sector Roundtable events to date in 2019 hosted by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and engagement with this sector, including haulage industry representatives, is continuing.

In March, my Department issued a comprehensive Brexit communications notice to all Irish licensed international road haulage operators outlining the position on a range of transport issues that would arise in the event of a no-deal Brexit. This notice is published in my Department's area of www.gov.ie and the information available online will continue to be updated to keep industry stakeholders informed of Brexit developments. An updated notice will be issued to the sector in the event of a potential no-deal Brexit on 31 January 2020.

My Department has also advocated at EU level for contingency measures to assist hauliers in continuing to access the UK market if the UK exits the EU without an agreement in place. Regulation (EU) 2019/501 of the European Parliament and of the Council was adopted by the EU on 25 March 2019 to ensure the maintenance of basic road connectivity for road freight transport in the event of a no-deal Brexit, allowing UK road haulage operators to continue to access the EU on the basis that the UK gives reciprocal access to EU road haulage operators. In October 2019, the period of application of this Regulation was extended to 31 July 2020.

The Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) study into the implications of Brexit on the use of the landbridge, published in November 2018, estimated that approximately 150,000 Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) travel between Ireland and the continent via the landbridge each year. A cross-departmental Landbridge Project Group, chaired by the Department of Foreign

Affairs and Trade, was established in October 2017 and has been working on measures aimed at ensuring the ongoing effective and efficient use of the landbridge post-Brexit, including the key Dover-Calais route. The Group continues to engage with our EU partners to find solutions to minimise the potential disruption to Irish hauliers' access to and through the UK in the event of a no-deal Brexit. In liaison with my Department, the IMDO hosted a workshop on 4 September 2019 to discuss maritime connectivity in the context of Brexit, and the Irish Road Haulage Association and Freight Transport Association Ireland were invited to this event, along with shipping companies, ports authorities, and importers/exporters.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) has a range of supports available to business including the freight and logistic sector and details can be found on their website www.dbei.gov.ie.

My Department, along with other Government Departments, has emphasised the importance of stakeholders taking all necessary steps within their control to prepare for Brexit, including undertaking contingency planning to minimise the impact of Brexit on their operations. I would encourage road haulage operators to refer to the European Commission's published Notices to Stakeholders in the field of road transport, the EU's basic road connectivity contingency Regulation and the section titled "Brexit and Transport – What You Need to Know" in my Department's area of www.gov.ie.

Bus Services

32. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the provision of a regular bus service from Portrane and Donabate, County Dublin to the city centre will be reviewed to ease the congestion and burden on the rail service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48152/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Industry

33. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the assessment being carried out on the impact on tourism of the additional hotels being built in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48173/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Fáilte Ireland monitors the performance of tourist accommodation through regular occupancy surveys. This analysis indicates that while the country as a whole has sufficient stock of tourist accommodation, there are capacity constraints in areas of high tourist traffic at times of peak demand and additional capacity is required in certain parts of the country, particularly Dublin city.

In this context, Fáilte Ireland commissions periodic assessments of hotel accommodation in Dublin, most recently August 2018. Although the latest results confirm the current shortage,

they expect that approximately 5,400 hotel rooms will come on stream in the coming years, including over 3,000 already under construction. Present projections are that this activity will still be outpaced by growing demand but this is a dynamic situation and additional room stock may be developed in response to this demand.

With specific regard to factors within my Department's and Fáilte Ireland's remit, revised hotel Regulations were introduced in 2016. These regulations were in response to consumer preferences and in order to boost the economic rationale for investment in hotel development. The changes set out in these Regulations, in particular in regard to minimum room size have made investment even more attractive by allowing hotel operators provide more rooms and operate at a lower cost base, thereby improving hotel capacity, competitiveness and profitability. Consumers also benefit in terms of increased room capacity, competition and range of accommodation. Such additional supply also leads to greater choice for consumers, improved quality of accommodation and has the added benefit of lowering prices.

Rail Network Expansion

34. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if discussions have taken place within his Department on providing funding for extension of the railway line from Navan to Kingscourt, County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46618/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have previously informed the Deputy that the priority funding objective in relation to mainline rail is the maintenance and renewal of the existing operating network. That objective is supported by the significantly enhanced funding now available to support that network as evidenced by the approximate 23% increase in Exchequer funding provided in 2019.

The Deputy is also aware from previous answers I have given on this issue that there is no funding provided within Project Ireland 2040 for the re-opening of the Kingscourt line.

Road Traffic Legislation

35. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made to date to legislate for the use of e-scooters in view of the fact that the public consultation period for the use of e-scooters has closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48178/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the public consultation on e-scooters and other forms of powered personal transporters closed on 1st November. My Department received more than 500 submissions and officials are currently going through them with the aim of producing a report. I have been informed that this report will be submitted to me for my consideration next month. I will not be making any decision on whether or not to amend road traffic law to regulate for the use of such vehicles until after I have given full consideration to the report.

In the meantime, the use of e-scooters and other powered personal transporters on public roads or in public places will remain strictly prohibited.

Rail Network

36. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to move beyond the steady State investment level in rail in the national development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42624/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that Project Ireland 2040 provides significantly enhanced funding levels for our rail network which will expand its capacity, improve line journey speeds and lead to a better passenger experience across an improved network.

As I recently informed the Deputy, key to this improvement is the increased funding being made available under the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract or IMMAC which is the funding programme providing for an extensive range of infrastructure improvements, including improved journey speeds and increased reliability for passengers across the country.

I will very shortly be seeking Government's approval to enter into a new 5 year IMMAC which will provide over €1billion to Iarnród Éireann and allow it maintain, renew and improve rail infrastructure. This represents a 40% increase in taxpayer support for the rail network as compared to the period 2014 to 2018 and is a hugely significant milestone.

Project Ireland 2040 also provides additional funding for the rail network beyond the increased funding available under the IMMAC.

Such funding includes the development of a new National Train Control Centre, that Government approved in the summer, and which will completely modernise and improve the management of the network and services across the country. Its completion will support the expanded services planned under the DART Expansion Programme which will roughly double the capacity of the network in the Greater Dublin Area.

Again as I previously informed the Deputy, funding under the PSO programme increased by approximately 6% between 2016 and 2018. This has supported increased services such as the 10-minute DART or greater utilisation of the Phoenix Park tunnel on the Kildare Line in recent years. In order to support further passenger growth Government has very recently approved the purchase of 41 additional InterCity Railcars and I expect those to start entering service in late 2021.

The future potential for rail is also being examined at a metropolitan level through the development by the National Transport Authority of metropolitan area transport strategies for all cities, which will assist with the Department's approach toward the mid-term review of the current Project Ireland 2040 funding profiles envisaged in 2022, while an independent review of a potential extension of the Western Rail Corridor has just been submitted to my Department. My Department also plans to conduct an evaluation in 2020 of higher speeds on the network in line with the commitment given in Project Ireland 2040.

So again, as the Deputy can see, there is a significant investment programme underway in relation to rail and I expect this to continue in the years ahead.

Rail Services

37. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of steps being taken to tackle overcrowding on commuter trains. [47781/19]

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

The operation and provision of services on the rail network are matters for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance, and the company and the National Transport Authority (NTA) continue to examine how best to source additional rolling stock as efficiently and effectively as possible, while ensuring value for money for the taxpayer. With the existing rail fleet fully deployed at peak times, additional train capacity is needed to meet the increased commuter services demand across the network.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Government recently approved for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann to proceed with the proposed purchase of 41 additional InterCity Railcars to increase capacity on the rail network. This additional stock will cost approximately €150 million and is expected to commence entry into service by end 2021.

The Deputy may also be interested that, in May this year, the NTA and Iarnród Éireann commenced pre-qualifying in relation to a 10-year procurement framework for a minimum of 300 electric and battery-electric units with the potential for that to increase to 600 over the life of the procurement framework. This proposals forms part of the DART Expansion Programme and I expect to receive a business case in relation to the overall programme next year.

I acknowledge the fact that at certain times of the day some rail services are currently crowded due to the level of demand. The Deputy can be assured that the safe operation of the rail network and services is the overriding priority at all times of both the company and, of course, the Commission for Railway Regulation, which is the independent, statutory body charged with overseeing the safety of our network.

From late September to early December is the busiest commuter period of the year for all transport modes, given the return of third-level educational institutions. Iarnród Éireann launched the website peaktime.ie on September 23rd.

I am advised by Iarnród Éireann that its intention in launching peaktime.ie was to equip those commuters who have flexibility in their travel times with information on demand levels on DARTs serving their stations, thus enabling them to decide their travel times based on the available options. With one in six weekday DART journeys made between 8am and 9am, the morning peak is particularly concentrated. The information provided on peaktime.ie may enable some commuters to travel at a time when there is greater capacity, thus increasing overall the contribution of DART to providing sustainable transport options for a greater number of commuters and helping those commuters make the modal shift from private to public transport.

Departmental Reports

38. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the PLUTO 2040, Planning Land Use and Transport - Outlook 2040 report has been delayed significantly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48175/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Project Ireland 2040 is the Government's overarching long-term strategy for the development of Irish society. Transport has a key enabling role to play in delivering this strategy and PLUTO will help to ensure that transport investment is aligned with and supports the ten National Strategic Outcomes.

The National Development Plan, published in February 2018 at the launch of Project Ireland 2040, notes my Department's development of PLUTO and estimated that a draft report would go to public consultation in the fourth quarter of 2018, with the final report then to be published in 2019. This original timeline has been impacted by a number of factors.

PLUTO is underpinned by an extensive evidence base comprising of 13 background papers carried out by officials in my Department. These papers consider a wide range of issues such as climate change, Brexit, technology, steady state maintenance, compact growth, rural accessibility, interurban connectivity and international connectivity. Undertaking and finalising this volume of analysis underpinning PLUTO, including associated review and engagement with the Steering Group, has taken longer than originally anticipated.

To help guide future transport investment to support the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, a particular focus of PLUTO has been identifying potential constraints on the future land transport network. Using the transport models held by the National Transport Authority and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, this has involved scenario analysis based on National Planning Framework population projections and National Development Plan investment. Ensuring these scenarios were appropriately specified and provided robust evidence for PLUTO took considerable time.

The Strategic Research and Analysis Division within my Department which is leading the development of PLUTO experienced some staff turnover and held a number of vacancies in the latter half of 2018 and into 2019. While the Division is now operating at capacity, staff moves as the project has developed have influenced the original timeline.

I note that good progress has been made on PLUTO and I expect that the public consultation on the strategy will now launch in the first quarter of 2020.

Public Transport

39. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the considerable capacity issues across the public transport system; and if he will take steps in the short to medium-term to address same. [48147/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The numbers using public transport have increased in recent years with a 6% increase recorded in 2018 across the State supported services of bus, rail and light rail.

These passenger increases reflect a growing population, a strong economy and an increase in the amount of public transport services being made available through the various operators. Those increased services have been supported through increased PSO subvention which between 2016 and 2018 rose by 9% (including Local Link), as well as increased capital investment.

In terms of bus, the Deputy is aware that the PSO fleet has increased in recent years with additional buses being added to existing fleets, as well as constant replacement of older, dirtier buses with newer, cleaner buses. That expanded bus fleet has supported expanded bus services with a 7% increase in annual operated vehicle kilometres across both Bus Átha Cliath and Bus Éireann over the period 2016 to 2018 for example.

In relation to rail, increased services such as the 10-minute DART and expanded usage of the Phoenix Park Tunnel have facilitated increasing patronage, but I recognise that there are particular capacity pressures now being experienced on the rail network, and in particular on the Greater Dublin Area commuter network which carries approximately 70% of all journeys. In the summer I secured Government's approval for a new National Train Control Centre which will improve the overall management of the network, while more recently Government approved the expansion of the Intercity Railcar fleet through the purchase of 41 additional carriages, which will boost capacity by around 34% across the Maynooth, Kildare and Northern Lines. In addition to these initiatives, I will very shortly seek Government's approval for a €1 billion

investment programme in our heavy rail network nationally which will provide the investment needed to maintain, renew and improve the network across the country.

In light rail, the Deputy will likely have already noticed the first of the eventual 26 extensions to the existing Luas Green Line fleet has entered service with additional extensions entering service on a regular basis over the coming months. Next year the 8 additional trams will begin to arrive also which will significantly boost capacity on the Green Line.

While in active travel my Department is providing increased funding to the NTA to allow it deliver the type of high-quality infrastructure required in our major cities to promote a shift to the active travel modes.

Of course these are largely short and medium term measures and the Deputy is aware that the longer term substantial increases in the capacity of our public transport network will be brought about through BusConnects in all major cities, DART Expansion across the Greater Dublin Area and MetroLink, each of which is hugely significant in their own right.

Road Projects

40. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider funding for the extension of the M3 motorway to Cavan town and the East-West Link which are urgently needed in the north-east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47712/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Once funding arrangements have been put in place with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction, including the distribution of funding, for individual national roads is a matter for TII, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

TII shall, of course, work within the overall context of Project Ireland 2040. This encompasses the National Development Plan 2018-2027 (NDP) which has been developed by Government to underpin the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF). This provides the strategic and financial framework for TII's national roads programme for the period from 2018 to 2027.

How projects are identified/selected

The NDP identifies two categories of national road improvement projects: –

- The first category covers projects to advance to construction, subject to the satisfactory outcome of the project appraisal and development consent approval processes.
- The second category relates to projects at pre-appraisal and early planning stage which are being assessed with a view to developing a pipeline of suitable projects for development.

The question of extending the M3 to Cavan town

While early stage assessment work was carried out a number of years ago on a potential road improvement scheme from the end of the M3 motorway, north of Kells to Cavan, this work was subsequently suspended due to funding constraints.

Therefore, in the context of what I have just outlined, this project is not included amongst

the national road schemes that were identified for development during the period of the NDP 2018 - 2027 and the advancement of this scheme cannot, therefore, be accommodated in the national roads programme at present.

N3 Virginia Bypass

A bypass of Virginia town is, however, included amongst a number of schemes identified in the NDP for progression through pre-appraisal and early planning during 2018.

This scheme has been identified as a Strategic Investment Priority in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the NDP.

Current Status

This project has been subject to Pre-Appraisal in compliance with the requirements of the Public Spending Code (PSC) and my Department's Common Appraisal Framework (CAF) to establish if it should be progressed to Stages 1-4 of Planning and Design, in accordance with TII's Project Management Guidelines. The Project Appraisal Plan has been approved by my Department and Technical Advisors were appointed in September 2019 to progress the Scheme to planning, design and appraisal.

Expected Benefits of the Virginia Bypass

The proposed scheme will seek to remove the current inefficiencies of the existing road in terms of safety, capacity and travel times. It is envisaged that it would also have a number of important benefits including:

- Improved road safety, by reducing frequency and severity of collisions;
- It will support economic growth by increasing network capacity and reducing travel times between Dublin and the Northwest;
- Environmental improvements in noise, air and water quality for Virginia Town and Lough Ramor, proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA);
- Improved access to the National Road network for the towns of Ballyjamesduff and Bailieborough.

East-West Link

Regarding the reference by the Deputy to the East-West Link, as I have previously outlined to you on 9th July, 23rd July, and 17th October 2019, proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo.

As regards regional road aspect of the proposal, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design.

My Department has discussed the project with Cavan County Council and this year I gave an allocation of €100,000 to the Council to enable it to undertake a detailed appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Appraisal Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the route. The aim of the detailed appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for future development. Preparation of the appraisal is the responsibility of the Council.

Tourism Policy

41. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the development of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48012/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Ireland's Hidden Heartlands tourism experience brand was launched last year. I am satisfied with progress being made by Fáilte Ireland and I believe that the area has great potential for further development.

As a tourism experience brand, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands benefits from a broad programme of Fáilte Ireland supports. These supports aim to develop visitor experiences and associated tourism infrastructure and products; enhance industry capability and run targeted marketing campaigns and other promotional activity - all underpinned by coordinated leadership structures, appropriate networking and community activation. The next phase of brand development includes Tourism Master Plans for the River Shannon and Beara Breifne Way – the two centrepieces of the brand offering.

As the development of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands on the ground is led by Fáilte Ireland, I have asked the agency to provide the Deputy with further detail on its development plans. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Public Transport Initiatives

42. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** 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. [48144/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my replies to Priority Questions Nos 3 and 5 which I answered earlier.

Road Traffic Legislation

43. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the response of his Department to the decisions in cases (details supplied) to find section 44(10) of the Road Traffic Act 2010 as amended by the Road Traffic Act 2016 incompatible with the Constitution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48134/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While the substance of this judgment was made clear in advance by the judge, the formal judgment was issued only on 19 November. I am taking legal advice and will analyse the implications carefully before deciding on an appropriate response.

Railway Stations

44. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans to reopen Killucan railway station. [47780/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The maintenance, renewal and operation of the rail network and stations on the network including the former station referred to, is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance.

In view of Iarnród Éireann's responsibility in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

45. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a sports capital programme grant will be provided each year to be paid in the same year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48174/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country. The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for Government provides for the aim to allocate sports capital grants on an annualised basis.

The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October 2018. By the closing date, 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. This was the highest number of applications ever received. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. 619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May. The final allocations for capital works were announced in the last week with a total of €39.5m allocated to 1,009 projects.

For the first time, applicants who submitted incorrect documentation under this round were given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While this new measure did extend the overall timeframe for completing the assessment, the opportunity was well received by applicants and helped ensure the number of invalid applications under this round was the lowest ever.

Now that all allocations under the Programme have been announced, my Department will shortly commence a full review of all aspects of the latest round. This review will consider, inter alia, if any further changes can be introduced to expedite the assessment process.

In relation to successful applicants, all grantees are informed at the time of allocation that they need to make progress in the drawdown of their grant or risk having it withdrawn. It can often take applicants a number of years to fully draw down their grants however, due to issues around legal requirements, delays in the planning process or delays with contractors. Given these genuine reasons for delays in drawing down grants I do not propose to make any changes

to the requirements on applicants drawing down grants within a set timeframe at this stage.

Driver Licence Data

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the percentage of disqualified drivers' driving licences returned to the PO box address of the Road Safety Authority in 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47910/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In 2018, 9,824 drivers received court disqualifications, of which 1,052 driving licences were surrendered. Of these disqualifications, 5,324 drivers had no Irish licence to surrender due to having a foreign licence (202), having no driving licence (2,962), having an expired driving licence (2,093) or having a licence exchanged abroad (67).

1,526 drivers received penalty point disqualifications, of which 560 licences were surrendered. Of these disqualifications, 186 drivers had no Irish licence to surrender due to having a foreign licence (19), having no driving licence (89), having an expired driving licence (9), having a licence exchanged abroad (2), or a suspended licence (67).

From the 1st January to the 15th November 2019, 8,240 drivers received court disqualifications, of which 789 driving licences were surrendered. Of these disqualifications, 4,218 drivers had no Irish licence to surrender due to having a foreign licence (193), having no driving licence (2,368), having an expired driving licence (1,586) or having a licence exchanged abroad (71).

1,416 drivers received penalty point disqualifications, of which 468 licences were surrendered. Of these disqualifications, 165 drivers had no Irish licence to surrender due to having a foreign licence (20), having no driving licence (86), having an expired driving licence (9), having a licence exchanged abroad (12), or a suspended licence (38).

Road Improvement Schemes

47. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for future investment in the secondary routes of County Meath. [48148/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

During the recession there were substantial cutbacks in the funding available for State grants for national, regional and local road programmes. Project Ireland 2040 does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network but it will take time to reach the level required for the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network. Grants in the three main grant categories (Restoration Improvement, Discretionary Grant and Restoration Maintenance) are allocated taking into account the length of regional and local roads within a local authority area and traffic factors. It is envisaged that grants will continue to be made available on that basis.

There is limited scope at present for funding projects under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes and any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under these Grant Programmes are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward

by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

Under the capital project appraisal process a Preliminary Appraisal has to be submitted in relation to each proposed project. Once an appraisal is received it is assessed taking into account other competing projects and the overall roads budget.

I have been pleased to be able to allocate significantly increased grant funding to Meath County Council in respect of regional and local roads over the last two years. In this context grant allocations to Meath in 2019 total €19,676,500 which is an increase of over 45% compared to the 2017 allocation.

Allocations for 2020 will be decided in line with the annual grant allocation process. Local Authorities will be notified of allocations in early 2020.

Road Traffic Legislation

48. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce regulations for motorised scooters and cycles in a forthcoming road traffic Bill. [47711/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department recently carried out a two month public consultation on e-scooters and other forms of powered personal transporters. This consultation concluded on 1st November and in excess of 500 submissions were received. My officials are currently going through the submissions with a view to compiling a report and recommendations for next steps. Any issues pertaining to legislation or regulation will be analysed as part of this process. It is important that we investigate thoroughly any issues, positive or negative, which may arise with these powered personal transporters. I anticipate receiving the report from my officials in December and will not be making any decisions about altering the legal status of these vehicles prior to that.

The use of these vehicles on a public road or in public places will remain strictly prohibited during this process.

Ministerial Meetings

49. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48299/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In the period since my appointment as Minister with Responsibility for Defence on 6 May, 2016, I have had no meetings with insurance companies or Insurance Ireland.

Air Corps

50. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details

of the pilot retention scheme in the Air Corps announced in July 2019; the results to date; and the number of pilots and other grades in the Air Corps that resigned their commission and retired from the service since 4 July 2019. [48397/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Air Corps Flying Officers Service Commitment Scheme has been restored arising from the implementation of the Public Service Pay Commission's report on recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces.

The scheme envisages commitments to service ranging from three to eight years and payments made for this commitment on an annual basis. Those who commit for periods of five to eight years will also qualify for a terminal bonus dependent on the length and structure of their commitment.

An annual payment of just over €22,000 per annum will be paid to Flying Officers holding the ranks of Captain, Commandant or Lieutenant Colonel. These ranks will also receive a terminal bonus (once off) of between approximately €14,800 and €37,000 depending on form of commitment given.

In respect of the remaining period encompassed by the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the annual payment will attract the 5% restoration of cuts to allowances that applied under FEMPI, scheduled for 1st October 2020. Following this, the annual payment and terminal bonus will attract increases or reductions in line with prevailing Public Service Pay Policy over the remaining period of the commitment.

Table of terminal bonus

Year of Entry to Scheme	Length of Commitment(years)	Terminal Bonus* Represents the full rate of payment. (see text)
2019	3	Nil
2019	5	€22,213
2019	8	€37,022
2019	3 + 2	Nil + €14,809*
2019	3 + 2 + 3	Nil + €14,809* + €9,872*
2019	5 + 3	€22,213 + €9,872*

Therefore, a flying officer (Captain to Lt. Colonel ranks) committing to a full eight year commitment from the start could earn a total €204,000 approx. over the lifetime of his commitment under the scheme. This is in addition to his normal pay and allowances.

The data in relation to the number of personnel who have departed from the Air Corps since the 4th July is being compiled and will issue to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Ministerial Meetings

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48303/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In my capacity as Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, my responsibilities include

trade promotion. Broadly these responsibilities seek to advance Ireland's prosperity by promoting our economic interests internationally. In this context my Department also supports the Ireland for Finance Strategy, which seeks to promote Ireland's offering for specialist International Financial Services.

While I have not had any dedicated meetings with insurance companies or Insurance Ireland, in the conduct of my trade promotion responsibilities I occasionally attend, or deliver keynote addresses at, events attended by companies and industry bodies from a range of sectors, including financial services. On such occasions I meet representatives of these companies and industry bodies, but this would be informal and by happenstance.

To assist the Deputy, I am providing details of these events:

Event (with role in brackets)	Date	Location
FSI/IBEC annual dinner (Delivered keynote address).	16 November 2016	InterContinental Dublin, Ballsbridge, Dublin
Insurance Institute of Cork Annual Dinner (Attended)	26 January 2018	Clayton Hotel, Silver Springs, Tivoli, Cork
FSI/Cork Chamber of Commerce regional event (Delivered keynote address).	2 March 2018	Clayton Hotel, Lapps Quay, Cork
World Nomads Group, on the occasion of the opening of their European HQ (Attended).	16 October 2018	City Quarter, Lapps Quay, Cork
Insurance Institute of Cork Annual Dinner (Attended).	25 January 2019	Clayton Hotel, Silver Springs, Tivoli, Cork

Passport Services

52. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the nominated public authorities that can access the Passport Office data set; the sections within those public authorities that have accessed the data in the past year to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48400/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service can confirm that no public authority has access to its datasets. The Passport Service considers requests from public authorities for information, and only provides this information on request, if it is satisfied it can do this in accordance with the GDPR and relevant sections of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Passport Services

53. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if nominated public bodies and An Garda Síochána have access on request to the data contained on a passport application form; if they have access to the data on the printed passport document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48401/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Office provides information requested from public authorities and An Garda Síochána only when it is satisfied it can do so in accordance with the GDPR and relevant sections of the

Data Protection Act 2018. This request for information could include the data on a passport application form or on a printed passport document.

The data shared is the specific data requested by the public authority and An Garda Síochána. Given that the nature of the response is determined by the content of each request, it is not possible to define what information would be shared.

Passport Services

54. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the breakdown of the information requested by public authorities and An Garda Síochána from the Passport Office data set in the past year to date; the number of requests for access to data in the past year to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48402/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Office provides data when it is requested from public authorities and An Garda Síochána and only when it is satisfied it can do so in accordance with the GDPR and relevant sections of the Data Protection Act 2018.

The data shared is the specific data requested by the public authority and An Garda Síochána. Given that the nature of the response is determined by the content of each request, it is not possible to define what information would be provided.

The following table outlines the public authorities which requested data under section 41 of the Act, and the number of such requests, from 1 January 2019 to 18 November 2019.

Name of Public Authority	Number of Requests
An Garda Síochána	1,498
Interpol	619
Dept. Employment Affairs and Social Protection	231
Europol	151
Revenue	144
Dept. of Justice and Equality	25
Health Service Executive	9
Road Safety Authority	4
TOTAL	2,681

Data Protection

55. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the process and procedures in place for handling data access requests from public authorities and An Garda Síochána; the way in which the data is requested and released; the decision maker in the context of deciding whether to release or refuse data requests from the bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48403/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is fully committed to keeping all personal data submitted by its customers, safe and secure during administrative processes.

All data access requests must be made in writing, citing the relevant legislation. Requests

are triaged by a designated officer. This is to primarily ensure that each request is made in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and that sufficient information has been provided to identify an individual. During triage, the request will be refused if it is not requested in accordance with the Act or if insufficient data has been provided to identify an individual.

It should be noted that in An Garda Síochána, the requests are authorised at Chief Superintendent level.

Ministerial Meetings

56. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48302/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, which includes insurance. In this regard, both I and my predecessor, Mr Michael Noonan T.D. as Ministers for Finance, have always recognised insurance reform as a key priority for this Government. However, we have been consistently clear that there is no quick fix solution to the current problems in the Irish market. This is in part due to the EU framework for insurance, which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules, which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. In addition, a further constraint is the fact that for constitutional reasons, I cannot direct the courts as to the award levels that should be applied.

That said, my predecessor Minister Noonan recognised that the environment within which insurers operate could be improved and consequently established the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) in 2016, which was chaired initially by then Minister of State for Financial Services, Eoghan Murphy TD. Its purpose was to examine the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance and identifying what short, medium and long-term measures could be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. I believe that the CIWG has made a lot of progress and it is continuing to work to implement the recommendations of both of its reports. This progress is reflected in the fact that CSO figures show motor insurance costs have decreased by 27.1% since the peak in July 2016.

Much work remains to be done and in this regard the implementation of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) benchmarking report is critical, if we are to bring award levels more into line with other jurisdictions, and thus reduce the cost of insurance and increase its availability. As the Deputy is aware the groundwork for this has been laid through the enactment of the Judicial Council Bill and once operational it will be a matter for the Judiciary to put in place new guidelines which reflect amongst other things the PIC report.

In addition, I think it is worth noting that the Minister of State's title includes special responsibility for Financial Services and Insurance. When An Taoiseach announced his decision to appoint Minister of State D'Arcy to this new portfolio in June 2017, I believe that the specific reference to insurance in his portfolio demonstrated the Government's belief that this issue needed to be tackled by a dedicated Minister of State within the Department of Finance. In that respect, Minister of State D'Arcy has taken a lead role in relation to chairing the CIWG, and as part of that role, he has held numerous meetings with relevant stakeholders, including the insurance industry and its representatives. I believe that this has been appropriate and remains so, in light of the Minister of State's responsibilities. However, I wish to emphasise that I, as

the Minister for Finance, have and will continue to play an active role in ensuring that insurance reform remains a priority for the Government.

In conclusion, I do not believe that a measure of success for any Minister for Finance is the number of meetings held with any individual sector, instead it is the progress being made towards a stated objective, in this case lower insurance costs. While accepting that much work remains to be done, I believe strongly that tangible results have been delivered on the insurance reform front to date. In addition, the necessary framework to enable the recalibration of personal injury award levels will soon be in place and I would expect this to have a significant impact on the cost and availability of insurance.

I am happy to provide the information requested and would refer the Deputy to the following table.

Meetings (Minister Noonan)	Date	Location	Purpose
Kevin Hogan, Chief Executive Officer, Consumer Insurance, AIG Sid Sankaran, Chief Financial officer, AIG Declan O'Rourke, Country Manager for Ireland, AIG	1/12/2016	Department of Finance	Meeting with AIG following request by IDA
Meetings (Minister Donohoe)	Date	Location	Purpose
Kevin Thompson, CEO (Insurance Ireland) Declan Jackson, Director of Government Affairs (Insurance Ireland) Aidan Holton, International Council Chair (Insurance Ireland) and CEO (SCOR Global)	28/03/2018	Department of Finance	Discussion – Implications of US tax reforms

Revenue Commissioners Powers

57. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the additional detection and support facilities made available to the Revenue Commissioners in view of the increased detection of illegal drugs being sent through the postal services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48355/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a number of additional staff and increased use of the Revenue drug detector dog teams including a new drug detector dog, have been deployed in the mail centres. These measures together with detection technology, such as scanners, currently used in the mailing centres have led to the increased rate of detection.

Revenue constantly reviews its detection technology and implements a normal replacement and upgrade strategy of its detection technology requirements taking account of new developments in those technologies. In addition, Revenue is continually monitoring where resources are allocated and will respond to changes in the risk profile in the mail centres and deploy resources as required.

Budget Submissions

58. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of pre-budget submissions received by his Department in relation to budget 2020; the number of these he read in full; the organisations to which they refer; the number summarised by officials for his information; the organisations to which they refer; the number of organisations his Department met following their submission; the procedure followed by his Department in relation to engaging with organisations when a submission is made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48394/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Taxation Division of my Department received in excess of 300 pre-budget submissions in relation to Budget 2020 and the Finance Bill. Some of these are duplicates sent in by different public representatives on behalf of the same organisation. All submissions are acknowledged by the Department on receipt. The relevant officials in the Division consider all pre-budget submissions in the context of the Budget and Finance Bill. They engage with the various organisations as appropriate. This could involve telephone calls, emails, letters or meetings.

I can confirm that I received pre-budget submissions from or on behalf of the following organisations:

KPMG	Federation of Irish Sport	MS Ireland
Irish Road Haulage Association	The Wheel	Limerick Chamber
Law Society of Ireland	Small Firms Association	Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers
PWC	BoyleSports	Bandon Motors
Irish ProShare Association	The Reilly Group	Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society Ltd
Insurance Ireland	Rape Crisis Network Ireland	Psychological Society of Ireland
Irish Wheelchair Association	Association of Consulting Engineers	Cork Chamber
Imperial Brands John Player	Irish Venture Capital Association	Oxfam Ireland
Brokers Ireland	Irish Pharmacy Union	Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation
Irish Health Trade Association	Wexford Car Centre	SONAS
National Traveller MABS	The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland	Hardware Association Ireland
Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies	Horse Sport Ireland	Irish Petroleum Industry Association

Japan Tobacco International Ireland	Arigna Fuels	Irish Council for Social Housing
Imperial Brands Tobacco	Food Drink Ireland	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Retired Civil and Public Servants Association	Federation of (Ophthalmic and Dispensing) Opticians	Irish Air Line Pilots Association
Chartered Accountants Ireland	Scale Ireland	Ferrybank Motors
Euronext	Focus Ireland	Screen Producers Ireland
Irish Tax Institute	Aontas	Trócaire
Home and Community Care Ireland	Irish Hotels Federation	Western Motors
Retailers Against Smuggling	National Off Licence Association	Lowry's Bar
Irish Local Development Network	Dóchas	Fr Peter McVerry Trust
Saint Vincent DePaul	The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations	Antique Dealers of Ireland
DIGI Drinks Industry Group Ireland	National Recruitment Federation	Irish Exporters Association
Irish Hospice Foundation	Words Ireland	Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association
IBEC	SIMI	Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists
Chambers Ireland	Ryanair	Rehab Group
Acquired Brain Injury Ireland	AudioVisual Ireland	Association of Eircom Pensioners
Joint Managerial Body Secondary Schools	Dublin Town	Simon
Irish National Teachers Organisation	Cyclist.ie The Irish Cycling Advocacy Network	Atlantic Youth Trust
Barnardos	Charities Institute Ireland	Solid Fuel Trade Group
Beacon South Quarter Owners' Management Company	Irish Duty Free Alliance	Cavanagh's of Charleville
Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland	Vintners' Federation Of Ireland	Irish Lung Fibrosis Association
National Women's Council of Ireland	Irish Farmers Association PBS 2020	Broadford Community Creche
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association	Olde Castle Bar and Restaurant	Irish Music Rights Organisation
Irish Heart Foundation	Bar One Racing	National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers
Alzheimer Society of Ireland	SAFRI Ireland	Health Stores Ireland
European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland	Healing Harvest	Dublin Civic Trust
Home and Community Care Ireland	Retail Ireland	Limerick Civic Trust

Synergy Hair Group	Citizens Information Board	Gordon Transport
Retail Excellence	Independent Craft Brewers of Ireland	McGuinness Forwarding
Apartment Owners Network	NewsBrands Ireland	Ireland Active
City View Wheels	Restaurants Association of Ireland	Duffy Express Freight
National Campaign for the Arts	Irish Congress of Trade Unions	Pat Foley Transport
Irish Thoroughbred Breeders Association	Union of Students in Ireland	Ability West
Irish Institutional Property	Stafford Fuels Ltd	Car Council of Ireland
Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland	British Irish Chamber of Commerce	Dogs Trust
Royal College of Physicians of Ireland	National Adult Literacy Agency	European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland
American Chambers of Commerce Ireland	Freight Transport Association Ireland	Children's Rights Alliance
Property Industry Ireland	Alcohol Action Ireland	Irish Rural Link
Visa	Fitbit International	Edmund Burke Institute
COPE Galway	Cavanagh's of Fermoy	COPE Galway
Construction Industry Federation	Evergreen	SafeIreland
Vehicle Leasing Association Ireland	CKH Fiscal Services	Irish MedTech Association
McCoy Motors	Irish Street Arts Circus and Spectacle Network	Irish Funds
Mid-West Irish Motor Industry	Central Remedial Clinic	Slaney View Motors
TG4	Meadowbrook Residents	Irish Primary Principals Network
Irish Bookmakers Association	Dublin Chamber	Threshold
Telecommunications Industry Ireland	The Copper Grove Bar and Restaurant	Respond
The Not for Profit Association	Association of Farm and Forestry Contractors Ireland	Irish Beverage Council
Disability Federation of Ireland	National Insulation Association of Ireland	Frank Hogan Motors
Enable Ireland	Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland	Milford Care Centre
Irish Cancer Society	The Irish Academy of Engineering	Irish Property Owners Association
Bruce Betting	Agricultural Consultants Association	Mongey Plunkett Motors
Clare Big Start Committee	Startup Ireland	Family Carers Ireland

I can also confirm that I and/or my officials held meetings with the following organisations who sent in pre-budget submissions:

Vehicle Leasing Association of Ireland	IFA
Society of Irish Motor Industry	American Chamber of Commerce
Irish Cancer Society	CIF
Irish Heart Foundation	IBEC
Irish Tobacco Manufacturers Advisory Committee	ICTU
Solid Fuel Trade Group	Chartered Accountants Ireland
Irish Road Haulage Association	Irish Duty Free Alliance
National Off licence Association	Irish Funds Boylesports
Irish Health Trade Association	Bar One Racing
Drinks Industry Group of Ireland	Scale Ireland
Irish Bookmakers' Association	ICMSA
Irish MedTech Association	Irish ProShare Association

I also met a Community and Voluntary Pillar grouping including Family Carers Ireland, The Wheel, Social Justice Ireland, Children's Rights Alliance, Age Action, St Vincent de Paul, Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, Protestant Aid, Irish Council for Social Housing and Irish Rural Link.

In addition, I should point out that I meet with many public service bodies during the course of the year and there may be correspondence between my Department and those bodies in relation to the Budget and Finance Bill in various forms. These are not included in the list because this engagement is ongoing by its nature and the correspondence would not necessarily be categorised as a pre-budget submission.

The contents of all pre-budget submissions are considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill regardless of whether they are sent in by individuals, organisations, representative organisations or public representatives. I should also point out that submissions may be received by the Department outside of the pre-budget process but would nonetheless be given due consideration. For example, responses to public consultations could be considered as part of the Budget/Finance Bill process as appropriate. These would not necessarily be included in the lists above.

Finally, I should say that I have endeavoured to give as full and accurate an answer as possible but the Deputy will appreciate that given the sheer volume of pre-budget submissions and meetings at what is an extremely busy time for my Department, some items may not have been included. It is also possible that what an organisation may consider to be a pre-budget submission may not be categorised as such by the Department, nonetheless it would have received due consideration.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether separated and divorced persons that previously owned a share in a property should be treated as first-time buyers in terms of the tax code and mortgage rules when buying a home at some point in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48395/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, Finance Bill 2019 proposes a two-year extension to the Help to Buy (HTB) scheme. The definition of first time buyer in HTB is as follows:

'first-time purchaser' means an individual who, at the time of a claim under subsection (3) has not, either individually or jointly with any other person, previously purchased or previously built, directly or indirectly, on his or her own behalf a dwelling;

The intention is to target the Help to Buy scheme on those who have not had the opportunity to build up equity in another property which could be used to purchase the second or subsequent property.

The definition complements that in the Central Bank's macro-prudential rules. It should be noted that the Bank is independent in the formulation of this policy.

I do not propose amending the definition of first time buyer in HTB.

The Central Bank has advised me that it defines a first time buyer as a borrower to whom no housing loan has ever before been advanced. (Also where the borrower under a housing loan is more than one person and one or more of those persons has previously been advanced a housing loan, none of those persons is a first-time buyer for the purposes of the lending rules). However, the Central Bank also advises me that it introduced proportionate limits in its mortgage lending framework specifically to allow flexibility by lenders when assessing individual cases, such as may be the case for separated or divorced persons. The Bank's view is that the proportionate limits mean that lenders are able to make decisions based on an individual borrower's circumstances up to a specific overall limit. Nevertheless, lenders will still be required to assess an individual borrower's affordability and lend prudently on a case by case basis, in line with the requirements of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code and other relevant regulations.

Banking Sector Investigations

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has been informed by a building society (details supplied) that an investigation has commenced on the overcharging of customers involving insurance products on their mortgage; if the Central Bank is undertaking its own investigation in relation to this; the number of customers believed to be involved at this stage; the amount overcharged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48453/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware I have no role in the day to day operations of any bank operating in the market. The bank concerned, AIB, has provided me with the following statement in relation to this matter:

"AIB can confirm that the issue has been notified to the Central Bank of Ireland.

"This issue relates to certain EBS mortgage customers where their insurance premium is collected with the mortgage repayment. In the event that the repayments are not made by the customer, the insurance premiums continue to be paid by EBS, the cover remains in place, which is beneficial to the customer. However, interest may accrue and in some cases this may not have been clear to the customer. EBS is at the early stages of the customer identification process and numbers are not currently available. However, based on the sampling, it is expected that the monetary impact on customers to be low."

Heritage Centres

61. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for Loughcrew Cairns megalithic tombs in Oldcastle, County Meath; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [48325/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Loughcrew site is managed from the Brú na Boinne Visitor Centre and Guide services are available on a seasonal basis during the months of June, July and August.

Currently, visitor access to the interior of the largest structure, Cairn T, is prohibited while necessary works are being designed and carried out to address serious structural issues, the effects of vandalism and concerns about the condition of specific stones within the chamber. The remainder of the site remains available to visit however and, as an additional service to visitors during the 2019 season, full Guided tours were made available of the entire Loughcrew landscape as opposed to simply Cairn T alone, which had been the case before access was restricted. The response to this was strongly positive and it was considered that the move added considerably to the overall depth of the visitor experience.

Prior to the closure of Cairn T, offseason visitor access (i.e. in the absence of Guides) was facilitated through a local keyholder who made the key available to visitors on request. Given the level of damage which has been noted at the site, it is not at this stage clear what the future position regarding offseason access will be following the remediation works and the level of unaccompanied access that will be feasible. This issue will be reviewed further therefore when the works are complete.

Ministerial Meetings

62. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48307/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that I have not met with any insurance companies or Insurance Ireland in my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform since my appointment to that role on 6th May 2016. I am providing a separate reply to the Deputy in response to his question to me in my role as Minister for Finance.

Garda Accommodation

63. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to provide appropriate accommodation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48312/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Following the recent fire the remains of Emyvale Garda Station have been demolished and the site has been cleared. It has been agreed with An Garda Síochána that there is an urgent need to provide accommodation and the OPW has looked at temporary options. It is intended that proposals will be put forward for agreement in the next two weeks. It is not possible to give a definitive timeline for the delivery of the accommodation but the project will be treated as urgent.

Office of Public Works Staff

64. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of external quantity surveyors that are engaged by the OPW across each active and proposed capital projects and renovation and-or restoration projects; the costs of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48316/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): In relation to the above PQ, I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that some of the information sought by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being collated. A detailed response will issue to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Public Spending Code

65. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the public spending code will be updated; the details on the review aspect of capital projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48460/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of the ongoing reform of Ireland's public investment management systems, my Department has undertaken extensive work on the updating of the Public Spending Code. The purpose of this update is to strengthen the existing guidance to better align with the realities of project delivery and with a particular focus on improved appraisal, cost estimation and management. I anticipate that the revised central elements of the Public Spending Code relating to the appraisal and management of public capital projects will be published in the near future following consideration and approval by Government. Further technical guidance building upon these central elements will follow in 2020.

In the context of updating the Public Spending Code, my Department has given consideration to the potential benefits of more structured scrutiny of major public investment projects, focusing in particular on the robustness of planned delivery, accuracy of cost forecasts, and consideration of risk. My Department is developing a new governance and assurance process for major projects with an estimated cost of over €100 million. This new process is being informed by international best practice and will involve consultation with all major public sector stakeholders. It is likely to involve an independent external review of major projects at key stages, drawing from international best practice approaches, and the modalities of such an approach in an Irish context are currently receiving careful attention. The detail of the process and arrangements for implementation will be scoped and developed with a target operational date of mid-2020.

Shared Services

66. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the financial shared service centre project; the amount spent on the project to date; the amount spent on consultants for the project by consultancy; if the EY report will be published; the expected cost to complete the project; the date the project was stalled; the date it is set to resume; the date it is expected to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48461/19]

67. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the original budgeted cost of the financial shared service centre; the original expected completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48462/19]

68. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he was first informed of the cost overruns in relation to the financial shared service centre project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48463/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 to 68, inclusive, together.

The Financial Management Shared Service Programme will see the migration and upgrade of 31 separate Financial Management Systems (FMS) to a single FMS, with a single common Chart of Accounts, and standardised accounting processes for all of Central Government.

This Programme is necessary, not only to address the upgrade requirements for these legacy systems, but also to support a number of interdependent reform initiatives and to position the Government to be responsive to evolving national and international requirements, including fiscal transparency and digital innovation. The existing distribution of financial processing across Public Service Bodies (PSBs) and systems does not support the automated consolidation of data at a central level. The continued use of legacy systems could not meet existing and emerging requirements without considerable duplication of effort and at a potentially significant cost/risk to the State.

The implementation of the single FMS, aligned with the standardisation of processes across central government, will provide the necessary supporting framework, and is an essential enabler, for the financial reporting reform outlined in the 2019 OECD Report on “Financial Reporting in Ireland”. A single best-in-class finance technology platform will provide greater flexibility and strategic capability to respond to new and emerging requirements in a more consistent, agile and cost effective manner, while future proofing the Government’s Finance Function. It will also provide significantly improved financial information and data insights, on a real time accruals basis, which will strengthen informed decision making across PSBs and Central Government.

The original business case anticipated that the Programme would return cost savings of some €15.4m per annum once fully operational.

In addition to the projected operational cost savings, it is also important to consider that the programme negates the costs of upgrading the existing 31 legacy systems which would be significant (benchmark estimates suggest a range of €50m-€80m), and would not deliver the reporting reforms or rich source of centralised data available from this single FMS programme.

With respect to timelines, a decision was made in mid-2018 to pause entry into user acceptance testing and review the design of the technology platform.

I am informed by the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) that the design review of the new financial management technology platform was completed recently. This has highlighted a number of process and technical opportunities for improvement of the single finance platform for Government. This will ensure that the quality of the solution implemented will support the reform of public finance management and reporting. Changes are not unusual in a programme of this scale and complexity that will replace and upgrade 31 existing different systems with one new finance system for Government.

As a result of the design review, and the work to realise the improvements identified by the review, the project will not be completed by 2021 as originally planned. This is a large scale complex programme that will take longer than originally anticipated to deliver the new system for 48 Public Service Bodies over a number of years. The timeline will be worked through in consultation with the system implementation partner and each Public Service Body.

The original Business Case recognised the level of complexity in this Programme and envisaged that the costs to support a full deployment, taking account of potential delays that were liable to arise for a system of this complexity, could range from €47.4m to €62.25m excluding VAT. The total amount spent to date on the project is €36.5m excluding VAT.

A project of this scale and complexity requires a wide range of skills and expertise from within and outside the Civil Service. I am informed by the NSSO of the following spending on consultants, recruited to provide advice on the development of the project to date:

Consultant	Spend to date (ex VAT)
EY	€814,000
Deloitte	€4,461,000

I am informed that EY was engaged by the NSSO to provide expert advice on programme governance. The work referred to by the Deputy included a confidential (not for publication) internal review of the governance arrangements for the Programme focused on making improvements and the recommendations have been implemented.

I am updated on matters pertaining to expenditure, including in respect of a range of organisations such as the NSSO, on an ongoing basis. A revised timetable and cost for completion of the Programme will be finalised when the consultation referred to above is completed.

School Accommodation Provision

69. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a request for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied) is being considered to alleviate demand for places in the 2020 school year. [48292/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application, for additional school accommodation, from the school authority in question.

The application is currently under assessment. The school authorities will be contacted directly as soon as the assessment process is completed.

Ministerial Meetings

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48300/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I have not met with insurance companies or Insurance Ireland since 1st January 2016.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

71. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the ASD unit for a school (details supplied); when works will commence; if the unit will be ready to open for the September 2020 intake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48314/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school referred to by the Deputy has been approved a four classroom SEN base under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2019.

The school authority are currently in the process of appointing a Design Team and are being assist by Dublin & Dún Laoghaire Education & Training Board (DDLETB).

It is not possible at this early stage to give a definite timeline as to when the accommodation will be available.

Schools Building Projects Status

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in relation to the new school development for a school (details supplied) in County Cork; when a new design team will be appointed due to the recent increase in the size of the school to a 16 classroom school with two special needs units; his views on whether the children and staff deserve a better environment than one that is split across two sites, that is not fit for purpose and lacks basic facilities such as adequate yard size, physical education facilities and a school hall; if he will personally intervene in the matter in view of the length of time the project has been in the system; his plans to ensure the project moves quickly to stage two; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48323/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of Architectural Planning.

A Design Team was appointed but a number of site issues were required to be addressed which precluded the progression of the project pending their resolution. The school has now confirmed to the Department that all site issues have been resolved in order to facilitate the progression of this building project.

The school also requested an increase to the original Project Brief from a Principal plus 12 mainstream teachers up to a Principal plus 16 mainstream teachers with 2 SEN class bases. My Department has approved the increased project brief on the understanding that the additional area can be accommodated on the proposed site.

Under EU Procurement Regulations a new procurement procedure is required to be undertaken where there are substantial modifications to a project. As such, a new Design Team is required to be appointed. My Department is in contact with the school authorities in that regard.

This major building project is included in my Department's Construction Program being delivered under the National Development Plan.

Teacher Training Provision

73. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 193 of 22 October 2019, if there is a timeline for the development and implementation of proposals following the comprehensive review of the special needs assistant scheme; and if so, when they can be expected. [48333/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Arising from the National Council for Special Education Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme, and my subsequent commitment to develop proposals for the implementation of recommendations in the review, I

announced on 27th March this year the trialling of the School Inclusion Model, a new model of support for students with special educational and additional care needs. This new Model is being piloted in 75 schools in the Kildare/Wicklow/South Dublin region in the current school year.

Key features of the School Inclusion Model are:

- Development of a new frontloaded allocation model for the allocation of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in line with their profiled need, thus breaking the link with the requirement for an assessment.

- The expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to provide a more intensive support service for pilot schools.

- The development of a National Training Programme for special needs assistants, to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to support students with additional care needs arising from significant medical, physical, emotional/behavioural, sensory, communication and other significant difficulties that pose a barrier to participating in school life.

- The development of a national nursing service for children with complex medical needs in schools to complement current provision provided through community based services.

- Establishment, on a pilot basis, of a new Regional Support service under the National Council for Special Education to include specialists in speech and language; occupational therapy and behaviour practitioners.

- The continuation of the current in-school therapy project for another year. This involves 19 Speech and Language Therapists and 12 Occupational Therapists working with and within schools.

The School Inclusion Model aims to build schools' capacity and to provide the right supports at the right time for students with additional needs.

A comprehensive independent evaluation of the pilot will be required to test its effectiveness and provide guidance on issues to consider in any potential mainstreaming of the School Inclusion Model.

There is a number of other recommendations in relation to the training of SNAs and the development of a nursing programme for children with the most complex needs being progressed.

Teachers Conciliation Council

74. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding teachers pay scales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48342/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC) is the recognised forum for dealing with matters relating to the pay and conditions of service for teachers. The Council is comprised of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Education & Skills and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

The criteria for the award of incremental credit for post-primary teachers was agreed under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council and issued by my Department under Circulars

29/2007 and 29/2010. The terms of these circulars are applicable to all post-primary teachers.

An incremental credit application, from the teacher referred to by the Deputy, was received in my Department on 15th July 2019, for previous teaching experience in a private post-primary school which is located outside of the European Union. As the service applied for did not meet the criteria as set out in Circular 29/2007 my Department issued its decision, on 6th September 2019, not to award incremental credit.

School Funding

75. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the possibility of having necessary works carried out at a school (details supplied); and the details of an assessment and survey of the school which was carried out by a technical team from his Department in April 2018. [48350/19]

76. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application (details supplied). [48370/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 76 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has received an application from the school in question. Officials from my Department are liaising with the school authority in order to organise a suitable date and time for a meeting to discuss the school's application for capital funding.

SOLAS Funding

77. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 342 of 8 May 2019, the breakdown of figures to include the initial tender price for supplying the TENRCS system; the status on the operation of the TENRCS system nationally; if the system has been shelved due to the fact it was not fit for purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48373/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): My Department has requested the information sought by the Deputy from SOLAS and it is currently being compiled. I will arrange for the information to be forwarded to the Deputy.

Counselling Services Provision

78. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding on-call counselling at second-level schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48374/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Department does not currently have plans for a national school-based counselling programme at post primary-school level. NEPS provides consultation for school staff who may have concerns about individual pupils or students. NEPS supports schools in putting interventions in place for individuals with clearly identified and serious difficulties. Consultation in relation to appropriate therapeutic interventions delivered in the school setting is also available. When counselling is considered

to be required a referral is made to an outside agency. Schools are advised to have identified appropriate referral pathways in consultation with HSE and other mental health services in their local community. NEPS helps schools in the process of making referrals to external agencies as appropriate for students who require more specialised interventions. NEPS Guidelines for Schools on Responding to Critical Incidents provide advice for schools in handling critical incidents and also advises about prevention and early intervention strategies for students at risk.

The Department of Education and Skills promotes a comprehensive and whole-school approach to the promotion of wellbeing and positive mental health focusing on the entire school community, as well as groups and individual young people with identified need.

School guidance counselling service plays a valuable role as an integral part of the school's pastoral care and student support structures to promote student wellbeing at whole-school level. Every post-primary school is required to publish a whole-school guidance plan in which the school outlines how students can be supported.

My Department's Wellbeing Policy and Framework for practice has given recognition to the importance of promoting wellbeing in education. It outlines a comprehensive, whole school approach to promoting wellbeing and positive mental health. It focuses on the school community, as well as groups and individual students with identified needs. Schools promote wellbeing through a range of activities and approaches to support the academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development of all students.

Higher Education Institutions

79. Deputy Tony McLoughlin asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures his Department takes to ensure that courses undertaken at universities and institutes of technology remain relevant to the changing workforce trends here; if there is data available which identifies the number of students that gained full-time employment directly as a result of their institute qualification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48375/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The tertiary education system has a number of key strategies in place at all levels to ensure we meet existing and future skills demands in the workplace and equip young people and the working population more generally with the skills and capacity to meet these demands, to enhance the level of human capital in Ireland and provide a solid basis for long-term economic sustainability and rising living standards. These strategies include, in particular, the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019.

According to an OECD 2017 Report, the employment prospects and expected financial benefits from completing tertiary education in Ireland are higher than in most other European countries, indicating that the education system provides skills that are relevant to the labour market. This finding is supported by the analysis contained in the recent independent impact assessment of Irish universities carried out by Indecon and commissioned by the Irish Universities Association.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) have been tracking graduate outcomes since 1982. This annual survey tracks student outcomes 18 months after graduation with findings published by the HEA on www.heai.ie. The HEA have also partnered with the CSO to produce longitudinal reports of graduate experience 1, 3 and 5 years post-graduation. These are available on www.cso.ie

The January 2019 version of the HEA graduate outcomes report tracked the 2017 gradu-

ate class. Of this cohort who were employed 18 months post-graduation - 70% of Level 6 & 7 graduates, 77% of Honours Bachelor Degree (L8) graduates and 84% of taught postgraduate graduates rated the area of study as relevant to their area of employment (somewhat relevant to very relevant).

In relation to graduate supply, in 2017 there were a total of 48,931 graduates from the Higher Education system. Of this number, a significant proportion were in key skills areas, 2,765 were in ICT, 5,729 in Engineering Manufacturing and Construction and 4,200 in Science and Maths.

The National Employer Survey completed in Q2 2018, has shown that employers are very satisfied with graduate recruits across a range of personal and workplace attributes, including computer and technical literacy, working effectively with others and numeracy/processing numerical data. Overall satisfaction with higher education graduates was 86% and for further education and training graduates overall satisfaction was 84%. The satisfaction with the computer and technology literacy of graduates is very high (88% for Higher Education, 83% for Further Education and Training).

I recently launched the Human Capital Initiative, the primary objective of which is to underpin the provision of additional capacity across the Higher Education Sector to meet priority skill needs for enterprise. It represents an additional investment of €300m (€60m per annum from 2020 to 2024) from the surplus in the National Training Fund in line with the recommendation contained in the independent review of the National Training Fund.

The HCI will also incentivise continued reform and innovation in third level provision building on best practice nationally and internationally, strongly supporting innovation in programme design and delivery. It aims to future proof graduates and ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of Higher Education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills.

Priority skills will be identified through the detailed and comprehensive framework now in place under the National Skills Council, including publications from the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU), the work of the Regional Skills Fora, the NTF Advisory Group, and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, and direct involvement of employers.

Technology Skills 2022: Ireland's Third ICT Skills Action Plan which is a collaborative effort by Government, the higher and further education and training system and industry to meet Ireland's high level ICT skills needs was recently published. The plan has devised measures that will boost the supply of ICT graduates to meet the ambitious level of demand forecast for the coming years. By 2022, the interventions outlined in this plan aim to deliver up to an additional 5,000 graduates per annum through indigenous supply, with the remainder serviced by inward migration.

I am satisfied that these and other important elements of my Departments strategies, developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, will help ensure that we are well prepared to meet our skills needs on an ongoing basis and to support the long-term success of our economy.

Bullying in Schools

80. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the implementation of the bullying policies of post-primary schools is monitored by his Department to ensure that the policies are implemented and followed through; the remedy available if a parent is concerned that the various steps outlined in a policy are not taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48378/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. The procedures recognise that a positive school culture and climate is key and set out a very practical way on what schools must do to both prevent bullying and to deal with bullying when it occurs.

In accordance with the Anti-Bullying Procedures, where a parent is not satisfied that a school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with the procedures the parents must be referred, as appropriate to the schools complaints procedures.

Also in accordance with procedures, in the event that a parent has exhausted the schools complaints procedures and is still not satisfied, the school must advise the parents of their right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

All Boards of Management are required to adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy that fully complies with the requirements of these procedures. A template policy is provided in the procedures to help facilitate schools in this regard.

The Board of Management must ensure that the school has clear procedures for the formal noting and reporting of bullying behaviour and these must be documented in the schools' anti-bullying policy.

The procedures for schools include important oversight arrangements that involve the school principal reporting regularly to the Board of Management and a requirement for the Board to undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation that the annual review has been completed must be provided to the Parents' Association and published on the school website.

My Department's Inspectorate, as part of its whole-school evaluation inspections of schools, specifically examines schools' compliance with the anti-bullying procedures including the actions taken to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying. Typically, in the course of whole-school evaluations, inspectors review the school's code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy (including evidence of the principal's report to the board of management on incidents of bullying and evidence of an annual review of the policy.) Where inspectors encounter non-compliance with the anti-bullying procedures relevant findings are included in whole-school evaluation reports published on my Department's website.

In the course of their whole-school inspection work, my Department's Inspectorate gathers information about how schools deal with bullying in a number of ways through:

- Review of relevant school documentation, including the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policy;
- Meetings with parents and student representatives at which there is an opportunity for parents and students to raise issues where relevant and
- The inclusion of parent and student Questionnaires on items relating to bullying.

Students and parents are also asked to respond to questions about how the school deals with bullying and discipline in the school and whether or not the school provides a safe environment for children.

Where responses indicate that students and/or parent do not believe that bullying is dealt with effectively, inspectors raise this issue with school management who have ultimate respon-

sibility for anti-bullying policies and procedures.

Inspection models for evaluating SPHE and for whole-school evaluations (WSEs) have been adapted to include more evidence gathering concerning the effectiveness of the school's actions to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying.

Furthermore, the Department's Inspectorate has, since February 2019, been conducting in-depth inspections of the implementation of child protection procedures in schools. During those Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections, inspectors check if the minutes of board of management meetings contain a record of a child protection oversight report being provided in line with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 and if, in the case of child protection concerns arising from alleged bullying behaviour amongst pupils, the board is provided with relevant documents for its consideration in line with the 2017 Procedures.

School Accommodation Provision

81. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Education and Skills the arrangements being put in place to accommodate 86 pupils that failed to obtain a place in a school (details supplied); when building will commence on the school extension; when the extension will be complete; the capacity the school will increase to following the completion of the extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48380/19]

98. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which his Department is engaged with various school authorities in Kilcock, County Kildare with particular reference to fully identifying the needs at preschool, primary and post primary level in view of the current and rapidly expanding population; the extent to which existing schools are equipped to meet the challenges of the future and primary and second level; if his attention has been drawn to enrolment difficulties at either level; his proposals in response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48498/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 98 together.

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in an area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date information on significant new residential developments in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,

- Provision of a new school or schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022) including a new 500 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Kilcock school planning area to be located in Enfield which, it is anticipated, will have the effect of reducing pressure on the existing post-primary school in Kilcock.

This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

The requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. My Department will also continue to monitor areas where the accommodation of existing schools may need to be expanded in order to meet the needs of the local population.

Under Project Ireland 2040, my Department continues to make progress to increase the infrastructural capacity in the schools sector, in order to meet demographic and other demands.

The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed under Project Ireland 2040. I wish to advise the Deputy that the current status of large-scale projects being delivered under Project Ireland 2040 may be viewed on my Department's website, www.education.ie and this information is updated regularly. In addition, a list of large-scale projects completed from 2010 to date may also be viewed on the website.

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. Details of schools listed on this programme can be found on my Department's website www.education.ie and this information is also updated regularly.

In relation to the school to which the Deputy refers I have approved a project under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2018. This project will provide for 9 Mainstream classrooms, 9 WC's, 1 Assisted Users WC, 2 Science Labs and Prep Area, and 1 x 119m² Arts & Crafts Room.

This project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority. It is a matter for the Board of Management to advance this project in that context.

Schools Building Projects Status

82. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stages for the extension of a school (details supplied) from initiation, including dates for each stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48381/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school referred to by the Deputy was approved a project under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme in September 2018 and its delivery has been devolved to the school authority. When completed the project will deliver 9 Mainstream classrooms, 9 WC's, 1 Assisted Users WC, 2 Science Labs and Prep Area, and 1 x 119m² Arts & Crafts Room.

I can confirm that the project is currently at pre Stage 1 (Preliminary Design). Once the

Stage 1 submission is submitted to my Department and approved the project will move to Stage 2A (Developed Design) and following approval to Stage 2B (Detailed Design) and then to Stage 3 (Tender Action) and Stage 4 (Construction).

It is not possible at this early stage to give a definite timeline for construction.

Schools Building Projects Status

83. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new secondary school for Enfield, County Meath is expected to open; if the patronage has been decided; the catchment for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48382/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the four years from 2019 to 2022, including a new 500 pupil post-primary school for Enfield (in the Kilcock school planning area) to be established in 2020.

New schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required, in the first instance, to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the school planning area where they have sufficient places, rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to parents and guardians which will allow them to make an informed choice in expressing a preference for their preferred model of patronage for their child's education.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG will submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and decision.

The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) closed for parental preferences on the 4th October 2019 for the six post-primary schools to be established in 2020, including the school referred to by the Deputy. It is anticipated that the successful patrons will be announced in the coming weeks. The assessment reports, including details on the number of parental preferences received for each of the areas, and the NSEG recommendations will be made available on my Department's website.

School Admissions

84. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which pupils that have been turned down for a school place due to capacity issues and have accepted a place in another location can be reconsidered if a place becomes available in the original location; if such arrangements are school specific; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48383/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area. In relation to school admissions, it is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998.

Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. It is open to the parents to contact the school, and request that their children are maintained on the waiting list. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment or maintenance of waiting lists in schools.

Higher Education Institutions

85. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the timeframe in which students with disabilities that are wheelchair users, visually impaired and hearing impaired could complete their degree course will be extended by at least one extra year without incurring extra costs or fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48385/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Students with disabilities are one of the target groups identified in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAP).

Various access supports are available to students with disabilities such as:

- The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) which allocates funding to further and higher education colleges for the provision of services and supports to students with disabilities. The FSD was extended in 2018 to cover students studying on a part-time basis;
- Students can also apply for financial support through the Student Assistance Fund (SAF);
- The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) has allocated a number of 1916 Bursaries to NAP target groups such as students with disabilities and students who wish to undertake their studies on a part-time basis.

All eligible undergraduate students are covered by the Free Fees Initiative whereby the State provides funding towards tuition fees for students undertaking approved courses in eligible institutions. Under the rules of the initiative, tuition fees are not paid in respect of students undertaking a repeat year of study at the same level. However, this condition may be waived

where there is evidence of exceptional circumstances, such as cases of certified serious illness. Decisions in such cases are made at a local level in each higher education institution in line with the criteria of the scheme. A similar approach applies in respect of grant support. In this regard, SUSI cannot extend funding past the normal duration of the course which is set out by the institutions themselves, unless the applicant is repeating the same year of a course under exceptional circumstances.

Education and Training Boards Data

86. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department contacted ETBs to put a hold on SNA posts from 20 August to 15 November 2019; if so, the ETBs contacted; the number of posts for which the request was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48386/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for the SNA allocation process, I will forward the Deputy's question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

Junior Cycle Reform

87. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the delivery of sample examination papers for the Irish junior certificate examination for 2020 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48393/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Students that entered 1st year in September 2019 were the first cohort of students undertaking a full programme under the new Framework for Junior Cycle.

As all new subject specifications include ongoing feedback, formative assessment, CBAs, assessment tasks as well as final examinations, there is a need to avoid 'over-assessment' and to minimise the cumulative burden on students and teachers of multiple assessments across the full range of subjects.

In this context, the Classroom-Based Assessments will substitute for other assessments currently undertaken in the school such as in-house examinations. Schools should examine their own assessment policies and must plan for the replacement of in-house examinations with Classroom-Based Assessments for students, where relevant.

It has been longstanding SEC policy, and DES policy (prior to the establishment of the SEC), to provide sample papers in the autumn of the examination year for the programme in question.

This to allow the curricular changes, and the associated changes to teaching and learning to become embedded. This is supported by the programme of continuous professional development that is specifically focussed on the systemic curricular and pedagogical changes involved.

To introduce the specifics of the final assessment at any earlier point in the process would distract from this fundamental requirement to focus on the teaching, learning processes, and content aspects of the curricular change. The consequence of acceding to requests for earlier publication of sample papers would result in an examinations focus too early in the change process, rather than on the curriculum content, and critically on the teaching and learning processes. This is particularly important in the context of Junior Cycle Reform, which is promoting

a very different approach to assessment and feedback to students to assist their learning over the course of Junior Cycle, away from the traditional focus on external terminal assessment through the state examinations.

School Transport Data

88. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will calculate a split in the figures to show the school transport net surplus profit for each year separately from the combined commercial and school net surplus deficit as reported in the Bus Éireann statutory accounts in the annual reports from 1997 to 2016 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48405/19]

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

The 1975 Summary of Accounting Arrangements form the basis of the payment to Bus Éireann for the operation of the School Transport Scheme. The school transport scheme is a demand-led service based on the number of eligible children who apply to avail of transport. Reimbursement to Bus Éireann is on a cost recovery basis only and the Department of Education and Skills do not pay any profit to Bus Éireann relating to the School Transport Scheme.

The Department reimburses Bus Éireann for a range of costs incurred in the operation and administration of the scheme, together with other direct and indirect costs attributable to the work carried out for the Department, referred to as the Transport Management Charge. Actual expenditure is finalised in the Bus Éireann annual statement of account which is independently audited by the Bus Éireann auditors in accordance with the 1975 Summary of Accounting Arrangements. Balances, where they occur, are accounted for in the following year's projected cost.

Information relating to Bus Éireann statutory accounts are a matter for Bus Éireann and information in relation to these accounts is published annually and is available Bus Éireann's website.

Employment Appeals Tribunal

89. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position of his Department with regard to the recommendations of an employment appeals tribunal on the use of summer holidays in the context of maternity leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48406/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Following legal advice my Department has appealed the decisions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal referred to by the Deputy.

As the decisions are now the subject of ongoing legal proceedings it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

National Training Fund

90. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent on the promotion of the human capital initiative on 7 November 2019 and associated advertising campaigns in relation to the launch; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48414/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Human Capital Initiative (HCI) was launched on Thursday 7th November 2019 at the Future Jobs Summit in the Tangent Centre, Trinity College, Dublin.

The HCI which represents an additional investment of €300m (€60m per annum from 2020 to 2024) from the surplus in the National Training Fund will incentivise continued reform and innovation in third level provision and strongly support innovation in programme design and delivery. It aims to future-proof graduates and ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of higher education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills.

To date €196.80 has been spent on promoting and associated advertising campaigns in connection with the launch of the HCI.

Schools Data

91. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools which have not opened in September 2019 due to a lack of enrolments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48415/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, including Child Benefit data from the Department of Social Protection and the Department's own school enrolment databases, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, the Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Information on school enrolments and Child Benefit data allows the Department to map where children are living or attending school and this information provides a degree of certainty in projecting demand in an area in future years.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand (and timing of demand) in an area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, the Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain up-to-date information on significant new residential development. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is aligned with the demographic changes in an area.

The pace of completion of planned housing and occupancy of houses is by its nature less predictable and can vary. Accordingly, while the Department takes into account planned additional residential development, the timing of completion of such development can be subject to change depending on local circumstances.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018 the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for

primary and post-primary schools across the country.

From time to time for operational or other reasons the patron of a new school due to open in a certain year may choose to defer the opening.

Of the 14 new primary schools to be established in 2019, two were deferred by the patron as follows:

- A new 8 classroom primary school to serve the Swords/North school planning area - the patron of the new school advised that there were no enrolments for September 2019 and that the opening of the school has been deferred to September 2020. The patron indicated significant parental interest in relation to enrolments for 2020.

- A new 8 classroom primary school to serve the Dunshaughlin school planning area - the patron of the new school advised that there are currently no enrolments for the 2019/20 school year and that the opening of the school has been deferred from September 2019. The patron body expects enrolments from a new local housing development which has been delayed in the area and they have received significant interest for September 2020 enrolments for the new school.

My Department will continue to liaise with the patrons of these schools. In addition, in the context of further strengthening the demographic analysis process, the Department intends to have additional engagement with patron bodies in relation to their local knowledge on school place requirements.

School Accommodation Provision

92. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when permanent accommodation will be provided for a school (details supplied). [48434/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The project to deliver the school's permanent accommodation requires the acquisition of a suitable site and engagement with a landowner in respect of an identified site option is currently underway.

Given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally I am not in a position to comment further at this time. I can, however, assure the Deputy that the acquisition of a new site for the school is a priority for the Department and the patron body will be informed of the location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

School Enrolments

93. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason enrolment caps were put in place at a school (details supplied). [48435/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The project to deliver the permanent accommodation for the school to which the Deputy refers requires the acquisition of a suitable site and engagement with a landowner in respect of an identified site option is currently underway.

A planning application was submitted to the Local Authority for the school to be located on third party lands at Colpe, in interim accommodation pending purchase of the permanent site. Final Grant of planning was issued on 16 September 2019.

In the meantime the school opened in September 2019 in interim accommodation in a building in Laytown, which is owned by the Department of Education and will remain there until they relocate to the site at Colpe.

Having reviewed the planning permission granted, my Department is satisfied the school could accommodate up to 72 pupils in first year intake from September 2020.

The temporary accommodation has been tendered. There are significant elements of new road access requirements which are currently under discussion with the landowner. It is anticipated that the installation of the temporary accommodation together with the ground works and road access will commence early in the New Year.

Schools Building Projects Status

94. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will take action to ensure a school building project (details supplied) which is at stage 2b progresses as quickly as possible; if the project will proceed to construction as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48451/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is part of a joint project. The project is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) Detailed Design which includes the application for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

In June 2019, at a meeting with the schools, their design team and officials from my Department, discussions took place regarding the current conditions at the schools. My Department advised the schools to submit an application for consideration, for replacement/additional temporary accommodation required to address their current accommodation needs pending the delivery of the major school building project.

At that meeting the consultant Design Team Quantity Surveyor advised that the company is withdrawing from the project.

In early October 2019, the Design Team Consultant Architect advised that it is forced to withdraw from the project as the firm has gone into liquidation. A tender process to replace both the design team Architect and Quantity Surveyor will commence shortly.

When the replacement consultants have been appointed the Design Team will complete work on the Stage 2(b) report which will be submitted to the Department for review.

Upon review of the Stage 2(b) submission my Department will be in contact with the school regarding the further progression of this project, including pre-qualification of contractors.

University Status Applications

95. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the application by Sligo Institute of Technology for university status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48470/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The establishment of technological universities (TUs), including in the Connacht Ulster region, is an important part of the

Government's higher education policy.

TUs are a core part of Government's plan to meet the challenges facing us as an economy and a society with the objective of having a TU presence in every region of the country. This will provide increased choices for students, an enhanced student experience and greater access for potential students tackling educational disadvantage with TUs offering a broad range of teaching from apprenticeship to doctoral degrees. They will also support an increased intensity of research activity which will provide increased opportunities for collaboration with industry and deliver benefits for the economy and wider society. TUs will marry both an attractive physical multi-campus presence with state-of-the-art digital connectivity, providing new modes of learning where the student and learner is placed centre-stage and can access course content and avail of first-class tuition irrespective of location or circumstance. Each TU will serve as an anchor institution in the development and advancement of its region. Drawing frontier technological developments to regions through intensive collaboration, engagement with and connectedness to national and international researchers will be fundamental to TUs acting as regional knowledge hubs. These hubs will, in turn, act as major catalysts for further direct investment, research, innovation and employment growth.

On 18 October I announced €14.25 million in funding to Higher Education Institutions under the HEA 2019 call for submissions for higher education landscape restructuring, consolidation and collaborative projects. The majority of this investment, €11.8 million, is aimed at progressing the creation and expansion of TUs. The Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA), comprising the Galway Mayo, Letterkenny and Sligo Institutes of Technology, was allocated €2 million under this call bringing total Exchequer funding to date for their project to €5.92 million. In total since 2013 some €31 million in Exchequer funding has been invested in TU creation and development.

Launched earlier this month, the report of the high level working group, the TU Research Network (TURN), entitled 'Technological Universities: Connectedness & Collaboration enabled by Connectivity' sets out the case for a state change in higher education reform for the delivery of national strategic priorities such as are elaborated in Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan and Future Jobs Ireland. This state change is to be achieved through the connectedness, particularly at regional level, collaboration and connectivity of TUs and their unique delivery of programmes across the full range of the National Framework of Qualifications. The report makes a series of 12 recommendations for outcomes that will provide TUs with a solid foundation for their development. These centre upon three thematic areas identified by TURN as the essential building blocks for successful TUs : -

- investment in integrated multi-campus digital infrastructure to provide regional cohesion and to facilitate new modes of learning and the prioritisation of capital investment in TUs;

- investment in research capacity building by developing researcher human capital, facilitating research activity and opportunities for existing academic staff and implementing a researcher career development and employment framework, addressing infrastructural deficits and prioritising research strategies within TUs, exploiting fully the mutually supporting roles of teaching and research; and

- re-alignment of the policy framework and funding for TUs including an expansion of institutional autonomy and reform through the implementation of TU-apposite career structures, the reform of the grant allocation model to accommodate TUs, the creation of a dedicated TU funding stream including in the post-establishment phase and the creation of a borrowing framework for TUs.

The report recognises that relevant priority actions can only be achieved through a struc-

tured, system-wide, relevant and dynamic process that will ensure value for money, underpinned by a robust and evidence-based set of monitoring and evaluation arrangements. The TURN report can be accessed on the Department's website

As announced during Budget 2020 and in response to the TURN report the Government is providing €90 million over the next three years under a new TU Transformation Fund to support consortia such as CUA to achieve TU designation and to support the further advancement of established TUs.

The TURN report and the ongoing work of the group, whose remit is being extended, will continue to be of considerable assistance and benefit to consortia such as the CUA towards achieving TU designation, as will access to the new TU Transformation Fund being developed currently in consultation with TURN.

As such further TU creation, establishment and progression will be achieved by the relevant stakeholders delivering on the TURN report recommendations and the transformational multi-annual funding underpinning such delivery.

The Department met with the Presidents and Chairs of the IoTs involved in the CUA in recent weeks in relation to TU related system-wide issues and to support and encourage the consortium in the progression of their TU development proposals. However, ultimately it remains a matter for a consortium to lead on the progression of their plans to seek TU designation under the Technological Universities Act 2018 and to ensure that they have a shared unitary vision and purpose for TU development and can demonstrate compliance with the relevant eligibility criteria and related legislative requirements prescribed in the 2018 Act.

In this context it is understood from the recent discussion that an application by the consortium is anticipated to be made by CUA in the latter half of 2020.

Schools Building Projects Status

96. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status and proposed timeline for funding of the construction of a new school building at a school (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48471/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The delivery of a building project at the school referred to by the Deputy has been devolved to the school authority. The project is currently at Stage 1 for the architectural planning process. It is not possible at this early stage to give a definite timeline for construction.

School Accommodation Provision

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an assessment in respect of the current and projected needs of a primary school (details supplied) in County Kildare in order to determine the replacement of deficient facilities in terms of accommodation with a view to maximising the proposals in keeping with the current space requirement demographics and special needs with a view to addressing the issue at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48497/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application, for additional school accommodation, from the school authority in question. The application is currently being assessed and the school will

be informed of the decision shortly.

Question No. 98 answered with Question No. 81.

Ministerial Meetings

99. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48306/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that I did not have any meetings with insurance companies or Insurance Ireland during the period in question. For your information, I spoke at an Insurance Ireland conference held in 2017 at which the issue of fraud was the main topic on the agenda.

The need to tackle insurance fraud and other drivers of insurance costs on enterprise and business, in both employer liability and public liability terms, goes to the core of the Government's on-going drive to reduce the burden on our economy of insurance costs.

As the Deputy will be aware, the focal point of this reform is the Cost of Insurance Working Group which was established by the Government in July 2016 and is chaired by Minister of State, Michael D'Arcy TD. The objective of the Working Group has been to identify and examine the drivers of the cost of insurance, and recommend short, medium and longer term measures to address the issue of increasing insurance costs. It has published two key reports with recommendations – one on the Cost of Motor Insurance (2017) and the other on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance (2018).

To date and on foot of these reports the Government has taken a substantial number actions including:

- New Guidelines for the Reporting of Allegations of Fraudulent Insurance Claims to An Garda Síochána were published on 1 October 2018.
- A new insurance claim fraud category on the Garda PULSE system went live on 2 November 2018, enabling the production of better statistics.
- The Personal Injuries Commission was established in January 2017 and presented two reports of its own over an 18-month work programme.
- The Personal Injuries Commission recommended that the future Judicial Council be assigned the function of compiling guidelines for general damages for personal injury. I envisage that the Judicial Council will be established before the end of this year and steps are being taken to facilitate establishment within that time frame.
- The Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018 was commenced by Minister Humphreys in January 2019 to provide a better understanding of those factors influencing the cost of insurance.
- The Personal Injuries Assessment (Amendment) Act 2019 was commenced by Minister Donohoe in April 2019 reinforcing the role of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board which enables claims to be settled in a less costly fashion.
- Sections 8 and 14 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 were amended in Janu-

ary 2019 in conjunction with my Department to improve their effectiveness against fraudulent claims with costs implications for the offending parties.

- With effect from 1 November 2019 new rules to improve motor insurance pricing have come into force.

Consultancy Contracts Data

100. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the nature of the consultation that an external company (details supplied) is providing outside of their primary remit regarding the reform and restructuring of his Department; if he is satisfied that the staff of the company have been appropriately vetted in order to undertake roles in information sensitive projects and cases in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48310/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): EY have been engaged by my Department in two areas in 2019, further details of which are set out below. If the Deputy has further information with respect to the subject matter of her question, I would welcome her providing this to my Department to facilitate further inquiries.

Transformation

EY was engaged to support the recent Transformation Programme undertaken by my Department. This engagement has now concluded and the Secretary General of my Department, Mr Aidan O'Driscoll, briefed the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality in respect of this programme on 6 November 2019.

The Transformation Programme is the largest restructuring ever undertaken by any Government Department and involved changes to almost every aspect of our work. Our internal programme team, assisted by EY, worked with over 300 representatives from across the Department to design and shape our new organisational structure. Staff from EY engaged at every level of the Department to map and evaluate existing activities and processes to inform the design of the new operating model.

As part of this engagement, EY were also asked to provide specific assessments of corporate functions, immigration service delivery functions and ICT platforms, and to develop a cultural roadmap for the Department.

All EY staff working on the programme were fully vetted to the same standards as are applied to Department staff. Access to Department resources was appropriately limited and contractual non-disclosure provisions also apply.

Specialised Audit

EY is currently engaged to provide specialised audit staff to support the work of the Department's Internal Audit Unit and also to carry out specific audit assignments. The contract to provide these services was procured under a framework put in place by the Office of Government Procurement in accordance with best practice. All external audit contractors are required to undergo appropriate vetting procedures.

Ministerial Meetings

101. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times he has met with the Garda Commissioner and other Garda officials to discuss insurance reform since he became Minister; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48315/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, I engage regularly and on an ongoing basis with the Garda Commissioner and members of his management team in my role as Minister for Justice and Equality, as do my officials. These engagements take various forms and cover the full range of issues of relevance to our roles.

In addition, I am aware that Minister of State D'Arcy has met with the Commissioner earlier this year in order to discuss insurance issues.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) specifically called for An Garda Síochána to explore the potential for further cooperation between it and the insurance sector in relation to insurance fraud investigation. An industry-funded Garda insurance fraud unit was one option considered in this regard. While the Commissioner has indicated that he does not support industry funding of Garda units, he is open to considering other industry-funded proposals to combat insurance fraud.

I am informed that the Commissioner is of the view that a Divisional focus on insurance fraud is preferable to the establishment of a centralised investigation unit. This approach is aligned with the Divisional-focused Garda model. It is the intention of the Commissioner that the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) will guide Divisions and provide training in the investigation of insurance fraud. Over a number of years, the GNECB and the Garda Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB) have delivered training courses to Garda members engaged in economic crime-related investigations, across all Garda divisions.

Since 2015, in conjunction with the Garda Síochána Training College and University College Dublin (UCD), GNECB and GNCCB have offered an accredited course to over 40 members per annum, drawn from all Garda Divisions, as well as from specialist units engaged in the investigation of economic crime. Representatives from the private sector, including the insurance industry are invited to contribute to the course, thereby providing specialist insight into relevant insurance sector-related topics. On completion of training, successful candidates are awarded a Post Graduate Certificate in Fraud and E-Crime Investigation from UCD.

Garda Expenditure

102. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 242 of 12 November 2019, if a retainer fee is due to each doctor on the established panel of nominated doctors that a Garda can visit free of charge; if he will provide a schedule of retainer fees for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48326/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I note that in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including human resources and personnel matters.

In my response to Parliamentary Question No. 242 of 12 November 2019, I set out information as conveyed to me by the Garda authorities in relation to the Doctor's Payments Scheme for Garda members.

In relation to the Deputy's follow-up query on this matter, I am informed that there are no retainer fees to Doctors or practices registered in the scheme.

Departmental Reform

103. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the organisational structure and function of the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, Cosc following its closure will be replaced. [48327/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In August 2019, my Department implemented a significant Transformation Programme, most notably in response to the recommendations of the Effectiveness and Renewal Group which was established by Government in January 2018 to identify the changes necessary to enable the Department to meet the changed demands of the environment in which it now operates.

The aim of the Transformation Programme is to create a Department that is more agile, more evidence-based and more open, while remaining loyal to traditional civil service values of integrity, impartiality and professionalism. This new operating model has been implemented in the Department to create a better platform for the professional delivery of services.

My Department's work was previously structured by subject areas relating to different parts of the Justice and Equality sector. Cosc - The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence was an example of this. By contrast, the Department is now divided into two pillars- Criminal Justice and Civil Justice and Equality. Within these pillars, the Department is divided into structured into four functional areas: Policy development, Governance, Legislation, Operations & Service Delivery. Support is provided across the pillars by Corporate and Transparency.

In terms of the work previously carried out by Cosc, the reorganised Department model means that specialist teams will now focus on specific functions relating to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. The work that was carried out by Cosc will be distributed under the new model in the following way:

Policy Function (Community Safety) will take over many of the responsibilities Cosc previously held. This Division will be the contact point for NGOs for issues such as the monitoring and implementation of the second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. This Division will be engaged with the development of Policy to determine requirements and challenges facing the domestic, sexual and gender based violence sector.

Governance Function will be responsible for overseeing the actions of criminal justice agencies in implementing the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Legislation Function will be responsible for actions such as any proposed amendments to the Domestic Violence Act 2018.

Operations and Service Delivery Function will make decisions on funding, through a centralised Funding Administration team, to support best practice and centralised oversight of NGO funding.

Transparency will be responsible for actions such as the national awareness raising campaign under the second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.

My Department has had a number of meetings with NGOs who work in the area, bilaterally and in larger groups, to discuss the Transformation programme. This has been done to ensure that they are appraised of the changes, personally are introduced to the new points of contact for individual functions and to ensure that a seamless customer service is provided.

The benefits of the new model include that the Department is in a better position to deliver on its strategic objectives. More clearly defined roles and responsibilities will mean improved accountability and services will be delivered in a better, streamlined way. Information will be shared with stakeholders and the public in a proactive way, through the dedicated Transparency function.

I am confident that with these changes, my Department has embarked on building a new and better model for the Civil Service and that the important issues within our responsibility, including in relation to tackling domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, will be handled in an even better way in future.

Departmental Inquiries

104. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will act on the instruction of the majority of Dáil Éireann who in a motion called on him to amend a person's (details supplied) terms of reference for the scoping exercise into the death of a person. [48328/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Shane O'Farrell have been addressed by me in both the Dáil and the Seanad on a number of occasions and in a number of earlier responses to Parliamentary Questions.

I have noted and take most seriously the motion approved by Dáil Éireann on 14 November. I would point out however that my actions in relation to the O'Farrell case are and must be carried out in accordance with the law.

The terms of reference for the scoping exercise were focused, as required by the law in particular the line of jurisprudence established by the Supreme Court in *Shatter v Guerin*, to reduce the risk of legal challenge to its recommendations. The judgment requires the terms of reference of a scoping exercise to be as specific as possible to remove potential ambiguity and focused enough to promote a timely outcome to ensure fairness to all parties. However they still allow for review of the issues intended.

Further, Judge Haughton is free to make any recommendation he sees fit in his final report, including the establishment of any form of statutory or non-statutory inquiry. It is also the case that the O'Farrell family is free to make any representations they wish to Judge Haughton in relation to any matter they wish to see inquired into, in any future inquiry. Should Judge Haughton recommend an inquiry, of whatever type, he has been asked to provide draft terms of reference for such an inquiry.

I welcome the fact that the O'Farrell family has decided to work with Judge Haughton and to supply him with the documentation they have.

While the process has taken some time, a clear process is now in place and it should be permitted to continue in accordance with the law and without the delay or additional risk of confusion which would arise if there were interference with the ongoing work of Judge Haughton.

Judge Haughton has submitted his initial report to me and this has been shared with the O'Farrell family. I intend to publish that initial report shortly, following consultation with the Attorney General.

Judge Haughton has committed to producing his final report in the coming months and the O'Farrell family is working with his scoping exercise to ensure that all the facts are fully considered and that recommendations are made to address this tragic case. I would ask Deputies to appreciate that I cannot and should not prejudge Judge Haughton's report or change his terms of reference in a way that doesn't comply with the law.

Drugs Seizures

105. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of the 2,200 seizures of illegal drugs made by the Revenue Commissioners officials going through the postal service that have resulted in follow-up operations by An Garda Síochána; the number of persons charged with offences as a result of the operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48354/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have asked An Garda Síochána to provide information in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy. The information requested is detailed and it was not possible to complete the task in the time available. I have requested the Commissioner to provide me with this information and I will provide it directly to the Deputy once it is received.

Citizenship Applications

106. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter regarding citizenship in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48377/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): While I am not in a position to provide information in relation to individual cases or applications, I can inform the Deputy that applications for Citizenship are governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended, and for the purposes of the 1956 Act, a parent is understood to mean either the mother or father of the child. For the purposes of Irish law, the mother of a child is the person who gives birth to the child or a female adopter of the child. In general, the father is the person identified as the genetic father of the child or a male adopter.

Section 7, of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended addresses citizenship by descent and provides that a person is an Irish citizen from birth if at the time of his or her birth either parent was an Irish citizen. However, an additional requirement of registration is imposed in respect of children born outside the State of Ireland where the Irish citizen parent was also born outside the island of Ireland.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and specifically the passport service, is tasked with processing passport applications in line with the requirements of the Passports Act 2008. The Passport Act 2008, sets out the legislative framework within which the passport service processes all applications for passports. Pursuant to section 7 of the Passport Act 2008, a passport cannot be issued unless the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade is satisfied the person is an Irish citizen and is also satisfied as to the identity of the person.

Therefore, under the current Irish law, Section 7, of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 does not apply, where the Irish citizen is neither the birth mother nor the genetic father or neither the male nor female adopter of the child. Consequently, the child does not qualify for Irish citizenship by descent and therefore does not qualify for the granting of an Irish passport.

I am informed that Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, which provide for parentage of children born through donor-assisted human reproduction, will come into operation on 4 May 2020, as provided for by the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (Parts 2 and 3) (Commencement) Order 2019 (S.I. No. 541 of 2019) recently made by the Minister for Health.

Where a child is born in the State through donor-assisted human reproduction prior to the commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Act, depending on the particular circumstances, it may be possible after Parts 2 and 3 come into operation for a couple to seek a declaration under section 21 of the Act that the spouse, civil partner or cohabitant of the birth mother is the other parent of the child (with all of the parental responsibilities that entails), and ultimately to have a new birth certificate issued reflecting that legal parentage. However, it is important to note that Parts 2 and 3 of the Act will only apply to children born in the State.

In light of the evolving situation relating to recognition of domestic births, and noting the very complex legal matters involved, I have asked my officials to consult with colleagues in other relevant Departments with the view to seeking an appropriate solution in relation to births that take place abroad.

Citizenship Applications

107. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when legislation will be brought forward to resolve the High Court ruling that placed a ban on all travel for applicants for citizenship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48387/19]

108. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to expedite citizenship applications in view of the excessive delays faced by applicants. [48388/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 108 together.

The Deputy will recall that I obtained Government approval to introduce legislation if required and depending on the outcome of an appeal to the Court of Appeal. The Court handed down its decision on Thursday, 14 November and, while my officials and I will need to study the judgement in its entirety over the coming days, I very much welcome the decision of the Court with regard to citizenship applications.

I know that the past few months have been quite stressful for applicants, their families and their friends. I am satisfied however, that the Court has provided legal clarity, and the decision has upheld the lawfulness of our residency rules governing citizenship through naturalisation.

The processing of applications continued throughout the period in which the appeal decision was awaited. My Department also continued to accept new applications during this time. I have directed my officials to do everything possible to arrange that a Citizenship Ceremony take place on 9th December and for further ceremonies to take place early in 2020.

Information will be provided to applicants, with as much notice as possible, in advance of

the ceremonies to allow them to make any necessary arrangements. Details will be published on my Departments website over the coming weeks.

Road Traffic Legislation

109. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he is taking to address the widespread and dangerous use of scramblers; the dates on which the inter-agency group on this issue met since the group's inception; the outcome of its deliberations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48422/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I would like to begin by stating clearly that my officials, alongside their colleagues in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and An Garda Síochána, are striving to find solutions to this complex policing issue.

As I have outlined in previous Parliamentary responses, a cross-agency group has been examining the misuse of scramblers. This process has involved my Department, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS), Housing, Planning and Local Government and Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, as well as An Garda Síochána, the Road Safety Authority, the Revenue Commissioners and representatives of local authorities.

On foot of advice from the Office of the Attorney General, it was agreed by all attendees at the last formal meeting of the group in March 2019 that, in the main, current legislative provisions appeared to be sufficient. Nonetheless it was also agreed that the group would remain open to considering workable legislative solutions to any specific legislative gaps specifically identified by An Garda Síochána.

My officials wrote to the Garda Commissioner to seek his formal views on the matter. A response was received on 28 June and has since been shared with DTTAS, as a primary contributor to the work of the cross-agency group. The response from the Office of the Garda Commissioner does suggest potential legislative changes which the organisation believes could assist in improving policing in this area.

These proposals are receiving detailed consideration in my Department, and have been shared with our colleagues in DTTAS who have responsibility for road traffic legislation.

My officials are currently in the process of reconvening the cross-agency group – proposed for early December – where the Garda proposals will be further scrutinised to ascertain whether they can be progressed alongside targeted enforcement measures, awareness raising and youth engagement, which are key to success in combatting this behaviour.

However I would stress that work and engagement on these issues continues on an ongoing basis between the relevant Departments and officials, between formal meetings.

Garda Stations

110. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeline for the relocation of a Garda station from a building which is not fit for purpose to a new suitable location in Tubbercurry, County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48484/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance

of Garda accommodation. As a result, all works to the Garda estate involve close cooperation between the OPW and the Garda authorities

Major investment is being made in the Garda estate, to provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff, as well as the public interacting with them. This is a significant undertaking, as there are over 560 stations nationwide.

The Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is based on agreed Garda priorities. It continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country and is underpinned by significant Exchequer funding across the Garda and OPW Votes. In addition, other major ongoing works to the Garda estate include the development of a new facility at Military Road and the major refurbishment of Fitzgibbon Street station as well as the Pilot Garda station reopening project.

I am informed that, in light of pressure on Garda accommodation in Tubbercurry, An Garda Síochána has requested the Office of Public Works to consider acquiring a suitable property in the area to meet Garda requirements. I understand that the OPW is currently exploring options in that regard.

Immigration Status

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if transfer from stamp 3 to stamp 4 is possible in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48487/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that the person referred to was awarded permission to reside in the State as a dependent person. Dependent status permission is issued as a Stamp 3 residence permission and therefore the person referred to does not appear to currently meet the criteria for a stamp 4 permission.

However, if the circumstances of the person referred to, or the person on whom they are dependent, has changed they may wish to apply for a change of status. An application for a change of immigration status may include changing from one category or stamp to another this is dependent on the criteria for the new category being met.

Information on how a person can change their status and the required criteria is available on the website of the Immigration Service of my Department at: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/WP07000279>

Applications for change of status made on the basis of Section 4(7) of the Immigration Act 2004 can only be considered when the applicant has a valid current permission to be in the State. Applications made by or on behalf of persons who are not lawfully resident will not be considered.

A person seeking to change their immigration status is advised to apply well before their current immigration permission expires. The fact that an application for change of status has been made and is under consideration does not affect or extend the person's current permission.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response is , in the Deputy's

view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Family Reunification Applications

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a join spouse visa will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48488/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that an application for a visa, for the purpose of joining with an Irish national spouse, was received in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy on 16 July, 2019.

The Policy Document on Family Reunification first published in December 2013 states that the business target for visa applications to join Irish citizens is to finalise such applications within six months of receipt of application. However, it should be noted that this is a business target and does not constitute a legal obligation. The business target takes into account the detailed and often complex assessment that is required in applications for family reunification.

While every effort is made to process these applications as soon as possible, in line with the business target, processing times can vary having regard to the volume of applications, their complexity, the possible need to investigate, enquire into, or seek further information in relation to certain applications, and the resources available. Any delays in achieving the business target are typically related to the processing of more complex cases where the provision of additional documentation is requested, or where detailed assessments of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights are required.

The Deputy should note that applicants are advised not to purchase airline or other travel tickets prior to a decision being received on the visa application.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48489/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that all persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide satisfactory documentary evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a current valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a previously held or out of date passport, birth certificate or register of birth and marriage certificate.

In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot produce their current passport, or a previous passport, birth certificate or other supporting documents, the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanation should, where possible, be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from

the relevant authorities or embassy responsible for the issuing of passports and birth certificates in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. My Department will consider the explanation given and, if satisfied it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may suggest alternative means to the person to assist in establishing their identity and nationality.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the email service except in the cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

114. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in regard to residency and stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48490/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, for reasons of maintaining full confidentiality, it is not my Department's practice to comment on whether an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State.

An applicant for such protection status, or their legal representative, should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted: by email to info@ipo.gov.ie; by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either: by email to info@protectionappeals.ie; by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

An applicant for international protection is awarded international protection, whether refugee status or subsidiary protection status, upon a declaration of status being issued from my Department. This is done on foot of a grant recommendation from the International Protection Office (IPO) or a decision of the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) to set aside a refusal recommendation of the IPO. My Department processes the recommendations received from the International Protection Office and the decisions of the International Protection Appeals Tribunal in chronological order based on the date the file is received in that Unit. Once the necessary due diligence has been carried out by officials in my Department, a declaration of status will issue as soon as possible.

The Ministerial Decisions Unit of my Department may be contacted by email - mduinfo@justice.ie.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the parliamentary questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Visa Applications

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) can have their visiting visa extended for a further period to support their sibling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48491/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed that the person in question was granted a visit visa on the 27 September 2019, permitting them to travel to the State between the dates of 27 September 2019 and 26 December 2019.

I can advise the Deputy that non-EEA nationals who visit the State may be granted a maximum of 90 days visitor permission by an immigration officer when they enter at the port of entry. This applies to both non-visa required nationals and visa required nationals.

It is a general policy of my Department not to grant an extension of a visitor permission. The visitor is expected to leave the State by the end of the original period for which permission was granted. If there is a change of circumstances since the original visitor permission or visa was granted then my Department will consider an application for an extension of the visitor permission. However, it is generally only in cases where unforeseen circumstances arise that my Department will grant an extension of visitor permission - for example where there is an unexpected illness of the visitor or of a member of the sponsoring family.

If unforeseen circumstances occur which mean that a visitor needs to extend their visitor permission, they must apply in writing by post to:

Extension of Visitor Permission

Residence Division Unit 6

Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service

PO Box 12695

Dublin 2

I can further inform the Deputy that my Department has no current record of receiving such an application from the person concerned.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the Immigration Service of my Department by e-mail using the oireachtas mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the parliamentary questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the Immigration Service is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Data

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the previous parliamentary questions wherein it was indicated in the case of a person (details supplied) was not identified by the information provided refers to them or another person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48492/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I must again inform the Deputy that, based on the information provided and after a thorough search of our systems, there

is no record to be found of an immigration application from the person referred to. The Deputy might also note that it is the responsibility of all persons with an immigration permission in the State, or an application for an immigration permission, to ensure that the information provided is kept up to date. Therefore if the person referred to has changed address since the original application or last registration they should advise my Department or their local registration office of their new address.

Should the Deputy obtain updated or revised details from the person, including full name, address and relevant reference or application numbers, I would be happy to advise on the position of the particular case.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Garda Vetting

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, in the case of a person (details supplied) who was the subject of legal proceedings overseas in respect of which they were found guilty when they were a student and is now anxious to ascertain the standing of the issue in terms of a criminal record; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48493/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The primary purpose of Garda vetting for employment purposes is to support protection for children and vulnerable adults. It is carried out by the Garda National Vetting Bureau in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 and other relevant laws. Neither I nor my Department has any role in the processing of vetting applications.

The Garda Vetting Bureau can be contacted as follows

By email:	vetting@garda.ie
By post:	National Vetting Bureau, Racecourse Road, Thurles, Co. Tipperary. E41 RD60

The person referred to by the Deputy may wish to contact the vetting office. It is also open to the person in question to seek private legal advice on the matter raised.

Refugee Appeals Tribunal Decisions

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, in the case of a person (details supplied) their original appeal to the refugee tribunal on 15 April 2002 was adjudicated upon by a tribunal member that out of approximately 1,500 cases is not known to have awarded refugee or asylum status to anyone, if the decision arising therefrom can now be set aside on the bases of natural justice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48494/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I must inform the Deputy that any international protection applicant who receives an adverse determination or decision from one of the State's international protection determining bodies may apply to the High Court

for a judicial review of that determination or decision within a specified period of time.

The same position applied to determinations or decisions made in 2002 by the refugee status determining bodies of that time i.e. the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal. Where a determination or decision was not challenged within the specified timeframe then it remains valid in law and can no longer be challenged, some 17 and a half years later. As a result, I see no basis for having any such decision revisited at this point in time.

The Deputy might also wish to note that it is open to any person refused a declaration as a refugee to make an application under s.22 of the International Protection Act 2015 for the consent of the Minister to make a subsequent application. Any such application would, however, need to be founded on new elements or findings which have arisen which make it significantly more likely that the relevant person will qualify for international protection and the relevant person was, through no fault of their own, incapable of presenting those elements or findings for the purposes of his or her previous application.

Ministerial Meetings

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of times she has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies she met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48295/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have had no meetings with insurance companies or Insurance Ireland since 2016 and neither had my predecessors. I have officiated at a number of events as has one of my predecessors the details of which are outlined in the following table.

Minister	Date	Location	Purpose
Minister Heather Humphreys	07/10/2019	Liberty Insurance, Dublin Road, Cavan	Photo call with Liberty Insurance (jobs announcement)
Minister Heather Humphreys	16/09/2019	Unit 10&11, Cashel town shopping centre, Cahir Road, Co.Tipperary	Opening of DMS new offices and jobs announcement
Minister Heather Humphreys	03/09/2019	Bord Gais Energy Theatre	Attended Allianz Business to Arts Awards 2019
Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor	25/05/2016	Merrion Hall, Strand Road, Sandymount	Announcement of the purchase of OSG Group by Sedwick. (Photocall)

Work Permits Applications

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if favourable consideration can be given to the issue of a work permit in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48503/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There does not appear to be a current employment permit application for the named person (details supplied).

An application for an employment permit by the named person will be considered should such an application be made, subject to the application fulfilling all relevant criteria.

In order to apply for an employment permit a non-EEA national must have secured a job offer for an eligible occupation from an Irish registered employer.

Details on how to apply for an employment permit are available on my Department's website at the following link - <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/>.

In order to assist with the application process, the Department has produced a suite of information including various checklist documents, a 'User Guide' to our online application system and a comprehensive FAQ Document which answers the most common queries received regarding employment permits. All this information can be found in the Employment Permit section of my Department's website at www.dbei.gov.ie.

Ministerial Meetings

121. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the date, location and purpose of each meeting she as Minister or a Minister of State in her Department attended with insurance companies, insurance brokers or representative bodies in the insurance industry in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48520/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have not met with insurance companies, insurance brokers or representative bodies in the insurance industry. I have checked with the Ministers of State in my Department and I am advised they have had no such meetings either.

Details of events which I have officiated at are detailed in the following table.

Minister	Date	Location	Purpose
Minister Heather Humphreys	07/10/2019	Liberty Insurance, Dublin Road, Cavan	Photo call with Liberty Insurance (jobs announcement)
Minister Heather Humphreys	16/09/2019	Unit 10&11, Cashel town shopping centre, Cahir Road, Co.Tipperary	Opening of DMS new offices and jobs announcement
Minister Heather Humphreys	03/09/2019	Bord Gais Energy Theatre	Attended Allianz Business to Arts Awards 2019

Labour Market

122. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the percentage of persons in the labour force that have basic or above basic digital skills based on latest OECD business and SME data and other international data sources; the corresponding EU average rate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48521/19]

123. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the percentage of persons in employment that have basic or above basic digital skills based on latest OECD business and SME data and other international data sources; the corresponding EU average rate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48522/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 and 123 together.

The share of the population with basic or above basic digital skills is tracked on an annual basis by EUROSTAT, and the results published in the European Commission's Digital Economy Society Index (DESI).

On the basis of the latest available data, which is for 2017, and which features in the 2019 edition of the DESI, 48% of Ireland's population have at least basic digital skills, which compares with an EU average of 57%- also for 2017. In Ireland's case, this is an increase on 44% in 2016.

28% of Ireland's population meanwhile have above basic digital skills, a figure that also refers to 2017, and which compares to an EU average of 31%. For Ireland this is also an increase on the 2016 level of 25%.

The importance of digital skills to the future of Ireland's workforce is recognised in the Government's *Future Jobs Ireland*, which aims to help prepare Ireland for the economy of tomorrow. Technological advances and the transition to the low carbon economy present challenges but also numerous opportunities as our businesses and workers learn to operate in a changed economy.

In addition to support from Government to exploit these opportunities, investment by enterprises to innovate is required and our people will also need to learn new skills. The enhancement of digital skills will be core to the vision set out in *Future Jobs Ireland*, which includes efforts to embrace innovation and technological change and the improvement of SME productivity.

One of the key targets set out in *Future Jobs Ireland* is to increase the share of the population with basic or above basic digital skills from its 2017 baseline of 48%, to equal or greater than the EU average by 2025. This is complemented by an ambition to double Ireland's lifelong learning rate from a 2017 baseline of 8.9% to 18% by 2025.

The means by which these targets will be realised are set out under pillar 3 of *Future Jobs*, on enhancing skills and developing and attracting talent- the majority of these initiatives will be progressed by the Department of Education and Skills and its agencies.

These include the development of digital literacy curricula at school level, the implementation of Upskilling Pathways- New Opportunities for Adults, the Skills to Advance and EXPLORE upskilling programmes for lower skilled workers, the expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship offerings, Springboard+ courses in new technologies, Skillnet Ireland training provision in digital skills development and emerging technologies, and the roll out of the new Human Capital Initiative within the Higher Education sector.

These initiatives are in turn being supported through reforms to the National Training Fund, to align it more directly with the changing skills requirements of the Irish labour force.

Other commitments in *Future Jobs Ireland 2019* complement these initiatives and recognise the role that employers have in supporting the upskilling of employees. *Future Jobs Ireland 2020* will build on these commitments and introduce additional actions which will result in further progress in this area.

Hospital Transfers

124. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be transferred; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48278/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services

125. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the development of inpatient capacity for mental health services within the Waterford and Wexford LHO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48283/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

HSE Staff Recruitment

126. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a position will be sanctioned in the case of a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48293/19]

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

Ministerial Meetings

127. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48304/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health I have oversight and governance responsibilities in relation to the Voluntary Health Insurance Board, the statutory board which does business as Vhi Healthcare. My officials meet quarterly with Vhi senior management as part of governance arrangements under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016). My Department also hosts the periodic Health Insurance Consultative Forum, in conjunction with the Health Insurance Authority, to discuss market issues with the health insurers. I am provided with detailed briefing on regulatory and governance matters that arise in these meetings. In addition to this, I have attended the following meetings in the period the Deputy mentioned:

Meetings:

Date of Meeting	Organisation	Purpose of Meeting
28th of September 2016	Vhi	Vhi requested to update the Minister on developments since the company was authorised as a health insurer in 2015
5th of December 2016	Vhi	The Minister met with the Vhi Board to discuss governance and oversight issues
7th of September 2017	Vhi	The Minister met with Vhi to get an update on Vhi's corporate strategy

Hospital Equipment

128. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the paediatric bone densitometry scanner at Temple Street Children's University Hospital is open and sufficiently staffed; the regularity with which it is operational weekly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48317/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Children's Health Ireland to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

General Practitioner Services Provision

129. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the general practitioner contract for a practice (details supplied) in County Kerry will be readvertised; if the practice will be kept open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48320/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

130. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [48332/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

131. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for patients to receive cardiac rehabilitation in Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48334/19]

132. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients on the waiting list for cardiac rehabilitation in Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48335/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 and 132 together.

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

Pharmacy Services

133. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding pharmacy fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48340/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Minister for Health I recognise the significant 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.

The regulations governing the current pharmacy fee structure were made under section 9 of the FEMPI Act 2009 and are set to expire at the end of 2019. Under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, these regulations must be replaced on 1 January 2020 to maintain a statutory basis for contractor payments and to prescribe the fees payable 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 my obligations under Section 43 of the 2017 Act, Department of Health officials have begun a process of consultation with the IPU, as the representative body, prior to the introduction of new fee regulations. My officials have met with an IPU delegation on two occasions and a detailed submission was received from the IPU on 8 November.

That submission is currently being considered by my Department in the context of the statutory fee-setting process as referred to.

General Practitioner Services Provision

134. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48341/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is committed to the provision of high-quality GP services through the GMS GP contract. Appointments in respect of new or

vacant GMS posts are made through open competition following advertisement and competitive interview. Periodically, challenges can be experienced in regard to the permanent filling of some GP posts. In areas where this challenge is experienced, every effort is made by local HSE management to ensure the provision of GP services to all GMS patients.

The HSE has repeatedly advertised the GMS list of 380 patients in an effort to put in place a permanent GP to serve the practice. However, the financial viability of a practice of this size is a challenge for GPs and it has not been possible to find a replacement.

As a result of this, the HSE wrote to the GMS patients served by this practice in early November 2019 advising them that the practice would close in December 2019 and providing them with information on how to find an alternative GP.

In light of the community reaction to this announcement, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare held a meeting with the local community and public representatives on Monday November 18 to listen to local concerns and to discuss any possible additional measures that could be taken to attract a GP to the GMS contract in Milltown. Cork Kerry Community Healthcare has also postponed the closure of the practice to early 2020 to provide time to the local community to work on possible additional measures.

Services for People with Disabilities

135. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the reduction in available service hours at a centre (details supplied) for persons with an intellectual disability; if sufficient funds will be provided to ensure full service is supplied to clients of the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48351/19]

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

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

Medicinal Products

136. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 154 of 13 November 2019, if he will expedite his considerations and publish the report without further delay in view of the valproate response project of the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48352/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has considered the report and I am due to receive a briefing on the HSE's Valproate Response Project from officials in the coming days. I expect the report to be published shortly.

Medicinal Products Availability

137. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make naloxone nasal spray available for use by personnel such as members of An Garda Síochána, the Fire Service and prison officers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48356/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Naloxone is a prescription-only medicine that, ordinarily, can only be supplied on foot of a prescription. It is used administered for the treatment of known or suspected narcotic overdose.

However, under the Medicinal Products (Prescription and Control of Supply) Regulations 2003, as amended (S.I. No. 540 of 2003), trained, non-medical persons, employed or engaged by a listed organisation, are enabled to administer certain prescription-only medicines to a person, without a prescription, for the purpose of saving their life or reducing severe distress in an emergency situation. The specific emergency medicines are listed in the Tenth Schedule to the Regulations and include intra-muscular and intranasal naloxone preparations following amendments introduced in 2018.

Listed organisations can include An Garda Síochána, the Fire Service, prisons, schools, sports clubs and community groups. In order for an organisation to avail of an emergency medicine without the need for a prescription, members of that organisation must complete an approved course of training regarding the administration of such medicines and the management of any adverse reaction. The Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) has established a framework for the education and training of persons to safely and competently administer these medicines to those urgently requiring care.

While PHECC approve these training courses, the decision to undertake the training lies solely with the organisation that wishes to gain approval under the Regulations to administer one of the scheduled medicines.

It is important to note however that notwithstanding the above, there is an existing and long-standing practice whereby any person may administer or assist in the administration of a person's personally prescribed medicine for the purpose of saving their life or reducing severe distress in an emergency situation. If a person has been prescribed a medicine, but is unable to administer it to themselves, such as in the case of an overdose, there is no legal impediment to another person administering that medicine to the patient.

Maternity Services

138. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the policy of his Department in relation to his plans to assist in the funding of the proposed transfer of the Rotunda Maternity Hospital to Blanchardstown, Dublin 15; if he has met with the board of management of the hospital regarding such a move; if his Department has conducted a population analysis of the Dublin 15 area and examined the expected future need for maternity services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48357/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In line with best international practice, it is Government policy that standalone maternity hospitals should be co-located with acute adult hospitals. The National Maternity Strategy, published in January 2016, reaffirms this commitment. In this context, the Rotunda Hospital will be relocated to the Connolly Hospital campus. Co-location will facilitate the provision of an appropriate environment within all our maternity hospitals and units to enable the delivery of a modern, safe, quality service where the woman's need for privacy and dignity is respected.

As the Deputy will be aware, the new children's hospital was originally planned for the

Mater site and it was proposed, as recommended in the KPMG report (Independent Review of Maternity and Gynaecology Services in the Greater Dublin Area) 2008, to redevelop the Rotunda Hospital on the Mater site. However, following the Government decision in 2012 to locate the new children's hospital at the St James's campus, it was necessary to revisit the earlier decisions regarding the relocation of both the Rotunda and the Coombe Women and Infants University hospitals.

A detailed review was undertaken by my Department, which considered a number of potential host sites for both hospitals, examining demographics, a range of clinical criteria as well as planning risks and site capacity. The Department engaged with a number of divisions within the HSE and with the Masters of both the Rotunda and the Coombe as part of the review process. In June 2015 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 I have also engaged with the Master of the Rotunda, the RCSI Hospital Group and the HSE in relation to the relocation of the Rotunda to Connolly, including meeting with these parties in July of this year.

Project Ireland 2040 provides €10.9 billion for health capital developments across the country, including funding to support implementation of the National Maternity Strategy. The relocation of the Rotunda Hospital to the Connolly campus is one of the key infrastructure projects which will be funded under Project Ireland 2040. It is important that we carefully plan all projects to meet population health needs and achieve value for money. This work is ongoing. While I am not in 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.

The Deputy will appreciate that 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. However, the Project Briefs for the relocation of the three stand alone maternity hospitals, namely the Rotunda, the Coombe and University Maternity Hospital Limerick, to acute hospital campuses, in line with the National Maternity Review will be progressed in 2020.

Maternity Services

139. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if he has examined a report by a person (detail supplied) that warned that if overcrowding continues it is only a matter of time before more infectious outbreaks occur; his plans to address the issues raised in the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48358/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Minister and his Department are aware of the concerns that have been raised by Prof Malone, Master of the Rotunda Hospital. The Minister met with Prof Malone and other representatives from the Rotunda Hospital, the RCSI Hospital Group, as well as the HSE in July 2019 to discuss potential interim works at the hospital.

The Minister asked that further consideration be given to the scope of the works necessary to address the infrastructural challenges, having regard to the plan to relocate the Rotunda to the Connolly Hospital campus. It was agreed that further engagement on a proposal was required across the HSE, and with the Rotunda. A revised and evaluated proposal is awaited from the HSE.

While the Minister recognises that some infrastructural development will be necessary at the Rotunda Hospital in the interim period, as Deputies will be aware, in line with Government policy to co-locate maternity services with acute adult services, the Rotunda Hospital will be relocated to Connolly Hospital. Co-location is considered international best practice and will best facilitate the provision of an appropriate environment within all our maternity hospitals and units.

Project Ireland 2040 provides €10.9 billion for health capital developments across the country. The relocation of the Rotunda Hospital to the Connolly campus is one of the key infrastructure projects which will be funded under Project Ireland 2040. In addition, the recently published HSE Capital Plan 2019 provides that the project brief for the redevelopment of the Rotunda will be progressed.

In a letter from mid-May 2019 relating to the infrastructural challenges at the Rotunda Hospital, Prof. Malone notified the Minister of an infectious outbreak involving ESBL-producing *Klebsiella* (a type of bacteria that is resistant to many antibiotics) and the risk to infants at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

Upon being notified of this outbreak, the Department of Health's immediate priority was for the welfare of the infants affected by the outbreak and the safe care of all infants at the Rotunda NICU. Consequently, the Department immediately sought assurances from the Hospital that safe and appropriate care was being provided to infants cared for at the NICU. In addition, the Department sought information regarding the immediate and medium-term actions being taken by the Hospital and Hospital Group to address the outbreak.

The hospital assured the Department that international best practice for managing infectious outbreaks has been followed by the hospital. The hospital also stated that an extensive action plan including both clinical and operational measures has been implemented to address the outbreak situation.

Antimicrobial resistance and the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections continue to be a significant priority for the Government of Ireland. Indeed, significant progress has already been made in implementing Ireland's National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2017-2020 (known as iNAP) and this work continues.

Hospital Waiting Lists

140. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the status of a surgery appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48359/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

141. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48364/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

142. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48366/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible

Hospital Appointments Status

143. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [48367/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

144. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [48368/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

145. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [48369/19]

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

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

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

Disabilities Assessments

146. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the case of persons (detail supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48376/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter it has been forwarded to the HSE for direct reply.

Paediatric Services

147. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will address concerns that Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin may lose its only consultant paediatric pain specialist that is also the only specialist here; if contingency plans have been put in place in the event that the consultant leaves in order that patients do not suffer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48389/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Children's Health Ireland to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

148. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding for the provision of health services will be provided to charity (details supplied). [48390/19]

149. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to agree a service level agreement for the provision of health services with a charity (details supplied). [48391/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 and 149 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Services

150. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take regarding the situation in Milltown, County Kerry in which there is no general practitioner service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48392/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I would like to assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future.

The Government is aware of workforce issues facing general practice in Ireland, including the increased demand for GP and Out of Hours services, and has undertaken a number of measures in recent years to make general practice more sustainable.

The conclusion of the Agreement on GP Contractual Reform and Service Development between the Department of Health, the HSE, and the IMO in May 2019 demonstrates the Government's determination to invest in general practice to ensure that it retains its place at the heart of the health service, and that it remains an attractive option for medical graduates. The Agreement will see an increase in expenditure of €210 million annually by 2023 on GP services, with specific increases in supports for rural practices and practices in urban areas of deprivation. The Government is also committed to increasing the number of medical graduates undertaking GP

training; the number has increased from 120 in 2009 to 192 filled places in 2019, with further increases anticipated over the coming years.

As of 1st November 2019, a total of 2,360 (94%) GMS GPs have signed up to the contract agreement.

Currently there are almost 2,500 GPs contracted to provide services under the GMS Scheme and as at 1 November 2019, 22 panels, or less than 1%, are vacant.

In relation to the vacant panel in Milltown Co Kerry, as this is an operational issue, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to this issue.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

151. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 368 of 16 April 2019, the additional funding his Department will provide towards the delayed digitalised registration system in the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland in addition to the contribution already made of €44,480; if the NMBI will be funding the remainder of the total project cost of €2,089,500 from nurses and midwives annual retention fees; the status of the expected new go-live date of the registration system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48409/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department recognises the importance of the digitisation programme currently being undertaken by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland.

As I advised previously primary responsibility for funding the digitisation project rests with the NMBI. My Department will consider any requests for additional funding should the NMBI be unable to meet the full costs of the project from within its operational budget.

I have asked to NMBI to update you directly on the go live date for the project.

Hospital Appointments Delays

152. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if he will take steps to ensure that a person (details supplied) is admitted for an appointment with the consultant rheumatologist at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48412/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

153. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the severe shortage of hospital consultants by which there are over 500 current vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48423/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to moving to a consultant delivered service. Notwithstanding the fact that consultant numbers in Ireland are low by international standards they continue to increase each year. At the end of September 2019 there were 3,190 whole time equivalent consultants working in the public health services. The number has increased by 125 in the 12 months to the end of September and by over 550 in the past 5 years. While it is not ideal, the majority of consultant posts not filled on a permanent basis are filled by locums or temporary staff to support the delivery of essential services.

The Government is aware that there are difficulties in filling certain consultant posts, particularly in smaller hospitals and in certain specialties, as identified by the Public Sector Pay Commission. The Commission in its Report published in September 2018 identified difficulties in attracting consultant applications for many posts at present and acknowledged that the pay rates for new entrants had been highlighted as a factor in this. The Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address the pay differential.

More recently, I published the Report of the De Buitléir Group in August. The Group was established to examine how to give effect to the Sláintecare recommendation on the removal of private practice from the public hospital system. My Department, together with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the HSE, recently met with both the IMO and the IHCA regarding Sláintecare, the De Buitléir Report and health sector reform and will be seeking to continue to engage with both bodies.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

154. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the total expenditure on the cross-Border directive since its inception; the organisations which are participating in the operation of the directive; the role of the HSE in operating this directive; the companies with which it is operating in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48424/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

155. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for hip surgery at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Navan, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48430/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Medicinal Products Availability

156. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a continued delay in the access to medication for patients with multiple sclerosis in view of the fact that there are a new drugs recently available and accessible in other EU countries, for example, siponimod; the steps he will take to expedite access of such drugs for patients; and the timeframe for same. [48467/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess a drug's clinical and cost effectiveness as a health intervention.

As a country, we invest heavily in medicines, to the tune of almost €2 billion annually. As of October 2019, there have been 29 new medicines and 5 new indications for existing medicines approved for reimbursement in the public healthcare system. The approvals to date represent an additional investment by the HSE over five years of approximately €220m in providing access to new and innovative treatment for Irish patients. It is expected that over 3,000 patients will benefit from access to these new medicines over the next 5 years

Notwithstanding the significant progress on drug costs achieved from price reductions under the pricing framework agreed with industry and commercial negotiations conducted by the HSE, the Health Service is still facing very significant challenges in relation to the affordability of medicines. The industry continues to develop very expensive products, particularly in the high-tech medicines area and the costs involved are a challenge for health systems even in countries with much greater resources than Ireland.

The HSE has received 2 applications for pricing and reimbursement of ocrelizumab (Ocrevus). Application 1 is for use of Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of Multiple Sclerosis (RMS) with active disease defined by clinical or imaging features. Following a number of rounds of commercial negotiations, an agreement was reached in relation to the commercial terms which will apply to this indication. The HSE intends to progress ocrelizumab for the RMS indication, which has been approved for funding from October 2019,

on a patient-specific basis for this indication. Application 2 is for the use of ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) in terms of disease duration and level of disability, and with imaging features characteristic of inflammatory activity. On 4 October 2018 the NCPE completed its assessment for this indication. They did not recommend that ocrelizumab be reimbursed for this indication. The HSE and the manufacturer have had a number of rounds of commercial negotiations in relation to this indication. Commercial discussions have concluded and the medicine has been reviewed by the HSE Drugs Group. The HSE Senior Leadership Team have received the Drugs Group recommendation. The HSE's final decision on reimbursement will take into consideration the criteria contained in the 2013 Health Act.

The HSE has also received an application for reimbursement of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol/Cannabidiol, THC/CBD (Sativex) which is indicated as treatment for symptom improvement in adult patients with moderate to severe spasticity due to multiple sclerosis who have not responded adequately to other anti-spasticity medication and who demonstrate clinically significant improvement in spasticity related symptoms during an initial trial of therapy.

The HSE commissioned a full HTA with respect to this indication in April 2018. On 25 September 2019, the NCPE received the applicant's submission and the HTA is currently underway.

On 14 November 2019, the EMA's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) recommended the granting of a marketing authorisation for the medicinal product siponimod (Mayzent), intended for the treatment of adult patients with secondary progressive multiple sclerosis (SPMS) with active disease. The EMA's decision on whether to grant marketing authorisation for siponimod will take into account CHMP's recommendation.

The Government wants new and innovative medicines to be available to our citizens as quickly as possible but this can only be achieved if medicines are priced by the pharmaceutical industry in a viable and sustainable manner. My Department and the HSE are working on making greater efficiencies in medicines usage through a range of initiatives both domestically and internationally to ensure the greatest possible access to new treatments for patients in Ireland.

The HSE's Medicines Management Programme (MMP), incorporating the Preferred Drugs initiative, is overseeing the implementation of a number of actions to bring about greater value for the taxpayer through cost-effective provision of medicines. These measures include the designation of preferred products with a focus on high-cost prescribing areas, in particular optimising the use of biosimilars.

I and officials have also been engaging over the past number of years with a number of voluntary EU forums. In June 2018, I signed the Beneluxa Initiative on Pharmaceutical Policy. This Agreement is in line with my objective to work with other European countries to identify workable solutions, in an increasingly challenging environment, to secure timely access for patients to new medicines in an affordable and sustainable way. In June 2019, Ireland became a Founding Member of the International Horizon Scanning Initiative which is being established as part of the work programme of Beneluxa.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

157. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown on the year-to-date distribution of the 2019 €75 million budget of the NTPF amongst each private and public hospital benefitting from same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48457/19]

158. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health the amounts paid to individ-

ual public hospitals receiving NTPF and other HSE funding for the purposes of insourcing and outsourcing of surgical procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48458/19]

159. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health the number and types of surgical procedures and treatments carried out to date in 2019 by each public and private hospital under the NTPF scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48459/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 to 159, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by officials in my Department and will be provided to the Deputy directly as soon as it becomes available.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

160. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the lack of pump services available for adults with type 1 diabetes in Sligo University Hospital (details supplied); his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48472/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

161. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the recent figures of the rising number of persons that are waiting on trolleys in Sligo University Hospital; his plans to introduce more beds at the hospital in the short term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48479/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to acknowledge the distress overcrowded EDs cause to patients, their families and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country.

According to HSE TrolleyGAR data, there was a 3.2% increase in patients counted waiting on trolleys at 8am in Sligo University Hospital ED this year up to the end of October 2019 compared to the same period last year. My Department has engaged extensively with the HSE this year to identify mitigating actions to bring down trolley numbers and waiting times in the ED in the face of growing demand.

The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November. The aim of the Winter Plan is to ensure that service providers are prepared for the additional external pressures associated with the winter period, including the prolonged holiday period, severe winter weather, seasonal influenza, and the spread of norovirus and other healthcare associated infections.

Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals.

The Integrated Winter Plan for Sligo University Hospital will be delivered by Winter Action Team 1 (WAT 1), whose membership includes the CEO of the Saolta University Health Care Group, the Chief Officer of CHO 1, and the CEO of Sligo University Hospital.

The HSE Winter Plan is supported by an additional €26m in winter funding nationally. This winter funding will support access to the Fair Deal scheme, and will provide additional home support and transitional care to facilitate timely hospital discharge and reduce congestion in EDs over the winter period.

Specific funding has been allocated to the Winter Action Teams to support initiatives at local level. The initiatives for WAT 1 include:

- added Medical Registrar for improved medical cover;
- rapid flu testing to reduce turnaround time to 2 hours;
- additional cleaning services to improve bed turnaround time out-of-hours;
- a reablement programme to decrease presentations and admissions;
- additional aids and appliances to facilitate timely discharge; and
- hospital avoidance measures to reduce the number of patients admitted for assessment.

The HSE is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects and has advised that preliminary design work and site investigations have been carried out for the proposed new ward block development and additional bed capacity at Sligo University Hospital. Planning approval was granted in July 2019 and the project is currently at the detailed design stage.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement, before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established. The final decision to proceed with the construction of a project cannot be made until the tender process has been completed and the costings reviewed to ensure that the proposal delivers value for money and remains affordable, and that sufficient funding is available to fund the project to completion, including equipping and commissioning costs. The delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process and is subject to the successful completion of the various approval stages, which can impact on the timeline for delivery.

Hospital Services

162. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health when the hospital will be permitted to obtain a new fixed cardio cath lab service to cover the north west region in view of the fact that the national review conducted to investigate the provision of the services here has not yet reported despite the timeline for its work to be completed being long overdue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48480/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): To date the National Review has completed a public consultation survey, collated and analysed information on activity levels in each of the Hospital Groups and all hospitals within each Group. A successful and well attended stakeholder consultation was held in November 2018. The Health Research Board - Collaboration in Ireland for Clinical Effectiveness Reviews (HRB-CICER) has completed an Evidence Review of Specialist Cardiac Services looking at (i) international standards for PCI centres (ii) international models that might be applicable to the Irish Healthcare system and (iii) the relationship between volume and patient outcomes for PCI. The Evidence Review has provided important guidance for the Steering Group thus far and arising from discussions at the Steering Group

they have been asked to complete one additional evidence review question which they have now completed and submitted to the National Review for comments and observations. Site visits to Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI) centres around Ireland commenced earlier this year and an international site visit to Glasgow is currently being organised. These site visits have included meetings with stakeholders in clinical, administrative, nursing and allied health professional roles. A visit to Northern Ireland was also undertaken to review the work of the Belfast Hospital Trust.

An additional workstream is being undertaken by the Health Intelligence Unit of the HSE with regards to Geospatial analysis and mapping of networks of cardiac services from a national perspective and a draft has been submitted to the National Review for comment and observations.

Work is ongoing on preparation of the National Review and the Chair is hoping to have the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services completed as soon as all streams of work have been completed.

Defibrillators Provision

163. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to support voluntary groups that wish to install cardiac defibrillators in their towns and villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48486/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): An Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) Steering group have finalised an Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy for Ireland, *“Putting Survival at the Heart of the Community”* and submitted it to the HSE Commissioners, who have accepted the recommendation of the Steering Group. The HSE are currently in the process of establishing an Implementation Governance Group to oversee implementation of the Strategy.

The overall aim of the OHCA Strategy is to increase the number of people who survive an out of hospital cardiac arrest in the Republic of Ireland through the development, implementation and evaluation of an out of hospital cardiac arrest strategy to increase survival rates. This work will support the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and Community First Responder Ireland (CFR Ireland) in their commitment to improve clinical outcomes for Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA).

The Strategy aims to make Ireland a leading ‘beating heart’ in Europe as a result of implementing a strategic plan derived from national and international experience in implementing targets which address all the elements in the Chain of Survival. In order to achieve the aims outlined, the Strategy discusses, among many other things, maximising public awareness of how to recognise OHCA; reducing emergency response time; the importance of cardiopulmonary resuscitation training; bystander CPR training; ‘CPR 4 Schools’; CPR training in local communities; CPR training for government and HSE employees; the establishment of 250 Community First Responder Schemes in Ireland by 2020; guidance on the purchase, display, positioning, accessing, use and maintenance of automated external defibrillators and much more.

Health Services Provision

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which diagnosis and treatment has progressed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48495/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Health Services Provision

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent of the diagnosis and treatment to date in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48496/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

HSE Staff Recruitment

166. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of the recruiting of a community geriatrician for County Kildare (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48523/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Farm Enterprises

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding social farming in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48372/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provided an allocation of over €713,000 for Social Farming in 2019 under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund (RIDF). A number of Social Farming initiatives are currently being implemented across the country and the following contracts have recently been extended for a further year:

- The Social Farming Network Project with associated funding of €350,000 will allow Leitrim Development Company to continue to develop the network of social farming in Ireland in conjunction with the regional hubs and to progress towards sustainable commissioning arrangements for the provision of Social Farming placements.

- Funding of €119,504 is being provided to Down Syndrome Ireland (Cork Branch) for the “Field of Dreams”, a horticulture centre for adults with Down Syndrome to enable them to participate in meaningful training and to provide “hands-on” horticulture work opportunities in a secure, caring and inspirational environment.

- Funding of €123,000 is being provided to South Kerry Development Partnership to continue to offer a choice to people with disabilities to engage with farm families and the community in meeting their personal development goals.

- Funding of €121,000 is being provided to Leitrim Development Company for the continuation of the delivery of evidence-based learning, best practice and policy recommendations

which should contribute to the promotion and development of social farming in Ireland.

The 2020 allocations under the Fund have not yet been finalised.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48279/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment Scheme/Areas of Natural Constraints schemes application on 17 April 2019. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including, in some cases, Ground Eligibility inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Ground Eligibility inspection. The outcome of this inspection is currently being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise, officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Payments have recently commenced to BEEP participants who have completed the weighing and submission of data in respect of **all** of their eligible animals. According to records submitted to the Department, the person named had not submitted weights for all his eligible animals. Therefore his payment has not yet issued. Final payments, including to the person named, are scheduled for December 2019.

Animal Welfare

169. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an animal welfare ex-gratia funding payment (details supplied). [48281/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In recognition of the importance of the work of animal welfare bodies, my Department have been providing funding directly to animal welfare bodies since 1995. This assists them in providing valuable services in the area of animal welfare. In December 2018, I announced record funding awards of €2,751,000 to 108 animal welfare organisations throughout the country.

An advertisement was placed in the national press earlier this year inviting applications from welfare bodies for funding in respect of their activities in 2020. Applications for funding from animal welfare bodies are assessed and awards made on the basis of certain criteria, including the level and type of assistance provided by the organisation in the delivery of care and welfare services to animals and the level of funding raised from other sources to support welfare activities. To date, 110 applications have been received including one from the organisation named. These are currently being processed and I expect to make an announcement on funding by the end of the year.

Bovine Disease Controls

170. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the status of new EU level proposals that will mandate the testing of cattle for TB every six months. [48282/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): New bovine TB rules are contained in the Delegated Act (DA) on Part II of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on surveillance, eradication programmes and free status of animal diseases. The original proposals from the EU Commission were quite severe and would have had a significant negative impact on Irish farmers. The original draft proposals included:

- 12 month minimum TB restriction period
- Prohibition on any inward/outward movement in restricted herds
- Derestriction only to occur following two clear tests 6 months apart
- Compulsory 30-day pre/post movement test in ALL cases

During the negotiation of the legal text, my officials engaged intensively with Commission counterparts and experts from other Member States on this issue. Ireland was successful in achieving considerable changes to the draft TB regulations to the benefit of Irish farmers in negotiations on all points but one - which though modified did not fully meet our requests.

The current draft text retains the 30 day pre/post movement test requirement, however only where the animal and the herd of origin have not been tested in the last 6 months. My officials had proposed the introduction of risk-based pre/post movement testing, supported by peer-reviewed scientific research undertaken in Ireland. Our analysis shows that this approach would be more effective than across-the-board pre/post movement testing. There has been very limited support from other Member States for our position.

Ireland has approximately 2.2 million movements (counting farm-to-farm and farm-to-mart-to-farm each as one movement for these purposes) per year - not all of these existing movements would have been affected by the proposed measures. The new rule would mean that these movements would have to either take place within 6 months of the herd test, or the herdowner (buyer or seller) would have to have a pre/post movement test carried out

Animal Welfare

171. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulatory regime regarding the sale of dosing products for animals and the points of sale to obtain such products by farmers; if there has been a recent change by which such products can only be obtained from a veterinary practice; and if he has considered the additional burden and cost this may place on farmers obtaining such dosing products for their animals. [48285/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The routes of sale, including the requirement for a prescription for the dispensing of animal preventative remedies such as worm and fluke doses, are governed by SI No. 786 of 2007 European Communities (Animal Remedies) (No. 2) Regulations 2007 and are determined by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA). There have been no recent changes to the current legislation.

However, new Regulations on Veterinary Medicinal Products (VMP) and medicated feed were adopted by the European Council on Nov 26th, 2018 and are due to come into effect from January 28th 2022. The objectives of the new legislation are to provide for a modern, innova-

tive and fit-for-purpose legal framework on VMPs, strengthen the EU action to fight antimicrobial resistance and ensure economically-viable production of safe medicated feed, as well as to foster innovation for further veterinary product development.

My Department is responsible for the transposition of the new Regulations into Irish Law and is currently developing a public consultation process to be undertaken in 2020 which will provide opportunities for submissions in a number of key areas.

Organic Farming Scheme Applications

172. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average time by weeks and months it took to process new applicants when the organic farming scheme was reopened for a brief period in November 2018 for 30 days; and the number of applicants that were informed whether they were eligible to join the scheme or not in each month after November 2018, in tabular form. [48286/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Organic Farming Scheme is one of our most successful schemes under our current Rural Development Programme. The Scheme has more than achieved its targets in terms of new land converted and the maintenance of organic land. The area of land under organic production has expanded dramatically as a direct result of my Department's investment. Latest figures indicate that there are now some 72,000 hectares under organic production, an increase of nearly 50% on the position at the start of the Programme in 2014.

As a further vote of confidence in the organics sector by this Government, my colleague Minister Doyle established an Organic Sector Strategy Group last year comprising relevant stakeholders and State bodies. Part of the remit of the Strategy Group was to consider the case for a possible re-opening of the Organic Farming Scheme. They recommended that it should be re-opened but on a targeted basis. The areas targeted were areas for which there is a clear market demand, and which are critical to the further development of the Organic Sector, namely horticulture, cereals and dairy. This recommendation acknowledged that the budget was very limited given the success of the current scheme and the overall spending within the RDP.

The targeted Organic Farming Scheme re-opened on the 19 November 2018 and closed for applications on 19 December 2018. As part of the eligibility process applicants were required to submit a BPS application, which had a closing date of 15 May 2019, and also had to submit their Organic training certificate by 1 September 2019. The determination of eligible applications and the ranking and selection process could only commence following the deadline for receipt of educational certification.

The timing of informing the applicants and their numbers is set out in the following table.

Type	Number	Time
Successful	55	9 weeks
Unsuccessful	111	9 weeks & 2 days

The Deputy should be aware that the predominant farming enterprises in 95% of the unsuccessful applications were not from the targeted sectors.

I fully expect that there will be a new Organics scheme under the next CAP. I would encourage all stakeholders to make their views known on the shape of this future scheme as part of the wider CAP consultation process.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

173. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the date by which Ireland formally must submit its final CAP strategic plan to the EU Commission; and if there will be increased demands on his Department in relation to administering the new delivery model and the move to performance instead of compliance based approach as set out in the European Commission CAP proposals published in June 2018. [48287/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The proposals for new regulations for the CAP 2021-27 were launched in June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan. The proposals, as drafted, involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments.

One important element is the new delivery model, which originally required Member States to submit their draft CAP Strategic Plan covering Pillar I and Pillar II expenditure to the Commission for approval before 1 January 2020. However, given the typically challenging nature of the discussions on the CAP and the EU Budget post-2020, there has been a delay in adopting these proposals.

As a result, the European Commission has recently published its proposals for transitional measures to allow for continuity between programming periods of 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 for CAP payments. The draft proposals provide for an additional, transitional year before starting the new CAP, which would require Member States to submit their draft CAP Strategic Plans to the Commission for approval by 1 January 2021. The proposals will be discussed by Member States over the coming months, and my officials are currently assessing their content.

I am open to working with the new delivery model and welcome the move to a more strategic, performance-based approach. However, this new framework must be based on a system which provides simplification for all.

The development of the draft CAP Strategic Plan will be a complex process, involving a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, a needs assessment, scheme design, an ex-ante evaluation including a Strategic Environmental Assessment, and an Appropriate Assessment.

A key element of the development of the Plan is regular stakeholder and public consultation. My Department has held a series of external stakeholder events, public consultations and public meetings since January 2018. In addition, in May 2019, I established a national CAP Stakeholder Consultative Committee, which meets regularly as the CAP negotiations evolve. In September, I launched a public consultation on the SWOT analysis, and as part of this process, my Department hosted a series of ‘townhall’ events in Mitchelstown, Sligo and Portlaoise, as well as a stakeholder workshop in Tullamore. The next stage of formal consultation is under consideration and its timing will be related to the progress of the discussions on the proposals.

In the meantime, my Department will continue to engage with relevant stakeholders and interest groups through existing forums and structures to update them on the progress of discussions and to hear their views.

Common Agricultural Policy

174. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine if his Department carried out an analysis on the new green architecture as set out in the new European Commission CAP proposals published in June 2018; and his views on this architecture and the new eco scheme proposed. [48288/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Commission's proposals for the post-2020 CAP commit to a more significant environmental ambition than the current CAP schemes. It is proposed that EU payments will be subject to a common baseline of conditionality with a number of requirements for good agriculture and environmental conditions for land. In Pillar I, an eco scheme, which would be mandatory for Member States to offer, but voluntary for farmers, is provided for. I support the provision of eco schemes. However, at this stage, it is too early to say how such a scheme, or other environmental schemes, might be configured.

The Commission proposals require 40% of the total CAP budget, at EU level, to be dedicated to environmental and climate actions. Member States must ensure that 30% of Pillar II funding - excluding funding for Areas of Natural Constraint - will be devoted to the environment and climate change.

I firmly support the principle that there must be a high level of environmental ambition in the CAP post-2020. I believe that the economic development of the agri-food sector goes hand-in-hand with the need for environmental sustainability. However, it is essential that the proposed new environmental conditionality is implemented effectively, with common standards that are relevant and effective. It is also important that the overall level of the budget acknowledges the public goods being delivered by farmers.

My key priority remains to continue to press for agreement on the CAP reform proposals and on the maintenance of the CAP budget as part of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for the post-2020 period. I will continue to work at building consensus among my agriculture colleagues in Europe in this regard.

Ministerial Meetings

175. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48294/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have had no meetings with such organisations during the relevant period.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

176. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in farm payments for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48319/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2019 Basic Payment Scheme/Areas of Natural Constraints schemes application on 16 April 2019. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including, in some cases, Ground Eligibility inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Ground Eligibility inspection. The outcome of this inspection is currently being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise, officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Beef Industry

177. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of new grading machines used as part of the recent trial at a company (details supplied) in operation across other European countries and the length of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48324/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Two VBS 2000 machines were used in the trial carried out at Slaney Foods as follows:

- The existing classification machine (VBS2000) currently authorised for classification.
- A second VBS2000 classification machine, installed for the purposes of the trial and fitted with the modified technology - a new digital camera and LED lights.

As outlined in the recently published report, automated beef grading equipment is also approved for use in several other Member States.

GLAS Payments

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48336/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into the GLAS 1 scheme with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received payment for scheme years 2015 - 2018.

The 2019 advance payment has not been made in this case as the application did not pass the GLAS pre-payment validations due to a validity issue with a claim for the Planting a Grove of Native Trees action.

A GLAS official has contacted the applicant directly to advise what they need to do to resolve this issue. Once this issue is resolved and the application clears all validations, the 2019 Advance payment will be processed.

TB Eradication Scheme

179. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of TB reactor animals in each of the years 2013 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by dairy cow, suckler cow, bull, steer or heifer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48337/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have attached tables showing the number of TB reactor animals disclosed for the years 2013 to 2018 and to date in 2019. This data has been extracted from the Animal Health Computer System. A breakdown is given by four different Herd Types, Dairy, Suckler, Beef and Other (other relates

to mixed enterprises) along with each animal type Cow, Bull, Heifer, Steer and Calf.

The total number of reactors in the tables for each year varies slightly from the official statistics. This arises because the official statistics are taken at a point in time yearly in early February and some processing may occur after this time which is not reflected in the official statistics.

Breakdown Table TB Reactors Year 2013

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Dairy	5,525	44	1,048	558	113	7,288
Suckler	3,682	102	1,250	918	206	6,158
Beef	242	7	373	1,039	16	1,677
Other	243	7	179	119	8	556
Total per animal type	9,692	160	2,850	2,634	343	15,679

Breakdown Table TB Reactors Year 2014

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Dairy	5,404	43	1,203	521	396	7,567
Suckler	3,679	107	1,448	996	260	6,490
Beef	245	10	312	944	99	1,610
Other	211	4	153	77	18	463
Total per animal type	9,539	164	3,116	2,538	773	16,130

Breakdown Table TB Reactors Year 2015

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Dairy	5,055	31	1,282	412	225	7,005
Suckler	3,356	74	1,535	1,102	237	6,304
Beef	226	7	362	1,043	8	1,645
Other	202	2	124	55	19	402
Total per animal type	8,839	114	3,303	2,612	489	15,356

Breakdown Table TB Reactors Year 2016

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Dairy	6,675	40	1,539	558	146	8,958

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Suckler	3,321	88	1,384	1,003	239	6,035
Beef	269	4	389	928	12	1,602
Other	118	3	163	74	7	365
Total per animal type	10,383	135	3,475	2,563	404	16,960

Breakdown Table TB Reactors Year 2017

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Dairy	6,388	8	1,506	492	170	8,564
Suckler	3,636	49	1,595	1,062	265	6,607
Beef	335	6	547	917	20	1,825
Other	117	1	131	87	13	349
Total per animal type	10,476	64	3,779	2,558	468	17,345

Breakdown Table TB Reactors Year 2018

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Dairy	7,182	10	1,329	453	200	9,174
Suckler	3,408	41	1,274	931	379	6,033
Beef	251	0	587	1,082	17	1,937
Other	103	1	148	148	3	403
Total per animal type	10,944	52	3,338	2,614	599	17,547

Breakdown Table TB Reactors Year 2019 to date

Herd Type	Cow	Bull	Heifer	Steer	Calf	Total per herd type
Dairy	5,916	9	1,014	541	202	7,682
Suckler	2,942	24	1,243	854	200	5,263
Beef	194	3	404	823	47	1,471
Other	108	0	103	95	4	310
Total per animal type	9,160	36	2,764	2,313	453	14,726

Greyhound Industry

180. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if greyhounds require a licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48371/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Greyhounds are subject to statutory dog licensing provisions similar to any other breed of dog as provided for in the Control of Dogs Act 1986 (as amended in 1992). Where multiple numbers of dogs are maintained on a premises, a kennel licence in respect of all the dogs can be obtained at a cost of €400.

TB Eradication Scheme

181. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which his Department deals with a farm TB breakdown when animals that have failed the skin test but pass both the blood test and the post-mortem analysis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48379/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the circumstances outlined by the Deputy, typically the animals would be deemed reactors and the holding would remain restricted.

A TB reactor is an animal that reacts to the TB skin test or blood test. Both tests are employed to maximise the efficacy of the TB eradication scheme. As in testing for any disease in any animal, there are a wide range of factors that impact on tests. These include duration of infection, level of immune response, age of animal, virulence of infection, settings of test, etc. Individual infected animals will react to various different tests in slightly different ways. This is normal and to be expected.

Less than 1 in 5,000 skin reactors are false reactors. Being able to see, with the naked eye, evidence of infection in animals after death is typically possible in approximately one third of reactors. This is not a verification of the skin test as it is a poorer test than the skin test.

My Department has produced leaflets and videos to explain how the tests work and what to expect from them. These are available on my Departments website at <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrol/bovinetb/tbleafletsandvideos/>.

Farm Enterprises

182. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding beef farm enterprises will exclusively receive in each scheme in 2019 both pillar one and two and schemes outside the RDP; the amount this funding equates to per animal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48399/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled and will be forwarded to him as soon

as it is available.

The Irish Government has provided significant financial support to the beef sector over the past number of years through national funding and the rural development programme.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) provides Irish beef farmers with up to €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) and provides a high degree of important performance data to beef farmers to drive efficiency through facilitating better decision making.

My Department has rolled out a range of other schemes from which beef farmers benefit, as part of the €4 billion RDP including GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit, of course, from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

In 2019, a further €20 million of exchequer funding was made available through the Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme, to encourage farmers to measure the weaning efficiency of their suckler cows.

And, of course, the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) has provided temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132.

BEAM is funded by a combination of EU aid and Exchequer support, provided in light of the difficult circumstances that Irish beef farmers have been facing as a result of the market volatility and uncertainty. Over 34,500 farmers had applied for BEAM at its closing date of 20 September, representing potential commitments of almost €78 million.

In recognition of the important income support role played by the ANC scheme, the total allocation for the scheme has been increased by €48m over the last two budgets (€25m in Budget 2018 and €23m in Budget 2019). In both 2018 and 2019, payment rates in the scheme were increased, with a targeting of increases corresponding to the different level of constraint in the different categories of land in the scheme.

In Budget 2020, I have provided almost €85 million in targeted schemes to support sustainable beef farming. This includes almost €45 million for the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), and a further €40 million for targeted supports. I intend to consult with stakeholders as to the use of these funds.

In addition, in the event of a No-Deal Brexit, my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform confirmed in Budget 2020 that a Brexit contingency fund of €650 million will be available to support our most vulnerable sectors, to be activated in tranches as the full impacts emerge. €110 million will be made available through my Department in the first tranche, of which €85 million will be provided in immediate supports for beef farmers. This will, of course, be supplemented by any exceptional aid provided from the EU under the CMO regulation.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme

183. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 350 of 8 October 2019, the progress in relation to outstanding payments under the REP scheme in the case of a person (details supplied). [48450/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Officials in my Department have completed the review of this case and have written to the person named earlier this week with the outcome of this review.

Afforestation Programme

184. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the factors taken into account by his Department when giving technical approval for an afforestation licence; the evaluation process used in respect of such an application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48517/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department manages the licensing process for four distinct forestry operations;

1. Afforestation;
2. Forest road works;
3. Aerial fertilisation;
4. Tree felling.

Applications for the first three operations must be made through a registered forester. Applicants do not require a forester to apply for a tree felling licence. My Department uses an online application system, to which foresters have access. The system contains extensive mapping layers enabling the location for the proposed site, along with other spatial information.

Reference Material and Guidelines

The application process is underpinned by various reference documents, which combined with information circulars are available on my Department's website. The main document is the *Forestry Standards Manual*. This manual complements, and should be read in conjunction with, *Land Types for Afforestation*, *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation*, *Irish National Forest Standard*, the *Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland*, *Standards for Felling and Reforestation* and other guidance published by my Department.

Required Documentation

Certain documentation, depending on the licence required, must be submitted with the application. An application form, site location map, certified species map and biodiversity maps are *inter alia* required for afforestation. Other documents will be required, registered foresters will be familiar with the requirements for the application.

Procedures

The application is submitted, and administrative officials will check to ensure it is complete. The application will be advertised on my Department's website and submissions from interested parties invited. At the same time, it is forwarded to a Forestry District Inspector and where required, the application is referred to certain prescribed bodies. The prescribed bodies include statutory consultees such as the local authority, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Inland Fisheries Ireland and/or An Taisce. 30 days is provided for public consultation and no decision may issue before that time. Where NPWS is consulted, that time is extended to a minimum of eight weeks.

If built heritage or archaeological monuments are recorded or found within or proximate to a proposed site, the application will be referred to my Department's Archaeologists so that the site can be assessed in conjunction with the National Monuments Service.

Upon receiving the application, the District Inspector may decide that further information such as revised maps, submission of a Natura Impact Assessment, hydrological report or a soil report is required. The applicant and their registered forester will be advised by letter of what information is being sought.

The District Inspector will desk assess the application and may carry out a field assessment where risk analysis selects the application or where the inspector's own knowledge will deem a field inspection necessary. All forestry licence applications undergo Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening.

I acknowledge that changes made to internal Appropriate Assessment Procedures (AAP) has resulted in delays to many files. These are beyond my Department's control as we are obliged to implement changes to AAP that were required following important Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decisions and their subsequent interpretation by the Forestry Appeals Committee and others.

Currently, we are amending the AA procedure in order to introduce a robust and workable system which will address the issues now faced. Introducing this system involves the recruitment of additional ecological expertise and changes in procedures for the forestry inspectorate. My Department recently advertised for additional ecologists and we also have access to external ecological support, which will be supplemented in due course. Inspectors have already undergone training and will receive appropriate support in delivering these new procedures. A categorisation of files affected by these requirements is also underway in order to best assess further action needed and by whom.

Notwithstanding that this has led to a temporary disruption in issuing afforestation licences, the Deputy should be aware that the sector has approximately 3,200 hectares of approvals issued this year which are shovel-ready and yet to be planted.

If the site is greater than 50ha, or 2km for a forest road, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be required. This will enable an Environmental Impact Assessment to be carried out. Where an application is less than these areas/lengths, that is sub-threshold, an EIS may also be required. This will be in situations where the proposed development is likely to have a significant environmental impact.

When the inspector is satisfied with the assessment of the application, recommendations will be provided. These recommendations will form part of the decision on the application, which will be issued to the applicant and their registered forester. The decision will also issue to any individual who made a submission on the application. The decision provides for 28 days in which to make an appeal, to the independent Forestry Appeals Committee. During that time, no forestry operations may take place.

Other Considerations

Apart from possible environmental impacts, the application will be assessed against other criteria, such as silvicultural requirements, the social impacts of the application and the local landscape. The application, where appropriate, must meet certain silvicultural standards. Tree felling licences may require a harvest plan and the application must consider the careful management of harvesting operations to minimise the potential effect on the surrounding area.

Questions - Written Answers
Greenhouse Gas Emissions

185. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the changes in the attribution of flights to Ireland that had previously been reported to another country in the scheme as mentioned on page 27 of the SEAI 2018 Report, Energy-Related CO₂ Emissions in Ireland 2005-2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48289/19]

186. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the increase in aviation emissions by carbon tonne that occurred as a result of the changes in the attribution of flights to Ireland that had previously been reported to another country in the scheme as mentioned on page 27 of the SEAI 2018 Report, Energy-Related CO₂ Emissions in Ireland 2005-2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48290/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No 525 of 19 November 2019.

The SEAI report referred to notes that emissions attributed to aviation in the EU ETS recorded in Ireland increased by 23% between 2015 and 2016, and indicates that this was mainly due to increased traffic but also due to some changes in the attribution of flights to Ireland that had previously been reported to another country in the EU ETS.

I am advised by the EPA that the most significant change to the aircraft operators assigned to Ireland occurred in 2015 when a new commercial operator (Norwegian Airlines Ireland) received an Irish Air Operator Certificate and was therefore attributed to Ireland. Emissions attributed to this operator in 2015 were 114,468 tonnes CO₂ and in 2016 were 960,025 tonnes CO₂.

Ministerial Meetings

187. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48297/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have not met with Insurance Ireland or other insurance companies since becoming Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

National Broadband Plan Data

188. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide time for a special debate in Dáil Éireann in advance of signing contracts in respect of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48313/19]

190. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to contact and or follow-up the groups that made submissions to the mapping consultation that closed on 30 September 2019 in the context of the NBP and interven-

tion areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48428/19]

191. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter regarding state aid (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48436/19]

192. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the material changes to the intervention area since the mapping exercise commenced; the number of premises added to the intervention area; the number of premises removed from the intervention area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48437/19]

193. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the breakdown of premises removed from the intervention area by operator type, that is, fixed line, cable, mobile, fixed wireless and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48438/19]

194. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there has been a minimum number of premises for the project discussed and or set between his Department and a company (details supplied); if so, the figure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48439/19]

195. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to sign-off on the national broadband contract plan ahead of the current mapping exercise being completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48440/19]

196. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the NBP will be set as a fixed-cost project; if it is future-proofed to account for inflation, overruns and or unforeseen obstacles and or costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48441/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 and 190 to 196, inclusive, together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) has been debated extensively in the Dáil, as recently as 23 October 2019. As a State intervention, the NBP must comply with the requirements scheduling of the European Commission's Guidelines on the application of State aid rules for broadband networks. The Guidelines require, amongst other things, that Member States carry out a detailed mapping exercise to identify as far as reasonably possible those areas where intervention Dáil business is required.

Since July 2013, the Department has engaged in an extensive process of mapping broadband availability in Ireland in order to identify premises requiring State intervention. The mapping exercise has been supported by a number of public consultations which have elicited significant response from industry and the public. The most significant changes to the NBP Map took place in 2017. The Department added a further 84,500 premises to the Intervention Area where commercial investment plans previously provided to the Department had failed to materialise. The update also removed 300,000 premises from the intervention area on the basis of what was then a planned infrastructure build, that eir entered into a Commitment Agreement in respect of.

Having consulted with industry on an ongoing basis, my Department recently conducted a final public consultation to close the mapping exercise in advance of the award of the NBP contract. Over 180 submissions were received from a variety of stakeholders, including 30 from large and small commercial telecommunications operators, with the remainder from local authority broadband officers and members of the public.

Following evaluation of the submissions and receipt of a positive State aid decision on 15 November, responses have been issued to the submissions from the commercial operators. Having evaluated the submissions received, approximately 38,000 premises were removed from the intervention area as commercial operators provided evidence that these premises can now access a high speed broadband service from an existing network. These premises relate to network deployment detailed in submissions received from eir and SIRO, that were evaluated as meeting the assessment criteria published by the Department.

In addition, approximately 37,000 premises originally identified as being served by commercial operators have now been included in the intervention area matter for the NBP, as commercial operators plans to serve these premises have not materialised. The map has also been updated for approximately an additional 2,000 premises identified in the latest Ordinance Survey Ireland data. The final Intervention Area now covers 537,596 premises.

The NBP contract, which was signed on 18 November, provides that the future proofed high speed broadband network to be deployed by National Broadband Ireland will also pass and connect new premises built in the intervention area over the next 25 years. While a download speed threshold of 30Mbps applied in the mapping process as a requirement, the tender submitted by National Broadband Ireland committed to a network that will initially provide services of 150Mbps to the majority of homes and up to 1Gbps to heavy data users and Small and Medium size Enterprises. There will be an upgrade pathway for the 150Mbps broadband product for consumers to 300Mbps by year 6 of the rollout and to 500Mbps by year 10. The 1Gbps product for businesses will also upgrade to 2Gbps by year 11.

These commitments are reflected in the NBP contract and will ensure that people living and working in rural areas, will have access to a similar quality of broadband service to people living and working in urban areas. The maximum possible investment by the State under the National Broadband Plan is capped at €2.977 billion over 25 years. This includes €480m for contingency costs and €354m in VAT.

Television Licence Fee

189. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the future of the television licence fee system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48344/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has accepted the recommendations of the Working Group on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting that the TV licence be put out to public tender. The Government has also agreed that an amendment to give effect to this decision be introduced at the Committee stage of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill, 2019. That legislation completed Second Stage in the Dáil in October 2019. The contract for TV licence collection will be for a period of 5 years in order to make it feasible for the successful tenderer to invest in the database and collection improvements. At the end of the contract period, the licence fee will be replaced by a device-independent charge to support public service content.

Questions Nos. 190 to 196, inclusive, answered with Question No. 188.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

197. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment when construction will commence on providing fibre optic cable to the home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48464/19]

198. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the first home will be connected to fibre optic to the home broadband under the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48465/19]

199. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will publish in full the European Commission state aid decision in relation to the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48466/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 to 199, inclusive, together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) contract, which was signed on 19 November, provides that a future proofed high speed broadband network will be deployed by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to people living and working in nearly 540,000 premises in the intervention area over the next 25 years. Work will begin immediately and over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next four years.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) will be deployed across all counties during 2020. The BCPs will be located in community centres, schools, library hubs and local GAA halls and will enable communities to get free public access to high speed broadband. The BCP locations are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

NBI will pass approximately 10,000 premises by the end of 2020. By the end of 2021, NBI plans to pass approximately 115,000 premises, with 70,000 - 100,000 passed each year thereafter until rollout is completed. NBI has indicated that the network rollout will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment. A deployment plan will be made available by NBI shortly.

I understand that the non-confidential version of the European Commission's decision will be published on the European Commission's website shortly.

Electric Vehicles

200. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce new fast electric car chargers in the Sligo area; the grants he will make available for businesses to develop these chargers privately; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48475/19]

201. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to make additional electrical resources and capacity available off the grid network system to power fast electric chargers for service stations and other major destinations located in the northwest region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48476/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 200 and 201 together.

The Climate Action Plan, which set a target of 936,000 electric vehicles to be on the road in Ireland by 2030, includes a range of actions to support the uptake of electric vehicles. These actions include developing the charging network to stay sufficiently ahead of demand.

There are currently over 650 standard public charge points and 96 fast chargers (the majority of which are operated by the ESB) in Ireland. A real-time map showing the ESB charge point locations, including the status and availability of these charge points, is available on the ESB's website at www.esb.ie/ecars.

Under the first call for applications from the Climate Action Fund, I approved funding of up to €10 million which will support the ESB to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network, with the ESB also investing €10 million. This project includes the installation of 140 fast chargers consisting of 90 150kW chargers (each of which will be capable of charging two vehicles simultaneously) and upgrading 50 existing standard chargers to 50kW chargers. The project will also involve replacing over 500 existing standard charge points with next generation high reliability models.

This is a multi-annual project and is expected to be fully completed by 2022. The locations of the chargers that will be installed as part of this project have not been finalised. However, a provisional map of the planned network, showing indicative locations, was developed by the ESB and has been published on my Department's website.

Budget 2020 provided €36 million in funding to my Department to support the uptake of electric vehicles and supporting charging infrastructure. In August, I announced funding to support the rollout of on-street public charge points for electric vehicles. A total of €2 million has been provided in Budget 2020 to support the installation of up to 400 on-street chargers in 2020. All Local Authorities can now apply for funding to the SEAI for this support to develop on-street charging infrastructure.

Businesses can already avail of accelerated capital allowances for the purchase and installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. This enables businesses to invest in energy efficient equipment, including electric charging infrastructure, and deduct the full cost of such equipment in the year of purchase rather than over 8 years.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

202. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider the recent reports by the EPA regarding inadequately treated sewage at treatment plants in counties Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal; his plans to grant funding to upgrade the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48481/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): This is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government in the context of his responsibilities regarding water quality. I have no function in this regard.

Recycling Policy

203. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to support local communities in rolling out the reverse vending recycling machine capabilities; his plans for such machines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48483/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the reply to Question No 193 of 13th November 2019. The position is un-

changed.

Community Development Projects Funding

204. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to support local community groups to protect natural sand dunes in areas such as Strandhill, County Sligo; the funding available to support same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48485/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have no function in relation to this matter. I understand that responsibility for issues arising at specific locations falls across a number of public bodies, including the National Parks & Wildlife Service and the relevant Local Authority.

Tourism Policy

205. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to enhance the tourism experience in Kells, County Meath. [45283/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Fáilte Ireland provides a wide range of supports for tourism businesses and attractions throughout the country to help create new experiences and enhance existing ones; extend the season and enhance the skills and business capability of tourism enterprises. At county and regional level, the regional tourism experience brands provide the overarching context for marketing, enterprise supports and tourism product development. For County Meath, including the town of Kells, the relevant brand is Ireland's Ancient East.

I have asked Fáilte Ireland to respond to the Deputy directly with further detail on specific plans to enhance tourism experience in Kells, County Meath. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Funding

206. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that cycling receives less than 2% of the €384 million increase in Budget 2020 in relation to the Climate Action Plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42159/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am aware there has been some confusion since Budget 2020 in relation to announcements made in relation to expenditure on active travel related programmes.

On Budget Day I announced allocations of €114 million toward active travel/greenways, comprised of -

- €91million toward active travel related programmes

- €23million toward greenways.

Those allocations included €9million divided equally between across active travel and greenways and sourced from the revenue derived from carbon tax receipts. This additional allocation from carbon tax receipts gave rise to a misunderstanding that active travel's total allocation

for 2020 was just €9million, which is completely incorrect.

I can inform the Deputy that since announcement of Budget 2020's overall funding parameters and as we move toward finalisation of allocations, and expected project level commitments next year, that there is likely to be an upward shift in the active travel related allocations for next year, with the two principal active travel related programmes now to be allocated just over €100million in total as opposed to €91million. (As already noted, there is also the announced allocation for greenways, which is additional to the €100 million.)

Within my Department active travel is also separately supported through funding provided under the BusConnects programme and the roads programme.

However, that does not capture the totality of taxpayer support for active travel as funding is also made available through other funding programmes such as the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and the Cycle to Work Scheme.

Road Projects Status

207. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated and the amount drawdown to date on the M50 enhancing motorway operation services project; the status of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46891/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my response which issued to Oral PQ 48179:

Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. However, under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, construction and operation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the Local Authorities concerned.

I would also like to stress that I fully recognise the demand pressures on the M50.

Demand management measures.

TII, along with other relevant stakeholders, has completed a number of measures on the M50 to manage demand and optimise operational efficiency, including:

- enhanced vehicle recovery services;
- establishment of an Inter-agency Incident Coordination Group;
- changes to merging and diverging layouts at junctions;
- establishment of signed Emergency Diversion Routes; and
- improved access for incident support and emergency services.

[Enhancing Motorway Operation Services (EMOS)]

TII has also commenced a project entitled 'Enhancing Motorway Operation Services (EMOS) to which the Deputy refers. This project will include Variable Speed Limits, referred to as VSLs and Lane Control Signalling.

[Variable Speed Limits (VSLs)]

The VSL regime on the M50 is intended to improve the operational efficiency of the motorway by

- smoothing traffic flow,
- improving journey time reliability, and
- reducing the number of traffic collisions.

As I mentioned, lane control signalling will also be installed as part of the project which will allow the rapid closing off of lanes.

Status of the project.

With regard to the status of the EMOS project, my Department is progressing the legislative arrangements to provide TII with the powers to operate VSLs. The legislative proposals will be contained in the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. A General Scheme of the Bill has been approved by Government for formal drafting, subject to two items being examined further.

These two items - for graduated speeding penalties and the carrying of driving licences - have now been examined in detail at Cabinet Committee and I shall be referring them back to Government shortly. In the meantime, work on drafting the other provisions of the Bill is under way in the Office for the Attorney General. I hope to publish the Bill before the end of the year.

I am also advised that, in order to progress this important measure, TII is extending the motorway traffic control centre at Dublin Tunnel to cater for the additional workload from introduction of VSLs. Phase 1, which includes the new Control Room, is expected to be handed over before the end of this month (November 2019). Tender competitions to procure the management systems and hardware for the operation and roll-out of VSLs for the M50 are progressing. Tenders for the software were returned at the end of last month (October 2019) and the tenders for the hardware are due back this week.

All the preparatory technical and logistical frameworks will need to be put in place by TII before VSLs can be introduced and become operational. As I have just explained, this work is ongoing and I expect that the first phase will be completed in mid-2020.

Public Transport Role

In addition, Project Ireland 2040 identifies a number of key public transport priorities including the BusConnects programme, MetroLink and the DART expansion programme. These will be delivered by the National Transport Authority (NTA) progressively and steadily over the short, medium and long term, to deliver a comprehensive public transport network that will match transport demand, alleviate congestion, provide an alternative to private car use and deliver a range of benefits over the next decade, all of which will have a positive effect on the M50.

Funding allocated and amount drawn down to date.

In 2019, TII provided an allocation of €16.75m to progress this project.

Approximately €12m has been drawn down to-date in 2019.

I very much support this project and look forward to its introduction.

Penalty Points System Offences

208. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is considering measures to ensure that in circumstances in which a person is found guilty of a penalty point offence, the correct number of penalty points are endorsed on their licence. [40157/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Section 22 of the Road Traffic Act 2002 provides for the recording of driving licence details in such cases in order to ensure that the record of the conviction can be connected to a licence record and the appropriate penalty points endorsed on that record. That section provides that the presiding judge shall require the person to produce his or her driving licence or learner permit to the registrar, clerk or other principal officer of the court, and the court shall record whether or not the licence/learner permit has been produced and the details of same

Following from difficulties with the working of the original section 22, I amended this section to alter the procedure via the Road Traffic Act 2016. This was done in consultation with the Courts Service, in order to ensure that the procedure was optimised.

In addition to legislation, there are also procedural matters to consider. Following the transmission of the relevant Court Order by the Courts Service to the Road Safety Authority (RSA) the information is placed on the National Vehicle Driver File (NVDF). A programme of work is underway to streamline this process involving my Department, the RSA and the Courts Service.

Primarily this programme will automate the current manual process for sending notification of driver disqualifications by the Court Services. Automation of this process will reduce the time taken to update my Departments National Vehicle Driver File (NVDF) with details of driver disqualifications. This reduction in time will reduce the risk of disqualified drivers obtaining licences because the National Driver Licensing Service (NDLS) were unaware of a disqualification. It will also help reduce any errors due to manual updating of disqualification notifications and driver records.

The programme of work involved is to be undertaken in two Phases. Phase I will automate records of disqualified drivers where a driver number has been captured while Phase II will cover all remaining records. Phase I is expected to be complete by the end of this year while Phase II will commence in 2020.

The average time for uploading a Court Notice taking account of the of its transmission from the Courts Service and uploading on the NVDF is 6 weeks, this includes the period of 14 days which is allowed for a driver to appeal the disqualification.

Road Projects

209. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if discussions have taken place within his Department on providing funding for the East-West link road and rural roads in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46619/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I have previously outlined to you on 9th July, 23rd July, and 17th October 2019, proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and

on national routes from Cavan to Sligo. As regards regional road aspect of the proposal, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design.

My Department has discussed the project with Cavan County Council and this year I gave an allocation of €100,000 to the Council to enable it to undertake a detailed appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Appraisal Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the route. The aim of the detailed appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for future development. Preparation of the appraisal is the responsibility of the Council.

As regards investment in rural roads more generally, Exchequer funding of €483 million has been made available this year to assist local authorities. Grant allocations for 2020 will be announced in January/February next year.

In relation to the national road element of the east-west route, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, construction and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. I have, therefore, referred your Question to TII for direct reply. If you do not receive a reply within 10 working days please advise my Office.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

210. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide feedback on applications (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48284/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October 2018. By the closing date, 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. This was the highest number of applications ever received. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. 619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May. The final allocations for capital works were announced in the last week with a total of €39.5m allocated to 1,009 projects.

My Department will be writing to all applicants, including the organisations referred to by the Deputy, in the coming days with details of the outcome of the assessment of their application. All unsuccessful applicants will also be invited to appeal the Department's decision if they

believe that their application was not correctly assessed according to the published assessment manual.

Bus Éireann Services

211. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to Bus Éireann of restoring the Dublin to Derry bus service on the previous basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48291/19]

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

Ministerial Meetings

212. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48309/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Since becoming Minister I have had two meetings involving Insurance Ireland.

On 16th November 2016 I met with Insurance Ireland and the Motor Insurers Bureau of Ireland (MIBI) for a general discussion on motor insurance.

On 28th March 2019 I met with Insurance Ireland and the MIBI to discuss Brexit Contingency Planning (Green Cards).

I have had no meetings with individual Insurance Companies.

Railway Stations

213. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is taking to address the lack of parking at Sallins and Naas railway stations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48404/19]

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which parking and/or other facilities are adequate and need to be provided respectively to serve the Sallins and Hazelhatch rail route to Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48508/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 224 together.

As the Deputies are aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area. Iarnród Éireann receive Exchequer funding via the NTA in relation to the provision of car parking at train stations on the heavy rail network in the GDA, including

Hazelhatch and Sallins and Naas railway stations.

Noting its responsibility in the matter, I have forwarded the Deputies questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Eligibility

214. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a club (details supplied) is eligible to apply for sports capital funding or other funding from his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48408/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

It is open to any organisation with a suitable project to apply for SCP funding. As a first step the organisation referred to by the Deputy should register at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie. More details about the Programme, including a guide to the registration process, can be found on the website along with all of the general terms and conditions of the scheme.

Even if a club does not own land, it is possible to receive funding under the SCP. Clubs which do not own land can still apply for funding towards sports equipment. Furthermore, if a club does not own land but has a registered lease in place with at least 15 years remaining at application stage, the club can apply for any works that comply with the general terms and conditions of the SCP.

It is anticipated that the next round of the SCP will be open for applications in the coming months.

Public Transport Data

215. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the current and capital expenditures for land transport broken down into the various sub categories from 2016 to date; the ratio of public transport and active travel measures to private transport in the case of both capital and current expenditures in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48432/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The ‘Where your Money Goes’ website, produced by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, available at the following link provides details of the Irish Government’s expenditure data by sector including Transport. It provides interactive charts with drill-down capabilities to Land Transport and trend analysis of expenditure over the last ten years.

<https://whereyourmoneygoes.gov.ie/en/>

The following table sets out the investment in Road Improvement/Maintenance versus the investment in PSOs and Public Transport combined from 2016 onwards (figures in millions):

Subhead	Investment Type	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 Budget
B3	Road Improvement/Maintenance	720,073	781,334	908,853	1,033,052	1,162,171
B7+B8	PSOs and Public Transport Combined	596,897	634,562	700,908	783,118	1,015,468
	Approximate Ratio	55%:45%	55%:45%	56%:44%	57%:42%	53%:47%

In the area of active travel measures, as the Deputy may be aware, my Department has recently launched a public consultation to review Ireland's sustainable mobility (active travel and public transport) policy. The review work arises from a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to review public transport policy "to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy". The public consultation is designed to give stakeholders, interested parties and the general public the opportunity to reflect on the information and analysis in the papers, to share their views, and to contribute to the development of a Sustainable Mobility Policy Statement.

Taxi Data

216. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of taxi drivers operating illegally; the measures he is taking to follow up on such taxi drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48452/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including measures against operators of illegal taxi services, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

Accordingly, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Transport Policy

217. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to support the introduction of electric or hybrid buses, taxis and other PSVs in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48477/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Improving public transport services and infrastructure, including national bus, taxi and other public service vehicles (PSV) networks, is central to providing an alternative to private car travel. In *Project Ireland 2040*, the government has indicatively allocated €8.6 billion over the period 2018 to 2027 towards the delivery of an integrated and sustainable national public transport system. Furthermore, I have made clear my intent, and that of the Government, to drive the transition from fossil-fuelled vehicles towards greener fuels and technologies.

While the public transport network, including buses, taxis and trains accounts for only a

little over 4% of Ireland's overall transport emissions, moving to low-emission alternatives for public transport is important in order to promote and normalise the use of lower emitting fuels and technologies. Such technologies offer significant benefits in reducing carbon and other harmful air pollutant emissions, and also play a strong leadership role in addressing the effects of climate change.

A Green Public Transport Fund operates at a national level to support the piloting and up-take of energy-efficient and alternatively-fuelled technologies for Public Service Obligation (PSO) operations within the bus fleet and the Small Public Service Vehicles (SPSV) sector. It also helps vehicle purchasers to bridge the price differential between such technologies and conventionally-fuelled vehicles.

Under the Fund, I established the national Electric Small Public Service Vehicle (eSPSV) Grant Scheme in 2018, as part of a range of other incentives to support electric vehicles. The SPSVs supported under the scheme include taxis, hackneys and limousines. The scheme currently provides grants of up to €7,000 for battery electric vehicles and up to €3,500 for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

This initiative has resulted in the registration of 70 electric SPSVs to date. I understand that, to date, one such grant was issued to an SPSV driver resident in Co. Sligo. The scheme will be continued and expanded in 2020 and is open to applicants across the country. Recognising the important role that the SPSV sector can play in demonstrating electric vehicle (EV) technology to a wider audience I have also agreed, under the *Climate Action Plan*, to improve the value of the eSPSV grant to those transitioning to wheelchair accessible electric SPSVs. This will help to make electric vehicles available to a greater number of our citizens. Furthermore, I have secured €1.5m of funding in 2020 to install dedicated fast charging infrastructure for the SPSV sector.

In the Heavy Duty Vehicle (HDV) sector, e.g. buses and trucks, electric technology is not quite as advanced as it is for smaller vehicles. To assist the transition of the bus and truck fleets to low emission vehicles, I intend to introduce a new Alternative Fuels Heavy Duty Vehicle Purchase Grant scheme in 2020. Under this scheme, which will operate at a national level, it is envisaged that grants of up to 30% of the cost differential between a traditional fossil-fuelled HDV and an equivalent alternatively-fuelled vehicle will be available. Complementary supports such as introduction of a new reduced tolling incentive regime for alternatively-fuelled Heavy Duty Vehicles will also be introduced.

Local Improvement Scheme

218. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the construction and funding of the eastern Garavogue Bridge in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48478/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Eastern Garavogue and approach road project is one of the 12 regional and local road improvement schemes identified in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 for implementation during the Plan period, subject to necessary approvals. These schemes are being implemented on a phased basis as funding allows. In the case of the Eastern Garavogue Scheme funding is also being provided from the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.

In line with the requirements of the Public Spending Code (PSC) and the my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework (CAF), an updated project appraisal for the scheme is being pre-

pared. Pending the completion of this appraisal and confirmation of its compliance with PSC and CAF, a construction programme has not been finalised.

Tourism Promotion

219. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for improved tourism marketing in the north west region; the efforts made to attract more tourists above the Galway to Dublin line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48482/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the tourism agencies. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Bus Services

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which it is expected to augment bus services for Kilcock, County Kildare in view of many requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48504/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including bus services.

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

Question No. 221 answered with Question No. 30

Rail Network

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timescale for the electrification of the commuter rail route Dublin to Confey, Leixlip, Maynooth and possibly Kilcock, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48506/19]

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

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area. This includes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme which provides for electrification of the rail network in the GDA including the Maynooth line.

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

within 10 days.

Public Transport Review

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which an examination has been undertaken of the commuter facilities from Dublin to Kilcock via Confey and Leixlip, County Kildare with a view to identifying shortfalls or deficiencies in the facilities which need to be addressed in the short and medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48507/19]

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which a coordinated management plan in respect of road and rail services facilitating the north County Kildare commuter belt is ongoing or can be facilitated with a view to maximising all opportunities to improve quality and availability of the most effective and energy efficient methodology in terms of road and rail transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48510/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 and 226 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area including north County Kildare, in consultation with the Public Transport companies.

Noting the responsibility of the NTA, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply on the specific issues raised. Please advise my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Question No. 224 answered with Question No. 213.

Traffic Management

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the up-to-date proposals in relation to the alleviation of traffic congestion on the M4 Kilcock to Dublin which is under capacity; if the extent of upgrading on the route has been agreed; if so, the likely timescale of its implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48509/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the improvement, maintenance and upgrading of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Question No. 226 answered with Question No. 223.

Tourism Industry

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he expects new tourist markets to open up with particular reference to the use of historical sites, monuments and houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48511/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the tourism agencies. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Industry

228. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which Ireland can be further developed as an attractive international conference location; if particular deficiencies in respect of required facilities in this regard have been identified and will be remedied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48512/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Business tourism overall, including conference tourism, has been an area of growth in recent years and one where Ireland continues to compete very successfully internationally. The tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, have operational responsibility for the development and promotion of this sector. Fáilte Ireland is responsible for developing business tourism strategy and, internationally, it works with Tourism Ireland under the *Meet in Ireland* brand to support the positioning of Ireland as a world-class conference destination.

The *Meet in Ireland* team works collaboratively with key stakeholders and, through its Conference Ambassador Programme, aims to secure high profile conferences for Ireland. It also offers training and trade supports for Irish and international businesses planning to host their conferences here.

In terms of facilities, a good stock of attractive high-quality hotels, operating to best international standards, is essential for the effective performance of the industry. In this regard, the quality of Ireland's hotels and other conference facilities is a key part of our business tourism offering and is instrumental in attracting international conferences to Ireland. We also have an excellent dedicated national conference centre - the Convention Centre Dublin (CCD) - which was developed to increase Ireland's share of the international conference market, thereby increasing tourism revenues.

I am satisfied with both the quality of our conference facilities and with the ongoing efforts of the tourism agencies, who continue to be very active in competing for and securing the hosting of international conferences in Ireland.

Sport and Recreational Development

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which sporting tourism has been developed in co-operation with the various sporting or recreational organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48513/19]

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

dan Griffin): I have answered another question today from the Deputy regarding the collaborative approach to attracting major international sporting events. For this reason, I am interpreting the Deputy's reference to "sporting tourism" in this question as referring to tourism based on sport and recreation leisure activities, or "activity tourism" (rather than to tourism relating to major sporting events).

My Department's Tourism Action Plan 2019-2021 commits to developing and enhancing tourism experiences within the framework of Project Ireland 2040. In this regard, the Deputy will be pleased to note that investment in activity-based tourism is one of the priority areas for tourism capital investment under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 in order to provide the type and quality of experience that visitors are seeking. In terms of cooperation with relevant organisations, I can assure the Deputy that my Department and Fáilte Ireland take a consultative and collaborative approach to activity tourism-related projects and initiatives with which we are involved.

With regard to Greenways, submissions received during the public consultation phase of the development of my Department's Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways included ones from Sport Ireland and from several cycling groups, including Cyclist.ie (the representative body for everyday cyclists). These views were taken into account as part of the finalisation of the Strategy. Sport Ireland also formed part of the assessment panel that looked at applications for funding under the recent funding call where €40m was allocated to 10 Greenway projects around the country.

In terms of other aspects of our overall activity tourism offering, Fáilte Ireland works closely with other relevant parties, including Sport Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development. One key collaboration is Fáilte Ireland's partnership with the Department of Rural and Community Development on its Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, which comes under the responsibility of the Minister for Rural and Community Development, to support the development of new and enhanced outdoor recreation infrastructure and amenities throughout Ireland.

In order to help ensure alignment of efforts across all relevant Government Departments and State agencies, the Deputy will be pleased to note that officials from my Department and from Fáilte Ireland participate in the National Outdoor Recreation Group, which comes under the responsibility of the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht - a cross-organisational group of public service recreational infrastructure providers, which aims to coordinate the approach to outdoor recreation across State-owned lands and waterways. Fáilte Ireland is also a member of Comhairle na Tuaithe (under the responsibility of the Minister for Rural and Community Development) which was, earlier this year, given a strengthened mandate with regard to the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland.

Sports Capital Programme Data

230. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount invested by way of capital grants or other financial assistance to providing and improving facilities the various sporting organisations nationally in the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48514/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Details of all allocations and payments under the Sports Capital Programme are published on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/471ed5-sports-capital-allocations/>.

Details of all allocations under the Local Authority Swimming Pools Programme are published on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/27c4d1-local-authority-swimming-pool-programme/>.

Sports Events

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which ongoing efforts continue to be made to encourage international sporting bodies to include Ireland in their list of locations for major events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48515/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The hosting of major sports competitions, in both participative and spectator sports, can provide great opportunities to showcase Ireland and drive international visitor numbers. In addition, the media coverage of sports events helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination.

Accordingly, I am very supportive of the work of the tourism agencies and the national governing bodies of sport to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs and benefits involved in any State financial support, in particular the number of overseas visitors.

Fáilte Ireland provides financial assistance, subject to eligibility criteria, to applicants who are proposing to bid to host international events (including sporting events) in Ireland that would attract significant numbers of international visitors. When an event with international tourism appeal is confirmed for Ireland, Tourism Ireland would then promote it in relevant markets overseas.

In terms of forthcoming sporting events, Ireland will host four games as part of the UEFA EURO 2020 football tournament in June 2020 - three group games and one round of 16 game. The bid to host was a collaborative effort between the Football Association of Ireland, Dublin City Council and my Department. In the sport of golf, the return of the Ryder Cup to Ireland in 2026 was announced in July of this year. This major event will take place in Adare, Co Limerick, and officials in the Department and the State agencies will be working closely with the event organisers in relation to the planning and organisation of the event.

Minister Ross and I also support efforts to explore possibilities to host other major sporting events. With regard to soccer, we welcomed the announcement by the FAI and IFA of their intention to submit a joint bid to host the UEFA European Under 21 Championships in 2023. In addition, the national football associations of the United Kingdom and Ireland are in discussions about the feasibility of bidding to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup. This consideration is at an early stage.

Sport Ireland and Fáilte Ireland have both supported the bid to host the European Cross-Country Championship, which was successful and now will be hosted in Dublin in December 2020.

Tourism Policy

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he encourages overseas bodies to use Ireland as a base for their international

conferences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48516/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the tourism agencies. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Industry

233. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which the tourism sector is expected to grow in 2020 with consequent benefits to the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48524/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Revenue from overseas visitors to Ireland reached record levels in 2018 and the tourism sector continues to perform strongly this year following 8 consecutive years of growth. Overseas visitor data released by the CSO for the first half of 2019 show that spending in Ireland by overseas visitors was €2,276 million, up 0.3% on the same period in 2018. Fáilte Ireland estimates that the overall tourism employment figure is now greater than 260,000.

In Budget 2020, I secured an allocation of €186 million for tourism, up 10% (over €17m) on the 2019 allocation, which puts the sector in a strong position to grow next year. The additional resources in 2020 are primarily directed at tourism product development, including Greenways, and build on the €35 million increase in 2019. Furthermore, €7 million is being provided in a 2019 supplementary budget, to support accelerated tourism marketing initiatives aimed at mitigating the impacts of Brexit. Budget 2020 also provided for an additional €40 million contingency fund in the event of a No-Deal Brexit.

Fáilte Ireland recently unveiled its plans for 2020 which focus on helping to sustain and support the tourism industry region by region.

Tourism Ireland will launch its 2020 marketing plans in early December. These plans will be consistent with the tourism commitments under the Government's Global Ireland Strategy. Under this Strategy, we are committed to developing tourism from new and emerging tourism markets with potential for Ireland. In Budget 2019, I provided almost €4 million in additional funding to Tourism Ireland to enable it to commence the implementation of strategies for growth in these new and emerging markets.

As the Deputy may be aware, in July of this year, the Government adopted new Tourism targets out to 2025. The headline target is revenue from overseas tourists of €6.5 billion (in real terms) by 2025. Secondary targets have also been set and they are: employment in the sector increasing to 310,000; and 11.6 million overseas tourist visits by 2025.

Ministerial Meetings

234. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of times she has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies she met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48296/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have not met with insurance companies or with Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016.

Ministerial Meetings

235. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48308/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department was established on 19 July 2017. The following table lists the meetings with insurance companies from that date until now.

I can confirm that I have not met with Insurance Ireland since the formation of the Department.

25/10/17	IPB InsuranceGeorge Jones – Chairman & Group Non Executive DirectorMichael Garvey – Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director	To explore the role of IPB in providing funding to community initiatives
02/10/19	IBP Insurance Michael Garvey (CEO) Matt Rafferty (Director of Underwriting)	To discuss the current insurance environment for community groups and the potential forinsurance for farmers who provide access to their lands for recreational users.

Ministerial Meetings

236. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of times she has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies she met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48301/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised that the then Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar T.D. had meeting with Insurance Ireland in January 2017.

Date of Meeting	Persons/Bodies met with	Purpose of Meeting
18 January 2017	Insurance Ireland Ann Kelleher Gary Marshall Tom Browne Denis McLoughlin Dave Roberts Alex Koslowski Anthony Brennan Kevin Thompson Jennifer Hoban David Harris	to discuss a Universal Pension system

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

237. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion the reason there has been such a delay in publishing the new road map or national action plan for social inclusion; when it will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48321/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The new social inclusion strategy, ‘Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2019-2025’, has been developed following consultation with relevant Government Departments and other stakeholders. The Roadmap is currently being finalised and it is expected that the new strategy will be published shortly following Government approval.

Occupational Injuries Benefit Eligibility

238. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48322/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person referred to by the Deputy (details supplied) was medically assessed for eligibility for Occupational Injuries Benefit by one of the Department’s Medical Assessors on 1st February 2019 at which the Medical Assessor determined that the medical evidence indicated the person was capable of other lighter category work. The case was reviewed on 30th July 2019 at which a different Medical Assessor in the Department having reviewed all current and previous available medical evidence, determined the person was still not incapacitated from all categories of work.

I am advised that in assessing the claim, the Medical Assessors have cognisance of the occupation of the client as Kitchen Hygiene Manager/Kitchen Porter Supervisor and agree with the Occupational Health Physician that the current job is not suitable for the person in view of his medical condition, however, the medical condition should not preclude the client from other lighter categories of work within the organisation.

In regards to the medical appointment, the amount of time given by a Medical Assessor to a customer at an assessment in-person may vary from case to case, depending on the volume of medical evidence to be assessed and the level of complexity involved with the case. The case was reviewed by the Chief Medical Officer and given the volume, content and detail in the Medical Assessor’s report of the 1st February 2019, I am advised that it is unlikely that the case could have been completed in 10 minutes.

I hope this clarifies the queries for the Deputy.

Household Benefits Scheme

239. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of allowances for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48329/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the person concerned is in receipt of Disability Allowance, he may have an entitlement to the Household Benefits Package. An application form has been issued to the person concerned for completion.

On return, the person’s eligibility for the Household Benefits Package will be examined and

the person will be notified of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

240. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48330/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 21 October 2019. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

241. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork is in receipt of a reduced rate of illness benefit. [48343/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Person concerned is in receipt of Illness Benefit at the graduated rate of €91.00 per week.

The rate of payment depends on the person's level of earnings in the relevant tax year, in this case the relevant tax year is 2017. Where the average weekly earnings are less than €300 per year a graduated rate applies. This person's earnings in 2017 were €0.00.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

242. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average monthly rent supplement payment for each quarter of 2019 to date; the average monthly rent supplement payment for each county; the number of recipients by county for each quarter of 2019 to date, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48347/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement continues its vital role in supporting families and individuals in private rented accommodation, with the scheme supporting approximately 17,680 recipients for which the Government has provided €132.4 million for 2019.

In recognition of the on-going rental market difficulties, the Department continues to implement a targeted case-by-case flexible payment policy approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the rent limits. To date, in excess of 14,200 cases have been provided additional flexible payment arrangements, having received support in excess of the prevailing rent limits.

Statistics in relation to average payments and the number of recipients supported by the scheme by County are provided in the following tabular statements:

Quarter	No. of Recipients	Average Monthly Rent Supplement
Q1 2019	21,959	€515.60
Q2 2019	20,156	€516.71
Q3 2019	18,265	€521.54

County	Average Monthly Rent Supplement Q3 2019
CARLOW	€350.14
CAVAN	€314.47
CLARE	€308.26
CORK	€450.49
DONEGAL	€227.57
DUBLIN	€634.17
GALWAY	€382.04
KERRY	€287.85
KILDARE	€508.44
KILKENNY	€380.46
LAOIS	€429.63
LEITRIM	€216.08
LIMERICK	€365.20
LONGFORD	€291.38
LOUTH	€378.62
MAYO	€243.87
MEATH	€479.51
MONAGHAN	€170.75
OFFALY	€252.08
ROSCOMMON	€277.28
SLIGO	€254.85
TIPPERARY	€275.10
WATERFORD	€261.18
WESTMEATH	€370.46
WEXFORD	€327.53
WICKLOW	€527.11

Rent Supplement Recipients by County Q1- Q3 2019

County	No. of Recipients at the end of Q1 2019	No. of Recipients at the end of Q2 2019	No. of Recipients at the end of Q3 2019
CARLOW	201	174	149
CAVAN	181	171	157
CLARE	98	71	63
CORK	2,573	2,466	2,255
DONEGAL	82	84	72
DUBLIN	11,381	10,526	9,627
GALWAY	1,011	905	822
KERRY	726	690	647
KILDARE	981	934	861
KILKENNY	110	95	88
LAOIS	207	165	128
LEITRIM	74	65	58
LIMERICK	448	412	386
LONGFORD	109	76	66
LOUTH	177	142	123
MAYO	324	289	276
MEATH	243	200	163
MONAGHAN	106	102	108
OFFALY	71	64	60
ROSCOMMON	207	180	151
SLIGO	72	67	66
TIPPERARY	225	220	188
WATERFORD	117	100	89
WESTMEATH	571	507	450
WEXFORD	683	572	486
WICKLOW	981	879	726
Grand Total	21,959	20,156	18,265

Carer's Allowance Applications

243. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48360/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 21 August 2019.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 7 November 2019 and the first payment issued to his nominated bank account on 14 November 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 22 August 2019 to 13 November 2019 also issued to his

nominated bank account on 14 November 2019.

The person concerned was notified on 7 November 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

244. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48362/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 23 July 2019, in respect of two care recipients.

In the case of the first care recipient, the application was awarded to the person concerned on 19 November 2019 and the first payment will issue to his nominated Post Office on 5 December 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 25 July 2019 to 4 December 2019 will issue shortly.

In the case of the second care recipient, it is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer concluded that the evidence did not indicate the requirement for full-time care was satisfied for the second care recipient.

The person concerned was notified on 19 November 2019 of these decisions, the reasons for them and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

245. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the plans in place for persons that have to retire at 65 years of age but cannot receive the pension until they are 67 years of age. [48363/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rationale for the increase in the pension age is twofold, first to recognise that due to improvements in health and work conditions people have the capacity and the desire to work beyond

what would traditionally have been seen as a retirement age. Second, as life expectancy increases, to help maintain the sustainability of our pensions system. In order to provide for sustainable pensions and to facilitate a longer working life, legislation passed in 2011 provides for an increase in the State pension age in three separate stages. In 2014, the State pension age was standardised at 66. This will be increased to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. Many other EU/OECD countries are making similar provisions. The Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 has stated that future changes in State pension age after 2035 will be based on research into life expectancy.

This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age.

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to State pension age, and so the question of claiming a social protection payment would not arise. Where this is not possible and a person ceases their employment before reaching State pension age, they may if they do not find alternative employment apply for either the jobseeker's benefit or jobseeker's allowance schemes. Jobseeker's payments are currently paid to eligible jobseekers aged 18 to 66 years subject to the person satisfying the general scheme conditions. Social Welfare legislation states that jobseeker payments may be made until the person reaches pensionable age provided they satisfy the necessary contribution conditions.

It is important to note that there is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement age of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so. In this regard, the Workplace Relations Commission has produced a Code of Practice on Longer Working and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has published guidance material for employers on the use of fixed-term contracts beyond normal retirement age.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Data

246. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 303 of 24 October 2019, the number of the women in receipt of the State pension (contributory) based on pre-September 2012 bands that are not in the highest band that would have qualified for a higher band if they could be assessed under the homemakers' scheme or the home carers' scheme; the number of the 23,822 women listed in the highest band of the current State pension (contributory) based on pre September 2012 bands that include the 10,808 women that fall within the invalidity saver cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48384/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Homemakers Scheme was introduced on 6 April 1994 to make qualification for state pension (contributory) easier for a claimant who took time out of the workforce for caring duties. It allows up to 20 years (since 1994) spent caring for children under 12 years of age or for an incapacitated person(s) to be disregarded in calculating a person's yearly average number of contributions and credits, and for homemaker credits to be awarded for homemaking periods of less than a full contribution year.

In January 2018, HomeCaring Periods were introduced as part of the interim total contributions approach (TCA) to the calculation of pension entitlement for those state pension (contributory) customers born on or after 1 September 1946 and in receipt of pension on post-2012 Budget rates. The TCA provides for up to 20 years of home caring periods in that pension entitlement calculation for applicants who took time out of the workplace for parenting or caring duties. I am advised that it is unknown how many on pre 2012 reduced rates would qualify for a higher rate under the TCA. These claims were not reviewed as they were not affected by the 2012 Budget changes.

According to the most recent records of my Department, 39,557 women are in receipt of state pension (contributory) under the pre-Budget 2012 rate bands at less than the maximum rate of pension. Of these, 707 women could not have benefited from the Homemakers Scheme as they were pension age before the introduction of the scheme in 1994. The provisions of the Homemakers Scheme would have been applied in processing the remaining claims if the persons concerned had advised of their caring duties in their application. It should be noted, however, that while a person's yearly average may increase under the provisions of the Homemakers Scheme, it may still remain within the same rate band and thus may not result in an increase in pension.

The 23,833 women on the maximum rate of state pension (contributory) are those who have been assessed with a yearly average of 48 contributions or over. The 10,808 who were in receipt of Invalidity Pension at maximum rate prior to their 66th birthday and who automatically transferred to the maximum rate of State pension (contributory) on reaching pension age are not included in the figure of 23,833.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Eligibility

247. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if parents of a child must be engaged in civil partnership and-or married to avail of parent benefit (details supplied); if couples that cohabit are also entitled to parent benefit in respect of children they may have following the introduction of the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48396/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Parent's benefit is available for all parents of new babies born or children adopted from 1st November 2019 to care for their child. This benefit is family-friendly and flexible, allowing parents to take leave for one week or two at a time. Each parent will be able to take the new paid leave any time during their child's first year. This is in addition to existing maternity, adoptive and paternity benefits.

The benefit is available to a parent or adopting parent of a child including their spouse, civil partner or cohabitant as the case may be.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 633 of 22 January 2019, if she will provide a

further update in relation to the proposed changes of the pension scheme in 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48398/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The introduction of a Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to establish the level of entitlement for all new state pension contributory claims was signalled by the then Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010.

Consultation is a very important part of the development and design of the new pension. With this in mind, I launched a public consultation on the design of the TCA on the 28th of May 2018 to which a wide variety of stakeholder groups were invited. A number of workshops were also held on the day to elicit views and feedback.

Shortly afterwards, Oireachtas members were invited to a detailed briefing by my officials in Leinster House. The consultation was open for over three months and the Department received almost 300 responses from individuals and organisations. Those submissions outlined the views of respondents on the issues of most interest to them.

Having carefully examined the outputs of the consultation process, my Department is now designing the scheme and I intend to bring a proposal to Government setting out that design in the near future. When the Government has agreed the approach to be taken, I will initiate the work required to introduce this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

249. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48407/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a successful appeal, this gentleman has been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 17 April 2019. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 11 December 2019.

Arrears of payment due, will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

250. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that the application was received by his Department on 1 March 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48410/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last or second last complete contribution year before the relevant date for their claim.

The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on 01 March 2019. The claim was disallowed on 22 March 2019 on the grounds that the contribution conditions under national legislation for the scheme were not satisfied.

EU Regulations provide that insurance contributions made in any other EU Member State may be aggregated with Irish contributions in order to satisfy the contribution conditions for IP. A request was sent to the UK social security authorities requesting the gentleman's UK insurance record. Receipt of this information confirms that he satisfies the contribution criteria under EU Regulations.

As well as satisfying the contribution criteria, a person must satisfy the medical conditions for the scheme. His claim has been disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme are not satisfied. He was notified on 18 November 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

251. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of illness benefit payments for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48413/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Person concerned is due to receive her payments each Monday, however if there is a delay in the Department receiving her medical certificate it can result in late payments due to late processing.

A payment of €203 was processed November 15th and another payment of €203 was processed November 18th. Payment by EFT may take two to three days to appear in accounts.

The Person concerned is medically certified as unfit for work until 2nd December 2019 and all monies due have now issued to her. If she is sick after that date she need to get further medical certification.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

National Minimum Wage

252. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the payment of the national minimum wage as recommended by the low pay commission with specific reference to legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48425/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As part of Budget 2020, the Government accepted in full the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission that the Minimum Wage be increased by 30c to €10.10. The Commission made its recommendation on the basis of an orderly Brexit. In developing its recommendation on the

National Minimum Wage, the Low Pay Commission assessed various economic indicators such as changes in earnings, exchange rates, employment, unemployment, productivity, international minimum wage comparisons, the need for job creation and the likely impact of the National Minimum Wage changes on levels of employment, cost of living, and national competitiveness.

Although there is still optimism of a Brexit deal being ratified, the possibility of a disorderly Brexit is still present and therefore the economic circumstances which will apply in 2020 continue to be very uncertain. Nevertheless, the Government has accepted in full the recommendation of the Commission, but has decided to defer a decision on when the Commission's recommendation will commence until the outcome of Brexit becomes clearer.

I intend to make provision in the Social Welfare Budget Bill to allow me to set the National Minimum Wage for 2020 in line with the Commission's proposals, once the situation in respect of Brexit is clarified.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

253. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the efforts made to date to resolve the impasse regarding community employment supervisor and assistant supervisors pension claims; the extent to which her Department is in cooperation with the WRC on the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48429/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Community Employment Scheme (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

The programme is delivered through independent Community Employment Sponsoring Bodies. The contract agreement between the Department and the Community Employment Sponsoring Body establishes their role as an independent contractor, responsible for all purposes and all persons recruited by them

CE Supervisors are not employed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. CE Supervisors have always been employees of Community Employment Sponsoring Bodies which operate in the community and voluntary sector.

I am very aware of the valuable and dedicated service that Community Employment (CE) sponsor organisations provide in running CE Schemes across the country. CE supervisors, as employees of these organisations, are an integral part of that good work.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Department is currently engaging with representatives of CE supervisors to discuss issues arising following that 2008 Labour Court Recommendation and that all parties agreed that the detail of all discussions undertaken by the group should remain confidential until the process had completed. I would ask Deputies to respect these wishes and allow the talks to continue free from speculation.

In relation to the Workplace Relations Commission judgement, the Department received the Adjudication Officer's decision on Monday 4th November. My Department is reviewing the decision at present and has sought legal advice on it.

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

254. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a contributory pension with adult dependent allowance, including fuel allowance, is likely to issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48499/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for State pension (contributory) on 4 October 2019 and was awarded maximum rate of pension with effect from 7 November 2019, their 66th birthday. They were notified of this decision on 16 October 2019.

The person applied for the Increase for a qualified adult and fuel allowance with their pension. As these payments are means-tested, additional information regarding means held by the couple (e.g., bank statements) were requested 16 October 2019. The Increase for qualified adult and fuel allowance were subsequently awarded from 7 November 2019. Notification of these decisions together with the arrears due issued to the person concerned on 18 November 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

255. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which rent allowance has been made payable to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48500/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned made an application for rent supplement on 18/10/19. My Department advised the person concerned on 24/10/19 that as she resides in a HAP designated area, she must in the first instance make a request for a Housing Needs Assessment with her local authority and also an application for Social Housing Support (including HAP).

The person concerned was also advised of the documentation required to progress the rent supplement application if necessary.

To date, the person concerned has not provided any further information to my Department. It is therefore not possible to progress the rent supplement application at this time.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

256. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the current entitlement in respect of illness benefit, alternative in the case of a person (details supplied) who may have exhausted their benefit entitlement but may qualify for alternative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48501/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Person concerned is not due to exhaust his entitlement to Illness benefit until 3rd October 2020, providing he still continues to satisfy the Medical criteria. A letter notifying him of this will issue to him prior to this date informing him of the alternative schemes he can apply for.

The Person concerned is currently certified until the 28th November 2019 and he is fully

paid up to date.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

257. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which efforts are being made to facilitate exceptional needs payment or alternative in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48502/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 18/11/19 my Department awarded the person concerned an Exceptional Needs Payment of €250. This payment was awarded to meet a need for home heating.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Written Answers Nos. 258-275

Vacant Sites Levy

258. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding acquired locally during 2019 from the vacant site levy will be allowed to be spent by the county council that collected it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48469/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the vacant site levy provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, planning authorities are empowered to apply a vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of relevant vacant sites in 2018. The rate of the levy has increased to 7% for sites on a local authority vacant sites register from 2019 onwards and in respect of which site owners will become liable to with effect from January 2020.

The primary objective of the levy is to act as a mechanism to incentivise the development of vacant and underutilised sites in urban areas for both the provision of housing and the development and renewal of land, thereby facilitating the most efficient use of such land and sites and enabling them to be brought into beneficial use rather than allowing them to remain dormant and undeveloped. It is not intended that the levy be a revenue generating measure. The proceeds of the levy do not accrue to the Exchequer.

The proceeds of the levy raised on vacant sites by individual planning authorities will be used by them for the provision of housing and regeneration development in the local area in which vacant sites are located. For example, the levy proceeds may be spent on:

- the provision of housing, the preservation/protection of structures of special architectural, historical, cultural interest etc.,
- the provision or improvement of services or facilities for the local community i.e. education, training, recreational, cultural facilities,
- the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities, including recreational ameni-

ties, on the land, civic improvements, and

- projects/works for the benefit of urban streets in the area including the improvement of streets/ footpaths in local shopping streets and business areas and the removal of graffiti.

No more than 10% of the levy monies received by planning authorities may be used on their administration costs.

Ministerial Meetings

259. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of times he has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies he met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48305/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government I have not met with any representatives from insurance companies or Insurance Ireland since taking office in June 2017. In the period since 1 January 2016, my Department has met with the insurance sector on a number of occasions as outlined in the following table.

Date of Meeting	Insurance Company	Purpose of Meetings
23 June 2016	Marsh Ireland	Latent defects insurance
7 September 2016	Homebond	Meeting between expert panel on concrete blocks and Homebond regarding issues in Donegal and Mayo
7 September 2016	Insurance Ireland	Meeting between expert panel on concrete blocks and Insurance Ireland regarding issues in Donegal and Mayo
3 February 2017	Homebond	Review technical details on Part L of the Building Regulations for the Homebond manual.
6 November 2017	Marsh Ireland	Latent defects insurance
6 February 2018	Homebond	Review technical details on Part L of the Building Regulations for the Homebond manual.

Separately, a representative of Insurance Ireland is a member of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management Board and attends Board meetings in that capacity on a regular basis.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

260. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason local authority tenants cannot purchase Part V houses under the tenant purchase scheme; if there are exceptions; if this applies to those that were tenants prior to the introduction of the 2016 legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48318/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015, provide the basis for the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The 2015 Regulations governing the Scheme provide for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale, including houses provided to local authorities under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, houses specifically designed for older persons, group Traveller housing and houses provided to facilitate people with disabilities transferring from institutional care to community-based living.

The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Under the terms of the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016, Part V homes regardless of when they were tenanted are excluded to ensure that homes delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

Local authorities may also, within the provisions of the Regulations, exclude certain houses which, in the opinion of the authority, should not be sold for reasons such as proper stock or estate management. It is a matter for each individual local authority to administer the Scheme in its operational area in line with the over-arching provisions of the governing legislation for the scheme, and in a manner appropriate to its housing requirements.

In line with the commitment given in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, a review of the operation of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase (Incremental) Scheme has been completed and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations.

I intend to bring a comprehensive package of social housing reform measures to Government in the near future and the review of the Tenant Purchase Scheme will be published as part of that process.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

261. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided for group sewerage schemes in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48339/19]

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

The following table sets out the recoupment by my Department to local authorities each year since 2016 for Group Sewerage Schemes.

Local Authority	2016	2017	2018	2019 - (up to 18/11/19)
	€	€	€	€
Cavan		80,274.36		
Clare				8,384.35
Kerry	59,270.34	7,806.84	4,947.54	
Leitrim				794.50
Totals	59,270.34	88,081.20	4,947.54	9,178.85

Housing Assistance Payment Data

262. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average monthly housing assistance payment for each quarter of 2019 to date; the average monthly HAP payment for each county; the number of recipients by county for each quarter of 2019 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48345/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. At the end of Q2 2019, over 62,700 HAP tenancies had been set-up since the scheme commenced, of which there were more than 48,000 households actively in receipt of HAP support and over 28,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme.

Details of the average monthly landlord payment by local authority area and the number of active tenancies at the end of Quarters 1 and 2 2019, are set out in the following table. Information in respect of Quarter 3 2019 is currently being compiled and will be available shortly.

Local Authority	Average land-lord payment Q1 2019	No. of Active Tenancies Q1 2019	Average land-lord payment Q2 2019	No. of Active Tenancies Q2 2019
	€		€	
Carlow County Council	554	707	555	743
Cavan County Council	455	301	456	322
Clare County Council	465	1,332	467	1,344
Cork City Council	774	2,167	791	2,546
Cork County Council	737	3,427	732	3,228
Donegal County Council	394	1,727	395	1,734
Dublin City Council	1,292	2,594	1,292	2,904
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	1,359	437	1,357	468

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	Average land-lord payment Q1 2019	No. of Active Tenancies Q1 2019	Average land-lord payment Q2 2019	No. of Active Tenancies Q2 2019
Fingal County Council	1,340	1,436	1,348	1,581
Galway City Council	807	1,465	813	1,544
Galway County Council	711	1,052	717	1,093
Kerry County Council	516	1,002	517	1,076
Kildare County Council	921	2,042	923	2,109
Kilkenny County Council	578	866	583	883
Laois County Council	581	715	589	788
Leitrim County Council	414	223	416	237
Limerick City and County Council	584	2,219	589	2264
Longford County Council	408	297	412	306
Louth County Council	846	2,786	860	2,890
Mayo County Council	506	1,158	510	1,201
Meath County Council	937	1,804	944	1,915
Monaghan County Council	490	555	498	579
Offaly County Council	515	862	520	855
Roscommon County Council	457	370	461	391
Sligo County Council	506	677	509	712
South Dublin County Council	1,230	2657	1,245	2,701
Tipperary County Council	492	1,772	495	1,792
Waterford City and County Council	513	1,826	517	1,863
Westmeath County Council	559	716	560	780
Wexford County Council	527	1,131	529	1,222
Wicklow County Council	1,005	1,036	1,001	1,197
Average Monthly Payment	817		829	
DRHE*		4,556		4,993
Total Active Tenancies		45,915		48,261

* The average monthly landlord payment for tenancies set up by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) are recorded against the individual local authority.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of the HAP and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme outlined under Rebuilding Ireland.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

263. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of households that have left the housing assistance payment scheme per annum from 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48346/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. At the end of Q2 2019, over 62,700 HAP tenancies had been set-up since the scheme commenced, of which there were more than 48,000 households actively in receipt of HAP support and over 28,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme.

HAP supported tenancies are agreed between the landlord and the tenant. It is important to note that the local authority is not a party to the tenancy and has no role in its agreement. There is no limitation placed by the scheme on the length of tenancy that can be supported by HAP. However, as with other private rental tenancies, the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended) governs the relationship between landlord and tenant and the length of the tenancy is a matter that must be agreed between the landlord and tenant in that context.

At the end of Q2 2019, a total of 14,478 households were reported on the HAP Shared Services Centre system as having exited HAP. This included tenant led exits; compliance exits; transfers to other forms of social housing; and landlord exits. This report is based on cessations, as submitted by local authorities.

Details of the number of Closed/Exit Tenancies by year, are set out in the following table.

Year	No. of Closed/Exit Tenancies
2015	312
2016	1,425
2017	3,181
2018	5,711
2019 (Q2)	3,849 (Q2)
Total	14,478

In cases where a HAP supported tenancy ends, the tenant can find alternative accommodation and retain their eligibility for HAP support or the local authority may decide to offer another form of social housing support to the tenant in accordance with their scheme of letting priorities.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of the HAP and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme outlined under Rebuilding Ireland.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Data

264. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average monthly rental accommodation scheme payments for each quarter of 2019 to date; the average monthly rental assistance scheme payment for each county; the number of recipients by county for each quarter of 2019 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48348/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was established in 2004 and placed responsibility on local authorities to meet the accommodation needs of people in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer, and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need. RAS provides a more structured, accommodation-based approach to the use of the private rented sector to meet long-term housing need, thereby eliminating dependence on temporary income support payments, i.e. rent supplement.

The following table sets out the average monthly and quarterly expenditure under RAS for Q1 and Q2 2019 and the number of RAS tenancies in place at the end of Q1 and Q2 2019, broken down by local authority area. Data in relation to Q3 is being collated.

RAS continues to be an effective and secure form of social housing support. While it remains a significant part of the suite of social housing options currently available to those who are assessed as being in need of housing support, its role as the replacement for Rent Supplement for these with a social housing need is now being increasingly fulfilled by the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Local Authority	RAS Average Expenditure per Month Q1 2019	Total Tenancies End Q1 2019	Average cost of Tenancy per Month Q1 2019	RAS Average Expenditure per Month Q2 2019	Total Tenancies End Q2 2019	Average cost of Tenancy per Month Q2 2019
Carlow Co. Cl.	€328,990.00	499	€659.30	€293,342.25	493	€595.01
Cavan Co. Cl.	€307,576.72	562	€547.29	€261,411.95	555	€471.01
Clare Co. Cl.	€199,399.29	373	€534.58	€179,505.63	394	€455.60
Cork City Cl.	€606,387.05	824	€735.91	€567,550.55	925	€613.57
Cork Co. CL	€502,933.19	857	€586.85	€439,033.41	732	€599.77
Donegal Co. Cl.	€180,298.64	547	€329.61	€143,410.29	547	€262.18
Dublin City Cl.	€1,510,850.87	1765	€856.01	€1,375,599.18	1719	€800.23
Dun/Rathdown	€568,011.70	1292	€439.64	€539,082.96	1261	€427.50
South Dublin Co. Cl.	€1,457,921.79	528	€2,761.22	€1,127,578.21	516	€2,185.23
Fingal Co. Cl.	€794,089.67	647	€1,227.34	€734,079.57	640	€1,147.00
Galway City Cl.	€267,445.48	421	€635.26	€229,527.31	412	€557.11
Galway Co Cl	€185,169.01	324	€571.51	€170,149.59	323	€526.78
Kerry Co. Cl.	€559,743.60	891	€628.22	€503,564.71	894	€563.27

Kildare Co. Cl.	€506,862.04	578	€876.92	€451,731.36	553	€816.87
Kilkenny Co. Cl.	€531,646.30	911	€583.59	€489,026.14	925	€528.68
Laois Co. Cl.	€112,427.22	218	€515.72	€100,090.99	214	€467.71
Leitrim Co. Cl.	€47,079.48	114	€412.98	€38,230.74	114	€335.36
Limerick City & Co. Cl.	€775,536.04	1145	€677.32	€713,136.35	1183	€602.82
Longford	€97,844.33	207	€472.68	€83,454.33	208	€401.22
Louth Co. Cl.	€57,427.31	120	€478.56	€47,837.22	120	€398.64
Mayo Co. Cl.	€428,793.52	808	€530.69	€387,805.22	816	€475.25
Meath Co. Cl.	€332,791.23	407	€817.67	€304,077.04	396	€767.87
Monaghan Co. Cl.	€91,304.87	215	€424.67	€81,375.54	209	€389.36
Offaly Co. Cl.	€80,461.14	130	€618.93	€74,746.92	132	€566.26
Roscommon Co. Cl.	€199,933.38	404	€494.88	€171,984.41	400	€429.96
Sligo Co. Cl.	€271,945.33	541	€502.67	€231,239.70	525	€440.46
Tipperary Co. Cl.	€556,743.99	1089	€511.24	€521,293.01	1087	€479.57
Waterford City & Co. Cl.	€341,403.28	675	€505.78	€268,117.29	667	€401.97
Westmeath Co. Cl.	€400,658.97	584	€686.06	€358,390.84	587	€610.55
Wexford Co. Cl.	€346,699.97	600	€577.83	€307,024.70	578	€531.18
Wicklow Co. Cl.	€443,342.33	421	€1,053.07	€399,463.63	395	€1,011.30
National Total	€13,091,717.74	18697	€700.20	€11,592,861.04	18520	€625.96

Local Authority Housing Data

265. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average monthly payment under the social housing current expenditure programme (leasing) for each quarter of 2019 to date; the average social housing current expenditure programme (leasing) for each county; the number of recipients by county for each quarter of 2019 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48349/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities for the long term leasing of houses and apartments from a range of different sources including Repair and Leasing, Enhanced Leasing and Long-term leasing. In addition, SHCEP supports the current costs of dwellings delivered by AHBs under my Department's Build and Acquisition Programmes under the Capital

Advance Loan Facility (CALF) and Housing Agency Acquisitions (HAA) programme. The SHCEP budget for 2019 is just under €155 million.

Data on the total number of contractual agreements held by local authorities and supported by my Department from SHCEP is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> .

Data in relation to the average monthly cost for dwellings delivered under leasing, and the total number of leased dwellings funded under SHCEP, for Q1 and Q2 2019, are set out in the following table. Data for Q3 2019 is being col

lated and will be available shortly.

Table: Average Lease Cost and Total Leased Dwellings Q1 and Q2 2019

LA	Average Monthly Lease Payment – Q1 2019	Total Operational Leased Dwellings – Q1 2019	Average Monthly Lease Payment – Q2 2019	Total Operational Leased Dwellings – Q2 2019
Carlow	€566	134	€566	134
Cavan	€524	33	€528	34
Clare	€619	336	€625	346
Cork City	€743	247	€757	253
Cork County	€728	981	€729	984
DLR	€1,202	189	€1,202	189
Donegal	€528	286	€528	286
Dublin City	€950	749	€955	756
Fingal	€873	537	€886	554
Galway City	€940	208	€940	209
Galway County	€626	70	€630	71
Kerry	€642	305	€659	298
Kildare	€742	231	€805	234
Kilkenny	€652	79	€649	84
Laois	€610	225	€610	225
Leitrim	€492	15	€492	15
Limerick	€684	94	€682	106
Longford	€578	100	€578	100
Louth	€707	369	€707	369
Mayo	€630	173	€636	192
Meath	€688	163	€696	170
Monaghan	€536	51	€535	54
Offaly	€646	256	€650	257
Roscommon	€476	14	€513	22
Sligo	€660	61	€660	61
South Dublin	€1,183	646	€1,183	646
Tipperary	€602	421	€603	443
Waterford	€553	260	€547	265
Westmeath	€673	362	€674	384
Wexford	€581	197	€582	204
Wicklow	€871	40	€877	43
Overall	€753	7,832	€757	7,988

*Note - operational units are units that are being claimed for by local authorities and ac-

tively funded by SHCEP.

Planning Issues

266. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the rights of the public in respect of access to details of new planning applications online; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Dublin City Council frequently takes up to three weeks to put documents on their website thus greatly reducing the time for members of the public to make submissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48421/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Article 27 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, planning authorities are required to publish on their websites weekly lists of all new planning applications. The lists must be published within five working days following a particular week.

With regard to the documentation linked to a planning application, there is no statutory requirement to publish planning documents online. However, planning authorities must make available copies of documents for public inspection and purchase at planning authority offices.

My Department, in conjunction with the local authority sector, is currently working on the development of an online eplanning system. This will enable the electronic submission of both planning applications and public submissions to the planning authorities, as well as the viewing of planning applications and documents online.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

267. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the affordable rental scheme which he and An Taoiseach launched in County Cork in recent days; the unit cost of developing these units with a breakdown of the site and build cost; the qualifying criteria for future tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48426/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I assume the Question is referring to a development in Boherboy Road, Mayfield, Cork City, that I launched with An Taoiseach on 16 November 2019. From the outset, I would like to clarify that this development comprises homes that will be made available for purchase under the affordable dwelling purchase arrangements rather than being made available for rental.

In line with the commitments in Rebuilding Ireland to support the delivery of more affordable homes to buy or rent, this Government has allocated €310 million under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), from 2019 to 2021, to provide infrastructure to support the delivery of some 6,200 homes on local authority lands. This funding is being made available in areas where local authorities have demonstrated a requirement for affordable housing and the viability to deliver such housing from their sites.

To date, I have allocated SSF funding of €127 million, in support of 35 projects in 14 local authority areas, for infrastructure works that will see the delivery of almost 3,200 affordable homes. One of the 35 approved projects, is the aforementioned Boherboy Road development in Cork City Council.

This site at Boherboy is local authority owned lands and has received approval for SSF funding of almost €5m for infrastructure that will support the delivery of 116 affordable homes.

In addition, 37 further homes will be made available on the site for social housing. The homes made available for affordable purchase will be a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced with a variety of house types and designs. Cork City Council have indicated to my Department that this project will be delivered in five different phases, with the first phase to be available in Q3 of 2020.

Cork City Council has provided a breakdown of the house type, the number of affordable homes, the anticipated starting price of the affordable homes and the floor area.

House Type	Number of Units	Pricing (From)	Approx. Floor Areas (m ²)
2 Bedroom House	24	€198,000	70m ²
3 Bedroom House	92	€ 223,000	92m ²

It should be noted that the above-mentioned prices take into account the maximum discount of €20,000 that is available to purchasers through the Help to Buy Scheme. Therefore the prices quoted above are the minimum sales prices to eligible purchasers and based on their individual applicable discounts.

Homes delivered under the SSF are subject to the provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 which was commenced in June 2018. This legislation now provides the statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase in the State. Regulations in respect of the making of Schemes of Priority were signed on 12 March 2019, and these were issued to local authorities on 22 March 2019. The purpose of a Scheme of Priority is to set out the affordable purchase arrangements at local authority level. This includes the methodology that will be applied by local authorities to determine the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households where the demand for such affordable dwellings exceeds the number available. I can confirm that Cork City Council submitted their Scheme of Priority to my Department on 3 May 2019, which I subsequently approved on 28 June 2019.

In line with the legal requirements of the Affordable Dwelling Purchase Arrangements, further regulations will be put in place over the coming months regarding eligibility and other matters. When the operational procedures for the scheme are finalised, and before dwellings are made available for purchase under the scheme, a programme of communication will be undertaken by my Department and local authorities.

An Bord Pleanála Appeals

268. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 213 of 11 October 2018, when it will be possible to make online appeal submissions to An Bord Pleanála via its website as is the case with local authority planning applications; his views on whether this service will be available by the end of 2019 as he previously stated; if not, the reason for the slippage; his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48427/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): An Bord Pleanála is currently implementing a major ICT strategy which will facilitate the introduction of online planning services as part of a complete transformation and replacement of core systems. The first phase of the implementation of the ICT strategy involves the ongoing deployment of a new case management and geographic information system across the organisation. The final phase includes development of a new website and web portal which will ultimately facilitate online submission of planning appeals, observations, submissions and applications,

linking in with the roll-out of the local authorities' own ePlanning initiative.

I understand that full implementation of the new case management system to a required satisfactory level of functionality has taken longer than expected and that this has consequently delayed progression of the related elements of the overall project. I also understand that the tendering process for the new website has commenced, with the expectation that web portal online functions will be available from late 2020/early 2021, in tandem with the completion of the new case management system.

Local Authority Expenditure

269. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount paid in each year since 2016 by each local authority on personal injury claims in tabular form; the mechanism by which personal injury claims are paid by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48454/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The day to day running of each local authority is a matter for its Chief Executive. I have no specific function in relation to the matter raised and the specific information requested is not available in my Department. The information should be available in individual local authorities.

Local Authority Expenditure

270. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount paid out by each local authority in each year since 2016 on public liability insurance and for employers liability insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48455/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The day to day running of each local authority is a matter for its Chief Executive while budgetary decisions are made by the Elected Members. I have no specific function in relation to the matter raised and the specific information requested is not available in my Department. The information should be available in individual local authorities.

Planning Issues

271. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the local government Part XI planning and public consultation process including the decision making responsibilities and the right of appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48456/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The public procedure for Part XI development is provided for under Part 8 of the Planning Development Regulations 2001, as amended. A planning authority is required to advertise its proposals for certain types of its own developments, erect a site notice, make available plans and particulars for inspection and to invite submissions and observations from members of the public as well as from the relevant statutory bodies in respect of such proposals.

Under Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, the Chief Executive of the authority is then required to produce a report, including reference to all submissions

received, regarding the proposed development for the consideration of the elected members of the Council.

The development proposals and the Chief Executive's report must be submitted to the elected members of the Council who may, as a reserved function, resolve to accept, modify or reject the proposal within 6 weeks of the date of the receipt of the report made by the Chief Executive.

As developments prescribed in Part 8 of the 2001 Regulations are exempted development, there is no provision for a planning appeal. However, anyone may apply to the High Court to seek judicial review of any decision made by a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála.

Regeneration Projects

272. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress report for east County Sligo and Cranmore invariant remaster plan; the funding drawn down to date; the planned timeline for its development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48468/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Masterplan for the Cranmore area was launched in December 2016 and sets out the high level priorities and objectives to be achieved and the range of physical, social and economic projects that will achieve these objectives. The estimated cost of the programme is €75.6m comprising €42m exchequer funding and €33.6m through private sector development. My Department has committed €20m funding for a physical and social programme of works and it is open to the Council to pursue funding from other Government Departments to achieve the €42m exchequer spend.

A key element of the regeneration programme is the upgrading of the housing stock in the Cranmore Estate at an estimated cost of €8.6m. The first tranche involving works to 96 homes received funding approval in October 2019, at a cost of €4.4m. Sligo County Council aim to be on site in the coming weeks.

Alongside this, the upgrade works to the junction of Devins Drive/Cranmore Road, the provision of Pedestrian/Bicycle Link to Chapel Hill and the refurbishment of void properties are among the elements of the Physical Regeneration programme, as is the construction of a new Community Centre. The Masterplan includes initiatives aimed at the local residents and community, such as an Education and Learning Strategy, Community Safety Taskforce while the three underpinning strategies of the Social Plan are Arts and Culture, Community Development and Youth Work along with Interagency Engagement and Collaboration.

Since the launch of the Masterplan the Council has drawn down €4.6m and prior to that, my Department had invested over €23.5m in a number of strategic initiatives across the regeneration area, bringing the total spend to date to €28.1m.

Ministerial Meetings

273. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of times she has met with insurance companies and Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016; the date of each meeting; the persons or bodies she met with; the purpose of each meeting in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48298/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I can ad-

wise the Deputy that neither I, nor my predecessor Minister Humphreys has met with insurance companies or Insurance Ireland since 1 January 2016.

Special Areas of Conservation Management

274. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the date on which her officials last inspected each area of the Malahide Estuary SAC (details supplied); her plans to conduct surveys in the SAC in the immediate future; if it is her Department or the local authority that holds the title to the lands in the area; if lands in the area are leased by groups and or clubs; if so, the terms and or duration of the lease; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48353/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department is responsible for implementing the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2018, the primary legislation underpinning the protection of biodiversity and nature in Ireland. The Wildlife Acts afford protection to a range of habitats and species and provide for regulation and control of activities that impinge on biodiversity, such as hunting and trade.

The legislative framework in place to protect our natural heritage is further strengthened by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 SI No 477/2011, which also fall under the remit of my Department. These Regulations transpose the EU Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive into national law, and provide for protection of certain habitats and species across the European Union, giving a framework for specific measures to be taken to target areas of concern in each Member State. The main instruments provided for are the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA), aimed at the protection of threatened species of birds, and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), aimed at protecting other animal species and habitats.

Malahide Estuary SAC is situated immediately north of Malahide and east of Swords and has been selected for designation for a number of habitats. The site is also important ornithologically, holding an internationally important population of Brent Goose and attracting migrant species such as Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Little Stint.

My Department do not own or manage any part of this SAC. Monitoring of SACs are carried out by my Department on a cyclical basis, typically every three years. There are no plans to undertake further scientific surveys in the Malahide Estuary SAC at this time.

Historic Towns Initiative

275. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to roll out a scheme for small heritage towns with a population under 1,500; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48365/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Deputy may be aware of The Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) which is a joint undertaking between my Department and the Heritage Council to support Irish historic towns in using their cultural heritage to drive investment and renewal. The internationally recognised practice of heritage-led regeneration shows that heritage can be used to create a desirable place where people can live, visit and do business. Heritage-led regeneration brings economic benefits enabling our historic towns to prosper through increased visitor numbers and decreased numbers of vacant buildings and commercial premises. This initiative is presently targeted at towns with

an indicative minimum population level of 1,500 people.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme, however, operated by my colleague, Michael Ring, TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development has a category of funding which includes towns and villages with a population under 1,500 people. It is a key part of this Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and is part of a package of national and local support measures to rejuvenate rural towns and villages throughout Ireland. Further details are available on that Department's website - www.drcd.ie .

In my own Department, I recently launched a €4.3m fund for conservation and repair of Ireland's protected historic structures through 2 grant schemes, the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Historic Structures Fund, both of which are administered through the local authorities. These schemes are provided by my Department to assist the owners of protected buildings and structures with meeting their obligations to care for and safeguard our built heritage. Applications can be made to Local Authorities until 31 January 2020 and both schemes are open to applications for projects across the Country, including in towns with a population of under 1,500. Further details are available on my Departments website www.chg.gov.ie and on all local authority websites.