

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 15, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 16 to 62, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 63 to 71, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Seirbhísí Leathanbhanda

72. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den Aire Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide cad é an t-amlíne chun seirbhís leathanbhanda a chur ar fáil faoin bPlean Náisiúnta Leathanbhanda do Choláiste Oideas Gael i nGleann Cholm Cille, Contae Dhún na nGall; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [29514/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Tagraíonn an Cheist d'áitreabh atá lonnaithe i gceantar ÓMRA (AMBER) ar Léarscáil Leathanbhanda Ardluais an Phlean Náisiúnta Leathanbhanda atá ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin mo Roinne [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). Is ionann limistéar ÓMRA agus an limistéar a bheidh an líonra a bheidh le husáid faoin idirghabháil faoi stiúir Phlean Náisiúnta leathanbhanda an Stáit ag freastal air.

Tuigim frustrachas na ndaoine atá ina gcónaí an-ghar do líonra snáithín ach nach féidir leo nasc a fháil leis an líonra sin, go háirithe agus tábhacht mhéadaithe na **nascachta** le linn phaindéim Covid-19. Cinnteoidh an Plean Náisiúnta Leathanbhanda i ngach cás den sórt sin go dtógfáir líonra leathanbhanda ardluais don todhcháil amach anseo chun freastal ar na háitribh seo, is cuma cé chomh cianda is atá an suíomh, agus tá obair ar bun chun é seo a chur ar fáil.

Tá 102,833 áitreabh i gContae Dhún na nGall as a bhfuil 32,483 áitreabh lonnaithe i gceantar Ómra agus freastalóidh an líonra nua leathanbhanda ardluais a chuirfear ar fáil faoin bPlean orthu. Moltar dom go ndearna Leathanbhanda Náisiúnta Éireann (NBI) suirbhéireacht ar thart ar 6,389 áitreabh i gceantair Bhaile na nGallóglach, Leitir Ceanainn, Ráth Mealtain, An Tearmainn, Bhaile Mhic Comhghaill, Chill Mhic Réanáin, Mhullach Fhinne agus Tommyscroft. Tá tús le cur le hoibreacha tógála i Leitir Ceanainn agus sa Chraoslach an bhliain seo chugainn. Freastalóidh an idirghabháil faoi stiúir Phlean Náisiúnta leathanbhanda an Stáit ar an áitreabh dá dtagraítear, ach ní féidir fráma ama cinntitheach a chur ar fáil le haghaidh nasc go fóill.

Tá tuilleadh sonraí ar fáil ar cheantair ar leith laistigh de Chontae Dhún na nGall trí shuíomh gréasáin an Phlean Náisiúnta Leathanbhanda, [www.nbi.ie](http://www.nbi.ie), a chuireann áis ar fáil d'aon áitreabh laistigh den cheantar idirghabhála chun a spéis i nuashonruithe imlonnaithe a chlárú. Gheobhaidh daoine aonair a chláraíonn leis an áis seo nuashonruithe rialta ar dhul chun cinn an Phlean maidir le líonra a chur ar fáil agus nuashonruithe a bhaineann lena n-áitreabh féin de réir mar a thosaíonn oibreacha.

Tá Pointí Nasctha Leathanbhanda ina ngné lárnach den Phlean Náisiúnta Leathanbhanda a sholáthraíonn leathanbhanda ardluais i ngach contae roimh fheidhmiú céimneach an tsnáithín chuig an líonra baile. Ón 27 Bealtaine, tá 317 láithreán Phointí Nasctha Leathanbhanda nascaithe ag an bPlean Náisiúnta Leathanbhanda. Tá roinnt Pointí Nasctha Leathanbhanda nasctha i nDún na nGall, lena n-áirítear ag Stáisiún Raonaithe Shliabh Liag, atá suite 10 gciliméadar ón áitreabh dá dtagraítear.

The Question refers to a premises located in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The AMBER area represents the area to be served by the network to be deployed under the NBP State led intervention.

I appreciate people's frustration when they are living so close to a fibre network but cannot get a connection to that network, particularly given the heightened importance of connectivity during the Covid-19 pandemic. The NBP will ensure that in all such cases a future proofed high speed broadband network will be built to serve these premises, no matter how remote the location, and work to deliver this is underway.

There are 102,833 premises in County Donegal of which 32,483 premises are located in the Amber area and will be served by the new high speed broadband network delivered under the NBP. I am advised that some 6,389 premises have been surveyed by NBI in the areas of Milford, Letterkenny, Ramelton, Termon, Ballymacool, Kilmacrennan, Mullaghfin and Tommyscroft. Build works are due to commence in Letterkenny and Creeslough next year. The premises referred to will be served by the NBP State led intervention but it is not possible to provide a definitive timeframe for connection as yet.

Further details are available on specific areas within County Donegal through the NBI website, [www.nbi.ie](http://www.nbi.ie), which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their interest in being provided with deployment updates. Individuals who register with this facility will receive regular updates on progress by NBI on delivering the network and specific updates related to their own premises as works commence.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 27 May, 317 BCP sites have been installed by NBI. A number of BCP's are connected in Donegal including at Sliabh Liag Ranger Station, which is located 10 kilometres from the premises referred to.

*Questions Nos. 73 to 77, inclusive, answered orally.*

## **Climate Change Policy**

78. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the engagement he has had to date with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage with regard to supporting and promoting efforts at the local government level on climate action, particularly in relation to County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29388/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Under the Climate Action Plan 2019, a Climate Action Charter for Local Authorities was agreed between my Department and the Local Authorities. The then Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government was consulted as part of this process. The goal of the Charter is to ensure that every Local Authority embeds decarbonisation, sustainable development and climate

resilience into all aspects of the work they do. The Charter acknowledges the need to take collective action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the impacts of climate change, while also committing Local Authorities to being advocates for climate action. Under the Charter, Local Authorities will measure the carbon impact of activities and implement measures to reduce carbon emissions in line with national objectives, including a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.

In 2018, my Department entered into a five year financial commitment of €10 million to establish four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs). Mayo County Council is the lead authority for the Atlantic Seaboard North region, which also includes the Local Authorities for counties Mayo, Sligo, Donegal and Galway, as well as Galway City. My Department engages with all four CAROs on a regular basis, in particular through participation in the National Local Authority Climate Action Steering Group. Under the National Adaptation Framework, each Local Authority has developed a Local Adaptation Strategy. These strategies are now being implemented, and each CARO is working with the Local Authorities in its region to both facilitate and monitor implementation of the local climate adaptation actions within the strategies.

The Climate Action Bill further strengthens the role of Local Authorities in climate action. It sets out legislative requirements for each Local Authority to prepare a Climate Action Plan, which will include both mitigation and adaptation measures and be updated every five years. These plans will have to be consistent with national climate plans and strategies, and Local Authorities will have to liaise with each other in the preparation of these plans.

To build the necessary capacity, my Department is also funding and engaging with the CAROs in relation to the implementation of a new Local Authority climate action training programme. This programme is increasing knowledge of climate change and the need for action among all Local Authority staff, and will facilitate both climate mitigation and adaptation at local level.

### **Grant Payments**

79. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the efforts he is taking to address the long waiting list for SEAI warmer homes grant; the extent which Covid-19 has impacted on the waiting list for retrofitting of homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29430/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. To date, over 142,000 homes have received free upgrades under the scheme and in 2020 the average value of the energy efficiency measures provided per household was over €14,800. I have secured additional resources this year to expand the capacity of the SEAI to deliver the scheme. Funding for the energy poverty retrofit schemes has also increased to over €109 million in 2021. This is an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation. In addition, delivery capacity has increased due to a new, broader contractor panel that commenced at the end of 2020.

The SEAI has advised me that wait times vary, based on the demand for the scheme at the time of application as well as other factors including the scale of works to be completed, access to the property, availability of materials and the weather.

The average wait times are expected to increase significantly in 2021 due to the extensive COVID-19 related restrictions on construction activity between March and June of last year as

well as between January and 12 April of this year when the scheme was fully paused in line with Government guidelines. Works under the scheme have now recommenced in line with activity in the residential construction sector.

### **Natural Gas Imports**

80. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the studies that have been undertaken to assess the emissions, climate and humanitarian impact of imported gas vis-a-vis Ireland's own offshore gas up to 2030; if undertaken, if he will publish same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29411/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The commitment in the Programme for Government to ending the issuing of new licences for the exploration and extraction of natural gas has been implemented by my Department and it will be given statutory effect by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021. I, as Minister, do not intend to review or revisit this policy. Therefore, my Department has not undertaken, and does not intend to undertake, studies in relation to the merits of future natural gas exploration in Ireland in the context of achieving the Government's climate ambitions to 2030 and beyond.

My Department is currently carrying out a review of the security of energy supply of Ireland's electricity and natural gas systems. The review is focusing on the period to 2030 in the context of ensuring a sustainable pathway to 2050. The review includes a technical analysis which will help inform a public consultation.

The technical analysis includes identification and examination of the key risks to the security of supply in the electricity and natural gas systems; identification of options that could address or mitigate these risks in the period to 2030; and appraisal of these options in the context of ensuring a sustainable pathway to 2050.

The review will take into account the expected levels of indigenous natural gas production under pre-existing applications, options and licences. However, in line with the Programme for Government, the options that could be taken to address or mitigate potential risks will not include further additional indigenous gas production.

It is planned that the technical analysis will be published and the public consultation undertaken in the second half of this year. The review, once completed, will be submitted to Government.

### **North-South Interconnector**

81. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the meetings or engagements he has had regarding the north-south interconnector to date in 2021. [29380/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The North-South Interconnector is critical to improving the efficient operation of the all-island single electricity market and increasing security of electricity supply in Ireland and Northern Ireland. It will also help Ireland to move towards our 70% renewable electricity target by 2030. A resilient and well-connected energy infrastructure is vital for Ireland's economic well-being and the ability to respond to the future needs of energy consumers. As with any project of such

scale and significance, I routinely discuss the project with my officials and colleagues within Government.

The option of undergrounding the North-South Interconnector has been comprehensively assessed on several occasions. Most recently, the key finding from the International Expert Commission's October 2018 report was that an overhead line remains the most appropriate option for this piece of critical electricity infrastructure.

Notwithstanding this, I have decided to commission a further short review to assess if the overall finding from the 2018 report remains valid. Terms of reference for this study were published on my Department's website on 21 April. On 7 May, my Department initiated a procurement process using the procurement frameworks administered by the Office of Government Procurement to appoint an expert to undertake the review. The aim is to complete the review as quickly as possible.

### **National Broadband Plan**

82. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the estimated number of schools that will be connected under the National Broadband Plan by the end of 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29382/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** My Department continues to work with the Department of Education to prioritise schools with no high speed broadband, within the NBP Intervention Area, for connection over the term of the National Broadband Plan. In this regard, an acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan was announced which will see some 679 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by end-2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of end-2026. The list of all primary schools to be connected, broken down by County, is available on the website of National Broadband Ireland (NBI).

Currently 114 primary schools have been installed with the necessary infrastructure by NBI. Connectivity is delivered through retail service providers as per arrangements with the Department of Education. NBI expect to make substantial progress through the remainder of this year with a total estimate of 250 schools getting high-speed connectivity by end 2021 and the final target of 679 schools being achieved by end 2022.

### **Environmental Schemes**

83. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications further to Parliamentary Question No. 56 of 17 February 2021, the progress of the public consultation on the proposed deposit and return scheme and the planned introduction of the scheme in the third quarter of 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29373/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, launched last September, sets out a clear roadmap for the introduction of a Deposit and Return Scheme (DRS) for plastic bottles and aluminium cans in the third quarter of 2022. This process began with the launch of a public consultation on the design of a DRS for Ireland in October last year. It was encouraging to see the level of public engagement in this first consultation with the majority of the 364 submissions received supporting the introduction of the Scheme and favouring a cen-



tralised, legislation based system, operated by a single entity. The submissions received under this consultation will be published shortly on my Department's website.

Following this consultation, a stakeholder working group, consisting of beverage producers, retailers, eNGOs and waste collectors was established to progress the design of the system. The Department of Agriculture, Environment Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland have sat in on the working group discussions as observers.

The second step in the process was a further consultation on the regulatory framework for the Scheme which concluded on 7 May. Submissions received under this are currently being assessed and will inform the working group in their deliberations on a final regulatory framework.

I intend to finalise Regulations enabling the introduction of the Deposit and Return scheme early in the third quarter of this year, in order to enable the scheme to commence in the third quarter of 2022.

### **National Broadband Plan**

84. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the roll-out of the national broadband plan in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29416/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** There are 13,696 premises in the Intervention Area in County Dublin that will receive access to high speed broadband under the National Broadband Plan. I am advised that as of 27 May, 2,437 (17.8%) of these have been surveyed by National Broadband Ireland (NBI). Surveying is the first step to delivering the new fibre network and informs design solutions for fibre network provision. Detailed designs are used to initiate the 'make ready' project with Open eir, where Open eir ensure poles and ducts being reused are fit for purpose and are made ready for other required infrastructure. Equipment ordering decisions are dependent on this step. Survey data is required to initiate pre-works paving the way for fibre deployment. Pre-works involve construction of new duct routes, erection of poles, building chambers and tree trimming. On completion of pre-works, the main construction works can commence.

I am advised by NBI that surveys are completed or ongoing in Skerries, Balbriggan, around Fingal, Castleknock, Blanchardstown, Clonsilla, Ongar, Chapelizod, Ballyfermot, Cabra, Bluebell, Finglas, City West, Bohernabreena, Rathcoole, Cruagh, Kilakee, Ballychorus, Ticknock and Ballybrack. Pre-works are in progress around Skerries, City West, Bohernabreena and Rathcoole.

Further details are available on specific areas in Dublin through the NBI website [www.NBI.ie](http://www.NBI.ie) which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their interest in being provided with deployment updates through its website.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 27 May, 317 Broadband Connection Points sites have been installed by NBI. A number of BCPs are connected in County Dublin including Glenasmole Community Centre, Man O War GAA Club, Fingal Ravens GAA Club, Stars Of Erin GAA, Dublin Mountain Community Centre, Tyrrelstown Community Centre and Newbridge House & Farm.

Balscadden National School is connected to high speed broadband as part of this initiative.

## North-South Interconnector

85. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the person or body that will carry out the announced review into the north-south interconnector; the expected cost of the review; if it will fully consider the option for undergrounding the project; and when he expects the review to be concluded. [29379/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The North-South Interconnector is critical to improving the efficient operation of the all-island single electricity market and increasing security of electricity supply in Ireland and Northern Ireland. It will also help Ireland to move towards our 70% renewable electricity target by 2030. A resilient and well-connected energy infrastructure is vital for Ireland's economic well-being and the ability to respond to the future needs of energy consumers. The option of undergrounding the North-South Interconnector has been comprehensively assessed on several occasions. Most recently, the key finding from the International Expert Commission's October 2018 report was that an overhead line remains the most appropriate option for this piece of critical electricity infrastructure.

Notwithstanding this, I have decided to commission a further short review to assess if the overall finding from the 2018 report remains valid. Terms of reference for this study were published on my Department's website on 21 April. On 7 May, my Department initiated a procurement process using the procurement frameworks administered by the Office of Government Procurement to appoint an expert to undertake the review.

The cost of this review will be determined within this formal Government procurement process in due course. The aim is to complete the review as quickly as possible.

## Grant Payments

86. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the volume and type of grant applications under the circular economy innovation grant scheme which is €250,000 for 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29401/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Circular Economy Innovation Grant Scheme is a new scheme which aims to provide support to projects that can advance the Circular Economy in Ireland and/or raise awareness of the need to transition to a Circular Economy. As announced at the launch on Thursday, 15 April 2021, the Scheme is intended to provide support to social enterprises and voluntary and community based organisations in particular.

The closing date for applications was close of business on Friday, 28th May 2021. A total of 75 applications were received; The majority of those applications were from the NGO, voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.

## Climate Change Policy

87. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his views on the recent conclusion of the Fiscal Advisory Council that climate action in Ireland will require a fundamental reorientation of the way the economy operates incurring heavy claims on Government resources and requiring careful planning; the costings that have been carried out in relation to the implementation of climate action measures in the

State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29427/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):**

Achieving our ambitious climate targets will require careful planning and an all-of-Government approach to ensure their delivery. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021, when enacted, will introduce a number of new obligations to help ensure good planning in respect of climate action. The Bill introduces a requirement to annually revise the Climate Action Plan and prepare, at least once every five years, a National Long Term Climate Action Strategy. Annual revisions to the Climate Action Plan will focus on the near and medium term perspectives; be consistent with the adopted carbon budget programme; and provide a roadmap of actions, including sectoral actions, that are needed to comply with the carbon budgets and sectoral emission ceilings. The National Long Term Climate Action Strategy will outline, over a minimum thirty year period, the range of opportunities and transition pathways towards the national climate objective. Work is currently underway across Government on the development of a new Climate Action Plan for 2021. This plan will include additional policies and measures in every sector to bring about the significant changes needed to transform our society. Furthermore, the Government is undertaking a review of the National Development Plan (NDP), which will look at the necessary capital investment in areas such as energy, transport and the built environment to support delivery of the Programme for Government commitment. The low-carbon transition will require significant private investment alongside Exchequer expenditure on a sustained basis over a number of decades. Policies and measures will need to integrate change into existing spending plans and create the regulatory requirements, market incentives and innovative space to achieve our climate objectives.

### **National Broadband Plan**

88. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of broadband in Blarney, County Cork. [29422/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):**

There are 79,669 premises in the Intervention Area in County Cork which will receive access to high speed broadband under the National Broadband Plan, including the area of Blarney. I am advised that as of 27 May, 22,765 (28.6%) of these premises have been surveyed by National Broadband Ireland (NBI). Surveying is the first step to delivering the new fibre network and informs design solutions for fibre network provision. I appreciate people's frustration when they are living so close to but cannot obtain a connection to that network, particularly given the heightened importance of connectivity during the Covid-19 pandemic. The NBP will ensure that in all such cases a future proofed high speed broadband network will be built to serve these premises and work to deliver this is underway.

I am advised by NBI that surveys are completed or ongoing in Midelton, Cullen, Templebreedy, Carrigaline, Ballyfoyle, Douglas, Ballyphehane, Glasheen, Mahon, Kilpatrick. Surveys have started Ballydesmond, Kiskeam, Umeraboy, Knocknagree, Rineen, Cullen, Coolinarna, Millstreet, Hollymount and Caherbarnagh. Main works are ongoing in Carrigaline, Fountainstown, Ballinhassig, Monkstown, and Upper Rochestown. Preworks are ongoing in Midleton. The first fibre to the home connections are successfully connected in Carrigaline, Co Cork and Cavan with almost 4,000 premises passed and available for connection to date.

Further details are available on specific areas in Cork through the NBI website [www.NBI.ie](http://www.NBI.ie) which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their interest in being provided with deployment updates through its website.



Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 27 May, 317 Broadband Connection Points sites have been installed by NBI. A number of BCPs are connected in County Cork including Laharn Heritage Centre, Ballindangan Community Centre, Whitechurch Community Centre, Clogagh Community Hall, T.O. Park Labbamollaga, Bere Island Heritage Centre, Sherkin Island Community Hall, Glash Community Centre, Ballydaly Community Hall, Aubane Community Centre, Mealagh Valley Community Centre, Coláiste Phobal Cléire, Lissavard Community Centre, Aghabullogue Community Centre and Castletownkenneigh Community Centre

Clogagh National School and Ballycroneen National School are installed as part of this initiative.

### **Departmental Bodies**

89. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he has met the management, board and the staff of an agency (details supplied) since he took the decision to abolish the agency, scrap its future plans and lay off the workers in the agency. [29387/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Following a strategic review, which concluded that the Digital Hub is no longer required to sustain the continued growth of Dublin's digital enterprise sector, the Government decided on 27 April that the Digital Hub Development Agency should be dissolved and its land and property assets transferred to the Land Development Agency. In the period between the completion of the strategic review and the Government decision, Minister Ryan met with the Chairperson of the DHDA Board and the Chief Executive. Officials from my Department have met with members of the Board and executive of the DHDA to discuss implementation of the Government decision.

I will shortly request the Board of the DHDA to prepare a programme for an orderly wind down, addressing the needs of the staff of the DHDA, client companies and communications with the local communities. My Department will work closely with the DHDA on the finalisation of the necessary steps including the re-deployment of its permanent staff within the public sector.

There will be no immediate effect on the DHDA's client companies and they will be in a position to continue trading as normal throughout the wind down period.

The Grant Thornton Strategic Review report concluded that the Irish digital enterprise sector and Dublin co-working office space market are robust and are not reliant upon the services provided by the DHDA. It is therefore anticipated that the time afforded for the orderly wind down will permit the client companies to find alternative accommodation, noting the supply of co-working and office space available in Dublin.

The redevelopment of the sites will also support a significant level of employment in construction and support a major economic and social regeneration in Dublin 8.

### **Environmental Policy**

90. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Com-

munications if he will report on the role his Department plays in ensuring that mineral exploration and mining in Ireland supports the economy and protects the national environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29431/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):**

My department is currently preparing a *Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining in Ireland*. The policy statement will seek to underline the importance of the sector and the role that it has in: - transitioning Ireland and the European Union to the circular economy and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions;

- supporting primary and secondary economic activity and associated jobs creation; and
- progressing many of our national, European, and international policies and commitments.

The draft policy statement is undergoing Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). In this regard, an SEA Scoping Report was published on 24 May, 2021 (available on [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)) inviting submissions from the wider public as part of a non-statutory consultation. A public consultation on the draft policy statement itself is scheduled for later in the summer.

The sector is subject to robust and transparent regulation, including in terms of environmental protection. The activity of mining requires, *inter alia*, obtaining a planning permission from the relevant local authority; an Integrated Pollution Control or Industrial Emissions Licence from the EPA and a State Mining Facility from my Department.

## Electricity Generation

91. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the discussions he has had with stakeholders regarding the future use of West Offaly and Lough Ree power stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28803/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):**

The Just Transition Commissioner made a recommendation in his first progress report, published in May 2020, that a study be undertaken in relation to the future potential of the ESB power stations at both Lanesborough (Lough Ree Power) and Shannonbridge (West Offaly Power) for the establishment of a dedicated Energy Hub in the Midlands. This was subsequently included as a commitment in the Programme for Government. ESB has been participating in a number of working groups established under the Just Transition programme which looked at the future of the Midlands area following the closure of the ESB Midlands stations and the ending of the harvesting of peat by Bord na Móna.

One of the working groups, which included representatives of my Department, relevant Local Authorities, and the Just Transition Commissioner, looked specifically at how the existing infrastructure on the station sites might form a part of a future renewable energy hub. To that end, ESB commissioned an internal engineering report to examine how the power plants might be re-used in the future. Options reviewed included the possibility of using other types of fuel. The report was subsequently reviewed by Fichtner, an external international consultancy firm with acknowledged expertise in these areas. These reports have not identified any viable alternative use for the existing power plants.

While the management of ESB-owned facilities is the responsibility of the Board and management of the ESB, the company has informed the Department that it plans to lodge planning applications shortly to develop additional energy services at these sites. These will include synchronous condensers and energy storage capabilities at both locations.

## Closed-Circuit Television Systems

92. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his legislative plans to deal with the issues raised by the Data Protection Commissioner regarding the use of CCTV systems in the detection of illegal dumping and litter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29375/21]

99. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will introduce legislation to allow local authorities to use CCTV footage to prosecute illegal dumpers; if there are data protection concerns in relation to this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29365/21]

100. **Deputy Darren O’Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans to tackle illegal dumping; if he intends to amend current legislation to permit the use of anti-dumping CCTV; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29406/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 92, 99 and 100 together.

The introduction of a Waste Management (Circular Economy) Bill is a commitment under the “Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy”, published in September 2020. My Department is currently finalising the draft Heads of the Bill, after which I intend to seek Government approval to publish the General Scheme. On the issue of CCTV, it is the view of the Data Protection Commission (DPC) that, although the Litter Pollution Act and the Waste Management Act provide local authorities with powers to prevent, investigate, detect and prosecute littering and dumping offences, the Acts do not provide for the processing of images of members of the public using CCTV footage. This advice is being considered by my Department and is subject to internal legal advice. It is my intention to facilitate not only the use of CCTV, but also the use of a broad range of Audio Visual Recording equipment under the Bill. A combination of legislation and guidance will help to ensure that the processing of personal data may be carried out by local authorities tasked with enforcing litter and waste law, thus providing an important deterrent in order to protect our environment from the scourge of littering and illegal dumping, while at the same time respecting the privacy rights of citizens.

## National Broadband Plan

93. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of premises connected to date under the roll-out of the National Broadband scheme; the number of premises surveyed to date; when details of the projected roll-out area by area will be available for all premises covered by the scheme; the projected cost of the National Broadband scheme for the next 20 years; the projected completion date of roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29203/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led Intervention will be delivered by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) under a contract to roll out a high speed and future proofed broadband network within the Intervention Area which covers 1.1 million people living and working in the over 544,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms along with 695 schools.

Despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, National Broadband Ireland has made steady progress on delivery of the new high speed fibre broadband network under the

National Broadband Plan. I am advised by NBI that, as of 27 May 2021, over 220,000 premises across 26 counties have been surveyed. The first fibre to the home connections are successfully connected in a test and trial phase in Carrigaline, Co Cork and Cavan with almost 4,000 premises passed and available for connection.

Build works are continuing across the country in 12 Deployment Areas covering townlands in Carrigaline, Ballinasloe, Cavan, Clare, Dundalk, Galway, Limerick Monaghan, Roscommon, Tipperary, Tralee, Wexford and Carlow and “make ready” work is underway in a further 15 Deployment Areas. In line with the NBP Contract, the deployment plan is a 7 year build programme which is due to be completed by the end of 2026. The maximum cost of the NBP to the State under the NBP contract will be €2.7 Billion over 25 years. This includes €480m for contingency costs.

I am advised that NBI is working to provide more detail on its website, with a rolling update on network build plans. The NBI website, [www.nbi.ie](http://www.nbi.ie), which is searchable by eircode, provides details at individual premises level. This will be updated to provide the most up to date information and timelines on deployment as the project progresses.

NBI has established a dedicated team to investigate acceleration of the rollout from its current contracted schedule of seven years. As part of this investigation NBI is engaging with current build partners (eir and enet) to reschedule build activities and is also reviewing potential additional build partners as an option to speed up the build process. Exploring the potential to accelerate the network rollout is being undertaken in parallel with the measures required to mitigate delays arising as a result of Covid-19.

## **Energy Policy**

94. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the modelling being carried out by his Department to predict energy demand in future; the efforts that are ongoing to reduce energy demand across the State to ensure sustainable output of energy as Ireland moves towards renewable forms of electricity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29428/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has a statutory role in compiling and disseminating national projections of energy production and use. SEAI has published energy demand and supply projections for Ireland since 2006 in collaboration with the Economic and Social Research Institute. These projections are used to inform the debate on future energy trends and to assist the government in developing policy measures. In the electricity sector, EirGrid’s Generation Capacity Statement, which is published annually, sets out the expected levels of electricity generation and demand for each year over the coming decade. EirGrid is also currently undertaking a ‘Shaping our Electricity Future’ consultation across the three dimensions of electricity networks, power system operation, and electricity markets with the aim of developing an integrated vision of the 2030 power system and electricity market. The draft strategy comprises four approaches to achieving this, as well as meeting the projected increased demand for electricity over the coming years.

In addition, My Department is currently carrying out a review of the security of energy supply of Ireland’s electricity and natural gas systems. The review is focusing on the period to 2030 in the context of ensuring a sustainable pathway by 2050. This review is taking into account the commitment in the Programme for Government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 which is now provided for in the Climate

## Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021.

Regarding energy efficiency measures, my Department funds a number of grant schemes to support homeowners, communities, commercial and public sector bodies to improve the energy efficiency of their properties. These are administered by the SEAI and fu

If details on the application processes for all schemes operated by the Authority are available at [www.seai.ie](http://www.seai.ie)

### Flexible Work Practices

95. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the remote working strategy which intends on supporting 4,000 workers to continue working remotely will be accessible equally across the island given that there has been reports of a lapse of up to 18 months for the installation of fast speed internet in certain areas of the west coast; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29465/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of high speed, quality, reliable broadband to ensure that citizens across Ireland can participate in remote working, on-line schooling, shopping, critical video calls, both business related and social, and a range of other online activities. A combination of commercial investment and the State led intervention will ensure access to high speed broadband in every part of the country and no premises will be left behind, no matter how remote. Of the 2.4 million premises across Ireland, 77% of premises now have access to high-speed broadband of more than 30 Mbps. National Broadband Ireland will address the remaining premises through the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

A number of commercial operators have also announced further investment plans in high-speed broadband. Eir has said it will roll out fibre to a further 1.4 million premises, bringing its fibre deployment to some 1.8 million premises. SIRO is currently completing the first phase of its fibre deployment which will see 375,000 premises passed with gigabit services. Virgin Media is offering 250Mbps as a standard offering with higher speeds available to many of its customers across more than 1 million premises. Many other network operators and telecom service providers across the State also continue to invest in their networks.

The Remote Working Strategy was published in January by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace in a way that maximises economic, social and environmental benefits. The Programme for Government recognises that the National Broadband Plan will be a key enabler to such policies and has committed to seek to accelerate its roll out. My Department continues to explore the potential to accelerate the roll out with National Broadband Ireland.

### Grant Payments

96. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will introduce at specific 100% grant for the retrofit scheme for first-time buyers of vacant properties to incentivise them to live in towns and villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29205/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):**



My Department funds a number of grant schemes to support people to improve the energy efficiency of their properties. These are administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Grants for insulation and heating control systems are available to homes built and occupied prior to 2006. Heat pump and solar grants are available to homes built and occupied prior to 2011. The schemes offer partial grants for individuals who can afford to contribute to the cost of upgrades as well as free energy efficiency improvements for people at risk of energy poverty.

Since 2000, around 450,000 homeowners have upgraded their homes with support from these schemes, representing nearly one home in four across the country. This has resulted in warmer, healthier and more comfortable homes that are easier and cheaper to heat and light.

This year, €221.5 million in capital funding has been provided for SEAI residential and community retrofit programmes. This represents an 82% increase on the 2020 allocation and is the largest amount ever for the schemes. Full details on the application processes for all schemes operated by the SEAI are available at [www.seai.ie](http://www.seai.ie)

My Department has no plans to introduce a specific 100% grant for the retrofit scheme for first-time buyers of vacant properties to incentivise them to live in towns and villages. However, Government is funding the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, administered through the Local Authorities. The scheme is designed to breathe new life into rural communities - making them more attractive places to live, work, socialise and raise a family. The Minister for Rural and Community Development recently announced €15 million in funding for the scheme. The Programme for Government commits to bringing forward an expanded Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy. Further details are available from the Department of Rural and Community Development: <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme/>

## **National Broadband Plan**

97. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the National Broadband Plan in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29461/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 103 together. 85 and 91 together

There are 36,615 premises in the Intervention Area in County Mayo that will receive access to high speed broadband under the National Broadband Plan. I am advised that as of 27 May, 8,281 (22.6%) of these have been surveyed by National Broadband Ireland (NBI). Surveying is the first step to delivering the new fibre network and informs design solutions for fibre network provision.

Detailed designs are used to initiate the ‘make ready’ project with Open eir, where Open eir ensure poles and ducts being reused are fit for purpose and are made ready for other required infrastructure. Equipment ordering decisions are dependent on this step. Survey data is required to initiate pre-works paving the way for fibre deployment. Pre-works involve construction of new duct routes, erection of poles, building chambers and tree trimming. On completion of pre-works, the main construction works can commence.

I am advised by NBI that surveys are completed or ongoing in Aghagower, Ballyhean, Breaghwy, Burren, Castlebar, Clogher, Cloonkeen, Croaghmoyle, Islandeady, Killavally, Manulla,

Pontoon, Strade, Tawynagry, Turlough, Drumsheen, Bunnyconnellan, Ballina Town, Carrowntreila, Ardagh, Campbells Crossroads, Rosserk, Shanvoley, Derryhick, Kilhale, Tawnyl-  
aheen, Turlough, Ballyvary, Keeloges, Castlebar Town, Rinnaseer, Bellaburke, Killawullaun  
Mountain, Carn, Carnacon, Ballyglass, Belcarra, Balla and Ringarraun, Newport, Carrowbeg,  
Inishgort, Inishcottle, Myna, Fahy, Ashbridge, Glenisland, Srahmore, Glenhest, Comploon,  
Slogger and Tawnameeltoge. Pre-works have commenced in areas around Castlebar and Bal-  
lina. Further details are available on specific areas in Mayo through the NBI website [www.NBI.  
ie](http://www.NBI.ie) which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their inter-  
est in being provided with deployment updates through its website.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed  
broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 27  
May, 317 Broadband Connection Points sites have been installed by NBI. A number of BCPs  
are connected in County Mayo including Bofeenaun Community Centre, Taugheen Commu-  
nity Centre, Kilmovee Community Centre, Belderrig Community & Research Centre, Clare  
Island Community Centre, Keel Community Centre, Killaser Community Centre, Islandeady  
Community Centre, Finny Community Centre and Cushlough Community Centre.

Cloghans National School, Scoil Néifinn, Midfield National School, Meelick More National  
School, Kinaffe National School, Facefield National School, Errew National School, Shraigh  
National School, Rathbane National School, Rathnamagh National School, Dookinella Nation-  
al School, Tavraun Central National School and Saint Coleman's National School are installed  
as part of this initiative.

## Waste Management

98. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Com-  
munications if his attention has been drawn to four waste management facilities in a location  
(details supplied) which are surrounded by residential properties and sporting facilities; and if  
he will make a statement on the matter. [29423/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications  
(Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Waste management facilities, such as those referred to by the Deputy,  
are subject to a range of regulatory controls under national legislation, including planning per-  
mission and the conditions attached to a licence issued by the Environmental Protection Agency  
(EPA) on the operation and management of such sites. Monitoring and enforcement of condi-  
tions imposed under planning permission is a matter for the relevant local authority while envi-  
ronmental monitoring and enforcement associated with licensed activities is the responsibility  
of the Environmental Protection Agency. Under Section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act,  
as Minister, I am precluded from the exercise of any power or control in relation to the perfor-  
mance in particular circumstances by the Agency or a local authority of a function conferred on  
it by the Act, therefore questions in relation to these facilities should be directed to the EPA and  
relevant local authority as appropriate.

*Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 92.*

*Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 92.*

## Environmental Policy

101. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Commu-

nications the status of efforts to reduce the use of single-use plastic items such as cutlery, plates and straws in addition to expanded polystyrene containers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29424/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy outlines the measures Ireland is taking under the Single Use Plastics Directive (EU 2019/904) to substantially reduce the amount of single use plastic items we use and to sustainably manage the waste arising from those we do. The Directive will be transposed by the deadline of 3 July 2021 and from that date single use plastic cutlery, plates, stirrers, straws, balloon sticks and cotton bud sticks may not be placed on the Irish market. This ban will also apply to single use expanded polystyrene cups and food containers and all products containing oxo-degradable plastic. The Plan sets out the range of steps we will take to become leaders in the EU in the fight against single use plastics including the commitment to introduce a Deposit and Return Scheme for plastic bottles and aluminium cans and a levy on the use of disposable coffee cups with the ambition of ultimately banning them entirely.

### **Climate Change Policy**

102. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the meaning of just transition and climate justice in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29278/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The recently published Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill, 2021, proposes to define climate justice as the requirement that decisions and actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the effects of climate change shall, in so far as it is practicable to do so, safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable persons and endeavour to share the burdens and benefits arising from climate change. In relation to just transition, the Bill proposes to amend section 4(8) of the Principal Act to provide that, for the purposes of performing their respective functions under section 4, the Minister and the Government shall have regard, inter alia, to the requirement for a just transition to a climate neutral economy which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to maximise employment opportunities, and support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition.

Key objectives for a just climate transition have been set out in the Programme for Government, including the need to deliver alternative job opportunities to sectors and regions most affected and to ensure that vulnerable groups are supported through the transition, as transformative policies are implemented. These objectives, as well as specific proposals for their implementation, will be further articulated in the forthcoming revision to the Climate Action Plan.

*Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 97.*

### **Cybersecurity Policy**

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the degree to which he is engaged in the protection against cyber-attacks across all Departments and the bodies under their aegis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29384/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications**

**(Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The National Cyber Security Strategy (NCSC) has a broad remit across the cyber security of Government ICT and critical national infrastructure. The National Cyber Strategy 2019-2024 sets out the role of the NCSC to support Government Departments and other public bodies to improve the resilience and security of their IT systems to better protect services that our people rely upon, and their data. The NCSC works very closely with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) in this regard. The NCSC acts as a central contact point in the event of a Government- or nation-wide cyber security incident affecting the State. The NCSC also coordinates and supports the response to significant incidents, with the lead role being taken by the entity affected by the incident. The Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) is the team within the NCSC that leads in responding to cyber security incidents. The CSIRT has achieved international accreditation and its personnel are highly-regarded internationally. It is this team that engages with the affected body to support it in addressing the threat.

Information sharing is a key component of the work of the NCSC whereby it acts as a source of expert advice and guidance, but also as a “clearing house” for information. That is to say it takes in threat intelligence data, trends and risks data, from national, global and local sources, analyses them, and makes sure that those people who need that data get it, either to protect their own systems, or to assist them in carrying out their statutory roles. The NCSC is in regular and frequent communication with international counterparts and there is an ongoing two-way exchange of information.

The NCSC also supports public bodies, operators of essential services and digital service providers to improve their cyber security posture and fulfil their obligations under the European Network and Information Security Directive. The NCSC takes a very proactive role to supporting these important bodies on their cyber security journey by hosting seminars and workshops for instance.

### **Grant Payments**

105. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will review the threshold on the level of grants available for deep retrofit of houses due to the exceptional rise in the cost of insulation over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29206/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department funds a number of grant schemes to support homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their properties. These are administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Since 2000, around 450,000 homeowners have upgraded their homes with support from these schemes, representing nearly one home in four across the country. This has resulted in warmer, healthier and more comfortable homes that are easier and cheaper to heat and light. This year, €221.5 million in capital funding has been provided for SEAI residential and community retrofit programmes. This represents an 82% increase on the 2020 allocation and is the largest amount ever for the schemes. SEAI offers grants of up to 35% of the cost of home energy upgrades to homeowners as well as free home energy upgrades to people at risk of energy poverty.

In the case of deep retrofits, improving insulation will be just one measure in a suite of upgrades. There has been an increase in the cost of insulation materials in the last 12 months. This is largely as a result of disruptions to the supply chain and impact of Covid globally. This increase is not limited to the retrofitting sector.

SEAI is currently reviewing the existing grant incentives available for homeowners in order to ensure that retrofit schemes encourage sufficient uptake and achieve the highest reduction of emissions while offering value for money. In addition, my Department is currently identifying best ways of bringing to the market affordable financing solutions to complement grants and support deeper home energy upgrades at scale.

### **Data Centres**

106. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the analysis his Department has carried out to determine the amount of renewable energy that will be used by data centres by 2030; the efforts he is taking to ensure the sustainable use of renewable energy as more data centres come on stream; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29429/21]

118. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the details of the impact that data centres will have on electricity demand in Ireland over the next decade and the policy interventions planned as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28802/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):**  
I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 118 together.

The Government Statement on the Role of Data Centres in Ireland's Enterprise Strategy (2018) acknowledges the role of data centres as part of the digital and communications infrastructure for many sectors of our economy. Data centres are part of the core infrastructure of the digital economy by enabling inter alia data storage, banking and disaster recovery services. They have become increasingly important in the context of remote working during the Covid 19 pandemic and also support high-quality jobs. The Statement also noted that data centres pose considerable challenges to the future planning and operation of Ireland's power system.

In 2020, data centres represented approximately 11% of the total electricity used in Ireland. EirGrid, in their Generation Capacity Statement 2020-2029, project that demand from data centres could account for 27% of all demand by 2029 which is significant.

The Programme for Government commits to developing efficiency standards for equipment and processes, particularly those set to grow rapidly, such as data centres. The ICT sector needs to undergo its own green transformation. In addition, EirGrid recently launched a public consultation on 'Shaping our Electricity Future'. The aim is to make the electricity grid stronger and more flexible so that it can carry significantly more renewable generation as well as meet increasing demand from high volume energy users such as data centres. This may include potential geographic restrictions or incentives of large demand customers closer to the generation of power, potentially giving a more regional balance of locations. A consultation on this strategy is open until 14 June and there has been detailed stakeholder engagement on it.

Furthermore, my Department is carrying out a review of the security of energy supply of Ireland's electricity and natural gas systems. It is planned that the review will be completed by the end of 2021. The outcome of the review may inform policy in order to meet future demand from data centres.

Ireland has significant ambitions to ensure that at least 70% of our electricity demand will be met by renewable sources by 2030. This will help supply the growing demand from data centres. In addition, the large multinationals with data centres in Ireland have committed to a global target of being 100% powered by renewable energy by 2025 with some committing to



24/7 renewable energy supply. Under the 2019 Climate Action Plan a Corporate Power Purchase Advisory Group was established to develop options for realising a target of 15% of demand to be met from CPPAs by 2030. The SEAI launched a public consultation on the report which closed on 14 April 2021. Based on the consultation feedback and other considerations, a recommendations paper on a roadmap for CPPAs will be developed later in 2021.

### **Environmental Policy**

107. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will report on the analysis on the consultation on the proposed deposit and return scheme, the introduction of which is planned for quarter three of 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29402/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, launched last September, sets out a clear roadmap for the introduction of a Deposit and Return Scheme (DRS) for plastic bottles and aluminium cans in the third quarter of 2022. This process began with the launch of a public consultation on the design of a DRS for Ireland in October last year. It was encouraging to see the level of public engagement in this first consultation with the majority of the 364 submissions received supporting the introduction of the Scheme and favouring a centralised, legislation based system, operated by a single entity. The submissions received under this consultation will be published shortly on my Department's website.

Following this consultation, a stakeholder working group, consisting of beverage producers, retailers, eNGOs and waste collectors was established to progress the design of the system. The Department of Agriculture, Environment Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland have sat in on the working group discussions as observers.

The second step in the process was a further consultation on the regulatory framework for the Scheme which concluded on 7 May. Submissions received under this are currently being assessed and will inform the working group in their deliberations on a final regulatory framework.

I intend to finalise Regulations enabling the introduction of the Deposit and Return scheme early in the third quarter of this year, in order to enable the scheme to commence in the third quarter of 2022.

### **Post Office Network**

108. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he plans to introduce a public service obligation payment for the post office network in order to protect this essential service and prevent further more closures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29403/21]

116. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his views on the present viability of the post office network; the steps that will be taken to support the viability of rural post offices which are a vital component in regional towns and villages; the further steps he will take to encourage the Department of Finance to provide public service obligation supports to the existing post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27883/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communica-**

**tions (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 116 together. 108 and 116 together.

An Post is a commercial State body with a mandate to act commercially. It has statutory responsibility for the State's postal service and the post office network. Decisions relating to the network, including those in relation to the size, distribution and future of the network are operational matters for the Board and management of the company.

While it is longstanding Government policy that postal services will not be directly subsidised by the Government, we remain fully committed to a sustainable post office network as a key component of the economic and social infrastructure in both rural and urban areas. As with any business the post office needs to develop commercial strategies to enable it to grow and maintain its relevance for its users.

Government continues to provide significant business to An Post through the Department of Social Protection's Social Welfare contract and National Treasury Management Agency business. Government efforts have been focussed on supporting An Post in the roll out of new services and the delivery of its strategic plan. An Post, has been growing its financial services as a key part of its business strategy, building on the significant savings business it has in partnership with the NTMA, its market-leading position in foreign exchange and existing current account, credit card and consumer lending customer base.

A Capital Expenditure programme was approved at Ministerial level which, as part of the Company's commitment to the sustainability of its network, is designed to develop the newer elements of An Post's Financial Services business and mitigate declining core mail volumes and revenues on the Retail side of the business. €30m in State funding was made available to the company, of which €15 million is to support the renewal of the post office network and a further €15 million towards the continued fulfilment of a five-day per week mail delivery service. Government has faith in the ability of An Post and the postmasters to deliver on that renewal process.

Government is committed to working with An Post and postmasters to ensure that the network continues to play a strong role in delivering State services. Government recently approved the Report on the Provision of Offline Government Services and the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Group, co-chaired by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, to, *inter alia*, examine the feasibility of directing more Government business to the post office network. The Group has met twice with a further meeting scheduled in early June and will report back to Government by the end of July.

All options will be considered fully to give effect to our commitment to ensuring a sustainable and viable post office network, while respecting the commercial mandate of An Post.

### **Cybersecurity Policy**

109. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the role of Director of the National Cyber Security Centre has been filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29455/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Last year as, as part of the ongoing development of the NCSC, it was decided to create two new positions of Director and Chief Technology Officer on the NCSC senior management team. Following an open competition, the CTO role was filled early this year.

An open competition was also held for Director of the NCSC. At the conclusion of the competition process, the preferred candidate did not accept the offer of employment. It is intended to re-advertise the Director role in the near future. The capacity of the National Cyber Security Centre has been increased from 7 in 2016 to 29 today. A Capacity Review of the NCSC which is due to report shortly, will inform the future development of the NCSC and the extent of any additional resources required in order for the NCSC to continue to deliver its mandate.

### **Water Services**

110. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his views on the possibility of introducing a scheme that would provide funding to local community centres, sports centres and other such premises for rainwater harvesting systems; the research that has been carried by his Department into such systems; his views on whether funding or contributing to the funding of such systems would have a beneficial effect on water usage and the costs incurred by these organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29390/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I have no function in relation to the matters raised by the Deputy. Responsibility for policy in relation to water services is a matter for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

### **Local Authorities**

111. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the supports and funding available to local authorities for litter and cleansing measures in particular in 2021 to facilitate an outdoor summer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29367/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I recently announced the provision of an additional €5m in funding for litter prevention and clean up in 2021, as the country prepares for an outdoor summer due to the ongoing Covid situation. This additional funding will support inter alia: - the provision of quality litter picking materials such as litter pickers, gloves and bags;

- immediate mapping of existing levels of on-street infrastructure (bins and dog-fouling receptacles) and the urgent provision and immediate roll-out of additional infrastructure to address any gaps identified;

- potential support for the servicing of on-street infrastructure;

- additional education and awareness efforts

A circular has issued to each local authority regarding this additional €5 million funding - on top of funding provided under the Anti Dumping Initiative and Anti Litter and Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme - and the Department is liaising with individual local authorities to establish a platform for funding proposals and to identify where additional infrastructure is most needed. Each local authority has now appointed a lead person to liaise with the Department regarding the new scheme and a questionnaire has issued to each lead, requesting a range of information relating to their existing litter infrastructure, clean up and awareness activities. The responses to this questionnaire and the ongoing discussions between the Department and the local au-

thority sector will inform the design of the scheme and a further Circular will issue informing local authorities of the details and their individual allocations shortly. While these measures are intended to support anti littering activities and support an outdoor summer to be enjoyed by all citizens, there remains a fundamental onus on all of us to make a conscious effort to leave no trace.

### **Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan**

112. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the way in which the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire coastal community will benefit from off-shore infrastructure such as windfarms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29368/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Programme for Government commits to the achievement of 5GW of offshore wind by 2030 and the development of a longer-term plan to potentially take advantage of up to 30GW of off-shore floating wind power in our deeper Atlantic waters.

These ambitious targets will require investment of tens of billions of euro in Ireland's off-shore renewable energy sector, which will deliver considerable benefits to coastal communities in terms of high-value jobs, and indigenous supply chains. A cross-departmental Offshore Renewable Energy Top Team, chaired by my Department, is in the process of being established to capture these wider economic and business opportunities.

The significant role for regional ports in development of Ireland's offshore renewable energy sector, and the need for investment in port infrastructure, will also benefit local coastal communities through employment and commercial opportunities. A review of national ports policy in 2021 by the Department of Transport will consider the required port infrastructure development to facilitate Ireland's future offshore renewable energy sector.

There is an additional requirement within the Renewable Energy Support Scheme that off-shore windfarms establish Community Benefit Funds prior to project operation and for specified contributions to be made to these funds. My Department will also publish a Good Practice Principles Handbook by July 2021, providing guidance on the management of Community Benefit funds, to ensure community participation in fund decision-making. This handbook will firmly establish local community participation in fund decision-making.

In addition to enabling Ireland reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to meet international decarbonisation obligations, and providing employment opportunities in the green economy, development of an indigenous offshore energy sector will benefit all Irish citizens through enhanced security of energy supply and reduced exposure to imported fossil fuel prices.

### **Departmental Schemes**

113. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he considers the current waiting lists for SEAI grants in counties Longford and Westmeath to be indicative of the roll-out of the warmer homes scheme nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29516/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free

of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). To date over 142,000 homes have received free upgrades leaving them better able to afford to heat their homes to an adequate level. The approximate average value of the energy efficiency measures provided to a household under the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme was €14,800 in 2020. I have secured additional resources this year to expand the capacity of the SEAI to deliver the scheme. Funding for the energy poverty retrofit schemes has also increased to over €109 million in 2021. This is an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation. In addition, delivery capacity has increased due to a new, broader contractor panel that commenced at the end of 2020.

There are currently over 7,800 homes including 71 homes in Longford and 188 homes in Westmeath on the Warmer Homes work programme. The scheme operates nationally on a first come first served basis. SEAI data indicates that for homes completed in 2020, the average time from application to completion was approximately 18 months in Longford, Westmeath and nationally. The average wait times are expected to increase significantly in 2021 due to the extensive COVID-19 related restrictions on construction activity between March and June of last year as well as between January and 12 April of this year when the scheme was fully paused in line with Government guidelines. Works under the scheme has now recommenced in line with activity in the residential construction sector.

The SEAI has advised me that the average wait times should only ever be used as a general guide and that wait times vary, based on the demand for the scheme at the time of application as well as other factors including the scale of works to be completed, access to the property, availability of materials and the weather.

A further €112.5 million will be spent on expanding other existing SEAI residential and community grant schemes and introducing new initiatives. This will support an increased level of retrofit activity in 2021.

### **Climate Change Policy**

114. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the energy security of the State in the context of meeting Ireland's emissions targets under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 and Just Transition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29410/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** A range of State bodies are responsible for ensuring security of energy supply. In the electricity and natural gas sectors, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, EirGrid and Gas Networks Ireland publish regular reports in relation to security of supply, which are available on their websites. For instance, EirGrid's Generation Capacity Statement, which is published annually, sets out the expected levels of electricity generation and demand for each year over the coming decade. In the oil sector, the National Oil Reserves Agency is responsible for holding stocks of oil equivalent to 90 days of national demand as required under EU law. My Department works with all of the State bodies to ensure continued security of energy supply. In addition, my Department is currently carrying out a review of the security of energy supply of Ireland's electricity and natural gas systems. The review is focusing on the period to 2030 in the context of ensuring a sustainable pathway by 2050. This review is taking into account the ambition set out in the Programme for Government which is set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021.

The Government is committed to a just climate transition as part of Ireland's transition, over



the coming decades, to a climate neutral economy. Key objectives for a just climate transition have been set out in the Programme for Government, including the need to deliver alternative job opportunities to sectors and regions most affected and to ensure that vulnerable groups are supported through the transition, as transformative policies are implemented. These objectives, as well as specific proposals for their implementation, will be further articulated in the forthcoming revision to the Climate Action Plan.

### **Waste Management**

115. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if there are plans to introduce a disability waste waiver; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29366/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** My Department has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including representative organisations such as Family Carer’s Ireland, Age Action, the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, the Irish Wheelchair Association, Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Ireland, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland and public bodies such as the National Disability Authority, the HSE, the Department of Health and the Department of Social Protection, in an effort to see how best to support persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical incontinence wear. Since mid-2017, a range of charging options have operated, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste. This provides flexibility to waste collectors to develop various service-price offerings that suit different household circumstances. Mandatory per kilogramme ‘pay by weight’ charging was not introduced. A Price Monitoring Group (PMG) was established in mid-2017 to monitor the on-going cost of residential waste collection to homeowners across Ireland as the ‘flat-rate structure’ was being phased out. While fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend has been relative price stability. Results from the PMG are available on my Department’s website.

In September 2020, Minister Ryan launched a new national waste policy for the period 2020-2025, A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy. This plan contains a range of measures to empower households through enhanced consumer protection requirements. It also envisages an enhanced monitoring of the market to ensure continued relative price stability.

*Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 108.*

### **Climate Change Policy**

117. **Deputy Darren O’Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications further to Parliamentary Question No. 67 of 19 May 2021, if he will publish the Just Transition Commissioner’s latest report given the added importance of its timing as the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 progresses through the legislative stages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29405/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Government appointed Mr Kieran Mulvey as Just Transition Commissioner in November 2019 to facilitate discussions and work with stakeholders to develop, mobilise and deliver opportunities for the Midlands for both the workers directly affected and the wider community. The Commissioner is undertaking his work with administrative support provided by my Department. The Commissioner is also being supported in certain of his engagements with stakeholders in the Midlands by the Secretariat to the Midlands Regional Transition Team.

1 June 2021

The Commissioner has prepared three progress reports to date and the first two reports are available on my Department's website at <http://www.gov.ie/decc/>. I have received and am considering the Commissioner's third report and I intend to publish it shortly. I anticipate requesting the Commissioner to prepare a further report before the end of 2021, with a view to considering progress to date in implementing the range of interventions that have been put in place by the Government.

I intend that the Climate Action Plan 2021 will contain a specific chapter on just transition which will address the Programme for Government commitment to prepare an implementation plan in response to the recommendations contained in the Commissioner's reports.

*Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 106.*

### **Departmental Data**

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which his Department continues to meet targets in respect of the environment, climate and communications with particular reference to the ongoing progress in each sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29383/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department published its Statement of Strategy this year which sets out our five strategic goals in line with the Programme for Government and our long-term vision of a climate neutral, sustainable and digitally connected Ireland. The five strategic goals are complemented by a broader list of deliverables for the Department to achieve in 2021. All of the deliverables identified for the first half of the year are being progressed. However, COVID-19 has had and will continue to have an impact on delivery in 2021 and engagement is ongoing across the Department and with our strategic partners to recover and to accelerate activity where possible.

The publication of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 underpins our goal to be a leader in climate action. Its enactment will set Ireland on the pathway to a net-zero emissions future no later than 2050, and to a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030.

We continue to make progress to meet the Government's commitment to deliver 70% of Ireland's electricity by 2030 from renewable sources – public consultations on programmes such as the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme, the Microgeneration Support Scheme and the Energy Efficiency Obligation Scheme have recently closed and the responses are now being analysed.

The protection and restoration of our environment through sustainable resource use is delivered through policy initiatives such as the draft National Strategy for Ireland to transition to a Circular Economy which was published in April and the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy published last year.

My Department is delivering world-class connectivity and communications through the National Broadband Plan – design work is complete or ongoing in target townlands across every county with 220,000 premises surveyed and 317 Broadband Connection Point installed as of 27 May.

### **Cybersecurity Policy**

120. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans to improve cyber security in Departments given the recent cyber-attack; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29459/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The National Cyber Security Centre has a broad remit in relation to the cyber security of Government ICT and critical national infrastructure. It acts as a central contact point in the event of a government or nation-wide cyber security incident affecting the State. The NCSC also coordinates and supports the response to significant incidents, with the lead role being taken by the entity affected by the incident. The NCSC team is made up of highly skilled, specialist technical civilian staff, with skillsets in areas such as computer science, software engineering, malware analysis, information technology forensics, cryptography, software development, and cyber security compliance, as well as general cyber security skills. The Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) is the team within the NCSC that leads in responding to cyber security incidents. The CSIRT has achieved international accreditation. It is this team that engages with the affected body to support it in addressing a threat.

Information sharing is a key component of the work of the NCSC whereby it acts a source of expert advice and guidance, but also as a ‘clearing house’ for information. That is to say it takes in threat intelligence data, trends and risks data, from national, global and local sources, analyses them, and makes sure that those people who need that data get it, either to protect their own systems, or to assist them in carrying out their statutory roles. The NCSC is in regular and frequent communication with international counterparts and the exchange of information is a two-way street.

The NCSC also supports public bodies, operators of essential services and digital service providers to improve their cyber security posture and fulfil their obligations under the European Network and Information Security Directive. The NCSC takes a very proactive role to supporting these important bodies in continually building their cyber security resilience through a range of initiatives, including by hosting seminars and workshops. In the days following the ransomware attack on the HSE, the NCSC has been providing specific guidance to its constituents, including Government Departments and agencies, together with operators of essential services, on appropriate measures they can take to reduce the risk of further ransomware incidents on their networks. This important element of the work of the NCSC which will continue into the future, will help inform the measures taken by individual organisations, including Government Departments, in securing their network and information systems.

Recognising that the environment in which the NCSC operates is extremely dynamic, a detailed capacity review of the NCSC is being undertaken to inform Government as to how the NCSC needs to evolve going forward. This capacity review is being carried out by an expert international consultancy and is due to report in the coming weeks in line with the timeline for completion of this work of Q2 2021 set out in the 2019 National Cyber Security Strategy.

### **Departmental Schemes**

121. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of homes that have undergone a deep retrofit in each of the past five years and to date in 2021; and if a target has been set on the number of homes to undergo a deep retrofit before the end of 2021 and over the course of the next three years. [29378/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Programme for Government and the Climate Action Plan set ambitious targets to retrofit

500,000 homes to a Building Energy Rating of B2/cost optimal and to install 400,000 heat pumps in existing buildings over the next 10 years. Some €221.5 million in capital funding has been provided this year for SEAI residential and community retrofit programmes. This represents an 82% increase on the 2020 allocation and is the largest amount ever for the schemes. This allocation has facilitated the expansion and improvement of existing SEAI grant schemes and the introduction of new initiatives. A further €65 million has been allocated to retrofit social housing administered by the Department of Housing.

Prior to the introduction of enhanced COVID restrictions in January 2021, it was estimated that, in total, SEAI residential and community schemes would deliver over 29,000 retrofits including approximately 8,000 to a B2 level. Every effort will be made to maximise activity now that construction activity in the residential sector has recommenced.

The table below shows the number of SEAI supported retrofits to a BER of B2 or better between 2017 and 2020.

	2017**	2018**	2019	2020
SEAI supported retrofits to BER B2 or better*	3	214	2,189	3,210

\* It is important to note that local authority retrofits are in addition to these.

\*\* Figures for 2017 and 2018 relate only to the Deep Retrofit Programme. Data in relation to B2 retrofits under other schemes for those years is not available.

## National Broadband Plan

122. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if his attention has been drawn to the fact that businesses in rural Ireland that have access to slow basic broadband services are not being included in the National Broadband Plan despite their need for access to high speed broadband; the way he plans to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29407/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The National Broadband Plan will ensure that businesses and individual citizens throughout the entire country will have access to high speed broadband services through a combination of commercial investment and the State led intervention under the NBP. The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), shows the areas which will be included in the National Broadband Plan State led intervention as well as areas targeted by commercial operators. The map is colour coded and searchable by address and Eircode. The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map will be served by the new high speed network being delivered by NBI. In order to comply with the State Aid decision which enabled the contract to be awarded, NBI can only serve those premises which have been identified as AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map, as no commercial operator has demonstrated that they will provide a high speed broadband service to these premises. My Department defines high speed broadband as a connection with minimum speeds of 30Mbps download and 6Mbps upload.

The activities of commercial operators delivering high speed broadband within BLUE areas are not planned or funded by the State and my Department has no statutory authority to intervene in that regard as they operate in a fully liberalised market regulated by ComReg as independent regulator.

Complaints about service provision are a matter between the consumer and the service provider in the first instance. If this avenue has been exhausted without a satisfactory resolu-

tion, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) may be able to assist further. ComReg is the independent body that issues licences to broadband service providers and investigates complaints to make sure that companies are delivering services in line with their licence obligations.

In the event that, having exhausted the above options, a premises located in the BLUE area still cannot get high speed broadband from service providers in the area, they should contact my Department at [broadband@decc.gov.ie](mailto:broadband@decc.gov.ie) with full details and the matter will be investigated by my officials.

### **Departmental Schemes**

123. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the actions he will take to accelerate the SEAI better energy warmer homes scheme to ensure delivery of improvements to households in receipt of fuel allowance and to reduce the current waiting time of two years for inspections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29208/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. To date, over 142,000 homes have received free upgrades under the scheme and in 2020 the average value of the energy efficiency measures provided per household was over €14,800. I have secured additional resources this year to expand the capacity of the SEAI to deliver the scheme. Funding for the energy poverty retrofit schemes has also increased to over €109 million in 2021. This is an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation. In addition, delivery capacity has increased due to a new, broader contractor panel that commenced at the end of 2020.

There are currently over 7,800 homes on the scheme work programme. This includes homes that: are currently undergoing works; have been allocated to contractors for works; completed an initial home survey and are awaiting allocation to a contractor or are awaiting initial survey. The scheme operates nationally on a first come first served basis. SEAI data indicates that for homes completed in 2020, the average time from application to completion was approximately 18 months. The average wait times are expected to increase significantly in 2021 due to the extensive COVID-19 related restrictions on construction activity between March and June of last year as well as between January and 12 April of this year when the scheme was fully paused in line with Government guidelines. Works under the scheme have now recommenced in line with activity in the residential construction sector.

The SEAI has advised me that the average wait times should only ever be used as a general guide and that wait times vary, based on the demand for the scheme at the time of application as well as other factors including the scale of works to be completed, access to the property, availability of materials and the weather.

A further €112.5 million will be spent on expanding other existing SEAI residential and community grant schemes and introducing new initiatives. This will support an increased level of retrofit activity in 2021.

### **National Broadband Plan**

124. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Commu-



nications if the National Broadband Plan has missed any of the deadlines set out in the contract agreed with National Broadband Ireland. [29372/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, National Broadband Ireland (NBI) has made steady progress on delivery of the new high speed fibre broadband network under the National Broadband Plan. I am advised by NBI that, as of 27 May 2021, over 220,000 premises across 26 counties have been surveyed. The first fibre to the home connections are successfully connected in Carrigaline, Co Cork and Cavan with almost 4,000 premises passed and available for connection. Build works are continuing across the country in 12 Deployment Areas covering townlands in Carrigaline, Ballinasloe, Cavan, Clare, Dundalk, Galway, Limerick Monaghan, Roscommon, Tipperary, Tralee, Wexford and Carlow and “make ready” work is underway in a further 15 Deployment Areas. While substantial progress has been made to date, the Covid 19 pandemic has had an impact on the delivery of the fibre network resulting in delays on delivery of aspects of the programme. Impacts include challenges with mobilisation of key contractors with restrictions on operations, supply chain and logistic delays (both nationally and internationally), as well as the recruitment of key personnel as NBI and its contractors scale, up including challenges associated with on-boarding and training people. Inevitably, like many other organisations, NBI and contractor staff are at risk of contracting Covid 19 or may have to restrict their movements as a result of being a close contact posing further challenges. My Department has worked closely with NBI to put in place a remedial plan under the Contract which re-baselines milestone for 2021 to address delays experienced by the NBP rollout, primarily arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Department is working closely with NBI to oversee the implementation of the remedial plan and work is continuing to re-baseline the remaining milestones for the remainder of the programme. In parallel, considerations are ongoing in relation to the potential for acceleration of the rollout.

## **Environmental Policy**

125. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the efforts he plans to make to promote the international phasing out of fracked gas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29432/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Programme for Government set out that the Government does not support the importation of fracked gas and committed to developing a policy statement to establish that approach. On 18 May 2021, the Government approved Policy Statement on the Importation of Fracked Gas was published. The policy statement provides that: - pending the outcome of a review of the security of energy supply of Ireland’s electricity and natural gas systems being carried out by my Department, it would not be appropriate for the development of any LNG terminals in Ireland to be permitted or proceeded with;

- the Government will work with like-minded European States to promote and support changes to European energy laws – in particular the upcoming revision of the European Union’s Gas Directive and Gas Regulation – in order to allow the importation of fracked gas to be restricted; and

- the Government will work with international partners to promote the phasing out of fracking at an international level within the wider context of the phasing out of fossil fuel extraction.

My Department will work with relevant Departments to implement this policy.

### **National Broadband Plan**

126. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans to accelerate the broadband roll-out as committed to in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29381/21]

128. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the sections and sectors of the National Broadband Plan roll-out that have been and will be accelerated under the review undertaken earlier in 2021 due to the greater demand in response to the changes in work patterns over the past year; the details of the effects of this acceleration in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29376/21]

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which the broadband roll-out throughout the country has been expedited with a view to ensure the availability of sufficient connectivity to enable the maximum number of citizens to work from home or from hubs where available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29807/21]

199. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the efforts that have been undertaken by his Department to accelerate the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan; if he will outline the engagement that has taken place with National Broadband Ireland on accelerating the roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29858/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 126, 128, 187 and 199 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led Intervention will be delivered by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) under a contract to roll out a high speed and future proofed broadband network within the Intervention Area which covers 1.1 million people living and working in the over 544,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms along with 695 schools. In line with the NBP Contract, the deployment plan is a 7 year build programme which is due to be completed by the end of 2026.

The Programme for Government commits to seek to accelerate the roll out of the National Broadband Plan. My Department is currently engaging with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of the NBP rollout with the aim of bringing forward premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the network build plan. Minister Ryan has recently written to National Broadband Ireland seeking to put the acceleration of the programme on a contractual footing. Any change to the contract will require detailed technical, commercial and financial analysis by both parties.

NBI has established a dedicated team to investigate the potential for acceleration of the fibre network rollout from its current contracted schedule of seven years. Substantial work has been completed by this team to date including productive engagement with current build partners. It is premature at this point to speculate as to how many premises may benefit from this potential change, but I can say that it will be those premises currently scheduled for the latter end of the rollout that are the focus of the analysis.

While significant progress has been made by NBI over the last year, in challenging circumstances, the pandemic has caused delays to elements of the programme. A remedial plan to

mitigate these delays has been agreed and it is in this context that the potential to accelerate the network rollout is being explored. I expect to receive a detailed assessment from my officials by the Autumn and will then bring an update to Government on this matter.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 6 May, 310 BCP sites have been installed by NBI and the high speed broadband service will be switched on through service provider contracts managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development for publicly accessible locations and the Department of Education for schools.

My Department continues to work with the Department of Education to prioritise schools with no high speed broadband, within the Intervention Area, for connection over the term of the NBP. In this regard, an acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan will see some 679 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. Further details are available on the NBI website at <https://nbi.ie/primary-schools-list/>

### **Broadcasting Sector**

127. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if Broadcasting Authority of Ireland funding was accessed for the production of a programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29218/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Responsibility for media matters, funding included, lies with my colleague the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media. The matter raised by the Deputy is therefore not within my remit as Minister.

*Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 126.*

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

129. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the expected increase in renewable energy generation in 2021; the expected increase between now and 2030; the actions being taken to achieve this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29204/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) recently published the Provisional Energy Balance for 2020 which estimates a normalised share of renewable electricity in 2020 of 38.9% of electricity demand. The most recent SEAI data shows that between 12.5% and 13.2% of Ireland's overall energy requirements in 2020 are expected to have been met from renewable sources. It is expected that 2021 data will be published in 2022. The 2019 Climate Action Plan sets out a range of policies and measures designed so Ireland can meet its existing 2030 EU emissions reduction climate target. The 2019 Climate Action Plan included commitments for 3.5 GW of offshore wind, up to 8.2 GW of onshore wind and up to 1.5 GW of solar energy by 2030. The Programme for Government commits to a further increase in offshore wind development to 5 GW by 2030.

The higher level of ambition set in the Climate Action Bill will be reflected through a new

set of policies and measures in the 2021 Climate Action Plan. This will contribute to meeting the Programme for Government target of reducing Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030, meeting the long-term target of climate neutrality by 2050, and to meeting the EU-wide binding target, under the recast Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001, of 32% of the overall share of energy to come from renewable sources by 2030.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

130. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the cost to date of all Covid-19-related payments in his Department to individuals and corporate entities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15409/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The information which the Deputy requested in relation to my Department is outlined in the table below.

Contractor/Recipient	Cost (March 2020 – May 2021)	Additional Details (purpose of contract)
Bid & Tender Management Services	€850	Procurement Training - training course delivered under existing contract in May 2020 on Managing Contracts during Covid
Quadro Consulting	€5,596	Health & Safety, specifically revised field procedures for COVID19 compliant operations.
Datapac	€33,504	HP Probook Laptops
Datapac	€2,007	Microsoft Lifecam and Headset
Integrity 360	€47,242	RSA Licences
Integrity 360	€27,607	Citrix Licences
BECHTLE DIRECT LTD	€4,130	Cisco Webex
MJ Flood	€24,600	HP Elitebook
PFH	€34,315	Citrix Gateway Licenses and Citrix Licences
Zoom	€12,332	Zoom Licenses, Zoom Room License and Zoom Sip Connector for Cisco
Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA)	€400,000	Additional funding to assist DHDA to meet a shortfall in commercial income resulting from the impact of COVID-19

Trading Online Voucher Scheme (Policy)	€18,460,000	Trading Online Voucher Scheme*
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\* With the advent of COVID-19 many small and micro-businesses found themselves with the challenge of having to shut their physical presence and adapt their business model, with many trading online for the first time. As part of the Government's COVID-19 Business Supports Package for small businesses, the terms of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme were amended and the budget significantly increased. In 2020, €20.7m was spent by the Department on the Scheme, of which €18.46m can be attributed as Covid-19 related spend. Approximately 13,000 businesses were supported by the Scheme in 2020.

### Environmental Policy

131. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason he has not proceeded with a ban on the importation of fracked gas and has instead issued a policy statement citing the fact that the advice of the Attorney General is that a ban would be against EU law (details supplied). [29385/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Programme for Government set out that the Government does not support the importation

of fracked gas and committed to developing a policy statement to establish that approach. On 18 May, the Government approved Policy Statement on the Importation of Fracked Gas was published.

There was a thorough and comprehensive consideration by my Department of all aspects of regulation and legislation permissible under Irish and EU law in considering the approach taken, in addition to consultation with the Office of the Attorney General. In the context of European Union Treaties and the laws governing the internal energy market, it is considered that a legal ban on the importation of fracked gas could not be put in place at this time.

The policy statement commits the Government to work with like-minded European States to promote and support changes to European energy laws in order to allow the importation of fracked gas to be restricted. It also sets out that the Government will work with international partners to promote the phasing out of fracking at an international level within the wider context of the phasing out of fossil fuel extraction.

### Commemorative Events

132. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Taoiseach his plans for the national day of commemoration in July 2021. [29067/21]

**The Taoiseach:** This year the National Day of Commemoration will take place in the National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts and History, Collins Barracks on Sunday, 11th July. The Ceremony ‘in honour of all those Irishmen and Irishwomen who died in past wars or on service with the United Nations’ will be broadcast live by RTE and will include a multi-faith service of prayer, military ceremonial and a wreath laying by the President. The numbers in attendance will be in line with Covid-19 restrictions to ensure the health and safety of all.

### Data Protection

133. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29316/21]

**The Taoiseach:** There were no data breaches identified within my Department since the GDPR took effect in 2018.

### Central Statistics Office

134. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Taoiseach the reason the Central Statistics Office is no longer publishing annual statistics derived from marriage registrations which it gathers (details supplied). [29349/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jack Chambers):** The CSO continues to publish, annually, statistics on marriages that occur in Ireland. The statistics are derived from marriages that were registered with the General Register Office (GRO) for the relevant year. The most recent Marriages publication was for the year 2020 and was disseminated on the 30 April 2021. Please see Table 13 Marriages of opposite-sex couples registered in 2020 celebrated in each county and city classified by form of ceremony and Table 13A Same-sex marriages registered in 2020 celebrated in each county and city classified by form of ceremony hereunder and the link to this publication:



**Table 13 Marriages of opposite-sex couples registered in 2020 celebrated in each county and city classified by form of ceremony**

Province, county or city	Catholic	Church of Ireland	Presbyterian	The Spiritualist Union of Ireland	Other religious denominations	Civil marriages	The Humanist Association	Total
Total	3,295	114	20	614	686	3,779	701	9,209
Leinster	1,341	68	4	386	429	2,456	404	5,088
Carlow	66	5	–	6	7	53	11	148
Dublin City	177	8	–	42	101	1,387	145	1,860
South Dublin	65	1	1	57	40	4	6	174
Fingal	65	–	–	21	39	15	24	164
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	64	12	–	23	15	8	18	140
Kildare	114	8	–	48	46	165	24	405
Kilkenny	107	3	–	10	15	78	10	223
Laois	79	4	–	6	11	21	5	126
Longford	36	1	–	–	–	26	–	63
Louth	80	–	1	15	31	157	17	301
Meath	171	5	2	73	43	86	58	438
Offaly	56	2	–	7	9	31	4	109
Westmeath	70	–	–	15	24	62	16	187
Wexford	115	5	–	26	16	126	10	298
Wicklow	76	14	–	37	32	237	56	452
Munster	1,066	26	–	131	187	736	240	2,386
Clare	138	–	–	11	46	6	29	230
Cork City	77	1	–	9	21	274	19	401
Cork County	302	13	–	52	57	41	73	538
Kerry	175	3	–	28	23	102	28	359
Limerick City	29	–	–	1	3	106	18	157
Limerick County	127	4	–	7	7	8	23	176
Tipperary	149	2	–	11	7	83	25	277
Waterford City	20	2	–	5	5	65	7	104
Waterford County	49	1	–	7	18	51	18	144
Connacht	564	9	–	53	45	396	36	1,103
Galway City	61	1	–	4	14	19	10	109
Galway County	159	1	–	8	15	202	13	398
Leitrim	42	1	–	1	3	8	2	57
Mayo	191	1	–	18	7	64	5	286
Roscommon	48	–	–	8	3	31	–	90
Sligo	63	5	–	14	3	72	6	163
Ulster (part of)	324	11	16	44	25	191	21	632
Cavan	93	6	1	17	13	71	10	211
Donegal	164	5	10	20	5	91	5	300

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Province, county or city	Catholic	Church of Ireland	Presbyterian	The Spiritualist Union of Ireland	Other religious denominations	Civil marriages	The Humanist Association	Total
Monaghan	67	–	5	7	7	29	6	121
Regional Authorities								
Border	429	17	16	59	31	271	29	852
Midland	241	7	–	28	44	140	25	485
West	459	3	–	38	39	316	28	883
Dublin	371	21	1	143	195	1,414	193	2,338
Mid-East	441	27	3	173	152	645	155	1,596
Mid-West	443	6	–	30	63	203	95	840
South-East	357	16	–	54	61	373	56	917
South-West	554	17	–	89	101	417	120	1,298

**Table 13A Same-sex marriages registered in 2020 celebrated in each county and city classified by form of ceremony Form of ceremony**

Province, county or city	Civil marriages	The Humanist Association	The Spiritualist Union of Ireland	Other religious denominations	Total
Total	228	38	27	21	314
Leinster	163	22	18	11	214
Carlow	3	–	1	–	4
Dublin City	121	13	3	3	140
South Dublin	–	1	4	–	5
Fingal	–	1	1	2	4
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	1	1	–	1	3
Kildare	10	–	1	2	13
Kilkenny	2	2	–	–	4
Laois	3	–	–	–	3
Longford	–	–	–	–	–
Louth	5	1	1	1	8
Meath	3	2	1	–	6
Offaly	3	–	–	–	3
Westmeath	4	–	2	–	6
Wexford	1	1	2	–	4
Wicklow	7	–	2	2	11
Munster	27	14	4	8	53
Clare	–	2	–	3	5
Cork City	16	1	1	1	19
Cork County	2	3	–	1	6
Kerry	3	4	1	1	9
Limerick City	1	–	–	–	1
Limerick County	–	1	1	1	3
Tipperary	2	–	–	1	3
Waterford City	2	1	–	–	3
Waterford County	1	2	1	–	4
Connacht	23	1	3	2	29
Galway City	2	–	1	2	5
Galway County	14	–	–	–	14
Leitrim	–	–	–	–	–

*Questions - Written Answers*

Province, county or city	Civil marriages	The Humanist Association	The Spiritualist Union of Ireland	Other religious denominations	Total
Mayo	1	1	1	–	3
Roscommon	1	–	–	–	1
Sligo	5	–	1	–	6
Ulster (part of)	15	1	2	–	18
Cavan	1	–	1	–	2
Donegal	12	1	–	–	13
Monaghan	2	–	1	–	3
Regional Authorities					
Border	20	1	3	–	24
Midland	10	–	2	–	12
West	18	1	2	2	23
Dublin	122	16	8	6	152
Mid-East	25	3	5	5	38
Mid-West	3	3	1	5	12
South-East	9	6	4	–	19
South-West	21	8	2	3	34

[www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-mar/marriages2020/](http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-mar/marriages2020/)

### Protected Disclosures

135. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29642/21]

**The Taoiseach:** My Department has received no protected disclosures from serving or former staff of the Department during the period in question.

### Data Protection

136. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 164 and 165 of 20 May 2021, the extent of contacts Irish officials have made with the officials or elected representatives in the US administration in relation to the drafting of a Bill that targets jurisdictions with inadequate enforcement of data protection law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29094/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The PQs referred to by the Deputy relate to issues on the enforcement of data protection law in this jurisdiction. I have no direct responsibility for the enforcement of data protection law.

I am not in a position to comment on draft legislation in a separate jurisdiction. Having made enquiries, my officials inform me that our embassy in Washington is aware of the draft legislation and is monitoring it. If the Deputy has further questions he can raise them with the Department of Justice.

### Workplace Relations Commission

137. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 201 of 31 March 2021, the breakdown of the counties in which the reported breaches in employment law uncovered by the Workplace Relations Commission investigations took place in each of the years reported by number of breaches and by county in tabular form. [29134/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body under the aegis of my Department, established on 1st October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015. The WRC's primary functions include the inspection of employment law compliance, the provision of information on employment law, mediation, adjudication, conciliation, facilitation, and advisory services.

Inspections carried out by WRC Inspectors operate on a compliance model. This means that an inspector will work with the employer to ensure that the employer fulfils all their statutory obligations and that any outstanding wages or entitlements are given to workers.

Table 1 sets out the breakdown of breaches by county for 2020 and 2019 from the current case management system. It is not possible to provide the information for earlier years due to decommissioning of a previous system.

County	2019	2020
Carlow	40	50
Cavan	22	46
Clare	61	55
Cork	26	85
Donegal	45	143
Dublin	250	614
Galway	128	96
Kerry	35	68
Kildare	146	335
Kilkenny	45	81
Laois	36	76
Leitrim	27	7
Limerick	118	95
Longford	33	43
Louth	53	197
Mayo	87	82
Meath	68	172
Monaghan	25	65
Offaly	76	148
Roscommon	34	40
Sligo	16	10
Tipperary	59	190
Waterford	14	103
Westmeath	119	179
Wexford	196	316
Wicklow	167	317
TOTAL	1926	3613

## **Vaccination Programme**

138. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if there is a protocol or instruction to employers to facilitate employees with time off in order to attend for Covid-19 vaccination; his views on reports of some employers insisting that employees must make the vaccine appointments at their own expense and that in some cases this is proving to act as a deterrent against getting vaccinated; his views on whether this is a dangerous practice; the steps he will take to ensure a proper protocol for employers in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29150/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English):** From the outset of Covid-19, many employers have taken the initiative in line with subsequent requests from the Government to be as flexible and as accommodating as possible with their staff. Employers have a general duty of care towards their workers and that care is often expressed in the form of understanding, compromise and flexibility.

COVID-19 vaccinations are an extremely important public health measure in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 in the community and in workplaces. There is no provision under occupational safety and health legislation to obligate employers to give employees time-off to avail of COVID-19 vaccinations. However, employers should bear in mind that in offering employees time off to facilitate COVID-19 vaccinations they are, in fact, ensuring that the greatest level of workplace safety against COVID-19 can be maintained in their business. Facilitating workers to avail of COVID-19 vaccination appointments will greatly assist in the recovery of individual businesses and of the wider economy.

I would encourage employees to engage with their employer in the first instance once they are assigned a vaccination appointment to explore all options available to enable them to receive the vaccination should it fall during working time. I would also encourage all employers to be as flexible and supportive as possible with a view to maintaining good employment relationships over the long term.

Employers are obliged to take reasonable steps to provide a safe place of work for their staff. In circumstances where employers fail to consider any of the reasonable options, an employee may have recourse to pursue a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission under the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2015, the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 or the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

139. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he has evaluated the scope of the successful exporting sectors to provide opportunities for redeployment of workers displaced by Covid-19; and if specific initiatives are being evolved to identify such opportunities and to develop programmes to support transition of workers to them. [29188/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In building towards recovery, it must be recognised that not all previous jobs will return, while capacity constraints may emerge in other areas. Fundamentally, the Government's labour market approach is about developing people and their potential through opportunities to reskill and upskill and supporting individuals to secure and remain in sustainable and quality employ-



ment. This will include supporting people to transition to new jobs in growing sectors of the economy.

We have a responsive national skills architecture, which monitors and identifies skills needs across the economy and informs provision for upskilling or reskilling across the education and training system. The Economic Recovery Plan published today outlines plans to further strengthen Ireland's Skills Framework and architecture to ensure our skills approach is routed areas of opportunity and growth. This will include a comprehensive review of Ireland's skills strategies and approaches, including the National Skills Strategy 2016-2025; developing a web-based "Skills Platform", for upskilling and reskilling opportunities; and developing Ireland's Pact for Skills, between businesses and government, to ensure those with low and no qualifications are not excluded from employment.

Upskilling and reskilling supports are delivered through a range of education and training programmes informed by this labour market and skills intelligence, which are funded through the National Training Fund. These include Skillnet Ireland, the Higher Education Authority's Springboard+ programme, apprenticeships, and digital upskilling programmes. The National Training Fund is also supporting an annual €60 million investment in the Higher Education system, through the Human Capital Initiative.

Through the agencies and initiatives mentioned above my Department and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will continue to ensure that there is a successful alignment of education and reskilling opportunities with employment opportunities in growth and emerging sectors to enable transitioning and redeployment of workers displaced by Covid-19, and other disruptive trends and structural shifts accelerated by the pandemic.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

140. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if a person (details supplied) will be advised in relation to matters raised in correspondence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29201/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English):** As you are aware the Government has put in place a comprehensive package to help businesses and workers during the pandemic, including the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), the small business assistance scheme for COVID (SBASC), low-cost loans, the deferral and warehousing of tax liabilities and the waiver of commercial rates.

Budget 2021 provided a significant package of tax and expenditure measures to build the resilience of the economy and to help vulnerable but viable businesses across all sectors. Details of the wide range of supports available are on my Department's website.

I am acutely aware of the difficulties SME's have faced and continue to face due to this pandemic. The SBASC scheme has been expanded and will now take into account businesses who do not pay rates and those businesses with a turnover of less than €50,000. Details of Phase 2 of this scheme are being finalised and will be open for applications in early June, with a closing date of 21st July.

Further details of these schemes including all eligibility criteria will shortly be available on my Department's website [www.enterprise.gov.ie](http://www.enterprise.gov.ie) and on Local Authority websites.

## **Social Media**

141. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his Department will be taking on the advice offered by a person (details supplied); and his plans to make a statement in support of the workers and their families. [29234/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I would like to re-assure the Deputy that I am aware of the genuine concerns of social media content moderators. I have previously met with them, and their representatives, and I have also raised their concerns with one of the primary social media companies, on whose behalf content moderation work is carried out.

It must be emphasised that there is already, in Ireland, a strong legislative regime to protect all workers in terms of their working conditions, including work-related health and safety, as well as their terms and conditions of employment.

The suite of workplace health and safety legislation is designed to prevent and mitigate against work-related accidents and injuries. Social media content moderators should be treated by an employer in the same way as any other worker potentially exposed to work related hazards. This means that the employer must ensure that appropriate training is provided and must carry out a robust risk assessment with a particular focus on the potential hazards arising from work activities. Where a particular hazard is identified that may require subsequent monitoring it must be included in the written Safety Statement, and the relevant worker must be made aware of the hazard and the associated monitoring that is in place.

I would also point out that there is provision in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, to ensure that an employer cannot penalise, or threaten to penalise, an employee who makes a complaint or a representation on any matter relating to health and safety at work. Any worker concerned for their health and safety can contact the Health and Safety Authority's Workplace Contact Unit in confidence.

While the Health and Safety Authority is independent in the carrying out of investigations into complaints that it receives, I am aware that the Health and Safety Authority continues to engage with the Social Media sector to reiterate their duties under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and to establish what control measures are in place to address the risks arising from the specific nature of the work of content moderators. On assessing the control measures the Health and Safety Authority will be able to determine whether further advice or guidance is necessary for employers and employees in that sector.

In addition, employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally employed on a contract of service basis. Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights they can bring a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) which is mandated to secure compliance with employment rights legislation. The WRC can be contacted at [www.workplacelrelations.ie](http://www.workplacelrelations.ie) .

Non-Disclosure Agreements should not and cannot be used to prevent content moderators from raising issues of concern around their working conditions and/or health and safety concerns. We have robust legislative protection for all workers in Ireland who wish to raise legitimate concerns without repercussion.

Separately, I would add that my colleague, Catherine Martin TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, is currently advancing a regulatory framework which will deal with on-line safety and which will include the establishment of an Online Safety Commissioner.

## Data Protection

142. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29306/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** It is not clear whether the Deputy is referring to cyber security breaches or more generally to personal data breaches under the GDPR, which would include the inadvertent disclosure of personal data to third parties.

Since 2018 there have been no cyber security breaches of ICT systems directly controlled and managed by my Department. In that period, there was one incident where an externally hosted static website associated with the work of my Department was compromised. The website in question is not hosted by my Department and there was no risk to the Department's ICT infrastructure arising from this breach. The matter was fully resolved in accordance with good cyber security practice.

Since the introduction of the GDPR on 25th May 2018 to date, 12 personal data breaches have occurred in my Department and 43 personal data breaches have occurred in the Offices\* under its aegis. The nature of all of these personal data breaches has involved the accidental disclosure of personal data to third parties as a result of administrative or human error.

The decision to report personal data breaches to the Data Protection Commission is a matter for our Data Protection Officer, who is an independent appointed officer, following a full risk analysis of the details pertaining to each personal data breach case. As a result of the mitigation actions that were put in place to protect the privacy rights and freedoms of the affected individuals, the Data Protection Commission were satisfied that no further action was required.

Since 2020, the number of personal data breaches that have occurred in my Department and in the Offices under its aegis has been reduced by more than 50% compared to 2019, as a result of targeted breach prevention training for staff that has been delivered by our Data Protection Officer and the enhancement of administrative protocols in business areas with high levels of personal data processing.

\*The Offices under the aegis of my Department include the Workplace Relations Commission; the Labour Court; the Companies Registration Office incorporating the Registry of Friendly Societies and the Register of Beneficial Ownership; the Intellectual Property Office of Ireland; and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement.

## Legislative Measures

143. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the status of the Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Bill 2018. [29332/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Robert Troy):** The Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Bill is a legislative priority for this session. This legislation has been in development since the Government adopted the package of Measures to Enhance Ireland's Corporate, Economic and Regulatory Framework in October 2017. The package included the action to establish the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement as an independent company law compliance and enforcement agency.

The General Scheme of the Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Bill 2018 was published on December 4th, 2018. My Department worked with the Office of the Parliamen-

tary Counsel on the drafting of the Bill and the Director was consulted on the draft legislation on an ongoing basis.

Pre-legislative scrutiny on the General Scheme of the Bill had not concluded at the time of the dissolution of the last Dáil and began again in December 2020. The Director of the Office of Corporate Enforcement attended the Committee on 22nd January and I attended the Joint Committee with the Tánaiste on 29th January 2021.

The Joint Committee published its report and recommendations on the General Scheme of the Bill on 20th April 2021. These are being reviewed in the Department and it is intended to revert to Government with a stamped Bill before the Summer.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

144. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will consider establishing a direct helpline for small businesses navigating the reopening of the economy as the country emerges from the current pandemic; the additional supports he plans to introduce to assist small businesses transitioning out of level 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29491/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 my Department established a dedicated Business Supports Call Centre to provide information to business owners seeking assistance following the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic. It assisted businesses in identifying the relevant business supports for which they are eligible and directing businesses on how and where to access grants, loans, mentoring, training and advice provisions. The Centre has a dedicated phone number and email address.

In November 2020 in recognition of the success of this vital resource for businesses, the role of the Business Support Call Centre was expanded and renamed the Enterprise Information Centre. The Enterprise Information Centre provides a central point of contact within my Department for businesses to be provided with information about, and signposted to, the range of services and assistance available from my Department, its Offices and Agencies.

The Enterprise Information Centre advises callers on where to find relevant information on the Gov.ie website. It provides up-to-date information on the enhanced financial measures that Government have put in place as the country emerges from the current pandemic. It can be contacted by telephone at 353 1 631 2002 and by email at [infobusinesssupport@enterprise.gov.ie](mailto:infobusinesssupport@enterprise.gov.ie)

The Government has put in place a comprehensive package to help businesses and workers during the pandemic, including the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), the small business assistance scheme for COVID (SBASC), low-cost loans, the deferral and warehousing of tax liabilities and the waiver of commercial rates. Details of the wide range of supports available are on my Department's website Government supports for COVID-19 impacted businesses - DETE ([enterprise.gov.ie](http://enterprise.gov.ie))

The SBASC scheme will soon take into account businesses who do not pay rates and also businesses that have a turnover below €50,000. Phase 2 of this scheme will be open for applications in early June, with a closing date of 21st July. Further details of the scheme including all eligibility criteria will shortly be available on my Department's website [www.enterprise.gov.ie](http://www.enterprise.gov.ie) and on Local Authority websites. However, businesses who were in receipt of CRSS on or after 1 January 2021 will not be eligible for SBASC, which was introduced to assist businesses

who were not eligible for CRSS.

These measures demonstrate the Government's commitment to the survival of viable enterprises. Work is ongoing across Government to ensure the supports which will be in place over the coming months are sufficient, targeted and sustainable. Details on these supports are being announced as part of our Economic Recovery Plan.

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

145. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when the second phase of the small business assistance scheme for Covid will open. [29493/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English):** The second phase of the small business assistance scheme for COVID (SBASC) will be open for applications from early June, with a closing date of 21st July. Local Authorities will once again be administering this scheme.

### Protected Disclosures

146. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29632/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The table attached sets out the number of protected disclosures made to my Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. I am informed by my officials that in four of these, the matters raised were not the subject of areas of responsibility of the Department and had been also separately raised with the relevant Government Department.

The nature of the protected disclosures related to operational issues of the Department and its Offices.

The Act imposes an obligation to protect the identity of the discloser and in this regard information cannot be given on individuals who have made disclosures.

2016	4
2017	3
2018	1
2019	2
2020	2
To date 2021	0

### Foreign Direct Investment

147. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the IDA has employed an Israeli based business development consultant for a new office in Israel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29725/21]

148. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and



Employment the estimated amount it will cost to set up IDA office space in Israel; the estimated cost of this operation in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29726/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 148 together.

IDA Ireland do not intend to set up an office in Israel.

A request for tender for a part-time Israel based Business Development Consultant was issued on 26 April 2021. The Business Development Consultant will be expected to identify Israeli-headquartered companies with potential for investing in Ireland.

IDA Ireland has not yet awarded the Tender for a Part-time Consultant in Israel. As this procurement competition is ongoing, the IDA is not able to release the estimated view on the budget for this part-time Consultant.

Ireland's position on the illegality of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory informs our engagement with the State of Israel across a range of bilateral issues, including trade, and will continue to do so.

Ireland consistently raises human rights issues in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory at the highest international levels, including most recently at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

As an Agency of my Department, I expect IDA Ireland to act in line with Government policy and the Agency has assured me that this is the case. IDA Ireland respects obligations under Irish and International law. Ireland remains steadfast in its support for a comprehensive two state solution which protects the future of both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

IDA Ireland has advised my Department that it will be guided by all aspects of the recently published Guidance for Business Enterprises by my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, when appointing a business development consultant in any territory.

*Question No. 148 answered with Question No. 147.*

## **Trade Data**

149. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the annual level in financial terms of import and export trade between Ireland and Israeli businesses in the occupied territories of Palestine in each of the years 2011 to 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29727/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Robert Troy):** The Central Statistics Office compiles statistical data in relation to Goods Exports and Imports. Statistics are collated in relation to the overall value of trade between Ireland and the Occupied Palestinian Territory; statistics are not available in relation to import and export trade with individual businesses.

In the period 2011–2020, the annual value of goods exports from Ireland to the Occupied Palestinian Territory grew from €691,000 in 2011 and stood at €1.85 million in 2020. The main goods exported to Occupied Palestinian Territory from Ireland are Infant formula and Medical & Pharmaceutical Products.

Year	Value of Ireland's Goods Exports to Occupied Palestinian Territory €'000
2011	691
2012	330
2013	224
2014	4,917
2015	6,931
2016	9,282
2017	7,594
2018	8,303
2019	8,354
2020	1,859

In the period 2011–2020, the annual value of goods imports from Occupied Palestinian Territory to Ireland has fluctuated from its highest value of €89,000 in 2012. In 2020, the value of goods imports from Occupied Palestinian Territory to Ireland was valued at €65,000, comprising imports of dates and cotton.

Year	Value of Ireland's Goods Imports from Occupied Palestinian Territory €'000
2011	52
2012	89
2013	58
2014	4
2015	0
2016	9
2017	0
2018	7
2019	0
2020	65

### Covid-19 Pandemic

150. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if an employer will be required to pay an employee outstanding holiday entitlement even though the business was closed down and employees were in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29728/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English):** The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 sets out the key parameters around the taking of annual leave and payment of same. The terms and conditions of individual employment contracts may provide additional specifics within those parameters such as stipulations in relation to the entitlement to extra days' leave above what is statutorily required by the Act.

Section 19 of the Act provides that an employee shall be entitled to paid annual leave equal to:

(a) 4 working weeks in a leave year in which he or she works at least 1,365 hours (unless it is a leave year in which he or she changes employment),

(b) One third of a working week for each month in the leave year in which he or she works at least 117 hours, or

(c) 8 per cent of the hours he or she works in a leave year (but subject to a maximum of 4 weeks).

A person must be fully unemployed to qualify for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and have lost their employment due to the Covid-19 pandemic. If an employee is in receipt of PUP, they are not in a position to accrue annual leave. Employees are also not in a position to accrue annual leave during a period of temporary lay-off.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

151. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the grants in place to help businesses with the cost of restocking (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29748/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English):** A significant package of tax and expenditure measures to build the resilience of the economy and to help vulnerable but viable businesses across all sectors was introduced in Budget 2021.

Government acknowledges the importance of ongoing supports such as the Employee Wage Subsidy Scheme and Covid-19 Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) to businesses and the role played by grant schemes such as the Restart Grants, the Small Business Assistance Scheme for Covid and the various sectoral supports administered by relevant Departments.

The CRSS has provided vital support to businesses that have been forced to close or restrict access to their premises on foot of public health regulations. As we start to reopen the economy, the Government has agreed to the extension of the CRSS until 30th of June 2021.

Any business currently availing of CRSS and that can now reopen as restrictions are eased will be able to avail of double restart week payments for two weeks subject to the statutory maximum of €5,000 per week to support them in meeting the costs of reopening as they exit the scheme.

My Department has made loan supports available to businesses that have been impacted by COVID-19. These include schemes to support businesses as they look toward reopening.

The COVID-19 Business Loan provides up to €25,000 to eligible micro-enterprises through Microfinance Ireland with zero repayments and zero interest for the first six months and the equivalent of an additional six-months interest-free, subject to certain terms and conditions.

The COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme makes lending available from participating lenders to eligible businesses. Loans available under the scheme range from €25,000 to €1.5 million and are for terms of up to three years. Loans are offered at favourable terms, including a maximum interest rate of 4% and no security on loans of up to €500,000. This scheme is available to SMEs and small mid-caps (businesses of up to 499 employees).

The Government are committed that there will be no cliff-edge end to the economic supports at the end of June. Government recognises that re-opening will be costly and will pose new challenges that will need to be sustained by continued supports and corrective measures to get the balance right between supporting recovery and cost to the Exchequer and plans for

this are currently in development. Details on these supports will be announced as part of our National Economic Recovery Plan which will be published in early June.

### **Trade Agreements**

152. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the consultants that have been commissioned to carry out an economic and sustainability impact assessment into the EU-Mercosur trade agreement; the amount that they will be paid for this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29760/21]

153. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when he expects that economic and sustainability impact assessment into the EU-Mercosur trade agreement to be completed; his plans release it to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29761/21]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 153 together.

The Economic and Sustainability Impact Assessment of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement was commissioned by my Department through an open competitive tender process. The Request for Tender was published on the eTenders website and in the Official Journal of the European Union in December 2019. Five bids were received for the tender and following evaluation by the selection committee from my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the contract was awarded to Implement Consulting Group. The value of this contract is €199,500 plus VAT.

The Deputy will recall that this particular Economic and Sustainability Impact Assessment consists of two important and complementary components, namely a comprehensive analysis of the potential economic benefits as well as a robust sustainability impact assessment including social, human rights and environmental impacts that the Trade Agreement could have in Ireland and the Mercosur countries of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. As such, it is a considerable undertaking, which, unfortunately, has necessitated us running beyond the Q1 2021 deadline by which we had hoped to have the finalised report considered by Government and published.

As previously reported to the House, the detailed research and stakeholder consultations are concluded, and I have been informed that drafting of the actual Report itself is well advanced such that the Report is expected to be received by my Department in the coming weeks. It will be published as soon as possible after consideration by Government.

*Question No. 153 answered with Question No. 152.*

### **Cybersecurity Policy**

154. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will report on the implementation of the measures set out in the National Cyber Security Strategy. [29589/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** An inter-Departmental Committee chaired by my Department oversees the implementation of the National Cyber Security Strategy 2019 - 2024. The Committee meets quarterly to review progress. Good progress is being made in delivering the 20 mea-

asures identified in the five-year strategy, with 6 measures completed by Q1 of this year. The majority of the other 14 measures are multi-year actions.

Delivery of the overall strategy is dependent on progress made with respect to the capacity review envisaged by the strategy. That capacity review, which is being conducted by expert international consultants, is due to report in the current quarter and will inform decisions to be taken on the future organisation and resourcing of the NCSC to enable it to continue to deliver on its mandate.

### **Legislative Measures**

155. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will amend the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 to ring-fence targets for biogenic methane produced from agriculture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29211/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 sets a target for Ireland of net zero GHG emissions no later than 2050, with an interim target of a 51% reduction, relative to 2018, to be achieved by 2030. However, it does not set targets for individual sectors or types of emissions. In this regard, the Bill provides for the Climate Change Advisory Council to devise and propose a series of 5-year carbon budgets. These budgets will define a pathway to meet Ireland's national emissions targets. When these budgets are approved, the Government will then set sectoral emissions ceilings based on the budgets and devise Climate Action Plans to implement the budgets.

In this way, the targets for individual sectors and types of emissions will take account of the most recent national greenhouse gas emissions inventory and projections, prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency; relevant scientific advice, including the distinct characteristics of biogenic methane; international best practice on the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions and removals and, in so far as practicable, the need to maximise employment, the attractiveness of the State for investment and the long term competitiveness of the economy. They will also have regard to climate justice.

### **Environmental Policy**

156. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if his attention has been drawn to the serious concerns of the local community in the Inishowen peninsula, County Donegal at plans for gold mining in the area; and if he will not grant any permission for such mining to proceed. [29123/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The licence application referred to is for a renewal of a prospecting licence, not a mining licence. A prospecting licence relates to the activity of prospecting (exploring) for minerals and does not, if granted, give a licence holder permission to mine. All prospecting licence applications, including renewals, are subject to public consultation giving all stakeholders and local communities an opportunity to make an input. Where a licence holder seeks to have a licence renewed, the application is evaluated by the Geoscience Regulation Office of my Department. Where renewal is proposed, a renewal offer is made to the holder, setting out the terms and area of the prospecting licence. If the holder accepts the offer, legislation requires 21 days' public notice of the Minister's intention to renew a prospecting licence and for the receipt of any



submissions. In practice the Minister allows for a 30 days' notice period. Notification is given through a printed notice in the newspaper that is most relevant to the prospecting licence area under consideration. The Minister's Intention to Grant Notices is also sent for public display to the appropriate Garda station(s), local authority office(s) and the Geological Survey Ireland.

Additional information on the process of granting prospecting licences and making submissions is available online on my Department's website.

### **Broadband Infrastructure**

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications when effective and efficient high-speed broadband will be provided to a person (details supplied); his plans for upgrade of connection in this area given same is required for work and educational purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29138/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Question refers to a premises located in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The AMBER area represents the area to be served by the network to be deployed under the NBP State led intervention. I appreciate people's frustration when they are living so close to a fibre network but cannot get a connection to that network, particularly given the heightened importance of connectivity during the Covid-19 pandemic. The NBP will ensure that in all such cases a future-proofed high speed broadband network will be built to serve these premises and work to deliver on this is underway.

I am advised by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) that, as of 27 May 2021, over 220,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed. Surveys are complete or underway in County Kildare in Killashee, Oughterard, Naas Rural, Rathmore, Kill, Killeel, Carnalway, Gilltown, Ballymore Eustace, Bodenstown, Naas Urban, Newtown, Donaghcumper, Athy, Coneyboro, Aughaboura, Ballinapark, Castlemitchell, Bert, Kilberry, Kilkea, Leixlip, Celbridge and Maynooth.

Further details are available on specific areas within County Kildare through the NBI website which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their interest in being provided with deployment updates through its website [www.nbi.ie](http://www.nbi.ie). Individuals who register with this facility will receive regular updates on progress by NBI on delivering the network and specific updates related to their own premises as works commence. I am advised that NBI is working to provide more detail on its website, with a rolling update on network build plans. NBI also has a dedicated email address, [reps@nbi.ie](mailto:reps@nbi.ie), which can be used by Oireachtas members for specific queries.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 27 May, 317 BCP sites have been installed by NBI and the high speed broadband service will be switched on in these locations through service provider contracts managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development for publicly accessible sites and the Department of Education for school BCPs. BCP's are installed at Crookstown Further Education and Training and Community Centre, Lullymore Heritage Park and Bigstone Community Hall. Further details can be found at [nbi.ie/bcp-locations/](http://nbi.ie/bcp-locations/).

Rathmore National School and Saint David's National School have been connected by NBI for educational access. My Department continues to work with the Department of Education to

prioritise schools with no high speed broadband, within the Intervention Area, for connection over the term of the NBP. In this regard, an acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan was announced in December which will see some 679 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. Further details are available on the NBI website at [nbi.ie/primary-schools-list/](http://nbi.ie/primary-schools-list/) .

## **Electricity Grid**

158. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the guidelines of his Department for the erection of electricity infrastructure; the policy on establishing new pylon routes versus upgrading existing routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29196/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Government does not have any role in the delivery of electricity infrastructure on the ground. This is consistent with the 2012 Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure which states: ‘The Government does not seek to direct EirGrid and ESB Networks or other energy infrastructure developers to particular sites or routes or technologies’. Planning conditions for particular projects are a matter for the relevant planning authority. EirGrid’s role as the designated Transmission System Operator (TSO) includes the operation, maintenance and development of the electricity transmission network in Ireland. EirGrid’s expenditure in this role is regulated by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) through a five year price control review process. ESB Networks is the Transmission Asset Owner and, under direction from EirGrid, it carries out all of the relevant tendering and procurement processes taking into account compliance with planning conditions arising from the consenting process in Ireland.

EirGrid is carrying out a public consultation on “Shaping our Electricity Future” and is engaging with communities and stakeholders across Ireland on improving the electricity grid and making it more flexible so that it can carry more renewable generation in the future. EirGrid’s consultation aligns with Ireland’s existing strategy to further reduce carbon emissions from the electricity sector which will be updated in this year’s revision to the Climate Action Plan.

## **Data Protection**

159. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29307/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I refer to my reply to Question 210 of 18th May 2021 in which I provided details on the number of data breaches experienced by my Department since 2018. All data breaches are reported to and assessed by the Department’s Data Protection Officer (DPO) in accordance with Articles 33-34 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and guidance issued by the Data Protection Commission.

For operational and security reasons, it is not considered appropriate to disclose any further details of the nature of breaches experienced by my Department.

## **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

160. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the obligations in respect of greenhouse gas reduction that have been set for public bodies; and the way delivery is being monitored. [20337/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Climate Action Plan 2019 set a target for the public sector to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2030. The Programme for Government increased this ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030.

Work is well progressed on a methodology to assign each public sector body with an individual greenhouse gas emissions reduction target and I expect to bring this methodology to Government for approval shortly. A decarbonisation strategy for the public sector will follow the approval of this methodology. This Strategy will translate the analytical measurement and methodology work into policies, measures and actions to support the public sector meet their targets.

The Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) System, established by the Sustainable Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department, allows all public bodies to report annually on their energy usage and actions taken to reduce consumption and meet their 2020 energy efficiency targets. In order to facilitate the reporting and tracking of progress towards the targets in the Climate Action Plan 2019 and the Programme for Government, the SEAI is currently redeveloping and enhancing the M&R system. The new system will introduce a robust approach for public bodies to track progress towards their targets, including their greenhouse gas emissions and other reporting requirements such as the Clean Vehicles Directive.

### **Closed-Circuit Television Systems**

161. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if there is a legislative barrier to local authorities using CCTV to prosecute illegal dumping; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29440/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I refer to the reply to Question No [ PQ 27311/21 ] of 20th May 2021. The position remains unchanged.

### **Waste Management**

162. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans to ensure a glass collection service is made available throughout the State by all private domestic waste operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29446/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** In 2018, the most recent year for which data is currently available, Ireland's recycling rate for glass was 82%, well above the EU Packaging Directive targets of 70% by 2025 and 75% by 2030. For further information please see [www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/waste/national-waste-statistics/packaging/](http://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/waste/national-waste-statistics/packaging/). Given how well the current system is operating in relation to glass recycling, there are no plans to mandate the provision of a household glass collection service.

### **Local Authorities**

163. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the budget allocation for the local authority anti-litter and anti-graffiti awareness grant scheme in each of the years 2019, 2020 and 2021, in tabular form. [29481/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The table below sets out the information sought.

**LOCAL AUTHORITY ANTI-LITTER & ANTI-GRAFFITI AWARENESS GRANT SCHEME 2019-2021**

YEAR	ALLOCATION
2019	€771,500
2020	€744,739
2021	€750,000

**Departmental Schemes**

164. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of warmer homes applications awaiting survey in Cork city and county; the number of applications awaiting works in Cork city and county; the waiting time for new applicants for both surveying and works in Cork city and county; the number of companies engaged in surveying and works in Cork city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29508/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. To date, over 142,000 homes have received free upgrades under the scheme, and the average value of the energy efficiency measures provided per household in 2020 was over €14,800. I have secured additional resources this year to expand the capacity of the SEAI to deliver the scheme. Funding for the energy poverty retrofit schemes has also increased to over €109 million in 2021. This is an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation. In addition, delivery capacity has increased due to a new, broader contractor panel that commenced at the end of 2020.

There are currently over 7,800 homes on the scheme work programme. 782 of these homes are in Cork. This includes homes that: are currently undergoing works; have been allocated to contractors for works; completed an initial home survey and are awaiting allocation to a contractor or are awaiting initial survey. The scheme operates nationally on a first come first served basis. SEAI data indicates that for homes completed in 2020, the average time from application to completion for homes in Cork and nationally was approximately 18 months. The average wait times are expected to increase significantly in 2021 due to the extensive COVID-19 related restrictions on construction activity between March and June of last year as well as between January and 12 April of this year when the scheme was fully paused in line with Government guidelines. Works under the scheme have now recommenced in line with activity in the residential construction sector.

The SEAI has advised me that the average wait times should only ever be used as a general guide and that wait times vary, based on the demand for the scheme at the time of application as well as other factors including the scale of works to be completed, access to the property, availability of materials and the weather.

The SEAI has established a panel of contractors to deliver the installation of energy efficiency measures in eligible homes nationwide under the scheme. There are 33 contractors on

this panel including 4 contractors that have their businesses based in Cork. All contractors can deliver measures nationwide as per the requirements of appointment to the panel.

A further €112.5 million will be spent on expanding other existing SEAI residential and community grant schemes and introducing new initiatives. This will support an increased level of retrofit activity in 2021.

### **National Broadband Plan**

165. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan. [29467/21]

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which the provision of broadband is progressing and in such a way as to enhance the competitiveness of the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29805/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 and 185 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led Intervention will be delivered by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) under a contract to roll out a high speed and future proofed broadband network within the Intervention Area which covers 1.1 million people living and working in over 544,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms along with 695 schools. The Government recognises that the NBP will be a key enabler to many of the policies envisaged in the Programme for Government particularly around increased levels of remote working and remote service delivery and adapting to an evolving economy and competing internationally.

Despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, National Broadband Ireland has made steady progress on delivery of the new high speed fibre broadband network under the National Broadband Plan. I am advised by National Broadband Ireland that as at the 27 May over 220,000 premises have been surveyed across all counties.

This survey work has enabled detailed designs to be developed for each deployment area. The detailed designs are then used to initiate the ‘make ready’ project with Open eir, where Open eir ensure any poles and ducts being reused are fit for purpose and the make ready of other required infrastructure. This step also informs decisions on equipment ordering. Survey data is also needed to initiate pre-works which pave the way for the deploying of fibre. Pre-works involve construction of new duct routes, erection of poles, building chambers and tree trimming. On completion of these pre-works, the main construction works can commence.

The first fibre to the home connections are successfully connected in Carrigaline, Co Cork and Cavan with almost 4,000 premises passed and available for connection to date. Premises in Galway and Limerick are expected to be available for connection in the coming months. I am advised that build works are continuing across the country in 12 deployment areas covering townlands in Carrigaline, Ballinasloe, Cavan, Clare, Dundalk, Galway, Limerick Monaghan, Roscommon, Tipperary, Tralee, Wexford and Carlow. In addition, “make ready” work is underway in a further 15 Deployment Areas.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 27th May, 317 BCP sites have been installed by NBI and the high speed broadband service will



be switched on in these locations through service provider contracts managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development for publicly accessible sites and the Department of Education for school BCPs.

My Department continues to work with the Department of Education to prioritise schools with no high speed broadband, within the Intervention Area, for connection over the term of the NBP. In this regard, an acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan was announced in December which will see some 679 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. Further details are available on the NBI website at [nbi.ie/primary-schools-list/](http://nbi.ie/primary-schools-list/).

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

166. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the role his Department will play in the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility given the significant amount of funds ring-fenced for climate. [29557/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department has worked closely with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach in the preparation of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) as required to access funding under the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which is the centrepiece of Next Generation EU, the Union's €750 billion response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of the facility is to provide support to Member States to assist in their recovery from the COVID-19 crisis whilst also supporting the investments and reforms that are necessary to prepare economies for the green and digital future. The NRRP will enable us to move beyond the pandemic and to invest in the future in key areas such as climate action and the digital transition. Two projects from my Department were selected for inclusion in the under NRRP Priority 1: Advancing the Green Transition:

- (i) Derisking a Low-Cost Residential Retrofit Loan Scheme; and
- (ii) Enhanced Rehabilitation of Bord na Mona Peatlands previously harvested for commercial purposes

In addition, under this Priority, Ireland is committed to implementing reforms by progressing the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021.

These projects will support actions in respect of the climate and environmental priorities of the Union and the 'do no significant harm' principle, and contribute to achieving the 2030 climate and energy targets and climate neutrality by 2050, as well as other environmental goals. The draft Plan will now undergo a formal assessment by the European Commission before being submitted to the Council of the European Union.

### **Health Service Executive**

167. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the estimated amount it will cost the State to fix the ransomware issue at the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29581/21]

168. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the amount of information that was taken from HSE by the cyber-attack; the amount

to date it has retrieved from the ransomware attack; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29582/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 and 168 together.

The Health Service Executive is an Agency under the remit of the Department of Health. The Department of the Environment, Climate, and Communications has no operational responsibility for the Health Service Executive. Each Government Department and Agency has responsibility for the security and integrity of its Information and Communications Technology systems.

*Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 167.*

### **Cybersecurity Policy**

169. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the current wage structure for the Director of the National Cyber Security Centre will be increased from €106,000-€127,000 per annum to the reported €220,000-€290,000 per annum and with benefits between €150,000-€200,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29583/21]

195. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the recruitment of a Director of the National Cyber Security Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29821/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 and 195 together.

Last year as, as part of the ongoing development of the NCSC, it was decided to create two new positions of Director and Chief Technology Officer on the NCSC senior management team. Following an open competition, the CTO role was filled early this year. An open competition was also held for Director of the NCSC. At the conclusion of the competition process, the preferred candidate did not accept the offer of employment. It is intended to re-advertise this role in the near future and the salary to be offered will be decided in the context of that competition.

The capacity of the National Cyber Security Centre has been increased from 7 in 2016 to 29 today. A Capacity Review of the NCSC which is due to report shortly, will inform the future development of the NCSC and the extent of any additional resources required in order for the NCSC to continue to deliver its mandate.

### **National Broadband Plan**

170. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his engagements with local authorities in relation to the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan specifically in relation to pole infrastructure and road opening licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23058/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Deputy will be aware that the rollout for the National Broadband Plan is now well underway. National Broadband Ireland (NBI) is now active across all counties. The work starts with surveys of premises within the Intervention Area. From this, detailed

designs are then drawn up and thereafter the necessary build work can commence. Once NBI have settled on designs on how the network will be built in a particular area, these plans are submitted to the relevant local authority in order to obtain the necessary licences or permissions that may apply, for example with respect to road opening, or Section 254 licences which apply to certain developments exempt from planning. Given the scale of the NBP rollout there is significant engagement by NBI with all the local authorities. With this in mind a number of stakeholders collaborated recently to publish a Guidance document on the *Process of Engagement between NBI and the Local Authorities on the Application for Section 254 Licences*. Last month Minister Ryan addressed a webinar for representatives of all local authorities to launch the guidance document. Speaking at the webinar, Minister Ryan stressed the importance of effective and timely consent processes to ensure that the NBP network is deployed as early as possible to support individuals and businesses in rural Ireland and commended the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), the County & City Management Association (CCMA), the Road Management Office (RMO) and NBI for their collaboration in developing the guidance document.

### Protected Disclosures

171. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29633/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the table below

YEAR DISCLOSURE RECEIVED IN MY DEPARTMENT	NUMBER OF DISCLOSURES RECEIVED
2017	1
2018	1
2019	3
2020	4
2021	3

Since the Protected Disclosure legislation was introduced in 2014, my Department has received 12 Protected Disclosures as set out in the table above.

Section 16 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 imposes an obligation to protect the identity of the discloser and as such I am unable to provide specific information on the nature of disclosures received or information relating to the person(s) who made these disclosures.

### Departmental Schemes

172. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the measures being taken to reduce the current long wait times for surveying and commencement of works under the warmer homes scheme, free energy upgrades for eligible homes; when applications under this scheme will be open for second-time applicants given that certain works are now available that were not available on their initial uptake of this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29682/21]

175. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the actions that will be taken to clear the backlog of SEAI applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29753/21]

198. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will seek increased resources for the SEAI to improve waiting times for the warmer homes scheme; the current average wait time from initial application to works being completed; the number of persons waiting for works to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29854/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 172, 175 and 198 together.

The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. To date, over 143,000 homes have received free upgrades under the scheme and in 2020 the average value of the energy efficiency measures provided per household was over €14,800.

I have secured additional resources this year to expand the capacity of the SEAI to deliver the scheme. Funding for the energy poverty retrofit schemes has also increased to over €109 million in 2021. This is an increase of €47 million on the 2020 allocation. In addition, delivery capacity has increased due to a new, broader contractor panel that commenced at the end of 2020.

The scheme operates nationally on a first come first served basis. SEAI data indicates that for homes completed in 2020, the average time from application to completion was approximately 18 months. The SEAI has advised me that wait times vary, based on the demand for the scheme at the time of application as well as other factors including the scale of works to be completed, access to the property, availability of materials and the weather.

The average wait times are expected to increase significantly in 2021 due to the extensive COVID-19 related restrictions on construction activity between March and June of last year as well as between January and 12 April of this year when the scheme was fully paused in line with Government guidelines. Works under the scheme have now recommenced in line with activity in the residential construction sector.

There are nearly 8,000 homes on the Warmer Homes Scheme work programme. These homes have not previously received any free upgrades under the scheme and for that reason are the priority to receive upgrades. Recommendations on the implementation of changes to the scheme to better target those most in need are being developed and I anticipate that they will be finalised shortly.

### **National Broadband Plan**

173. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the engagement he has with National Broadband Ireland to escalate the roll-out of fibre broadband for areas in County Cork still awaiting on survey stage given that surveys are ongoing in certain areas in the County by National Broadband Ireland; the measures that are being taken to progress the roll-out given the commitment on remote working; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29683/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** There are 79,668 premises in the Intervention Area in County Cork under the National Broadband Plan that will receive access to high speed broadband. Government investment in Cork in the NBP will be €314 million. As of 27 May, 22,765 (28.57%) premises in the Intervention Area in County Cork have been surveyed by National Broadband Ireland (NBI). Surveying is the first step towards delivering the new fibre network and informs

design solutions for provision of the fibre network: build works have started in rural parts of Cork. The first homes have been connected in Carrigaline, Co Cork where almost 4,000 premises are available for connection. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of good reliable broadband to ensure that citizens across Ireland can avail of remote working, education and other essential online facilities. The Programme for Government commits to seek the acceleration of the roll out of the National Broadband Plan. My Department continues to engage with NBI to explore the feasibility of accelerating aspects of this rollout to establish to possibility of moving premises which are currently scheduled in years 6 and 7 of the plan to an earlier date.

A dedicated team in NBI is investigating the acceleration of the rollout from its current contracted schedule of seven years. As part of this investigation NBI is engaging with current build partners (eir and enet) to reschedule build activities and to review potential additional build partners as an option to speed up the build process. Exploring the potential to accelerate the network rollout is being undertaken in parallel with the measures required to mitigate delays arising as a result of Covid-19.

Further details are available on specific areas within Cork through the NBI website which provides a facility for any premises within the intervention area to register their interest in being provided with deployment updates through its website [www.nbi.ie](http://www.nbi.ie).

### **Human Rights**

174. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he has responded to the legal proceedings brought by six young persons from Portugal against Ireland and 32 other countries in the European Court of Human Rights given the deadline of 27 May 2021; if he is supporting or contesting the case; his views on whether human rights are engaged by climate change; if he will expedite the publication of the State's reply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29712/21]

*Awaiting reply from Department.*

*Question No. 175 answered with Question No. 172.*

### **Grant Payments**

176. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications further to Parliamentary Question No. 206 of 18 May 2021, if the BER criteria will be reviewed for accessing the PV scheme given currently the grant is only available if a house is grade C or higher; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29754/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is responsible for the operation of the grant scheme to help homeowners install rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) equipment.

My Department recently outlined proposals for a new Micro-generation Support Scheme (MSS) in a public consultation that closed on 18 February last. Within the public consultation, the issue of minimum Building Energy Rating (BER) was reviewed and two questions (numbers 11 & 12 refer) regarding the proposal to include a minimum BER C requirement were included. The MSS public consultation is available on the Department's website.

An analysis of the submissions is underway by my Department, with a view to publication



of a summary of responses along with the submissions themselves on the Department website in the coming weeks. The findings from the public consultation will inform the final design of the Micro-generation Support Scheme.

### **National Postcode System**

177. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the case of persons (details supplied) in County Cork will be expedited with regard to obtaining an Eircode given that they have been waiting a substantial period of time for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29755/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, assigns Eircodes to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post collects information on new and existing buildings, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland provides the geo-locations for these buildings. An Post GeoDirectory, a subsidiary company of An Post and Ordnance Survey Ireland, issue a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Eircode in accordance with their licence agreement. Each new postal address assigned an Eircode is published on the free to use Eircode Finder website, a notification letter is issued to the property occupant containing the Eircode of that address and an updated Eircode Database is provided to licenced businesses for their use. Eircode have informed my Department that over 141,000 property addresses have been assigned an Eircode since the launch in 2015.

Eircode has advised my officials that they have raised a case with An Post GeoDirectory in relation to this address and my officials have requested Eircode to liaise directly with the individual in question regarding the assignment of an Eircode for this property address.

Early assignment of Eircodes is contingent on An Post facilitating the increased frequency of new and changed addresses in the GeoDirectory database from quarterly to monthly to Eircode through their subsidiary An Post GeoDirectory. My officials are working with An Post, Ordnance Survey Ireland, An Post GeoDirectory and Eircode to expedite the process of assigning Eircodes for new properties with postal addresses and geo-locations.

### **Climate Change Policy**

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which his Department continues to meet climate change targets in conjunction with the protection of the agri-food business; the main issues of conflict if any, that exist with his proposals for resolution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29798/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC (ESD) sets annual binding emission reduction targets for EU Member States for the period 2013-2020. These targets cover emissions from sectors outside of the EU Emissions Trading System, including agriculture, transport, buildings and waste. For the year 2020, the target set for Ireland was that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. The 2020 greenhouse gas emissions estimates report, published by the EPA in January 2021, indicates that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the ESD could be 8% below 2005 levels by 2020. According to this report, Ireland will cumulatively exceed the carbon budget implied by our ESD targets by 11-12Mt and will need

to avail of flexibilities in order to comply with our obligations. Pre-COVID19 estimates of the additional costs of purchasing carbon credits for compliance with these targets were in the region of €6 million to €13 million, depending on the price and final quantity of allowances required. Looking forward, the Programme for Government commits to an annual average 7% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to 2030 (a 51% reduction over the decade), while our current 2030 EU target is a 30% emissions reduction by 2030. The European Commission will publish their “Fit for 55” package this July, which is expected to propose higher EU targets for all Member States, including Ireland, in line with the new EU ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. While Irish agriculture has a positive international reputation in terms of producing high quality, sustainable produce, emissions from the agri-food sector have continued to increase. The long-term challenge for the sector is to achieve carbon neutrality, while not compromising our capacity for sustainable food production. The Government is committed to finding the balance between environmental, climate and biodiversity needs, and supports for farmers. The Climate Action Plan 2019 includes a range of policy and measures to be delivered in order to ensure we meet our existing EU targets. My Department launched a public consultation in March 2021 to inform the Climate Action Plan 2021, and to identify additional policies and measures necessary to meet the Programme for Government ambition. As well as developing the next Climate Action Plan, we are evaluating the potential climate contributions from land use improvements, to set in train the development of a land-use strategy. Land-use offers significant potential to sequester additional carbon and may provide a new source of family farm income and rural economic benefit. We recognise the interlinked role the agriculture and agri-food sectors have with the waste sector and are also committed to supporting the agri-food sector to evolve Ireland’s capability as a leader in circular economies. We are investing in research in the agri-food sector to prioritise investment in climate and the bio-economy and will implement the National Policy Statement on the Bio-economy, providing the agri-food sector with new opportunities using biological resources in a sustainable and circular manner. With the correct policy choices in the agriculture sector, we can reward farmers for sequestering carbon, restoring biodiversity, improving water and air quality, producing clean energy, and developing schemes that support results-based outcomes. In the Climate Action Plan 2021, far reaching policy changes will be developed across every sector that set us on the path of systemic change that is required for Ireland to become a climate-neutral and climate-resilient society and economy by 2050 at the latest.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

**179. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the success to date in meeting carbon reduction targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29799/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC (ESD) sets annual binding emission reduction targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 2020. These targets cover emissions from sectors outside of the EU Emissions Trading System, such as agriculture, transport, buildings and waste. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. The Effort Sharing Decision allows Member States to meet their targets by means of unused emissions allowances from earlier years, or through purchasing allowances from other Member States or on international markets. The 2020 greenhouse gas emissions estimates report published by the EPA in January 2021 indicates that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the ESD could be 8% below 2005 levels by 2020. According to this report, Ireland will cumulatively exceed the carbon budget implied by our ESD targets by 11 to 12Mt and we will need to avail of flexibilities in order to comply with

our obligations. Pre-Covid estimates of the additional costs of purchasing carbon credits for compliance with these targets were in the region of €6 million to €13 million, depending on the price and final quantity of allowances required.

As a follow up to the ESD, the EU Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) sets binding emission reduction targets for Member States for the period 2021-2030. The final agreement sets Ireland a target of 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. It is important to recognise that this target will be amended following the European Commission's plan to increase ambition from its existing EU wide 2030 target of 40% reduction to at least 55%, compared to 1990 levels. Legislative proposals to implement the new EU 2030 target will be presented by July this year, and additional effort will be asked of all Member States, including Ireland.

As Minister for Climate Action, I will lead on delivering this ambition, which will more than halve our carbon emissions over the course of the decade. With the increased scale and depth of this ambition, new strategies will be needed to sustain a reduction trajectory that will increase over time. I am working with colleagues across Government to develop a new Climate Action Plan, with additional initiatives in every sector to bring about the significant change needed to transform our society. The Climate Action Plan will require annual revisions to address the need for intensive and regular monitoring and updating of policy actions to ensure we remain on track and within our emission limits, and will act as a further review mechanism and opportunity to adjust and refocus actions, as required.

In line with EU ambition, Ireland has committed to achieve an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030, and to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. This objective will be set in law by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021, which was published on 23 March 2021. The Bill will support Ireland's transition to net zero and achieve a climate neutral economy by no later than 2050. It will establish a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments set in law, and ensure the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to ensure we achieve our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term.

## **Environmental Policy**

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the main areas of environmental protection requirements deemed at present to be urgent; the action to date in hand or proposed to deal with any such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29800/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** In November 2020, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published its seventh State of the Environment report. These reports are important milestones for Ireland, as they provide a snapshot of the environment at a particular point, as well as showing trends and changes in the environment over time. The reports assess progress in meeting the main environmental challenges facing the country and evaluate how national policies are being implemented, and if they are operating and delivering as intended. A copy of the report is available at [www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/irelands-environment/state-of-environment-report/](http://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/irelands-environment/state-of-environment-report/) The most recent State of the Environment report recognised climate change as an urgent challenge in terms of Ireland's environment. Other areas highlighted in the report, including air quality, waste and energy are all being addressed within the remit of my Department.

Earlier this year my Department published its Statement of Strategy for the period 2021-2023, *Le Chéile*, setting out our strategic goals in line with the Programme for Government and our long-term vision of a climate neutral, sustainable, and digitally connected Ireland. The statement identified five strategic goals which were set out at a high level and are complemented by a broader list of deliverables for the Department in the year concerned. A copy of the Statement of Strategy is available at *gov.ie*

### **Cybersecurity Policy**

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which he and his Department have in hand further enhanced measures to ensure the protection of all Departments and bodies under their aegis from any cyber-attacks in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29801/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The National Cyber Security Strategy includes measures to support Government Departments and other public bodies to improve the resilience and security of their Network and ICT systems. Through its work, the NCSC supports public bodies, including a number of commercial and non-commercial State bodies to improve their cyber security posture and fulfil their obligations under the European Network and Information Security Directive.

### **Electricity Generation**

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent of the shift away from fossil fuels for the generation of electricity; if this is in line with targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29802/21]

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which the national grid currently relies and draws on renewable energy as a percentage of total requirement; if he has specific new proposals in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29803/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 183 together.

Under the Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC Ireland committed to meeting a target of at least 16% of gross final energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020. To assist in meeting this target, Ireland set a national target of achieving 40% of electricity produced from renewable sources.

In 2019, 36.5% of electricity in Ireland was generated from renewable sources, based on the calculation methodology set out in the Renewable Energy Directive, compared to 15.6% in 2010. Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) provisional figures for 2020 show 38.9% of electricity in Ireland was generated from renewable sources.

More information on Ireland's renewable energy use can be found in the SEAI report *Energy in Ireland 2020* which is available at *www.seai.ie*. The Energy in Ireland report is updated on an annual basis and published in the last quarter of the year. Information on energy use for the year 2020 may be found in the 2020 Provisional Energy Balance, which is also available on the Authority's website.

EirGrid's Generation Capacity Statement, which is published annually, sets out the expected levels of electricity generation and demand for each year over the coming decade. EirGrid is also currently undertaking a 'Shaping our Electricity Future' consultation across the three dimensions of electricity networks, power system operation, and electricity markets with the aim of developing an integrated vision of the 2030 power system and electricity market. The draft strategy comprises four approaches to achieving this, as well as meeting the projected increased demand for electricity over the coming years.

The Programme for Government 2020 sets a target of at least a 70% renewable share in electricity production by 2030. This will contribute to meeting the Programme for Government target of reducing Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030, meeting the long-term target of climate neutrality by 2050, and to meeting the EU-wide binding target, under the recast Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001, of 32% of the overall share of energy to come from renewable sources by 2030.

*Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 182.*

### **Waste Management**

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which the national waste management plan continues to address the relevant issues with particular reference to reduction, reuse and recycle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29804/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Ireland is achieving or is on course to achieve all our EU waste targets. For example: - Our landfill rate for municipal waste was just 14% in 2018, representing a significant reduction from the 2017 figure of 23% and continuing the ongoing welcome decline from the 62% recorded for 2008.

- 43% of municipal waste was incinerated for energy recovery in 2018, significantly higher than the 32% recorded for 2017.

- Just 7% of municipal waste was incinerated as recently as 2012.

- Significantly more residual waste is now used as a fuel (energy recovery) than disposed to landfill.

Further information is available at <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/waste/national-waste-statistics/municipal/>

The Government wants to build on this strong performance. Minister Ryan launched a *Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy* in September 2020. This represents a step change in our approach to waste in Ireland, as it shifts the focus away from management to a fuller reconsideration of how we use resources and materials. The measures in the Plan are intended to minimise the amount of waste generated, eliminating waste before it can be created and diverting as much as possible to beneficial reuse or recovery and will help us deliver on our national targets.

*Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 165.*

### **Climate Change Policy**



186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the progress to date in reducing the collective dependency on plastic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29806/21]

190. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of Ireland's recycling targets for 2025 as detailed in the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29816/21]

191. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the details of the level of plastic recycling in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29817/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 186, 190 and 191 together.

The EPA is the competent authority with responsibility for compiling waste data in Ireland and publishes annual reports on this. These reports assess Ireland's performance against the recycling and recovery targets set out in EU and national legislation. Details of these national waste statistics can be found at [www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/](http://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/).

The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy details the measures that will be adopted to achieve optimum results in the area of plastics and packaging. The over-riding objective is to ensure that all packaging placed on the Irish market is reusable or recyclable in an economically viable way by 2030. It sets out a level of ambition which will position Ireland as a frontrunner towards the attainment of EU packaging recycling targets including:

- overall packaging recycling rates of 65% by 2025 and 70% by 2030 and
- material specific plastic recycling rates of 50% by 2025 and 55% by 2030.

The Plan also outlines the measures Ireland is taking under the Single Use Plastics Directive (EU 2019/904) to substantially reduce the amount of single use plastic items we use and to sustainably manage the waste arising from those we do. The Directive will be transposed by the deadline of 3 July 2021 and from that date single use plastic cutlery, plates, stirrers, straws, balloon sticks and cotton bud sticks may not be placed on the Irish market. This ban will also apply to single use expanded polystyrene cups and food containers and all products containing oxo-degradable plastic.

*Question No. 187 answered with Question No. 126.*

### **Broadband Infrastructure**

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of broadband connection points installed in County Kildare to date in 2021; the number of points expected to be installed over the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29808/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are a key element of the NBP providing high speed broadband in every county in advance of the roll out of the fibre to the home network. As of 27 May, 317 BCP sites have been installed by NBI across the country and the high speed broadband service will be switched on in these locations through service provider contracts managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development for publicly

accessible sites and the Department of Education for schools. BCP locations were chosen by Broadband Officers in each Local Authority and for Kildare there were three sites for public use identified. Crookstown Further Education and Training and Community Centre, Lullymore Heritage Park, and Bigstone Community Hall have all been installed and connected to high speed broadband. Further details can be found at <https://nbi.ie/bcp-locations/>. My Department continues to work with the Department of Education to prioritise schools with no high speed broadband, within the Intervention Area, for connection over the term of the NBP. In this regard, an acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan was announced in December which will see some 679 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. Saint David's National School and Rathmore National School in County Kildare have been connected with a further eight primary schools to be installed by the end of 2022 as part of this initiative. Further details are available on the NBI website at <https://nbi.ie/primary-schools-list/>.

### Air Quality

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the extent to which air quality continues to be monitored at various locations throughout the country; the trends identified in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29809/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for monitoring ambient air quality in Ireland via the national Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP). The AAMP has undergone significant investment and expansion in recent years, with the number of monitoring stations increasing from 30 in 2017 to 93 today. All monitoring stations collect air quality data for a range of pollutants in order to provide information to the public, and for assessment against European legal limit values and World Health Organisation guideline values. Real-time data from these monitoring stations is available online at all times at [www.airquality.ie](http://www.airquality.ie), and the most recent report on Ireland's air quality can be found at <https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/quality/epaairqualityreport2019.html>.

The data being generated through the AAMP confirms that air quality in Ireland is generally good, and compares favourably with other European countries. While significant reductions in emissions have already been achieved through a range of policy measures, as more comprehensive, real-time, localised air quality information becomes available, it is apparent that there are key pollutants which still need to be addressed more comprehensively.

Particulate matter, from the burning of solid fuel, is estimated to cause 1,300 premature deaths per year in Ireland, and I am committed to addressing this public health and environmental challenge through a nationwide ban on smoky coal and enhanced regulation of other solid fuels.

The recent public consultation on a new solid fuel regulation for Ireland was the first step in this process. It is my intention to move now to develop a new, legally robust, and evidence-based framework for how we regulate all solid fuels used for domestic burning. This will be a central plank of Ireland's first National Clean Air Strategy which will also identify and promote the integrated measures and actions across Government required to reduce air pollution, which I intend to publish shortly.

*Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 186.*

Question No. 191 answered with Question No. 186.

### Recycling Policy

192. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the details of the total recycling in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29818/21]

193. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the amount of waste incinerated in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29819/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 193 together.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for the collation of national waste data and reports annually on Ireland's performance against the targets set out in EU and national legislation. Reports indicate Ireland is achieving or is on course to achieve all our EU waste targets. Further information is available at <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/waste/national-waste-statistics/municipal/>

The Government wants to build on this strong performance. Minister Ryan launched a *Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy* in September 2020. This represents a step change in our approach to waste in Ireland, as it shifts the focus away from management to a fuller reconsideration of how we use resources and materials. The measures in the Plan are intended to minimise the amount of waste generated, eliminating waste before it can be created and diverting as much as possible to beneficial reuse or recovery and will help us deliver on our national targets.

Question No. 193 answered with Question No. 192.

### Recycling Policy

194. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the measures taken by his Department to ensure waste is recycled in an environmentally friendly method when exported from Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29820/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Dublin City Council is designated as the National Competent Authority for the export, import and transit of waste shipments under S.I. No. 419 of 2007 Waste Management (Shipments of Waste) Regulations, 2007. These Regulations give effect to Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1013/2006 on transfrontier shipments of waste, which sets out notification procedures, specifies waste listings and strengthens enforcement provisions in relation to waste movements within, into and out of the European Union. The Waste Shipment Regulation is also the legislative instrument that implements the EU's obligations under related international conventions, including the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste, to which Ireland is a signatory. Provisions of the Waste Shipment Regulation require that all exports of waste from the European Union "destined for disposal shall be prohibited". Similarly, in terms of meeting our EU waste reduction targets, S.I. No. 323/2020 - European Union (Waste Directive) Regulations 2020 provides that waste collected in Ireland and exported to another EU Member State for the purposes of preparing for re-

use, recycling or backfilling in that other Member State may be counted towards the attainment of the targets in Ireland. Waste exported from the European Union may also be counted towards the attainment of national targets, providing that the exporter can prove that the shipped waste is treated in equivalent conditions to that required in the European Union. It is therefore important for Ireland to ensure that exported waste is appropriately accounted for. The enforcement and monitoring of shipments of waste to and from Ireland is maintained by the National Trans-frontier Shipments Office (NTFSO) within Dublin City Council, which monitors and enforces these requirements and maintains statistics and information on shipments of waste to and from Ireland.

*Question No. 195 answered with Question No. 169.*

### **Departmental Policies**

196. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will consider initiating the development of a circular economy roadmap for some of the key sectors under his policy area. [28809/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** In April, I launched a draft Whole-of-Government Circular Economy Strategy for public consultation. This strategy, when finalised, will set out the high-level directions we need to take to make our transition to a circular economy possible. The first iteration of the Strategy is not intended to be an action plan but does reflect specific targets already set and actions already being taken. Subsequent versions of the Strategy will incorporate additional actions and targets, including sector specific targets for those sectors within the Irish economy that have the potential to make significant contributions to the circular transition including, *inter alia*, construction, agriculture, circular design and manufacture, repair, digital services and textiles. These specific actions and targets will be delivered through a range of mechanisms, potentially including through the development of standalone Sectoral Circular Economy Roadmaps. Each new version of the Strategy is also likely to be supplemented by additional thematic analyses of specific sectors and/or activities, such as the scope for embedding circular practices within resource intensive sectors, or the potential for digital services and novel manufacturing techniques to ‘design-out’ waste. It is anticipated that the Strategy will be updated in full every 18 months to 2 years.

### **Energy Policy**

197. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of the introduction of export tariffs for the export of solar energy to the national grid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29853/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Programme for Government commits to prioritising the development of micro-generation of electricity primarily for self-consumption. Under the Climate Action Plan, a Micro-Generation working group, chaired by my Department, is developing an enabling framework for micro-generation which tackles existing barriers and establishes suitable supports within relevant market segments. The proposed support mechanism was outlined in a public consultation launched in January (now closed) and the submissions received are currently being reviewed. While the primary aim of a micro-generation scheme is to enable a household to meet its own electricity needs, it is envisaged that a suitable payment for excess electricity generated on site

and exported to the grid will be available to all renewables self-consumers in the second half of 2021, subject to regulatory arrangements, in line with Articles 21 and 22 of the recast Renewable Energy Directive.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) published an updated Roadmap for the Clean Energy Package's Electricity and Renewables Directives in February, which provides for a public consultation on the regulatory framework for prosumer development later this year.

*Question No. 198 answered with Question No. 172.*

*Question No. 199 answered with Question No. 126.*

### National Broadband Plan

200. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of premises that will be connected to high-speed broadband under the National Broadband Plan; the number and percentage of these that have been surveyed for connection to date by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29859/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led Intervention will be delivered by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) under a contract to roll out a high speed and future proofed broadband network within the Intervention Area which covers 1.1 million people living and working in the over 546,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms along with 695 schools. The deployment plan forecasts construction commenced in all counties within the first 2 years and over 90% of premises in the State having access to high speed broadband within the next four years. Despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, NBI has made steady progress on delivery of the new high speed fibre broadband network under the National Broadband Plan. I am advised by NBI that, as of 27 May 2021, over 220,000 premises across 26 counties have been surveyed. I understand that build works are continuing across the country in 12 deployment areas covering townlands in Carrigaline, Ballinasloe, Cavan, Clare, Dundalk, Galway, Limerick, Monaghan, Roscommon, Tipperary, Tralee, Wexford and Carlow. In addition, “make ready” work is underway in a further 15 Deployment Areas. The first fibre to the home connections are successfully connected in Carrigaline, Co Cork and Cavan with almost 4,000 premises passed and available for connection to date.

A breakdown of the premises in the intervention area by county and surveys undertaken to date is set out in the table following.

COUNTY	number of premises in the IA	surveys completed	% surveys completed
Carlow	8,190	7,772	94.62%
Cavan	16,274	3,817	23.45%
Clare	22,719	3,567	15.70%
Cork	79,663	22,765	28.57%
Donegal	32,483	6,389	19.67%
Dublin	13,677	2,437	17.79%
Galway	38,887	14,914	38.34%
Kerry	26,988	16,382	60.69%
Kildare	14,085	7,598	53.94%
Kilkenny	18,416	5,951	32.31%
Laois	12,562	9,695	77.18%
Leitrim	11,614	3,576	30.79%
Limerick	21,293	8,583	40.31%



COUNTY	number of premises in the IA	surveys completed	% surveys completed
Longford	8,712	3,294	37.81%
Louth	8,423	7,850	93.18%
Mayo	36,614	8,281	22.62%
Meath	19,824	7,742	39.05%
Monaghan	15,332	10,644	69.42%
Offaly	12,216	1,275	10.44%
Roscommon	19,185	8,268	43.10%
Sligo	14,875	3,959	26.62%
Tipperary	29,810	14,001	46.97%
Waterford	15,048	11,277	74.94%
Westmeath	11,761	8,656	73.60%
Wexford	22,552	11,231	49.80%
Wicklow	15,464	10,547	68.09%
TOTAL	546,762	220,471	40%

### Renewable Energy Generation

201. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if renewable electricity projects awarded RESS-1 contracts will be delivered by the end of 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29862/21]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Under the first auction of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS-1) 68 projects, equating to approximately 1,088MW of new renewable energy generation, have entered into implementation agreements as set out in the terms and conditions of the scheme. The RESS-1 terms and conditions and implementation agreement provide that all successful projects must achieve commercial operation by 31 December 2022. This date was set based on reasonable and realistic delivery timeframes required for projects to connect to the grid. Up to a one year extension to this date is provided for RESS-1 projects with reduced support payments commensurate with the delay.

A number of milestones remain for each project to meet in order to be eligible for PSO Levy support under RESS-1. The electricity system operators (EirGrid and ESB Networks) are responsible for engagement with projects to programme their connection to the grid and commissioning.

My Department is monitoring the development of all RESS 1 projects and the overall RESS-1 delivery programme in order to ensure high project realisation rates and maximise the level of renewable energy output to meet Ireland’s national and EU 2030 climate and energy targets.

### Road Traffic Offences

202. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Transport the number of successful prosecutions of drivers who have struck the Luas in each of the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021, including the offence which was prosecuted and the sentences that were handed down in tabular form. [29649/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operation of public transport services.

The issue raised is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) who are the agency with responsibility for the Luas and I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Electric Vehicles**

203. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Transport the reason the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland is currently not fully processing local authority applications for the electric vehicle public charge point grant; when local authorities can expect to receive notice on the status of their applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29814/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Electric vehicles (EVs) are the most prominent transport mitigation measure in the 2019 Climate Action Plan, and Ireland has set an ambitious target of 936,000 EVs on our roads by 2030.

To expedite the deployment of low emitting vehicles, the Public Charge Point Scheme has been in place since September 2019 and will continue to be available during 2021 to provide local authorities with a grant of up to €5,000 to support the development of on-street public chargers. The primary focus of this scheme is to provide support for the installation of infrastructure which will facilitate owners of electric vehicles, who do not have access to a private parking space but rely on parking their vehicles in public places near their homes, to charge their EVs.

In light of the SEAI's responsibility for administering the scheme, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to SEAI for a direct response. Please contact my office if no reply has been received within 10 working days.

### **Electric Vehicles**

204. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the need to reform the SEAI electric car grant scheme to ensure those households that need the greatest financial help purchasing an electric car can do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29404/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department is providing significant supports to households and businesses who wish to make the transition to an electric vehicle.

The purchase grant supports are distributed through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) for the purchase of battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and plug in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs).

In order to qualify for the relevant supports under the SEAI scheme, the electric vehicle must be classified as M1 (private passenger vehicle) or N1 (light commercial vehicle). The scheme currently provides up to €5,000 in grant support for the private purchase of a new electric car (M1) and up to €3,800 for the purchase of a new electric van (N1) by a company or where a motor dealership is purchasing a demonstration vehicle. My Department is making an allocation of €27 million in 2021 for grants under this scheme.

This grant scheme encourages behavioural change and supports the Government's commitment to achieving a 51% reduction in transport emissions by 2030.

The grant schemes are kept under continuous review to ensure that they are as effective

as possible in driving the decarbonisation effort. In this regard, I announced in March that the terms of the Purchase Grant Scheme will be amended from 1 July 2021, so that vehicles with a market value greater than €60,000 will no longer qualify for grant aid. This is to ensure that funding is targeted most effectively at those who might not otherwise buy an electric vehicle and where the availability of Government support is most likely impact upon a decision to purchase an EV.

As well as the purchase grant scheme, there is a significant range of other supports to incentivise the take-up of electric vehicles, including:

- Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) relief of up to €5,000 for battery electric vehicles and low rates of VRT for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles;

- Benefit-in-kind tax relief for battery electric vehicles;

- Grant support towards the full cost of installation of a home charger up to a maximum of €600;

- Lowest rate of motor tax (€120 per annum) for battery electric vehicles and generally low rates of motor tax for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles; and

- A discount on tolls of 50% for battery electric vehicles and 25% for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (up to a maximum amount of €500 per year with greater reductions off-peak on the M50).

- Grants of up to €12,500 to support the purchase of electric vehicles in the taxi/hackney/limousine sector

- €15 million to support taxi and hackney drivers in scrapping their older vehicles and replacing them with electric alternatives.

- Accelerated Capital Allowances for businesses;

Over the coming years, we will see through the combination of improvements in technology, reductions in vehicle purchase prices, increasing driving ranges and model availabilities from manufacturers, as well as Government incentives and new investment in the recharging network, a further boost to the current positive policy environment under which electric vehicle sales are rising steeply year on year.

### Driver Test

205. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport the reason the driver theory test service has not yet resumed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29092/21]

207. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport when driver theory test centres will be reopened for persons due to sit their theory test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29129/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 207 together.

In line with the further easing of restrictions, the gradual re-opening of in-person driver theory test centres will commence after the 7th of June. The Road Safety Authority (RSA) will

reopen its network of test centres and will be permitted to carry out 25,000 driver theory tests per month.

Prior to COVID-19, the RSA provided 15,000 tests per month. In light of the significant backlog of customers, the RSA will gradually increase capacity in its test centres to 25,000 tests a month.

The test centres have extensive COVID-19 measures in place to protect both customers and staff and to ensure the safe delivery of the service. It is hoped that capacity will gradually increase to 50,000 tests per month over time, if public health guidance permits.

The RSA has been working to deliver an online theory test service, with a pilot online test already underway for trucks and buses. This pilot service has now been extended to include a limited number of car and motorbike tests.

The new offering will see 4,000 online theory tests available for all categories of vehicles per month. Tests are available on a 'first come, first served' basis with the new online service becoming more widely available later in the year. Once the online service is established, all customers will be able to opt to do the test online.

### **Driver Test**

206. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport the status of a driver theory test application by a person (details supplied) which has been rescheduled six times in the past six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29122/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The driver theory test is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority.

Individual cases are a matter for the Authority and the question in relation to this case is being referred to it for direct reply.

I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

*Question No. 207 answered with Question No. 205.*

### **Córas Iompair Éireann**

208. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport if he will provide assurances that a pending High Court decision will be awaited before there are further discussions or engagement in relation to CIÉ pensions. [29133/21]

210. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Transport if he will await the outcome of the High Court application before engaging in further discussions in relation to the 1951 CIÉ pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29149/21]

217. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Transport the status of a pension system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29166/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 208, 210 and 217 together.

As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland.

The CIÉ Group has two pension schemes, namely the Regular Wages Scheme (“RWS”) and 1951 superannuation scheme (“1951 Scheme”) and issues in relation to CIÉ pension schemes are primarily a matter for the trustees of the schemes, the CIÉ Group and their employees.

Concerning the 1951 pension scheme, members of the scheme were recently balloted regarding the Labour Court Recommendation which emerged on 23rd November 2020, with a majority of the members voting to accept the proposals. CIÉ have written to me in recent days advising that they will begin the process of amending the Statutory Instruments to implement the Labour Court Recommendation. I understand that CIÉ has also advised the Pensions Authority and the ‘1951’ Pension Scheme Trustees and Committee of this development.

In the light of the above, I have referred the Deputies questions to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **National Car Test**

209. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Transport if he has considered extending the validity of NCT certificates given that waiting times for appointments are now over three months in some areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29142/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The previous extension to National Car Test (NCT) test due dates was given as a direct result of the temporary suspension of the NCT roadworthiness service on 28 March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the NCT is now classified as an essential service no further extensions to test due dates for NCT inspections are anticipated at this time.

I would advise contacting the NCT on 01-413992 in relation to this matter and to obtain a suitable NCT appointment.

*Question No. 210 answered with Question No. 208.*

### **National Vehicle and Driver File**

211. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport the reason a person (details supplied) has not yet received a tax disc. [29159/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** My Department’s offices in Shannon manage the National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF) and its associated online services, including online motor tax, at [www.motortax.ie](http://www.motortax.ie).

The records on the NVDF indicate that the vehicle in question was taxed online on 26th April 2021, and a motor tax disc was issued on 27 April 2021. The vehicle owner in question contacted our offices by email on 14 May regarding the status of her tax disc. My official responded on the same day, and advised the individual concerned that their tax disc had not been returned by An Post, as undelivered. The response also gave details of how a replacement tax disc can be sought, in the event that it is lost, stolen or misplaced. The Department have no record of any further response from the individual concerned.



Today (1st June 2021) the customer was contacted by officials in my Department by telephone and by email to confirm address details. We have posted out a further application form with a pre-paid envelope to allow the customer to apply to Cork Motor Tax Office for a replacement document. Officials in my Department will maintain contact with this customer to ensure that she has a replacement disc supplied to them.

### Departmental Correspondence

212. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport if the email addresses of his Department are being manned; and if so, when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive a reply to their query. [29160/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The email addresses referenced in the Deputy's enquiry are manned daily by my officials at the Departments offices in Shannon. The initial response is automated, with links to the appropriate areas in the website that addresses frequently asked questions. If such links do not address the query, the customer can reply to the automated response seeking further assistance, and one of my officials will respond. Effectively all such queries that are referred to my officials are addressed within 24 hours.

The records on the NVDF indicate that the individual concerned emailed the Department (at one of the email addresses provided) on 14 May 2021 just after 12 noon. She sought further assistance and a reply was issued from my officials at 15.02 that same afternoon, to the email address the query was issued from. The query itself referred to the non-receipt of a motor tax disc. The response stated that the tax disc in question had not been returned undelivered to our offices by an Post. The response also set out how a replacement motor tax disc could be sought. The Department have no record of any further response from the individual concerned, and were unaware of any continuing issues in this regard.

Today (1st June 2021) the customer was contacted by officials in my Department by telephone and by email to confirm address details. We have posted out a further application form with a pre-paid envelope to allow the customer to apply to Cork Motor Tax Office for a replacement document. Officials in my Department will maintain contact with this customer to ensure that she has a replacement disc supplied to them.

### Greenways Provision

213. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the allocation of the Mallow to Fermoy greenway project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29161/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Funding was allocated to Waterford and Cork County Councils in 2020 from the Carbon Tax Fund for pre-construction work on routes that would link Mallow to Dungarvan as outlined as follows. The section from Mallow to Fermoy is included in the scope of this feasibility work.

Mallow to Dungarvan Greenway	€80,000	Cork County Council	Scope, Pre-Appraisal, Concept, Feasibility and Options Selection for a 39.15km section from Mallow/Youghal to Ballyduff on the Waterford border.
Waterford Greenway Network	€80,000	Waterford County Council	Options Selection and a Project Appraisal Report for a 38.5 km section from Dungarvan to Cork County boundary west of Ballyduff Upper.

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Cork County Council in conjunction with Waterford City and County Council have sought tenders for the undertaking of a Feasibility Report for the development of the Greenway from Mallow to Dungarvan. A Letter of Intent has been issued to the successful tenderer and once the required information requested is submitted and the standstill period expires, it is envisaged that a Letter of Acceptance will be issued in early June.

The cost of the tender was significantly more than the amount originally allocated; however my Department has agreed to funding the entire cost of the project at just over €361,000.

I look forward to the outcome of this work and hope that it will contribute to the creation of a network of Greenways in the area, providing increased opportunities for people to travel by bicycle and foot to work, school, shops and for tourism purposes also.

### **Rail Network**

214. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the electrification of the Malahide to Drogheda rail line; the timetable for the work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29162/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, 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 DART+ Coastal as part of the overall DART+ Programme.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the 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.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

215. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if he has consulted with the Minister for Health in respect of the use of antigen testing in the context of a Covid-19 mitigation measure in order to expedite the full resumption of the inbound and outbound transit from Irish airports; and if he has conducted a review of the most effective methods of testing in respect of travel that falls under his responsibility. [29163/21]

216. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to inconsistencies in the way in which one cohort of persons is treated in respect of travel and the use of antigen testing (details supplied). [29164/21]

245. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport if rapid antigen testing can be considered and put in place in order to accommodate the opening of international travel during the summer months. [29653/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 215, 216 and 245 together.

Our public health authorities are responsible for determining the most appropriate testing regimes for COVID-19 in Ireland, and Government is guided by their recommendations. My Department assists with the implementation of public health measures in relation to international travel, as decided by Government.

I am aware that considerable work has been undertaken to date to evaluate the potential use of rapid antigen tests in an Irish context. The Government has decided, however, that for testing for international travel to Ireland a Covid-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test is the only test that is accepted.

Statutory Instrument No. 11 of 2021, which was signed by the Minister for Health on 15 January 2021, sets out the requirement for passengers to have evidence of a negative or 'not detected' result from a pre-departure COVID-19 RT-PCR test that was carried out no more than 72 hours prior to arrival in Ireland.

*Question No. 216 answered with Question No. 215.*

*Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 208.*

### **Driver Test**

218. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Transport the status of an application for a driving test for a person (details supplied) who requires a licence for work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29259/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The Road Safety Authority (RSA) is the body responsible for the operation of Driver Tests.

Individual appointments are an operational matter for the RSA and I do not have any role in this process.

This question is therefore being referred to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

### **Transport Policy**

219. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department has engaged with the European Commission as part of the ongoing review of the TEN-T core network with a view to having the Atlantic Economic Corridor restored to the network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29282/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) is a term applied in an Irish context to the Atlantic seaboard region. Elements of the AEC are currently on the TEN-T core and comprehensive network, though the AEC as a concept was never included on the TEN-T network.

In April 2019, the European Commission commenced the review of the TEN-T network with an evaluation of the existing TEN-T Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013. The main objectives for the Commission in revising the TEN-T Regulation are to:

- Ensure the completion of the core network by 2030 and comprehensive network by 2050;
- Make the EU's transport systems green, digital and resilient; and
- Reinforce the infrastructure standards and quality requirements across the network.

In August 2019, my predecessor, Minister Ross, made a submission to the European Commissioner for Transport, Violeta Bulc, regarding the review. While preparing this submission

there was significant engagement between my Department and the AEC Taskforce to ensure the views of the AEC were incorporated.

The submission outlined significant national developments since the TEN-T Regulation came into force in 2013, particularly the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan, and the implications of Brexit on Ireland's international connectivity. The submission requested that consideration be given by the European Commission to including the Atlantic Economic Corridor region of Ireland on the core network, fulfilling a commitment in the 2016 Programme for Government.

A copy of that submission, and Commissioner Bulc's reply, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

[www.gov.ie/en/publication/3c921e-submission-to-commissioner-bulc-for-a-revision-of-the-core-ten-t-net/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3c921e-submission-to-commissioner-bulc-for-a-revision-of-the-core-ten-t-net/)

As part of the review, the Commission is analysing the extent to which the existing Regulation is still fit for purpose and considering what adjustments, if any, may be required to address any new challenges in the European transport sector. There are a number of guiding principles for the Review, one of which is that the planning methodology, used for the design of the network adopted in 2013 remain unchanged. The Commission is expected therefore to only consider slight network adjustments on the basis of this methodology when justified through specific developments.

My Department is participating fully in the review process, engaging directly with the European Commission on a number of occasions (most recently on 19 May 2021), in order to ensure that any amendment to or revision of the TEN-T Regulation recognises the concerns of Ireland and the national policy developments that have occurred since the Regulation came into force in 2013. My Department will arrange a further bilateral with the Commission in September.

I expect the Commission to put forward a legislative proposal reviewing the TEN-T Regulation in Q4 2021, based on an impact assessment which is due for publication in Q3 2021.

In the meantime, I draw the Deputy's attention to the Commission's Staff Working Document on the TEN-T Guidelines evaluation which was published on 26 May 2021 and which is available on the Commission's website at the following link:

[ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1908-Trans-European-Transport-Network-TEN-T-Guidelines-evaluation\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1908-Trans-European-Transport-Network-TEN-T-Guidelines-evaluation_en)

### **Road Safety Authority**

220. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Transport the number of persons that notified the Road Safety Authority via patient advisory form of diagnosis of epilepsy in each of the years 2018, 2019 and 2020. [29289/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** All enquires relating to driver licensing are handled by the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS), the provision of which I have delegated to the Road Safety Authority (RSA) under the relevant legislation.

I have forwarded the Deputy's query to the RSA for direct reply. If she has not heard from them in 10 working days, I would ask that she contact my office directly.

### **Driver Licences**

221. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Transport the number of persons that renewed or applied for a licence on the basis of being 12-months epilepsy free or on the basis of an exceptional case in each of the years 2018, 2019 and 2020. [29290/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** All enquires relating to driver licensing are handled by the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS), the provision of which I have delegated to the Road Safety Authority (RSA) under the relevant legislation.

I have forwarded the Deputy's query to the RSA for direct reply. If she has not heard from them in 10 working days, I would ask that she contact my office directly.

### **Bus Services**

222. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport if a private bus operator can operate on a route that Bus Éireann has decided to reduce its service on; if there is a process that must be adhered to; the body that sanctions such a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29291/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally.

I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Data Protection**

223. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29318/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Over 90% of the data breaches that occurred in my Department since 2018 are classified as unauthorised disclosure of personal data (most of which occurred due to human error), while the balance involved the loss of personal data e.g. loss of an electronic device.

The majority of the breaches identified were determined to be minor in nature and were handled in accordance with the Department's data breach management policy.

### **Rail Network**

224. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport when the ramp at platform 2, Thurles railway station, County Tipperary will be upgraded and reopened for public use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29321/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.



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As the issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply.

### **Public Transport**

225. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport the number of tram sets operating on the Luas Red Line; the number, length and passenger capacity of type 401 and 402 trams operating on the line; the number of type 401 and 402 trams that have been lengthened; and the planned percentage increase in passenger capacity of trams operating on the Luas Red Line over the period 2021 to 2023. [29333/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operation of public transport services.

The issues raised are matters for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the Luas operator, Transdev, and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Rail Network**

226. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport if there are plans to increase the frequency of Dublin Connolly to Wexford from three services in each direction to four services in each direction at the weekends. [29334/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the operations of public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally and for the scheduling of these services in conjunction with the relevant transport operator, in this case, Iarnród Éireann. I have, therefore, 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.

### **Aviation Industry**

227. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to support the aviation industry in the regions in order to ensure international connectivity for the regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29357/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** The Government is acutely aware of the devastating impact that COVID-19 restrictions are having on the aviation sector and from the outset has sought to ensure that the aviation industry is in a position to rebound quickly when the public health situation allows. Government supports for the airports, airlines and companies in the aviation sector have been provided throughout this crisis. By the end of June 2021, the sector will have received approx. €300 million in State funding spanning employment supports, waiver of commercial rates and deferral of taxes. The bulk of the support to airlines is through the TWSS/EWSS wage subsidy schemes which were specifically designed to maintain the link between employers and employees. Liquidity support

has also been made available by ISIF to large aviation enterprises.

In November 2020, in recognition of the very difficult circumstances facing the aviation sector, the Government agreed a revised funding package of €80 million specifically for Irish aviation in 2021. As part of this package, €21 million is being provided under the Regional Airports Programme (2021-2025) this year. This gives funding certainty to Donegal, Kerry and Ireland West Airports and also supports the PSO services on the Donegal/ Dublin and Kerry/Dublin air routes. In addition, €32 million is being provided to Cork and Shannon airports through a new one-year Covid-19 regional State airports programme. A €26 million Irish state aid scheme to compensate airport operators for the losses caused by Covid-19 and the travel restrictions imposed by Ireland to limit its spread. The scheme will augment the supports already in place and help the industry to maintain connectivity and make a recovery from the impacts of Covid-19.

### **Transport Policy**

228. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport when the safe routes to school programme will be rolled out; if schools in County Donegal will be selected for this programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29360/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** In March, I was delighted to launch the Safe Routes to School Programme which will support Active Travel infrastructure for selected schools around the country. The Programme will see approximately €15 million of funding this year to support walking, scooting and cycling to primary and post-primary schools.

As the Deputy is likely aware, the Safe Routes to School Programme aims to create safer walking and cycling routes within communities, alleviate congestion at the school gates and increase the number of students who walk or cycle to school by providing the necessary infrastructure.

All schools were eligible to apply to the programme and information was circulated from the Departments of Education and Transport to schools nationwide. The closing date for expressions of interest was 16 April 2021 and there was a fantastic response with over 900 expressions of interest received. At least one expression of interest was received from every county, including Donegal.

The Safe Routes to School Programme team is currently making good progress in assessing applications and is due to report a final recommended list of schools to be included in this year's programme in the coming weeks.

The Programme will select a number of schools for participation this year, with further opportunities for schools that are not successful in their application to reapply at a later date.

### **Cycling Policy**

229. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport if he will expand incentives to purchase and or use electric bicycles to include persons that do not qualify for the bike to work scheme such as students and carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29450/21]

230. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport if he will introduce incentives to purchase and or use electric bicycles to facilitate persons whose employer does not participate in the bike to work scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29451/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 229 and 230 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, tax policy is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance, in the first instance. I welcomed the announcement of increased thresholds under the existing Cycle to Work Scheme as part of the 2020 July Stimulus package, as well as the expansion of the scheme to electric bikes. The changes to the Scheme are in line with the commitment made in the Programme for Government.

The use of e-bikes is proving to be an increasingly popular method of travel, whether for commuting or leisure purposes, and is encouraging more people to choose to cycle. Bearing this in mind, and referencing the commitment by the Government to increase funding to active travel, all potential incentives to potential purchasers of bikes and e-bikes will be taken into consideration moving forward.

The Programme for Government commits to widening the eligibility of the Bike to Work Scheme and my Department, in cooperation with the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform will be examining ways in which to do this so that bikes and e-bikes are available and affordable to as many of our citizens as possible.

I was delighted to recently take an initial step towards this with the launch of the Pilot Bike and e-Bike Upcycling Initiative in partnership with the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). This three-year pilot scheme will see high quality up-cycled bicycles and e-bikes provided at a lower cost to those on low incomes and/or those who are most marginalised and disadvantaged. My Department will provide €1 million per annum towards this initiative for its duration, while Pobal will administer the scheme through DRCD's Community Services Programme. The deadline for applications was 28th May 2021.

Finally, the Deputy may also be aware that my Department is in the process of preparing a new Sustainable Mobility Policy following public consultation last year. This new policy framework will provide a strategic backdrop to the increased investment planned by this Government across the sustainable mobility programme, including active travel, and I look forward to the completion of this important work in 2021. The issue of widening the eligibility of the Bike to Work scheme will be explored as part of this policy document.

*Question No. 230 answered with Question No. 229.*

### **Driver Test**

231. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport when he expects the large backlogs of both driver theory and practical tests to be cleared; if he will prioritise those that require a full licence for the purposes of employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29480/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** In line with the further easing of restrictions, the gradual re-opening of in-person driver theory test centres will commence after the 7th of June. The Road Safety Authority (RSA) will reopen its network of test centres and will be permitted to conduct 25,000 driver theory tests per month.

Prior to COVID-19, the RSA provided 15,000 tests per month. In light of the significant backlog of customers, the RSA will gradually increase capacity in its test centres to 25,000 tests a month.

The test centres have extensive COVID-19 measures in place to protect both customers and staff and to ensure the safe delivery of the service. It is hoped that capacity will gradually increase to 50,000 tests per month over time, if public health guidance permits.

The RSA has been working to deliver an online theory test service, with a pilot online test already underway for trucks and buses. This pilot service has now been extended to include a limited number of car and motorbike tests.

The new offering will see 4,000 online theory tests available for all categories of vehicles per month. Tests are available on a 'first come, first served' basis with the new online service becoming more widely available later in the year. Once the online service is established, all customers will be able to opt to do the test online.

Driving tests for essential workers will continue to be the priority for the driver testing service. In line with the gradual reopening of services, driving tests for all those who are eligible to take the test and have been waiting longest will recommence in a limited fashion.

My Department is liaising with the RSA on an ongoing basis to meet the growing demand for tests. An additional 40 driver testers have been authorised along with 36 approved for retention or rehire in 2020. The RSA is making good progress in recruiting these additional testers and they are expected to conduct tests by the end of June 2021.

The Department and the RSA will monitor what impact the new testers are having as they come on stream and as the Covid restriction level reduces. Further recruitment, if necessary, will take place.

The health of both the public and the testers themselves must take priority, and as a result it is important to recognise that it will take time to get driver testing waiting times back to normal pre-Covid levels.

### **Dublin Bus**

232. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport the number of bus drivers recruited by Dublin Bus in each of the past three years in tabular form; and the annual salary range of bus drivers. [29482/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is a matter for Dublin Bus and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Rail Network**

233. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport the number of train drivers recruited by Iarnród Éireann in each of the past three years; and the annual salary range of train drivers. [29483/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Minister for Transport, I have

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responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issues raised are operational matters for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Public Transport**

234. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport the number of wheelchair accessible taxi grants issued for the period March 2020 to May 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29535/21]

235. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport the cost of wheelchair accessible grants issued for the period March 2020 to May 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29536/21]

236. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport the number of wheelchair accessible taxi grants issued for the period March 2020 to May 2021 that were issued to persons who did not previously own a small public service vehicle licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29537/21]

237. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport the number of wheelchair accessible taxi grants issued for the period March 2020 to May 2021 that were issued to persons changing from an existing saloon licence to a wheelchair accessible vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29538/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 to 237, inclusive, together.

The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including SPSV licences and administration of grants for SPSVs, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

Given the role of the NTA as regulator, I have referred your question to the Authority for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days

### **Driver Test**

238. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport if he will designate the driver theory test as essential in order that it can open up for applicants. [29550/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** In line with the further easing of restrictions, the gradual re-opening of in-person driver theory test centres will commence after the 7th of June. The Road Safety Authority (RSA) will reopen its network of test centres and will be permitted to conduct 25,000 driver theory tests per month.

Prior to COVID-19, the RSA provided 15,000 tests per month. In light of the significant backlog of customers, the RSA will gradually increase capacity in its test centres to 25,000 tests a month.



The test centres have extensive COVID-19 measures in place to protect both customers and staff and to ensure the safe delivery of the service. It is hoped that capacity will gradually increase to 50,000 tests per month over time, if public health guidance permits.

The RSA has been working to deliver an online theory test service, with a pilot online test already underway for trucks and buses. This pilot service has now been extended to include a limited number of car and motorbike tests.

The new offering will see 4,000 online theory tests available for all categories of vehicles per month. Tests are available on a 'first come, first served' basis with the new online service becoming more widely available later in the year. Once the online service is established, all customers will be able to opt to do the test online.

### **Driver Test**

239. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport if an applicant who had a physical driver theory test is able to swap it for an online theory test; and if he will approve the RSA online plan. [29551/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The RSA has been working to deliver an online service, with a pilot online test underway for trucks and buses. This pilot service has now been extended to include a limited number of car and motorbike tests.

The new offering online will see 4,000 online theory tests available for all categories of vehicles per month. Tests are available on a 'first come, first served' basis with the new online service becoming more widely available later in the year. Once the online service is fully established, all customers will be able to opt to do the test online. It is not possible to swap a physical theory test for an online test.

I can confirm that if someone books an online appointment and already has a booking for a physical appointment, the system automatically transfers the booking and they don't end up with a double booking. In effect, capacity will be freed up in the physical centres if someone switches to online.

### **Road Safety**

240. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Transport the reforms that have been made or that will be made to the LPSV licensing system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29554/21]

241. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Transport if he has plans to introduce legislation on reforming the existing LPSV licensing system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29555/21]

242. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to consult with industry stakeholders regarding the reform of the existing LPSV licensing system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29556/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 240 to 242, inclusive, together.

My Department undertook an initial examination of this licensing regime to see if scope existed to streamline the process, which included consideration of the proposals to end the requirement for LPSV operators to hold an LPSV licence issued by An Garda Síochána and to replace the current LPSV test with an expanded Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT).

A key aim of the reform is to streamline the process for industry so as to eliminate the overlap and duplication that currently exist regarding the various elements of the current LPSV licensing regime.

The proposed reform has been included in the Department's 2021 business planning with a view to making further progress on these issues this year. The type of changes envisaged will of course involve consultation with the industry stakeholders, and require the adoption of new legislation by the Oireachtas, as well as the development of the required procedures and technical specifications for any new regime, and the establishment of any necessary transitional arrangements.

*Question No. 241 answered with Question No. 240.*

*Question No. 242 answered with Question No. 240.*

### Public Transport

243. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport the BusConnects and DART west proposals that are putting over 60 trees at risk along the Navan Road and in Martin Savage Park; if additional avenues will be taken to mitigate against cutting down the trees; if there are plans by the NTA to replace any trees lost in the proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29594/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including BusConnects and DART+.

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.

### Protected Disclosures

244. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29644/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The number of allegations received by my Department which invoked the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 in each of the years 2016 to 2020 and to date in 2021 are set out in the table below. The table indicates the total number of allegations received, the number of these which were found, following assessment, to be not relevant or not a protected disclosure and the number subject to investigation.

Year	Number of allegations received	Number assessed as not being Protected Disclosure	Number subject to Investigation
July 2014 to 2015	3	1	2

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Year	Number of allegations received	Number assessed as not being Protected Disclosure	Number subject to Investigation
2016	3	2	1
2017	2	1	1
2018	8	3	5
2019	5	3	2
2020	4	1	3
2021	0	0	0

*Question No. 245 answered with Question No. 215.*

### **Driver Test**

246. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Transport if advice will be provided in relation to the case of a person (details supplied). [29713/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** The Road Safety Authority (RSA) is the body responsible for the operation of the Driver Test. The protocol for scheduling appointments is an operational matter for the RSA and I do not have any role in this process.

This question is being referred to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

### **Driver Licences**

247. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport the health restrictions, including vision requirements for persons applying for a bus or HGV driver licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29751/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** An applicant for a Group 2 (bus and/or truck) driving licence must meet the minimum physical and mental fitness and eyesight standards specified in Schedules 6 and 7 of the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) Regulations 2006 (SI 537 of 2006), as amended.

Detailed information on the standards can be found in the latest version of the Sláinte agus Tiomáint Medical Fitness to Drive Guidelines, available on the National Office of Traffic Medicine website: [www.rcpi.ie/traffic-medicine](http://www.rcpi.ie/traffic-medicine). The Guidelines were updated in April 2021.

### **Road Network**

248. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport when the reclassification of L5433 to a regional road and the reclassification of R444 to a minor road will commence. [29759/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As regards the classification of the L5433 and the R444, the classification of roads as either a national road or a regional road is a Ministerial responsibility under section 10 of the Roads Act, 1993, as amended. A public road, other than one classified as a national road or a regional road, is a local road.

Roads classified as regional or local roads fall under the responsibility of local authorities. The construction, repair and maintenance of these roads is funded by local authorities' own

resources supplemented by State grants.

Requests to classify a road as a national road or regional road are considered, in consultation with TII as appropriate. Criteria for consideration are numerous and include items such as function of road including access to towns and Cities, major ports and airports, geographical regions, population centres and tourist regions. It also includes considerations of continuity of classification throughout the length of road, whether roads are feeder connections or links to the national road network, cross section, alignment and structural integrity as well as amount of heavy commercial vehicles. Funding source for road improvement is not a consideration of classification of road type.

The Department carries out periodic reviews of classifications and these proposals, in relation to the L5433 and the R444, will be considered as part of the next such review. This is likely to take place in 2022.

### Road Projects

249. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Transport if funding is being made available for a project (details supplied) that is urgently required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29837/21]

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

An allocation in excess of €15 million is being made available in 2021 to local authorities funded under my Department's regional and local road maintenance and renewal grant programmes for Climate Adaptation and Resilience schemes. In March this year local authorities were invited to submit applications for Climate Adaptation and Resilience Works, for consideration for funding in 2021.

An application has been received from Mayo County Council, which includes a scheme for seawall renovation works on the R313 in Belmullet. It is expected that these grant allocations will be announced later this week.

### Rail Network

250. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Transport if he will make the preliminary business case for MetroLink and the outcomes of the feasibility studies in relation to MetroLink and the Review of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area publicly available; if these studies were extended to include the feasibility of the MetroLink to come out as far as Firhouse and Ballycullen and connect on to Tallaght; the position regarding extending the MetroLink out to the Dublin south-west area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29848/21]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I think it important to set out what are two different processes currently underway both of which relate to the potential future development of metro in Dublin.

Firstly, we have the project known as MetroLink. This is a project set out in the existing,

statutory, Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 to 2036 and one which has been subject to extensive, non-statutory public consultation over the last 3 years. This project has now reached an important milestone as its Preliminary Business Case has been submitted to my Department for review as is required under the Public Spending Code. For projects of this scale, the Public Spending Code stipulates that Government approval is required to allow the project submit its Railway Order application to An Bord Pleanála. The Preliminary Business Case has been developed on the basis of the existing project as has been subject to public consultation in recent years.

Secondly, we have the statutory review of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area. The Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 stipulates that the Strategy must be reviewed every six years and this review provides an opportunity to re-examine and re-consider proposals for inclusion in the revised Strategy. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has stated that as part of its review it is considering whether additional metro routes should be included in any revised Strategy. It has further stated that as part of the public consultation process all background studies conducted to assist with this consideration will be published and I understand this public consultation phase will commence in the coming months.

I think it important to also note that inclusion in any revised Strategy is the first step in what is a very detailed process to enable projects move from the strategic support enabled by inclusion in a Transport Strategy to being a project with a Preliminary Business Case seeking approval to enter the statutory planning process.

### **Tax Code**

251. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Finance if a review of the local property tax case of a person (details supplied) can be carried out. [29547/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the person in question recently informed Revenue that the 2013 self-assessed valuation on his property was over-stated and requested that it be reduced from Local Property Tax (LPT) Band 3 to Band 1.

The person previously paid LPT liability for 2013 (in 2013) but did not make payments in respect of subsequent years until 2019, following notifications from Revenue. The payment received in 2019 was allocated to his older LPT liabilities in accordance with normal Revenue practice for historical tax arrears. The subsequent reduction in the person's LPT valuation in 2021 meant that both 2013 and 2015 were consequently overpaid. However, these amounts are not repayable, in accordance with section 26(2)(b) of the Finance (Local) Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended), because the valuation was changed more than four-years after the end of the relevant tax years.

Revenue is engaging directly with the person in the context of his overall LPT liability, including in respect of interest charges and his entitlement to a deferral of LPT.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

252. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for the employment wage subsidy scheme which is due to end on 30 June 2021 given that many businesses such as bars which have been closed for extensive periods will have just reopened when the scheme ends; his plans to provide additional supports to businesses; and if he will make a statement on



the matter. [29810/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 28B of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 provides for the operation of the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), which is an economy-wide enterprise support for eligible businesses in respect of eligible employees. It provides a flat-rate subsidy to qualifying employers based on the numbers of paid and eligible employees on the employer's payroll and charges a reduced rate of employer PRSI of 0.5% on wages paid which are eligible for the subsidy payment.

The objective of the EWSS is to support employment and maintain the link between the employer and employee insofar as is possible. The EWSS has been a key component of the Government's response to the continued Covid-19 crisis to support viable firms and encourage employment in the midst of these very challenging times. To date, payments of over €3.29 billion and PRSI credit of over €540 million have been granted to 49,500 employers in respect of some 570,000 workers.

Other members of the Government and I have been clear that there will be no cliff-edge to the EWSS and, as the Deputy will be aware, the scheme is currently scheduled to run until the end of this month. The COVID Restrictions Support Scheme has been similarly extended.

On many occasions over recent months, I have indicated to the House in responses to questions from Deputies that consideration was being given to the fact that continued support could be necessary out to the end of 2021 to help maintain viable businesses and employment and to provide businesses with certainty to the maximum extent possible.

Subject to the deliberations of Government, the Deputy may expect to hear further details today in this regard in relation to the EWSS.

I can also assure the Deputy that the Government will continue to assess matters as we move forward with the reopening of the economy and I will continue to work with Ministerial colleagues to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic as far as possible.

### **Departmental Schemes**

253. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider extending the help-to-buy scheme for all first-time buyers to include existing properties rather than exclusively for new builds. [29812/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Help to Buy (HTB) scheme is designed to stimulate the supply of new houses in the housing market and to assist first time buyers in accumulating a deposit for a new home. In order to help further meet these goals, I announced an enhancement to the existing scheme with effect from 23 July 2020 for the remainder of that year as part of the July Stimulus Package. The legislation to give effect to this is set out in the Financial Provisions (Covid-19) (No.2) Act 2020. Finance Act 2020 further extended the period of application of the enhanced levels of support until 31 December 2021.

In relation to second-hand properties generally, an increase in the supply of new housing remains a priority aim of Government policy. As mentioned above, the HTB scheme is specifically designed to encourage an increase in demand for affordable new build homes in order to encourage the construction of an additional supply of such properties. A move to include second-hand properties within the scope of the relief would not improve the effectiveness of

the relief; on the contrary, it could serve to dilute the incentive effect of the measure in terms of encouraging additional supply. I have no plans to extend HTB to second-hand properties.

## **Financial Services**

254. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance the action he has taken to address ongoing issues regarding unlicensed mortgage providers; the protections that are in place for customers who have been affected by the unlicensed mortgage providers facilitating mortgages here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29863/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy may wish to note that the Central Bank's website sets out information on the types of entities which require an authorisation to provide credit, including mortgages, such as credit institutions, credit unions and retail credit firms. It also sets out information on entities which require authorisation to advise on and intermediate between mortgage credit providers and consumers i.e. mortgage credit intermediaries. The Central Bank's website also includes registers of all firms regulated by the Central Bank.

Consumers that engage with an unauthorised firm may lose the protections of regulation and the consumer protection framework. For example:

- the Consumer Protection Code (CPC) or Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) would not apply;

- consumers may lose access to protections such as the Deposit Guarantee Scheme, the Investor Compensation Fund, the Insurance Compensation Fund and the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO).

In addition, the directors and senior management of unregulated firms are not subject to the Fitness and Probity Regime and unregulated firms are not subject to prudential requirements such as regulatory capital requirements or safeguarding of client funds.

The Central Bank encourages consumers to take the SAFE test [www.centralbank.ie/consumer-hub/explainers/how-can-i-avoid-a-financial-services-scam](http://www.centralbank.ie/consumer-hub/explainers/how-can-i-avoid-a-financial-services-scam) before dealing with financial services firms.

The Central Bank advises that it has a dedicated unit, the 'Unauthorised Providers Unit', which investigates alleged instances of unauthorised activity carried out by individuals or entities that are not authorised or regulated by the Central Bank. Members of the public can report alleged instances of unauthorised activity through the Central Bank's website or directly by telephone. Details for making reports are contained at [www.centralbank.ie/regulation/how-we-regulate/authorisation/unauthorised-firms](http://www.centralbank.ie/regulation/how-we-regulate/authorisation/unauthorised-firms). All instances of alleged unauthorised activity are investigated in full by the Central Bank. However, the Central Bank has also advised that it is bound by strict statutory obligations of confidentiality and therefore is precluded from commenting on the specific investigations it undertakes.

## **Real Estate Investment Trusts**

255. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 311 and 312 of 18 May 2021, the amount of IREF dividend withholding tax deducted for 2017, 2018 and 2019 in gross terms and in net terms after refunds in instances in which a person is entitled to receive a distribution without the deduction of DWT on account of a double

taxation agreement. [29147/21]

256. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 311 and 312 of 18 May 2021, the amount of IREF dividend withholding tax deducted for 2019 that was and was not attributable, respectively, to provisions under Finance Act 2017 that ended the exclusion from the IREF DWT of the distribution of capital gains on the disposal of assets which had been held for more than five years, which became effective from 1 January 2019. [29148/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 255 and 256 together.

The Irish Real Estate Fund (IREF) legislation was introduced by Finance Act 2016 to address concerns raised regarding the use of collective investment vehicles by non-residents to invest in Irish property. An IREF is an investment fund, or a sub-fund, which derives 25% or more of its market value from assets acquiring their value directly or indirectly from real estate in the State.

As an investment undertaking, the profits of the IREF are not taxed within the fund, but instead are subject to tax in the hands of the investors. IREFs are subject to a 20% withholding tax on distributions to non-resident investors. Irish resident individuals/corporates are subject to investment undertakings tax. Certain categories of investors such as pension funds, life assurance companies and other collective investment undertakings are generally exempt from having IREF withholding tax applied provided the appropriate declarations are in place.

The legislation governing the taxation of IREFs provides that an investor resident in a country with which Ireland has a double taxation agreement (DTA) may reclaim any excess withholding tax incurred above the rate specified in the relevant DTA where the investor owns less than 10% of the units in an IREF. The table below sets out details of the number and value of reclaims processed by Revenue up to the period ended 30 April 2021. The reclaims processed total €3,319,159. The bulk of the repayments relate to IREF WHT deducted in the tax period ended 31 December 2019.

Date of repayment	Number of reclaims	Amount of reclaims €
2021	<10	2,521,414
2020	34	773,538
2019	<10	24,207

The gross amount of IREF WHT arising and paid for the periods 2017, 2018 and 2019 were previously provided to the Deputy and are set out in the following table.

	2017 €	2018 €	2019 €
IREF Withholding Tax paid	8,321,359	28,229,097	65,759,048
Income tax charge paid*	n/a	n/a	6,211,720

\*The Finance Act 2019 contained a number of anti-avoidance measures for IREFs. IREFs are regarded as having income subject to income tax where they have excessive debt or expenses that are not wholly or exclusively for the purpose of their business. For the three-month period to 31 December 2019, €6.2 million income tax was paid by IREFs.

In respect of question 29148/21, Section 19 of Finance Act 2017 removed the exemption referred to by the Deputy in respect of disposals occurring on or after 1 January 2019. It is not possible to estimate the amount of IREF withholding tax paid in 2019 directly attributable to the removal of this exemption, as this would have required taxpayers to declare information no longer relevant in filing their tax returns - i.e. to advise if a gain would have been excluded if it

had arisen in a prior year. I can however advise that in 2019, no IREF indicated on the returns filed that it had availed of the exclusion of profits in respect of a profit distribution arising from a property sale.

*Question No. 256 answered with Question No. 255.*

### **Tax Code**

257. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the stamp duty that will apply to a development (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29155/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that it is difficult to comment definitively on the stamp duty liability of individual transactions. The stamp duty liability that might arise in respect of a particular development would have regard to the particular facts and circumstances of each transaction. In addition, any potential stamp duty liability that might arise in the circumstances of the case in question would not appear to be directly relevant to the requester, so the issue of taxpayer confidentiality also arises for Revenue.

In relation to the recent Financial Resolution passed by the Dáil on May 19 last, I can confirm that a new higher rate of 10% stamp duty applies under section 31E of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 in situations where 10 or more residential units, excluding apartments (as defined), but including duplex units and terraced town houses, are acquired in any 12-month period. For the purposes of section 31E, an apartment is defined as a residential unit in a multi-storey residential property that comprises, or will comprise, not less than 3 apartments with grouped or common access. It will be a question of fact in each case whether the residential units concerned come within this definition.

Stamp duty is payable by the purchaser or by a lessee in a long lease with a term of at least 35 years. While it is not clear who might be acquiring the residential units in question following their refurbishment, it should be noted that local authorities and certain approved housing bodies purchasing or leasing residential units are exempt from stamp duty so the threshold of 10 residential units would not be relevant to them.

### **Data Protection**

258. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29308/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** For operational security reasons, my Department is not in a position to provide any details of its cyber security systems or those of the bodies under its aegis, as it would be inappropriate to disclose information that may in any way assist those with malicious intent.

### **Tax Code**

259. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the failure to include private mortgage to rent providers in the exemption from an increase in stamp duty on bulk purchases in the recently passed financial resolution places the conclusion of up to 200 mortgage to rent transactions with home for life at risk of collapse; if so, the action he plans to take to avert this risk; and the timeline within which he plans to act. [29359/21]

261. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the impact of the recently announced changes to stamp duty in respect of the bulk buying by investment funds of houses on organisations active in the mortgage to rent sector (details supplied) and that are in the process of purchasing homes under the mortgage to rent scheme in order to lease back to distressed homeowners; if he has been in contact with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage with regard to identifying a way in which such organisations may be exempted from the new stamp duty regime under certain circumstances and informed by the way in which approved housing bodies have been exempted under the new system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29479/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 and 261 together.

On May 19th this year, the Dáil approved, by way of a Financial Resolution, a new higher stamp duty rate of 10% that will apply to the multiple purchase of houses.

I introduced this measure in response to the multiple purchase of residential units by certain institutional investors in the Irish property market. I share the widespread concerns that the activity of these institutional investors risks distorting the market for houses in the State and I recognise the difficulties that this has the potential to cause for first time buyers and others who wish to buy a family home.

I indicated at that time that as some multiple purchases of property are undertaken by bodies specifically for the purpose of providing social or affordable housing, the higher stamp duty rate will not apply in such instances e.g. Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, and the Housing Agency. I also pointed out that other social or affordable housing arrangements would be considered as part of the legislation which will be brought before the Houses in the next few weeks to permanently underpin this Financial Resolution.

In relation to the Deputies specific question about whether private sector participants in the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme will be exempted from the new higher stamp duty rate, I have been advised by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage that he wishes such an exemption to be provided for as part of the legislation required to put the stamp duty Financial Resolution on a permanent statutory footing.

Finally, my officials have been in contact with a major private sector participant and it is understood that the addressing of this matter through legislation over the next number of weeks should ensure that current mortgage to rent transactions are concluded satisfactorily.

### **Departmental Schemes**

260. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the bike-to-work scheme in each year since it was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29452/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, section 118(5G) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997) provides for the Cycle to Work scheme. This scheme provides an exemption from benefit-in-kind (BIK) where an employer purchases a bicycle and associated safety equipment for an employee and was introduced in 2009.

The scheme operates on a self-administration basis. Relief is automatically available provided the employer is satisfied that the conditions of their particular scheme meet the require-



ments of the legislation. There is no notification procedure for employers involved. This approach was taken with the deliberate intention of keeping the scheme simple and reducing administration on the part of employers.

Tax expenditure reports prepared by my Department have estimated the cost in a full year at €4 million but have been clear that this figure was an estimate as separate returns are not required.

An estimated additional tax expenditure of €0.5m in 2020 and €1.5m in 2021 is expected to arise on foot of the changes made to the scheme by Section 9 of the Financial Provision (Covid-19)(No.2) Act 2020. This increased the allowable expenditure from €1,000 to €1,500 in respect of e-bikes and €1,250 in respect of bicycles and allowed the purchase of a new bicycle every 4 years instead of 5.

*Question No. 261 answered with Question No. 259.*

### **Insurance Levy**

262. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reduce the levy on private health insurance given the already exorbitant cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29507/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Health Insurance Levy is a stamp duty paid by health insurance companies to support the Risk Equalisation Fund (REF).

It is charged as a fixed amount on each health insurance policy, with the amount paid dependent on the nature of the policy. The fixed amount can vary from year to year. The Levy operates in accordance with section 125A of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999, and has been paid into the REF since 2013. The REF received €752 million from Revenue in respect of the duty in 2019 and €771million in 2020.

Ireland supports its community rated system by providing age related health credits to insurers in respect of older people and less healthy people, to help meet the expected higher cost of health insurance for this group. As a result, all people pay the same premiums net of these tax credits for their health insurance, so helping to prevent insurers cherry-picking younger customers who are less likely to get sick. These tax credits are funded by the health insurance levy which is collected by insurers as part of the annual premium of policy holders. They then pay it to Revenue, and it is then transferred to the REF.

Risk equalisation credits are paid out of the REF to the insurers by the Authority. Any surpluses or deficits in the REF are carried forward and allowed for in setting future levy amounts.

The annual Health Insurance (Amendment) Act sets out the risk equalisation credits and Stamp Duty levy applicable for the following 12 month (1 April to 31 March) period. The level of Stamp Duty to be applied to advanced and non-advanced products for adults and children is then calculated on that basis by the Health Insurance Authority (HIA), and is also provided for in that Act.

For example, in November 2020 the Minister for Health accepted the HIA's recommendation to leave the levy unchanged for the coming 12 month period, i.e. 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022). The rates currently in effect are shown in the table below.

HIA contracts effective 1 April 2021

From 1 April 2021	Non-advanced health insurance contracts	Advanced health insurance contracts
17 and under	€52	€150
18 and over	€157	€449

I therefore have no plans to revisit the charging of the levy, and as my reply notes, the rate at which it is charged is determined by the Minister for Health each year, on foot of advice from the HIA, and not by the Minister for Finance.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

263. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the uptake of the stay and spend scheme to date; if he plans to reintroduce a similar scheme to incentivise domestic travel and spending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29531/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The purpose of the Stay and Spend Tax Credit scheme was to provide targeted support to businesses within the hospitality sector whose operations are likely to be most affected by continued restrictions on public health grounds. The scheme terminated on 30 April.

Since 1 October 2020, a total of 65,661 receipts have been uploaded to the Revenue Receipts Tracker, as at 26 May 2021. The related expenditure recorded on these receipts amounts to €10,762,518, and the potential tax cost is €2,152,504, assuming all such expenditure is claimed and qualifies in full for tax relief. Subsequent to claims being made in respect of this scheme and any other relief or deduction, verification of such reliefs and deductions forms part of Revenue's comprehensive risk assessment programme.

The scheme was developed at a time last year when there appeared to be a steady downward trend in infection rates and there was an expectation that the re-opening of the economy could be sustained uninterrupted. Unfortunately, this has not been the case and, with the exception of some short periods, public health restrictions have had the effect of impeding the operation of the incentive as originally envisaged.

While I am very mindful of the significant difficulties that remain to be faced by the hospitality sector, I made the determination that the broad interests of taxpayers would not have been best served by extending the scheme over the summer months in circumstances where most will be staying at home and hopefully holidaying in Ireland. This is particularly the case when other very significant support measures will remain in place.

Currently, I do not have plans to re-introduce the Stay and Spend scheme. However, it may be useful to highlight and summarise the significant supports that remain available to support businesses in the hospitality sector:

- In recognition of the unprecedented challenges facing the Hospitality and Tourism sector, the VAT rate was reduced from 13.5% to 9% from 1 November 2020. This is a temporary but important measure to provide support to the sector, where many businesses remain closed for now and those that are open are operating at significantly reduced capacity. It will apply until 31 December 2021. It should be noted that this VAT rate reduction came after the introduction of the Stay and Spend Tax Credit and reflects the fact that the latter was not intended to be the sole sector-specific support for hospitality.

- In addition, the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) continues to be a key component of the Government's response to the COVID-19 crisis to support viable firms and encourage employment in the hospitality and tourism sector and beyond. I have been clear that

there will be no cliff-edge to the EWSS. Subject to the Government meeting today, there may be further announcements in this regard.

- The Covid Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) is a targeted support for businesses significantly impacted by restrictions introduced by the Government under public health regulations to combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The support is available to companies, self-employed individuals and partnerships who carry on a trade or trading activities, the profits from which are chargeable to tax under Case I of Schedule D, from a business premises located in a region subject to restrictions introduced in line with the Living with COVID-19 Plan.

- Finally, businesses may also be eligible under the Debt Warehousing Scheme to 'park' certain VAT and PAYE (Employer) liabilities, outstanding balances of self-assessed Income Tax for 2019 and Preliminary Tax for 2020 as well as other liabilities.

### **Tax Credits**

264. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance if he plans to reinstate a system such as the one parent family tax credit to provide tax credits for parents who are co-parenting (details supplied); if consideration has been given to the many different approaches to sharing parenting responsibilities and the financial implications of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29539/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The 2009 Commission on Taxation reviewed the One-Parent Family Tax Credit and acknowledged that it played a role in supporting and incentivising the labour market participation of single and widowed parents. However, in its recommendations, the Commission concluded that the credit should be retained but that it should be allocated to the principal carer of the child only. It is essential to review all tax reliefs, credits and incentives in order to ensure that they are properly targeted and if necessary re-focused in order that they could achieve the socio-economic objectives that are set for them. A feature of the One-Parent Family Tax Credit was that it could be claimed by multiple individuals in respect of the same child, resulting in an unsustainable position.

The One-Parent Family Tax Credit was replaced with the Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit from 1 January 2014. The restructured credit is of the same value i.e. €1,650 per annum as the one-parent family tax credit and it also carries the same entitlement to the additional €4,000 extended standard rate band, which increases that band to €36,800 per annum, before liability to higher rate of income tax arises. However, the credit is more strategically targeted, in that it will in the first instance only be available to the principal carer of the child.

The Single Person Child Carer Credit is available to you if you are the 'primary claimant'. To be a primary claimant your qualifying child must live with you for the whole, or greater part, of the year (a period greater than 6 months). Ultimately, of course, the allocation of childcare responsibilities is primarily for parents or guardians to agree and a principal carer will be able to relinquish the credit in order than a non-principal carer can claim it.

Issues concerning the Single Parent Child Carer Credit are outlined in a review conducted by my Department in 2015, which is contained in the Report on Tax Expenditures, available at the following link: [http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2016/Documents/Tax\\_Expenditures\\_Report\\_pub.pdf](http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2016/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report_pub.pdf).

I am satisfied that the Single Parent Child Carer Credit in its current form is targeting limited State resources to where they are most needed. As such, I have no plans to reinstate a system such as the One Parent Family Tax Credit. While it is the case that policy choices exist as to

how best to deploy the available financial resources of the State, resources are being prioritised at this time on initiatives to support those who are no longer in employment or who will or have had reduced income arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as measures seeking to support employers in retaining staff on the payroll.

### Tax Credits

265. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who received the one parent family tax credit in 2013; and the number who received the single person child carer credit from its introduction and in subsequent years until 2021, by year in tabular form. [29540/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the number of taxpayers who received the One Parent Family Tax Credit in 2013 and the Single Person Child Carer Credit for each of the years 2014 to 2018 (the latest available year) are set out in Revenue's Cost of Tax Expenditures Publication, which are published on the Revenue website. (Search "Tax Expenditures" and select result "Costs of Tax expenditures (credits, allowances and reliefs)")

Tax returns for 2019 were due to be filed in late 2020 and the data from these are currently being analysed. Once this analysis is completed, the information will be updated at the above link. Information for 2020 and 2021 will not be available until tax returns for those years are filed and processed.

### Tax Data

266. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax that has been waived, exempted and forgone by the Exchequer through residential property tax reliefs inclusive of construction, purchasing, leasing, renting and other related reliefs in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021. [29548/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the latest available information in respect of the cost of tax reliefs and exemptions is published on the Revenue website. (Search "Tax Expenditures" and select result "Costs of Tax expenditures (credits, allowances and reliefs)")

In this table, of particular relevance to the Deputy's question may be the tax costs in respect of CGT Relief on Disposal of Certain Land or Buildings, the Home Renovation Incentive Scheme, the Help to Buy Scheme, Mortgage Interest Relief for Principal Private Residence, various rental tax credits and reliefs and the Residential Development Refund Scheme. Further, more detailed information in respect of some of these tax reliefs is also available on the Revenue website via the same Tax Expenditures section mentioned above.

In addition, I am further advised by Revenue in respect of legacy property based tax reliefs that are now closed to new entrants, there is information available on their website which may also be of interest to the Deputy. (Search "Certain property based tax reliefs" and select result "Certain property based tax reliefs").

### Tax Rebates

267. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider the introduction of a VAT rebate for static mobile home owners who have had to pay full fees for 2020 and 2021 despite not having access to their mobile homes for significant periods during that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29580/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy may be aware under Irish legislation, there is no entitlement to a refund of VAT for non-business activities. Therefore, in line with section 59 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010 mobile home owners would not be entitled to such a refund.

### **Tax Code**

268. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance if it is possible to reclaim VAT on a garden sensory room under the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 15) Order 1981; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29598/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 15) Order 1981 provides for the refund of VAT incurred on qualifying goods for the use of persons with a disability. The Order specifies the degree of disability and defines the qualifying goods as goods which are aids or appliances, including parts and accessories, specially constructed or adapted for use by a person with a disability and includes goods which, although not so specially constructed or adapted, are of such a kind as might reasonably be treated as so constructed or adapted having regard to a particular disablement of that person.

While the provisions of the Order would not extend to the construction of a garden sensory room, they may be applicable to certain goods purchased in connection with the development or adaptation of the room where those goods would be necessary to meet the particular needs of the person with a disability.

Each claim received by Revenue in relation to this Refund Order is evaluated on its own merits, from the point of view of the extent of the applicant's disability and the nature of the claim received. Further information including how to make a claim for a refund can be found on Revenue's website.

### **Protected Disclosures**

269. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29634/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Deputy, I have been informed by my officials that the response set out below covers the numbers of protected disclosures as required under section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. As detailed in the response, it is not possible to release some of the information requested.

In broad terms, a 'Protected Disclosure' is a disclosure of information which the discloser believes may reveal wrongdoing and which came to the attention of the discloser through their employment. This is a very broad category of information. As such, it can be expected that in many cases disclosures falling into this category are received and dealt with in an appropriate proper manner without the person making the disclosure or those receiving it ever advertent to the fact that the information could be regarded as constituting a Protected Disclosure.



The legal obligations which arise in respect of Protected Disclosures consist principally of not penalising the discloser for making the disclosure and protecting the identity of the person making the disclosure in some circumstances. These obligations would be routinely met without the need for any legal obligation to compel this to occur, so that it is generally not relevant whether the information constitutes a Protected Disclosure within the meaning of the legislation or not. It is, therefore, not possible to be certain that no disclosures which fall within the definition of Protected Disclosure but which have not been formally identified as a Protected Disclosure per se have been received.

It is for these reasons that it is not possible to provide a comprehensive and exhaustive response to the Deputy's question. Having said that, it is important to state that the Department of Finance has put in place policy and procedures for the making of Protected Disclosures in the Department, which have been developed in line with the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 and agreed by the Department's Executive Board. This sets out the process by which a 'worker' of the Department can make a Protected Disclosure, what will happen when a disclosure is made, and what the Department will do to protect the discloser.

The process supports the Department's strong commitment to ensuring that the culture and working environment of the Department encourage, facilitate and support any member of staff of the Department in 'speaking-up' on any issue that may impact adversely on the Department's ability to properly and fully carry out all its roles and responsibilities to the highest performance standard required. Two alternative confidential recipients have been nominated to receive Protected Disclosures from internal staff, in the event that a staff member does not wish to make the disclosure to their Line Manager or the normal Senior Management Team. These nominees are the Department's Head of Legal and the Compliance Officer. To date, neither of these officers have received such an internal Protected Disclosure.

Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act requires the publication of a report in respect of Protected Disclosures received in the preceding year setting out certain information in respect of any Protected Disclosures received. For the purposes of complying with section 22, the Department publishes information regarding Protected Disclosures formally identified as such, without identifying the person making the disclosure. Previous reports indicate that one Protected Disclosure was received in 2017 with a further one in 2018 and another one in 2019. No Protected Disclosure was received during 2020 and this fact will be reflected in the required report for 2020 that is due to be published by this coming June. To date, there has been no Protected Disclosure in 2021.

Tabular summary:

Year	No of Protected Disclosures
2016	Nil
2017	1
2018	1
2019	1
2020	nil
2021	nil to date

### Financial Services

270. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of meetings he or the Minister for State with responsibility for financial services, credit unions and insurance have held with insurers and underwriters since 1 June 2020 regarding professional indemnity insur-

ance for construction professions and construction-related professions with particular reference to fire safety concerns and the withdrawal of underwriters from the market. [29654/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset, I would like to note that the Government recognises the concerns felt by many groups, including in the construction and related professions, around the cost and availability of insurance cover. Addressing this issue is a priority for this Government, as is reflected in the prioritisation of insurance reform. The Government's Action Plan for Insurance Reform sets out 66 actions which aim to improve both the cost and availability of insurance for consumers, business and other groups, including by increasing competition.

Minister of State Fleming and I have held several meetings with representatives of the insurance industry and have raised the issue of professional indemnity cover, including for construction-related sectors.

In his capacity as the Chair of the Office to Promote Competition in the Insurance Market, which was established within my Department as part of this comprehensive insurance reform agenda, Minister of State Fleming has also engaged with sectoral stakeholders to understand gaps in the insurance market with a view to expanding the risk appetite of existing insurers. The Office is also involved in exploring opportunities for new entrants in order to increase the availability of insurance, including specialised cover in areas such as Professional Indemnity insurance.

While the various structural factors that have contributed to the hardening of the Professional Indemnity insurance market are primarily international in origin, implementation of the Action Plan should nonetheless assist in attracting such insurers into the Irish insurance market when it begins to soften again, including in the construction sector. My officials will continue to monitor the situation.

### **Insurance Industry**

271. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if he will respond and advise on the serious concerns raised by a person (details supplied) in respect of their struggle to secure insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29722/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am very much aware of the issues of affordability and availability facing many sectors, such as the specific motor sport one highlighted by the Deputy, which provide such a valuable contribution to the well-being of our society and economy in general. However, it is important to note that neither the Government nor the Central Bank of Ireland have any influence over the pricing or provision of insurance products, nor can we compel any insurer operating in the Irish market to provide cover to any individual business or groups, as this is a commercial matter. This position is reinforced by the EU legislative framework for insurance (the Solvency II Directive).

Notwithstanding these constraints, insurance reform is a policy priority as illustrated by the Programme for Government. This contains commitments aimed at addressing consumer and business concerns around the cost and availability of insurance cover. The Action Plan for Insurance Reform contains a range of deliverable actions across a number of policy areas. Actions delivered in the first three months of the year include:

- The publication of new Personal Injuries Guidelines which will be formally adopted via legislation shortly;

- Establishment of a new Office to Promote Competition in the Insurance Market;
- The commencement of a public consultation on enhancing role of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB); and,
- Introduction of new regulations on solicitors advertising.

I would also like to add that we have initiated reform to PIAB, led by the Minister of State, Deputy Troy. We will make changes to duty of care legislation and we are also undertaking reforms to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to improve its powers in regard to competition.

With respect to my own Department, it is the lead for just over a third of the actions in the Action Plan on Insurance Reform. Work is progressing to implement these actions within the timeframe set out in the Plan.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to assure the Deputy that securing a more sustainable and competitive market through deepening and widening the supply of insurance in Ireland remains a key policy priority for this Government. In this regard, it is my intention to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that implementation of the Action Plan can have a positive impact on the affordability and availability of insurance for individuals, businesses, community and voluntary groups across Ireland.

### **Workplace Relations Commission**

272. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 2 of 25 May 2021, his views on whether the WRC's code of practice in the understanding of quality employment, for example, the code of practice on the right to disconnect, should be included as a condition of availing of the tax credit; and his further views on whether the payment of the living wage should be a condition for availing of the tax credit. [29763/21]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As stated in PQ 28102, officials in my Department have commenced work on the development of a tax credit for the digital gaming sector. The intention is to publish legislation to introduce this new credit as part of the 2021 Finance Bill process. It is important to note however, that European Commission State aid approval will be required prior to the introduction of the tax credit. Therefore it is expected that the Finance Bill 2021 legislation will be introduced subject to a commencement order, pending completion of the State aid approval process.

As the tax credit is currently still in development I am not in a position to confirm the exact conditions which will need to be met in order to avail of the credit.

As advised in PQ 28102/21, I can state it is crucial that employee rights are upheld in all industries and my officials are cognisant of this fact throughout the development process. I can also state that my officials will also have regard to relevant transferrable elements of the s.481 film credit requirements in setting the criteria for the relief.

With this being said, it is also important to note that the monitoring of compliance with employment rights legislation is primarily a matter for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, through the Workplace Relations Commission. While the importance of employment rights will be reflected in the tax credit for the digital game sector, the WRC remains the appropriate avenue to address non-compliance with employment rights legislation.

### **Pension Provisions**

273. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a retirement pension and gratuity will be paid to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29283/21]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** The administration of pensions for retired civil servants is the responsibility of the Payroll Shared Service Centre (PSSC) of the National Share Services Office (NSSO).

Following further consultation between officials from my Department and the NSSO on the matters raised by the Deputy, I can confirm that all outstanding issues pertaining to this case have now been resolved and that the individual concerned will be contacted very shortly by the NSSO in order to confirm payment details for this case.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

274. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for more flexible conditions and working from home arrangements in the public service following the mass roll-out of the vaccine. [29299/21]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** The Government, has committed, in the Programme for Government, to mandating public sector employers to move to 20% home and remote working in 2021. In this context, My Department is, as a matter of priority, working with employers across the civil service to develop the longer term approach to remote working in the sector. My Department is also working closely with the wider public sector to ensure a consistency of approach.

### **Data Protection**

275. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29313/21]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** My Department has a data breach management policy in place to ensure that any data breaches are dealt with as required under Articles 33-34 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In line with this policy, the Department has identified and recorded twenty eight data breaches since 2018. Of the breaches identified in the Department since 2018, only a small proportion warranted formal notification to the Data Protection Commissioner under the GDPR. The majority of the breaches identified were determined to be minor in nature. These were handled in accordance with the Department's data breach management policy.

### **Heritage Sites**

276. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if consultation was undertaken with private car park operators at national monuments to provide free parking in concert with free access to OPW heritage sites. [29336/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** Parking provided by the OPW at National Monument sites is free of charge

in general with the exception of Glendalough where parking charges are essential to assist with traffic management at this extremely busy site. At National Monument sites where there are restricted or limited parking options, visitors usually avail of nearby municipal (or, in some rare instances, private) car parks which, by and large, also service other users. It would not be feasible to request the operators of such car parks to waive parking charges for OPW visitors.

### **Office of Public Works**

277. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenditure and personnel headcount of the Office of Public Works by county and NUTS3 region in each of the past five years in tabular form; his views on whether there is a balanced spread across regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29497/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The OPW is collating the information sought and will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

### **Office of Public Works**

278. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the specific location, purpose, county, NUTS3 region and cost of completed land acquisitions undertaken or supported by the Office of Public Works by county and NUTS3 region in each of the past five years. [29498/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The OPW is collating the information sought and will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

### **Project Ireland 2040**

279. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the schedule of each project, the description and funding that has been implemented under final review or completed in the south-east NUTS3 region under the Ireland 2040 campaign; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29499/21]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** My Department has published Project Ireland 2040 Annual Reports for 2018 and 2019, along with nine Regional Reports for each of those years. The reports highlight Project Ireland 2040 achievements during 2018 and 2019 and give a detailed overview of the public investments which have been made throughout the country including in the following regional areas: the North-East, North-West, West, Mid-West, South-East, South-West, Dublin, Mid-East and Midlands. These nine Regional Reports, including that for the South-East, set out the projects and programmes which are being planned and delivered in each region as part of the public investment detailed in Project Ireland 2040. While the Regional Reports for the South-East do not provide an exhaustive list of all public capital expenditure in the region, they serve to highlight the diverse range of investments being made by the State under Project Ireland 2040 in the counties of Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford.

More granular information on individual projects and programmes can be found on the capital investment tracker published by my Department and mostly recently updated in December



2020. This update provides a composite update on the progress of all major investments that make up Project Ireland 2040. It focuses on projects with estimated costs greater than €20 million. The update increased the coverage of projects and improved the functionality, including the ability to search the tracker by county, user-friendly dashboards and other information to aid interpretation of the data. The myProjectIreland interactive map was also updated in December 2020 and was extended to include almost 800 projects across the country. By clicking on the map on [gov.ie/2040](http://gov.ie/2040), citizens will find updated information on what has been achieved and what is planned for their own local area. This version features a dashboard with charts, allowing citizens to see the progress being made on projects at a glance. New search facilities also allow citizens to view projects in their regional area, by city, by county or by eircode. The Project Ireland 2040 Annual Reports, Regional Reports, capital investment tracker and myProjectIreland interactive map are all available on [gov.ie/2040](http://gov.ie/2040). Further updates to these publications are planned for later this year.

### **Public Sector Pay**

280. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied); and his plans with an organisation regarding same. [29529/21]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I wish to advise the Deputy that officials in my Department have been actively engaging with relevant stakeholders in relation to the request from The Bar of Ireland for restoration of fees to criminal defence barristers. There has been ongoing correspondence and engagement in respect of this request.

The matter is under consideration and will be examined further in the context of wider public pay policy and expenditure implications.

### **Protected Disclosures**

281. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29639/21]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I wish to advise the Deputy that no correspondence was received from 2014 to date that required to be progressed within my Department under the provisions of the Protected Disclosures legislation. The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 provides under section 8(2) that a disclosure may be made to “a Minister of the Government on whom any function relating to the public body is conferred or imposed by or under any enactment”. The Department received 14 such disclosures from 2014 to date and protected the identity of the correspondents in line with the requirements of the Act. As none of these were appropriate to be dealt with by the Department, the correspondents were advised accordingly and the correspondence was forwarded to the relevant bodies for attention as appropriate. In addition, the Department received correspondence from a further 4 individuals which, on examination, were not protected disclosures under the terms of the Protected Disclosures legislation.

The Deputy may wish to note that, in line with Section 22 of the Act, annual reports in relation to disclosures received by the Department are published on the Government website, at this link: [www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/80a7fc-protected-disclosures/](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/80a7fc-protected-disclosures/).

## Defence Forces

282. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will update the 1979 public sector circular governing the Reserve Defence Forces to allow leave in instances such as aid to civil power; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29678/21]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** Circular 51/1979 - 'Leave for attendance at training with the Reserve Defence Force' currently provides for up to 10 days of Special Leave with pay, depending on the duration of the training period, to attend annual or basic training with the Reserve Defence Force. Additionally, special leave with pay may also be granted in respect of any necessary time spent in travelling to and from the training. Civil Servants who wish to attend training courses with the Reserve Defence Force should be facilitated as far as possible consistent with the business needs of organisations.

[circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/finance/1979/51.pdf](http://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/finance/1979/51.pdf)

There are currently no plans to update the circular referred to by the Deputy. Any revisions to the circular would require consultation with both Civil Service employers and trade unions.

## Coastal Erosion

283. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW will provide funding to assist with the prevention of coastal erosion at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29723/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** It is a matter for Local Authorities in the first instance to assess and address problems of coastal erosion in their areas. The OPW operates the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme, under which applications for 90% funding to local authorities for small localised cost beneficial works are considered for measures costing up to €750,000 in each instance. Funding for coastal risk management studies may also be applied for under this scheme.

The local authority completes and submits the funding application for a project under the scheme and, in doing so, must have carried out the necessary preparatory work and preliminary investigations, costings and economic assessments. It is a matter for each local authority to ensure that all the necessary environmental, statutory and regulatory approvals are in place prior to any works being undertaken. I understand this location is at or near designated environmentally sensitive areas.

While Kerry County Council has made no application to the OPW for these works, I understand it is aware of the issue and considers they would not meet the scheme's criteria. The Council may carry out coastal protection works using their own resources.

## Flood Risk Management

284. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide details of the recent works to reduce the risk of flooding carried out on the banks of the River Maine at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29762/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the maintenance of Arterial Drainage Schemes completed under the Arterial Drainage Act of 1945.

There is an extensive network of embankments under the auspices of the OPW at Castlemaine, Co. Kerry. These embankments are maintained on a regular basis and such maintenance works include vegetation management as well as structural repairs to any existing structures such as sluices and bridges forming part of the scheme.

In relation to flood insurance, the Department of Finance has overall responsibility for policy matters in relation to insurance. The OPW has a role to assist insurance companies to take into account the protection provided by completed OPW flood defence schemes. In this regard, the OPW has a Memorandum of Understanding with Insurance Ireland, the representative body of the Insurance industry. This Memorandum of Understanding sets out principles of how the two organisations work together to ensure that appropriate and relevant information on these completed schemes is provided to insurers to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the availability to the public of insurance against the risk of flooding.

The insurance industry has its own flood modelling tools for assessing the level of risk that it is willing to underwrite in relation to individual properties. The decision on whether to offer insurance, the level of premiums charged and the policy terms applied are matters for individual insurers. Insurance companies make commercial decisions on the provision of insurance cover based on their assessment of the risks they would be accepting on a case-by-case basis.

Insurance related complaints or queries may be directed to Insurance Ireland's Insurance Information Service (01 676 1914 or [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu)). In addition, the Financial Services Ombudsman (1890 88 20 90) deals independently with unresolved complaints from consumers about their individual dealings with all financial service providers.

### **Legislative Measures**

285. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will give consideration to addressing the malicious dissemination of flashing images as part of the online safety and media regulation Bill; if her attention has been drawn to the campaign by a company (details supplied) to have this provision included; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29874/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill will, among other things, establish a regulatory framework for online safety to be overseen by an Online Safety Commissioner as part of a wider Media Commission. The goal of this regulatory framework will be to tackle the availability of defined categories of harmful online content through systemic oversight over how certain online services deliver and moderate the user-generated content on their platforms.

These defined categories of harmful online content include content by which a person commits a criminal offences and a number of categories of potentially harmful content, these being:

- Content by which a person engages in serious cyberbullying;
- Content by which a person promotes suicide or self-harm, and,
- Content by which a person promotes behaviour associated with eating disorders.

These categories concerning potentially harmful content are carefully defined in the General

Scheme to ensure that they deal with the most egregious content and respect other fundamental rights such as freedom of expression. These definitions are being refined during detailed legal drafting of the Bill by the Office of the Attorney General.

While my Department has not been contacted in respect of the specific issue raised by the Deputy, provision is also made in the Bill for the addition of further categories of harmful online content in the future. This process will involve a proposal by the Media Commission, informed by stakeholder consultation, and both Government and Oireachtas approval. The Media Commission will be tasked with keeping a close eye on emerging online harms which may be suitable to be dealt with under the regulatory framework for online safety.

The purpose of this provision is to future-proof the legislation to create a statutory process by which emerging online harms such as the issue raised by the Deputy may be examined for potential inclusion as a further category of harmful online content. This will help to avoid the need for ad-hoc primary legislation to deal with emerging harms in the future.

It's intended that the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill will be enacted this year. The Bill is on the Government priority list for publication during the current legislative session, which ends in July 2021.

At the same time, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht is conducting pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Bill. The timeline for this is a matter for the Committee.

### **Commemorative Events**

286. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the funding available to local authorities for the national day of commemoration in July 2021. [29067/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** My role as Minister with responsibility for leading the coordination of the Decade of Centenaries 2012-2023 Programme is to help ensure that the events of this important and formative period in our history and related themes, are meaningfully, proportionately and sensitively remembered.

Throughout the Decade of Centenaries, our local authorities have encouraged and supported authentic historical exploration and respectful reflection about the multiple identities, traditions and perspectives that are part of the overall Irish historical experience.

On 16 December 2020, I announced funding of €1.75 million for local authorities in 2021, to support their leading role in developing community-led commemorative activities, for the final phase of the Decade of Centenaries Programme. This amounts to €50,000 for each local authority and an additional fund is also available to support local authorities who have further requirements in relation to specific community-led centenary events, or larger projects. My Department has developed comprehensive guidance for the allocation of funding to assist local authorities, however, we do not direct them with regard to the allocation of funding for specific events.

The annual National Day of Commemoration is held on the Sunday closest to the 11th July, the date on which, in 1921, the Anglo-Irish Truce was agreed. The event normally takes place in either the Royal Hospital Kilmainham or the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, Dublin and is led by An Taoiseach. In addition a number of regional commemoration ceremo-

nies are held on the same day, in Cork, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Sligo and Waterford. If any local authority wishes to include initiatives to support or mark the national day of commemoration this year or any other key milestone in the Decade of Centenaries Programme, they may do so from their allocation or indeed funding from other sources they may have access to.

### **Sports Funding**

287. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the status of an application by Cork County Council in partnership with a club (details supplied). [29135/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** The National Sports Policy published in 2018 provided for the establishment of a Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). The National Development Plan provided a capital allocation of at least €100m over the period to 2027 for the fund. The aim of the scheme is to provide exchequer support for larger sports facility projects with at least €100m being made available over the period to 2027.

The first call for proposals under the fund closed for applications on 17th April 2019. Following a detailed assessment process approximately €86.4m has been awarded to 33 proposals and the priority in the short term is on advancing these projects.

An application was received from Cork County Council in respect of the project referred to by the Deputy but did not score sufficiently highly to be awarded a grant and the applicants were notified at the time. The total funding applied for under the scheme significantly exceeded the amount available to allocate. All applications under the LSSIF were assessed in accordance with the published scoring criteria with scores were awarded based on factors such as the priority given to the project by the relevant NGB and/or local authority, the level of funding being provided by the project sponsor and the likelihood of increasing sports participation.

All unsuccessful applicants were given the opportunity to appeal the Department's decision if it was felt that an error was made in the assessment process. No appeal was received in respect of the project referred to by the Deputy.

It should be noted that a review of progress on the existing LSSIF grants is now underway. As part of this work the Department will be examining, inter alia, progress on all projects awarded funding to date. The scope for awarding new grants to projects which missed out under the first set of allocations will also be considered. This review is expected to be complete in the coming months.

### **National Orchestras**

288. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the status of the planned transition of the National Symphony Orchestra to the National Concert Hall; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29143/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Following the publication of the report by RTÉ that it commissioned from independent consultants Helen Boaden and Mediatique on the RTÉ Orchestras entitled RTÉ Orchestras Ensuring a Sustainable Future, the Government agreed in principle that the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra (RTÉ NSO) should come within the remit of the National Concert Hall



(NCH). The Government also authorised the initiation of discussions on the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

The overall aim of the Government decision in relation to the proposed transfer of the RTÉ NSO is to enable the orchestra to be established as a world class orchestra which would, with the NCH, provide a creative and imaginative programme strategy that would greatly enhance the offering of the combined organisation to the public.

As part of Budget 2021 an allocation of €8m has been made to the National Concert Hall to allow for the transfer of the National Symphony Orchestra from RTÉ.

An Oversight Group has been established with a view to identifying and addressing the relevant issues to enable the successful transfer of the NSO from the remit of RTÉ to the remit of the NCH. The group has met on several occasions over the last number of years. In addition, a Working Group, as a subset of the oversight group, has been examining the detailed issues involved in the proposed transfer of the orchestra.

A number of issues are currently being finalised and it is hoped that the transfer of the orchestra can be completed as early as possible in 2021.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

289. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if her attention has been drawn to a matter (details supplied) in relation to outdoor cinemas. [29195/21]

305. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will investigate the case of drive in movies (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29709/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 and 305 together.

I am pleased to advise that the Government has announced that cinemas, including drive-in cinemas can reopen from 7 June 2021.

Until then, Drive-in cinemas remain closed under the regulations currently in place under Section 31A of the Health Act 1947. Subject to the prevailing public health situation, the Government has been delivering a phased easing of public health restrictions over the period since April this year. The Government has been keeping the situation under review with a view to continuing to reopen sectors, services and activities as the public health situation allows. The public health advice prepared by the National Public Health Emergency Team is considered as part of the Government's decision-making process. Once the Government has taken its decision, the Minister for Health prepares regulations under the Section 31A of the Health Act 1947

As has been the case at each stage of the easing of restrictions, the set of measures introduced is intended to incrementally re-open the country while minimising the risks of transmission in alignment with risk levels. The Government is conscious of the impact of any and all restrictions across every sector and fully aware of the challenges individuals and businesses continue to face. The intention is to make steady progress with the reopening of society and the economy while avoiding a further wave of disease and re-imposition of restrictions.

I am pleased that Government was in a position to revisit the position in relation to cinemas, drive-in cinemas and theatres when it met on Friday 28 May and I look forward to the re-opening of these important cultural facilities from 7 June.

### Údarás na Gaeltachta

290. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** den Aire Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán i bhfianaise an ceadúnas do bharshaothraithe sliogéisc atá ag Údarás na Gaeltachta do Chuan na Beirtrí Buí agus Cuan Chill Chiaráin i gConamara a bheith in ainm an Údaráis le dhá bhliain anuas, cén plan oibre atá curtha i bhfeidhm agus cé na hacmhainní atá á gcur ar fáil le hathbheochan a dhéanamh ar thionscal na hiascaireachta sliogéisc sa cheantar; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [29200/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** Tá sé tugtha le fios dom ag Údarás na Gaeltachta gur cheannaigh siad na cearta iascaireachta ar Chuan Chill Chiaráin agus Cuan na Beirtrí Buí ó Ghael Linn ag deireadh na seachtóidí/tús na n-ochtóidí. Ó shin i leith bhí na cearta seo ar léas do Chomharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo. chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar na beirtreacha agus chun go mbeadh siad in ann an t-iascach sliogéisc a bhainistiú ar son bhaill an chomharchumainn.

D'iarr Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo ar Údarás na Gaeltachta an ceadúnas do bharshaothraithe a thógáil ar lámh in 2018 de bharr dúshláin inmheánacha a bhí ag an gComharchumann ag an am.

Tá Údarás na Gaeltachta i mbun comhoibriú leanúnach le Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo. ó shin i leith chun struchtúr na heagraíochta a threisiú agus athnuachan a dhéanamh ar phlean agus straitéis forbartha don earnáil sliogéisc i gCuan Chill Chiaráin agus i gCuan na Beirtrí Buí. Cuirtear deontas reáchtála ar fáil don Chomharchumann, ar aon dul leis na hEagrais Forbartha Pobail Ghaeltachta eile. Cuireann an deontas reáchtála ar chumas an Chomharchumainn bainisteoir a fhostú chun tabhairt faoi obair laethúil agus forbartha.

Tá tacaíocht díreach á tabhairt ag an Údarás don chomharchumann ar chúrsaí bainistíochta agus rialachais, agus ar chothú nasc agus deiseanna le heagraíochtaí mara agus oideachais. Tá nasc cruthaithe le Foras na Mara agus le taighdeoirí in ollscoileanna éagsúla chun saineolas eolaíoch a chur ar fáil don eagrais maidir le suirbhéireacht agus forbairt stoic.

Chuipe sin, tá Údarás na Gaeltachta agus Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo lárnach i dtogra Eorpach, InEVal, atá ag breathnú ar na féidearthachtaí crosán mara, atá ag cur as don stoc sa Bheirtreach Buí, a úsáid chun tairgí nua a chruthú.

De bharr an dlúthchomhoibríthe, tá Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo anois ag feidhmiú ar an mbunús go bhfuil eolas á bhailiú go laethúil chun gur féidir cinntí a dhéanamh faoi thodhchaí an chomharchumainn atá bunaithe ar fhíricí chomh maith le suirbhéanna bliantúla agus monatóireacht níos fearr atá á déanamh ar fás stoc sa chuan.

Ó thaobh cúrsaí caomhnaithe stoc de, is é Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo. atá ina bhun agus cuirtear cuóta i bhfeidhm maidir leis an líon tonnaí gur féidir a iascach in aon séasúr amháin chomh maith le coinníoll maidir le saghas agus méid an tsliogéisc gur féidir a ghabháil. Is é an chomharchumann a shocraíonn na laethanta iascaireachta agus na cuótaí laethúla do na hiascairí chomh maith.

Ar iarratas ón gcomharchumann, tá Údarás na Gaeltachta ag obair go dlúth leo agus tá gach

atá ar bun dírithe ar an iascaireacht agus an stoc a chaomhnú agus a láidriú ar mhaithe leis an gceantar Gaeltachta máguaird.

### Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

291. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the details of all meetings she has had with her officials to deal with the future of the circus industry here; the details of support provided to the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29251/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Circus has a long tradition in Ireland, incorporating classical or traditional circus and contemporary circus. Both strands are valued artistically, with classical circus having a long working history in Ireland, while contemporary circus practice is relatively new. The Arts Act 2003 cites circus as one of nine art forms. As an art form, circus attracts high audience numbers each year including many rural audiences and members of new communities.

The live events sector has been impacted by Covid-19. There were some drive-in traditional circuses last year, which shows once again the innovation of the arts sector. Government support for circus as an art form is channelled through the Arts Council. Primary support for the arts, including circus, is delivered through the Arts Council which is a statutory agency under the Arts Act 2003. Funding for the Arts Council has increased steadily in recent years, reaching a record level of €130 million this year. Under the Arts Act 2003, the Arts Council is independent in its funding decisions.

The tables below show the Arts Council support for circus and for traditional circus.

Table 1: **Arts Council total allocation to Circus, Street Arts and Spectacle 2019 – 2021**

Description	2019	2020	2021
Strategic Funding	€748,651	€748,650	€1,107,000
Arts Grants Funding	€176,000	€236,000	€359,500
Projects	€154,100	€175,889	€330,000
Bursaries	€45,500	€337,313	€431,080
Commissions	€0	€64,000	€0
Totals	€1,124,251	€1,561,852	€2,227,580
Change		39%	43%

Table 2: **Arts Council allocation to Traditional Circus 2020**

	€
Duffy's Circus Awarded: 2020 - Arts Grant Funding - Circus	€59,000.00
Circus Gerbola Awarded: 2020 - Capacity Building Support Scheme - Circus	€17,400.00

The strategic context for the Council's support of circus and all other art forms is set out in its strategy Making Great Art Work: Arts Council Strategy 2016-2025. The Arts Council supports both strands of circus and, through direct support and strategic intervention, engages with the sector to assist individuals and organisations to develop high-quality performance and participatory work. Circus is supported by the Arts Council by way of grants under a range of categories including bursary, strategic funding, project awards and touring and dissemination awards. There were very significant increases in supports provided for the circus in 2020 and 2021, with over €2.2 million allocated to circus, street arts and spectacle in 2021. The council

makes awards to circus organisations and to individual circus artists. In 2020, many circus artists also qualified for the council's Covid-19 crisis response award. Details of all grants are available on the Arts Council's website.

While there are enterprise supports available for businesses and individuals impacted by Covid-19, these are matters for my colleague, the Tánaiste, in his role as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, as are the criteria for their eligibility. The Government has worked to support businesses through this difficult time with a comprehensive range of measures for firms of all sizes. The measures include the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), the Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC), low-cost loans, the deferral and warehousing of tax liabilities, the waiver of commercial rates the Sustaining Enterprise Fund and a reduced VAT rate from 13.5% to 9% for the hospitality and tourism sector to help businesses in the entertainment, tourism and hospitality sectors.

### **Sports Funding**

292. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when she expects to announce the awards under the sports capital scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29252/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** The Sports Capital and Equipment 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 2020 round of the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme closed for applications on Monday 1st March. By the closing date, 3,106 applications were submitted seeking over €200m in funding. This is the highest number of applications ever received.

The scoring system and assessment procedures have been finalised and all applications are being assessed in accordance with these. Given the large number of applications received this assessment process is likely to take a number of months. As soon as this process is complete all applicants will be informed of the outcome of the assessment of their application.

### **Data Protection**

293. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the nature of the data breaches experienced by her Department since 2018. [29317/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question No. 349 of 18th May in which details of data breaches for the requested time period were provided.

As previously advised, the majority of breaches experienced were deemed to be of zero or low risk, and were therefore not required to be reported to the Data Protection Commission. All breaches were managed internally with steps taken to ensure that similar breaches would not reoccur.

Those breaches that met the threshold to be referred to the Data Protection Commission were quickly resolved to the satisfaction of that office.

## Ministerial Responsibilities

294. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she has spoken formally with her UK counterpart to date in 2021. [29330/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** While I exchanged correspondence with Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, Secretary of State at the Department of Culture, Media & Sport following my appointment in 2020, I have not as yet had any formal personal engagement with the Secretary of State.

I can confirm to the Deputy, however, that officials of my Department are in ongoing contact with their UK counterparts in relation to matters of mutual interest across the range of my Department's remit.

As the deputy is aware my Department is responsible for two of the North-South implementation bodies Tourism Ireland and An Foras Teanga. I met with Minister Diane Dodds MLA at the NSMC held in July 2020. Minister Dodds and I also attended an online sectoral NSMC meeting on Tourism in November, while Minister of State Jack Chambers T.D. met with Minister Carál Ní Chuilín MLA an online sectoral NSMC meeting on Language bodies in November.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

295. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if a stadium (details supplied) is considered an enclosed stadium under the current Covid-19 restrictions; if spectators are currently allowed watch sports taking place in this facility; if not, when they will be allowed; and the number to be allowed. [29358/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** Minister Martin and I announced on Friday 28 May that we will begin to trial the safe return of spectators to sporting events in June and July. Cultural events will also be trialled. The announcement follows a decision by Government to allow for the further easing of restrictions in line with public health guidance. In total, 15 sporting events across Gaelic games, rugby, football, golf and athletics have been targeted for the period from 11 June to 10 July.

These pilot events will allow for sports organisations to test necessary control and other measures in stadia across a range of areas.

The trial events are spread across five different sports and in venues located around the country and include the national athletics championships at the Morton Stadium in Santry.

The intention is that the pilots will pave the way more matches, games and other sporting events to be attended by spectators further into July and August with capacity increasing throughout the summer.

Details on the 15 initial trial events can be found at the following link:

[www.gov.ie/en/press-release/dcd5c-series-of-outdoor-pilot-sport-events-announced-to-allow-for-the-safe-return-of-spectators/](http://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/dcd5c-series-of-outdoor-pilot-sport-events-announced-to-allow-for-the-safe-return-of-spectators/)

In addition to the trial events, the Government also announced on 28 May that from 7 June numbers permitted at organised outdoor events can increase to a maximum of 100 for the majority of venues, with a maximum of 200 for outdoor stadia/venues where there is a minimum



capacity of 5,000.

### **Departmental Schemes**

296. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when the music entertainment business assistance scheme will open for applications. [29494/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** As part of a suite of ongoing supports for the culture sector, I made an allocation of €14 million to a Music Entertainment Business Assistance Scheme to contribute towards the ongoing overheads of businesses, specifically musicians and related crew, that have been significantly negatively affected by COVID-19 and that do not qualify for other business supports. Under the scheme, businesses including musicians, singers, lighting and sound crew and audio equipment suppliers - whether sole traders, partnerships or incorporated entities - operating exclusively within the commercial live entertainment sector will be eligible to apply. This scheme has been developed following consultation with the sector and will be managed directly by my Department. The Scheme will open for applications on 9 June 2021.

### **Departmental Reports**

297. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when the night-time economy taskforce will present its final report. [29495/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The Taskforce is currently finalising its Report which I expect to receive in the coming days. I will be reflecting on the findings and bringing them to the attention of Government colleagues in the coming weeks, after which I intend to publish the report.

### **Island Communities**

298. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the initiatives that have been undertaken by her Department to develop sustainable tourism practices on offshore islands; the consultation that has taken place between her Department and island communities on the development of island tourism; the role Fáilte Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta play in developing and marketing sustainable island tourism; and the research that has been undertaken by her Department on ensuring tourism is developed sustainably. [29545/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I am well aware of the economic importance of tourism to our offshore islands and it is important that we strike a balance between the economic benefits and the need to protect and preserve these natural assets and the quality of life for their host communities.

A Sustainable Tourism Working Group was established, under the Government's outgoing Tourism Policy Statement, which has set out the ambition that "Ireland will seek to be amongst the world-leaders in sustainable tourism practices" and in addition, accompanying Guiding Principles for Sustainable Tourism Development in Ireland. In order to maintain momentum on the sustainable tourism agenda, I reconvened the Sustainable Tourism Working Group early this year to complete the development of a suite of actions that promote sustainable tourism prac-

tices which can be implemented prior to a new policy being developed. The overall focus for these actions is to promote sustainable tourism practices in all locations throughout the country rather than in any specific region.

In line with the Programme for Government commitment, the development of a new national tourism policy, that mainstreams sustainability, will commence in the latter half of 2021 when the tourism sector starts to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. The development of this new policy will involve extensive consultation with the tourism industry and our communities to help set out a path for the coming years which will support a sustainable recovery and subsequent growth in the sector.

Central to developing a more resilient and sustainable tourism sector will be an increased focus on regional growth and season extension to deliver greater visitor dispersal throughout the country with a more even spread of demand across the year. I am very aware of the important role that Tourism plays as a driver of rural economies and I am committed to a continued focus on the potential of tourism to facilitate the development of our islands.

In regard to the Deputy's specific question about the role Fáilte Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta play in developing and marketing sustainable island tourism, these are operational matters for the agencies. I have requested the information from the agencies and I will forward it on the Deputy in accordance with timelines set out Standing Orders.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

299. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the consideration being given to allowing fully vaccinated persons dining indoors in restaurants and cafés during the summer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29588/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Last Friday, 28 June 2021, in light of the continuing significant progress in the vaccination programme and the developing public health situation, the Government announced the next phases in the easing of public health restrictions for June and into early July.

With specific regard to the Deputy's query and subject to maintaining progress with the virus, I am happy to confirm that, subject to the evolution of the public health situation, it is intended that indoor services in cafés, restaurants and bars will resume from 5 July for all patrons.

### **Departmental Reports**

300. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if a copy of a report (details supplied) has been published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29590/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** The report mentioned by the Deputy is an audit of the organisation's governance and financial administration which was commissioned by Sport Ireland in 2017. I am informed by Sport Ireland that the report has not been published but that the organisation in question has been furnished with a copy of the report.

The purpose of such reports is to provide an assessment of the governance arrangements and financial control framework within an organisation. The selection of an organisation for audit

review is informed by numerous factors including the level of grant funding awarded and the strategic significance of the sport. I am sure the Deputy will appreciate that the success and effectiveness of Sport Ireland's internal audit programme depends on the frankness and candour of those who participate and engage with the process. As such, there is an expectation of a degree of confidentiality with the process and the routine publication of reports could ultimately undermine engagement with the process.

### **Sports Funding**

301. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the funding allocated to an association (details supplied) since 2017 to date; the conditions attached to this funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29591/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards. This includes the allocation of funding to sporting organisations across a variety of funding schemes. I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct reply in relation to the funding allocated to the organisation mentioned by the Deputy from 2017 to date and the conditions attaching to same. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 working days.

In relation to support for capital projects, €512,000 has been allocated since 2017 to the Association referenced by the Deputy. Of that allocation, €212,000 has been allocated via the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme and €300,000 via the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund.

The Sports Capital and Equipment 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 Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund provides Exchequer support for larger sports facility projects.

My Department corresponded directly with the Association in respect of all allocations under the SCEP and LSSIF and those communications addressed the terms and conditions that must be met prior to formal approval of the grants.

### **Sports Funding**

302. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the funding issued to an association (details supplied) under the Covid sport resilience fund in 2020 and 2021; the conditions attached to this funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29592/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** A Covid-19 funding package of €85 million was provided in 2020 to support the sport sector. This significant investment benefited all levels of the sport sector, including thousands of grassroots clubs across the country, and provided some certainty for sporting organisations in their planning for 2021.

In total, €725,000 was allocated to the association mentioned by the Deputy, comprising €225,000 under the NGB Resilience Fund and €500,000 under the Sports Club Resilience Fund.

1 June 2021

A full breakdown of the funding provided to individual sporting organisations in November and December 2020 is available on Sport Ireland's website at the following links:

[www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-11/sport-ireland-covid-19-funding-annoucement-breakdown.pdf](http://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-11/sport-ireland-covid-19-funding-annoucement-breakdown.pdf)

[www.sportireland.ie/news/eu58-million-in-covid-19-supplementary-funding-for-sport](http://www.sportireland.ie/news/eu58-million-in-covid-19-supplementary-funding-for-sport)

The funding criteria for each of the grant schemes was established by Sport Ireland and the funding guidelines were issued by Sport Ireland directly to National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships. As the conditions attached to the funding are a matter for Sport Ireland, I am arranging for Sport Ireland to provide the Deputy with a detailed reply on the criteria used in the allocation of the Covid-19 grant funding to the association. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 working days.

No decisions have yet been made in relation to Covid-19 funding support for the sport sector for this year. Sport Ireland is in ongoing communication with the National Governing Bodies of Sport and is assessing the financial needs of the sector. In addition, I am engaging with NGBs both bilaterally and through the Covid-19 Sports Monitoring Group with regard to the supports required in the period ahead.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Supports**

303. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the situation regarding eligibility by guesthouse and bed and breakfast owners for grant aid for outdoor seating to facilitate summer dining in a Covid-19 context; if she will waive the requirement for a VAT registration number in such circumstances given that many of these operators are very small seasonal businesses and are not registered for VAT; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29599/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The development and administration of the Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme - including decisions relating to eligibility, such as those referenced by the Deputy - are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred this question to the agency for direct response to the Deputy. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Protected Disclosures**

304. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the number of protected disclosures made to her Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29643/21]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** As required under Section 22 of the Protected Disclosure Act 2014 my Department publishes an annual report setting out the number of protected disclosures made to it in the course of the immediately preceding year and certain other information relating to any such protected disclosures.

These reports contain the further detail sought by the Deputy. The 2019 report is available on the Department's page on the gov.ie website ([www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/58aa8-disclosure-of-wrongdoing-in-the-workplace/](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/58aa8-disclosure-of-wrongdoing-in-the-workplace/)), and the 2020 report is being prepared for pub-

lication at present. Reports for the years 2015-2018 are available at [wayback.archive-it.org/org-1444/20201009111625/https://www.chg.gov.ie/about/policy-on-disclosure-of-wrongdoing-in-the-workplace/](https://www.chg.gov.ie/about/policy-on-disclosure-of-wrongdoing-in-the-workplace/) which can be accessed through the Department's page on the gov.ie website

I can confirm to the Deputy that no protected disclosures have been received from officials within my Department or from any retired officials of my Department during the period in question.

For the Deputy's convenience, I can also confirm that both submissions that were accepted as constituting Protected Disclosures, were processed in accordance with my Department's Policy on Disclosure of Wrongdoing in the Workplace and that in neither case was evidence identified of any wrongdoing having occurred.

A summary of the submissions made to my Department under the Protected Disclosures Act since 2015 is set out in the table below.

Year	Submissions Received	Number accepted as a Protected Disclosure
2015	0	0
2016	0	0
2017	1	1
2018	0	0
2019	2	1
2020	2	0
2021 (to date)	0	0

*Question No. 305 answered with Question No. 289.*

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

306. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will advise on a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied). [29731/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** According to the details provided by the Deputy, the event to which he refers is not a sporting activity conducted under the remit of a National Governing Body of Sport that is recognised by Sport Ireland.

As the event described would appear to be an organised outdoor event, I would refer the Deputy to the Government's recent announcement, which permits, from the 7th of June, 2021, the holding of outdoor events on the basis that the numbers in attendance at such events does not exceed 100 people for the majority of venues, with a maximum of 200 for outdoor venues with a minimum accredited capacity of 5,000.

The Government's decision to move ahead with the next stage of reopening the economy and society in line with Resilience and Recovery: The Path Ahead plan recognises the extraordinary efforts and support of the Irish people. To maintain momentum, it is essential that all concerned, including the participants and organisers of the event referred to by the Deputy, continue to follow the individual everyday measures in the public health guidelines in the coming weeks.



## Legislative Programme

307. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media her views on the call for critical changes to the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2019 to include the naming and establishing of an online safety commissioner and amending the Bill to include an individual complaints' mechanism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29732/21]

**Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill will, among other things, establish a regulatory framework for online safety to be overseen by an Online Safety Commissioner as part of a wider Media Commission. The General Scheme of the Bill provides for the establishment of a multi-person Media Commission with up to 6 commissioners. It is intended that an Executive Chairperson and 3 commissioners, including an Online Safety Commissioner, will be appointed initially following a recruitment campaign by the Public Appointments Service.

The General Scheme provides that the Commission will delegate the performance of certain functional areas to individual commissioners and it's intended that the person recruited as the Online Safety Commissioner will be delegated the online safety related functions of the Commission. This approach was taken on foot of legal advice that specifying the exact role of each commissioner in the Bill would make it difficult to appoint additional commissioners to work on online safety in the future.

The goal of the regulatory framework for online safety will be to tackle the availability of defined categories of harmful online content through systemic oversight over how regulated online services deliver and moderate the user-generated content on their platforms. This is a risk based approach that is intended to drive towards the best possible outcomes for all users of online services.

While there is an appreciation of the desire for an individual complaints mechanism, there are serious doubts about the effectiveness of a statutory mechanism of this kind in the online safety space. There are a number of reasons for this, including that:

- requirements for fair procedures would not facilitate a swift resolution of individual issues, as it would be necessary to engage with the uploader of content as well as the complainant;

- the volume of online content, particularly as Ireland will be regulating Video Sharing Platform Services for the whole of the EU population of 450 million people, would overwhelm even the best resourced regulator

- referring complaints relating to individual items of content that are potentially criminal in nature to a civil regulator instead of An Garda Síochána would not be appropriate.

Among other things however, the Bill provides the Commission with the power to oblige designated online services to have effective complaints and appeals mechanisms in place and also the power to audit those mechanisms. This is part of the risk-based framework that will enable the Commission to seek the greatest degree of protection for all users through systemic oversight.

Individuals will always be able to bring issues to the attention of the Commission and the Commission will also have the power to order the removal of individual items of content in certain discrete instances. However, this will not be a formal complaints mechanism.

The Commission will also be empowered to set up a systemic complaints scheme to receive

complaints from nominated bodies such as expert NGOs about trends in the prevalence of harmful online content and the effectiveness of measures taken by regulated online services to comply with their obligations. This will help to inform the Commission about what the prominent and emerging risks are at any point in time and inform the Commission's approach to making online safety codes and conducting audits and investigations.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

308. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when the plan for a return of spectators to sports grounds will be published; the trail event that will be held; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29747/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** Minister Martin and I announced on Friday 28 May that we will begin to trial the safe return of spectators to sporting events in June and July. Some cultural events will also be trialled. The announcement follows a decision by Government to allow for the further easing of restrictions in line with public health guidance. In total, 15 sporting events across Gaelic games, rugby, football, golf and athletics have been targeted for the period from 11 June to 10 July.

These pilot events will allow for sports organisations to test necessary control and other measures in stadia across a range of areas.

The trial events we have identified are spread across five different sports and in venues located around the country.

The intention is that the pilots will provide lessons for further phase of sporting events to be attended by spectators into July and August.

Details on the 15 initial trial events can be found at the following link:

[www.gov.ie/en/press-release/dcd5c-series-of-outdoor-pilot-sport-events-announced-to-allow-for-the-safe-return-of-spectators/](http://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/dcd5c-series-of-outdoor-pilot-sport-events-announced-to-allow-for-the-safe-return-of-spectators/)

### **Environmental Policy**

309. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to ensure that environmental marine conservation and pollution control measures are protected in bilateral relations. [29864/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** As the Minister responsible for the development and implementation of marine environmental policy and the safeguarding of our seas and ocean, I recognise that transboundary cooperation plays a significant role in marine conservation and prevention and elimination of pollution.

Our primary mechanism for marine environment cooperation is through the European Union and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. This provides an on-going framework for cooperation between EU Member States to prevent pollution and to conserve the marine environment.

The UK departure from the EU in January 2020 means that this avenue of cooperation is no

longer available to us in bilateral relations with the UK. In this regard we cooperate with the UK through the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (The OSPAR Convention). OSPAR has 16 Contracting Parties who implement the Convention through the OSPAR Commission. The parties are Belgium, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and UK.

Through OSPAR and a pooled resource of experts, Ireland works bilaterally with the UK administrations to ensure conservation of marine ecosystems and the prevention and elimination of pollution. Ireland holds the Chair of the OSPAR Commission (2018-2021).

OSPAR has the competency to take action on the protection of biodiversity, prevention of pollution including hazardous substances, marine litter and noise and the regulation of human activity including offshore installations and radioactive discharges.

### **Defective Building Materials**

310. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will deliver a 100% MICA redress scheme. [29057/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The current maximum grant amounts payable under the Defective Concrete Blocks Grant scheme were finalised in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This process also took account of the comprehensive engagement that took place between my Department and both Donegal and Mayo County Councils, who operate and administer the scheme.

The grant limits agreed on foot of this engagement ensures that the scheme can be budgeted for with the potential financial liability known at all times and also to ensure that the available budget can benefit the majority of properties and the maximum number of people.

The scheme needs time to work and it is premature to consider making changes at this point. I am keeping progress under the scheme under review and engaging regularly directly with both local authorities and local action groups on the matter.

### **Departmental Schemes**

311. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications submitted and approved, respectively by quarter, month and local authority in 2020 and to date in 2021 in tabular form. [29119/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications. Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

The requested figures, as to the end of April 2021, from the Agency on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and recommended for approval for each local authority in 2020

and to date in 2021 by quarter, are included in the attached spreadsheet.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq311-01-06-21\_en.xlsx ">Statistics</a>]

The next stages in the process are approval and drawdown from the local authority.

My Department regularly publishes information on the number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Local authority approval means that an official letter of offer has been sent to a borrower (and therefore relates to a specific property and loan amount).

Figures for 2020 are available at the following link: [www.gov.ie/en/collection/42d2f-local-authority-loan-activity/#local-authority-loans-approvedpaid](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/42d2f-local-authority-loan-activity/#local-authority-loans-approvedpaid) this link will be updated as updated figures are published.

## Water Pollution

312. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he has considered implementing a daily sample testing of the Dublin Bay area bathing waters to ensure the waters are safe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29151/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I am very aware of the recent increase in people swimming in Dublin Bay. In response, I have tasked the Bathing Water Expert Group with examining the frequency of bathing water monitoring and with developing measures to improve the availability of water quality results. This will help safeguard people and improve information for everyone, especially people swimming outside of the current bathing season.

I have also requested that the Expert Group consider the issues related to changing the bathing water season, taking into account the current review by the European Commission of the Bathing Water Directive.

The Bathing Water Quality in Ireland 2020 report, which was recently published by the Environmental Protection Agency, shows that 96% of bathing waters met or exceeded the minimum required standard. This is up from 95% in 2019 and improvements in bathing water quality are welcome and necessary.

## Local Authorities

313. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the position in relation to procurement for local authorities; if they have discretion in relation to using their own suppliers for stationery supplies and other such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29167/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** My Department does not have direct involvement in executive functions such as procurement, carried out by a local authority. Under Section 149 of the Local Government Act 2001, the Chief Executive of a local authority is responsible for the executive functions of the local authority, and for that purpose to manage and control generally, the administration and business of the authority, subject to law.

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP), an office within the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, was established for the purpose of centralising procurement arrangements for common goods and services right across the public sector, including local authorities. The OGP has established a number of Framework Agreements and Contracts for goods and general services. The Local Government Operational Procurement Centre (LGOPC) based in Kerry County Council has responsibility for the operation of certain procurement categories. The LGOPC operates the SupplyGov frameworks website, acting as a central procurement authority for those categories, on behalf of the Public Sector.

If the supplies, general services, works or works related services required are not included in any of the established Framework Agreements, local authorities proceed to conduct an appropriate competitive process under EU and National rules. Prescribed procedures governing public procurement are set out in EU Directives, which apply only to contracts that are above the relevant EU advertising thresholds. Public procurement below the relevant EU threshold is subject to National procurement rules that are set out in National Guidelines (Public Procurement Guidelines – Competitive Process published by the Department of Finance in 2004) and subsequent Circulars, the most recent being Circular 10/14 issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in April 2014. Circular 10/14 replaced the Department of Finance Circular 10/10 issued in August 2010.

My Department works closely with the Local Government Strategic Procurement Centre (LGSPC), which acts as a conduit between the Department, the Local Government Sector and the OGP, and is represented on the LGSPC Programme Board. The LGSPC provides additional supports to local authorities to ensure compliance by the sector in the use of all national frameworks and application of all relevant legislation and circulars relating to procurement. The LGSPC also supports training for SMEs and small/micro business suppliers to improve their engagement with the public procurement process.

Notwithstanding the above, procurement and tendering processes carried out by each local authority, and compliance with procurement rules in relation to the same, are directly a matter for the relevant Chief Executive.

## **Housing Provision**

314. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the circumstances under which a person can access HAP in cases in which they are not on a local authority housing list. [29194/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a social housing support under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. In order to be eligible for HAP support, a household must first qualify for social housing support through the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

Once a household is deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the HAP scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that local authority.

## **Housing Policy**



315. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if there is a national policy to support downsizing domestic residences as family size decreases once children have left the family home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29197/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Firstly, it is settled Government policy to support older people to live in their own homes and communities with dignity and independence for as long as possible, as this has the best outcomes both for the individual and for society as a whole.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, is developing policy options for supported housing/housing with care in accordance with the principles of the joint policy statement, "Housing Options for Our Ageing Population". This policy statement was published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of Health in 2019. The policy statement is available on my Department's website at:

[www.housing.gov.ie/housing/special-housing-needs/older-people/housing-options-our-ageing-population-policy-statement](http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/special-housing-needs/older-people/housing-options-our-ageing-population-policy-statement).

A number of the 40 Actions in the Joint Statement consider the issue of rightsizing within the context of providing a variety of housing options for older people depending on their circumstances. Many local authorities already provide for such a scheme for their tenants.

My Department and the Policy Implementation Group are examining such options and a number of research projects are informing this work. It is intended that the Implementation Group will provide its final report addressing each of the 40 actions, including those relating to rightsizing, by the end of 2021. Consideration of ageing in place and rightsizing is also taking place as we prepare the Government's new Housing Strategy - Housing for All.

### **Housing Policy**

316. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if consideration has been given to devising new guidelines for the construction of structures in the back gardens of residences for the purpose of home offices in view of the changes that have already happened and are likely to occur in the development of home working options; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29198/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** A wide range of exemptions from planning permission are already provided for under Section 4 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, (the Act) and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, (the Regulations). Such exemptions are provided for when they are considered to be consistent with proper planning and sustainable development.

Under Class 1 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations, an extension to an existing house up to a limit of 40 square metres is exempted development, with additional conditions and limitations set out in the Regulations.

Class 3 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations provides for a further exemption in respect of the construction, erection or placing within the curtilage of a house of any tent, awning, shade or other object, greenhouse, garage, store, shed or other similar structure. Similarly, this exemption is also subject to conditions and limitations as set out in the Regulations, including that it should be for the sole purpose of being incidental to the enjoyment of the house.

It should be noted that the exemptions outlined are for the sole use of the home owner and not, for example, for the purpose of facilitating the establishment of a commercial enterprise. Such development would be classed as a material change of use - i.e. a change of use of a property from residential use to commercial use - and would therefore require planning permission. An application for such permission provides an opportunity for members of the public to make submissions or observations in respect of the proposed development while also providing the planning authority with the opportunity to consider a range of potential impacts, such as increased traffic, in the area that may result from any such proposed change of use.

If a person wishes to establish whether or not planning permission is required for a specific development proposal, they can seek a declaration from their local authority under Section 5 of the Act.

As outlined, the current legislation provides for the construction of certain structures in the back gardens of residences, including for the purpose of home offices. Accordingly, I do not have any plans for the making of further legislative changes or the issuing of new guidelines in this regard at this time.

### **Wastewater Treatment**

317. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if legislation will be amended to allow Irish Water to take over estates with builder-built wastewater treatment systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29245/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and the Water Services Acts 2007 to 2018 set out the statutory provisions which allow local authorities and Irish Water to take control of water and waste water services infrastructure, including developer provided wastewater treatment systems, where it is appropriate to do so.

Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (the Act) provides for the taking in charge of housing developments by planning authorities. The legislation sets out the process to be followed when a development is considered to have been satisfactorily completed, as well as where it has not been completed to the satisfaction of the planning authority.

While Irish Water is not a planning authority, it is a prescribed body under the Act for applications for planning permission where it appears to the authority that the development might impact on the provision of public water services. The obligation to take in charge wastewater infrastructure for developments which are completed satisfactorily remains with planning authorities, unless such infrastructure has already been vested in Irish Water through a Connection Agreement pursuant to the Water Services Acts.

When taking an estate in charge under section 180 of the Act, the local authority shall take in charge “any sewers, water mains or service connections within the attendant grounds of the development” which must then be transferred to Irish Water by Ministerial Order pursuant to section 12 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013.

I have no plans at this time to amend the arrangements by which wastewater infrastructure may be taken in charge.

### **Traveller Community**

318. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the No End in Sight report from the Ombudsman for Children; the recommendations he will be making to all local authorities based on its findings and recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29256/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have a statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas.

My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist local authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

In response to the Report of the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation, the Minister has established a Programme Board to oversee implementation of recommendations from the Report. The Programme Board has adopted a work programme for 2021 a number of which relate to the design, management and maintenance of Traveller-specific accommodation.

In relation to the No End in Sight report just published by the Ombudsmans for Children's Office, my Department are in ongoing communication with the relevant local authority to provide the necessary supports so as to ensure that the recommendations made are implemented in a timely manner.

Over the course of the past year, and despite the on-going pandemic, my Department has progressed the rollout of a number of initiatives to improve the standard of accommodation on Traveller-specific sites. These include:

- A revised, preferential and affordable Caravan Loan Scheme for Traveller families which is being introduced on a 6 month pilot basis across four local authorities from May 2021 with the objective of rolling it out nationally if the pilot proves successful. This scheme, which has the support of Traveller representatives on the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, has the potential to make an immediate and hugely significant improvement to living conditions on sites.

- The management and maintenance allowance payable per annum to local authorities by my Department for each halting site bay has just been increased by 50%. This will have an immediate and noticeable positive impact on halting site conditions.

- In 2020, just over 250 halting sites were audited for Covid preparedness and a list of deficiencies and checklist of works was prepared for each site. This resulted in an investment of over €4m in improvements to site conditions last year.

Funding remains available from my Department to local authorities to carry out improvements works on existing sites and for new traveller specific accommodation proposals put forward by local authorities and this will continue.

### **Local Authorities**

319. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he plans to provide additional funding to local authorities under the housing adaption grants in order to support older persons and persons with a disability remaining at home; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [29284/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Funding of €75 million is available nationally in 2021 for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability Scheme. This funding has increased year on year since 2014. As part of the annual budgetary process, consideration will be given to this funding in future years in line with the Programme for Government commitments and the Policy Statement on Housing Options for Our Ageing Population, which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

[www.gov.ie/en/publication/ea33c1-housing-options-for-our-ageing-population-policy-statement/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ea33c1-housing-options-for-our-ageing-population-policy-statement/)

### **Data Protection**

320. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29311/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force on 25th May 2018. The nature of the data breaches identified by my Department since 25th May 2018 fall into three broad categories: personal data being shared accidentally with unintended recipients; the loss or theft of equipment (phones/laptops); or the accidental exposure of personal data to unauthorised persons.

All breaches were dealt with in line with the Department's Data Breach Management Policy, and as required under Articles 33-34 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All breaches have been closed/resolved.

### **Departmental Schemes**

321. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the details of statistical information in relation to a scheme (details supplied) will be provided in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29325/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) was developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or approved housing bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in vacant dwellings across Ireland. Subject to the suitability of the dwelling for social housing, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met upfront by the local authority or an AHB with the cost of the repairs being recovered from the property owner by offsetting it against the lease payment.

At end Q1 2021, a total of 247 dwellings had been brought back into use under the scheme across a range of dwelling types, including over the shop properties, former bedsits, city centre terraced houses, and one off rural dwellings. The capital budget allocation for RLS in 2021 is €11 million, targeting the delivery of 170 homes.

Data to end Q1 2021 in relation to dwellings delivered by each local authority is available on my Department's website at the following link:

[www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/#repair-and-leasing-](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/#repair-and-leasing-)

scheme-rls

Total funding drawn down under RLS for years 2017 to 2021, broken down by local authority is set out at the tables 1 and 2 below;

**Table 1 - Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) - Capital Spend 2017 – Q1 2021**

LA	Spend - 2017	Spend - 2018	Spend - 2019	Spend - 2020	Spend Q1 2021
Carlow	€0	€67,983	€68,267	€1,433	0
Cork County	€0	€0	€40,000	€80,000	0
DLR	€4,987	€0	€0	€0	0
Dublin City	€0	€39,044	€0	€0	0
Fingal	€0	€0	€40,000	€146,315	0
Kerry	€0	€0	€0	€120,000	€40,000
Kildare	€0	€0	€36,008	€0	0
Kilkenny	€0	€24,000	€0	€0	0
Laois	€0	€0	€0	€7,753	0
Limerick	€0	€207,174	€80,000	€221,800	€40,000
Longford	€0	€0	€28,768	€0	0
Louth	€0	€0	€0	€40,000	€80,000
Mayo	€0	€0	€62,076	€280,000	0
Meath	€0	€8,698	€0	€0	€19,034
Monaghan	€0	€25,000	€20,000	€54,414	0
Roscommon	€0	€27,222	€0	€40,000	0
Tipperary	€0	€33,789	€0	€0	0
Waterford	€191,398	€1,106,739	€1,183,054	€1,199,054	€87,407
Westmeath	€0	€35,000	€0	€0	0
Wexford	€0	€38,458	€278,948	€234,513	€40,000
	€196,385	€1,613,107	€1,837,121	€2,425,282	€306,441

**Table 2 - Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) Current spend 2017 -Q1 2021.**

LA	Spend - 2017	Spend - 2018	Spend - 2019	Spend - 2020	Spend Q1 2021
Carlow	€0	€2,270	€11,764	€14,255	€3,554
Cork County	€0	€0	€426	€9,962	€4,503
DLR	€8,809	€21,582	€21,642	€21,582	€5,381
Dublin City	€0	€0	€22,851	€35,446	0
Kildare	€0	€0	€8,159	€23,687	€1,436
Kilkenny	€0	€5,761	€19,050	€9,919	€2,473
Laois	0	0	0	0	€9,254
Limerick	€0	€39,167	€78,027	€126,241	€39,261
Longford	€0	€0	€34,473	€26,886	€6,703
Louth	€0	€0	€3,773	€9,304	0
Mayo	€0	€0	€4,658	€13,831	€24,573
Meath	€0	€18,940	€15,754	€15,711	0
Monaghan	€0	€12,174	€25,679	€27,934	€11,224
Roscommon	€0	€7,145	€6,708	€24,290	€4,580
Tipperary	€0	€0	€9,544	€4,468	0
Waterford	€17,371	€103,150	€338,544	€426,511	0
Westmeath	€0	€2,115	€4,276	€10,906	€1,132
Wexford	€4,009	€67,641	€87,524	€82,225	€91,274
	€30,189	€279,945	€692,852	€883,158	€205,348

## Homeless Accommodation



322. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the backlog in homeless HAP payments is causing warnings and threats of eviction to tenants from landlords and causing anxiety to those who already have experience of homelessness and do not wish to return to that scenario again as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29326/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Despite the challenges faced throughout 2020 due to the Covid 19 emergency measures, local authorities and the Housing Assistance Payment Shared Service Centre (HAP SSC) have continued to provide a critical service to all HAP customers. This is evident in the high number of HAP tenancies that continued to be set-up this year. The 2021 HAP target is for 15,000 additional tenancies and, at the end of Q1 2021, 3,914 HAP tenancies (26% of target) had been established.

Measures that were required to be taken in the context of Covid-19, however, have had an impact on processing times for HAP applications, including Homeless HAP Applications. The average processing time at end Q4, 2020 was 38 days. An analysis of more recent data from the HAP SSC indicates a reduction on that average processing time at end Q1, 2021 to 35 days.

My Department and local authorities are keenly aware of the importance of minimising HAP processing times and the critical need to keep this under review at a local level. My Department has communicated this to local authority management through the County and City Management Association.

It should be acknowledged that any delay in tenants and landlords supplying relevant information, or inaccuracies or missing information, will impact on the processing time of the HAP application. However, in instances where there are delays at the processing stage within a local authority, payment to the landlord will be backdated to the date on which a complete and valid application form was received by the local authority. The landlord is, therefore, not penalised for any delay.

Through our ongoing engagement with local authorities my Department has stressed the need to minimise delays in processing these vital applications to ensure the social housing needs of tenants can be met through the HAP scheme where required. My Department is closely monitoring this situation and will continue to do so over the coming months.

Additionally, as you are aware, under HAP, households at risk of homelessness may be eligible for additional supports. To qualify for specific additional supports available to homeless households, a household must have been determined by the relevant local authority to be homeless within the meaning of section 2 of the Housing Act 1988.

The operation of local homeless services, including the Place Finder Service, is a matter for each local authority.

### **Local Authorities**

323. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the amount provided by his Department to Tipperary Council in 2020 in respect of housing supports (details supplied). [29352/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is avail-

able to all eligible households throughout the State. At end Q1 2021, there were over 61,300 households in receipt of HAP and nearly 34,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme.

In respect of the provision of HAP funding, Limerick City and County Council provides a highly effective HAP transactional shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Accordingly, my Department does not recoup individual local authorities in respect of HAP rental payments in their administrative areas but, rather, recoups all landlord costs via the HAP SSC.

Data in relation to the funding for HAP provided by the State in 2020, broken down by local authority area, can be found on my Department's website at this link:

[www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/#housing-assistance-payment](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/#housing-assistance-payment)

This funding represents the portion paid by my Department after receipt of the differential rent which is paid by the tenant to the local authority. It does not include administration costs related to the Scheme.

The overall cost of supporting the HAP Scheme to the Exchequer for 2020 was €464.6 representing 59,821 active tenancies.

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) has been an important contributor to social housing supply since its introduction on a pilot basis in 2005 and has 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.

The scheme is delivered by local authorities who source accommodation from the private market and Approved Housing Bodies. Expenditure under the scheme covers recoupment made to local authorities for contracted rents due to private landlords and Approved Housing Bodies, administration costs and a damages contingency fund for newly acquired accommodation.

Details for the number and cost to the exchequer of tenancies funded under the RAS scheme in County Tipperary in 2020, is available on my Department's website, titled 'RAS Current Expenditure Housing Programmes 2011 to 2020', at the following link: [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - Overall social housing provision ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

Funding for leasing projects is provided for under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP). This Programme supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities for the long term leasing of houses and apartments from private owners and Approved Housing Bodies.

At end 2020, a total of 374 leased properties were supported under SHCEP across all leasing delivery programmes in Tipperary County Council. The total Leasing spend under SHCEP in 2020 was €2,547,845, of which €1,002,904 was spent on long-term leases secured by both Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

All data is based on local authority claims for operational agreements recorded on the Department's SHCEP financial management system. Any variations in data between operational figures and total output under leasing delivery streams may be due to the time lag in the submission of claims to my Department in respect of new claims after delivery.

The Leasing, RAS and HAP schemes continue to be effective and secure forms of social

housing support and remain a significant part of the suite of social housing options currently available across the country.

### **Regeneration Projects**

324. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the regeneration plan for St. Patrick's Park, Rathangan, County Kildare; the timeline for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29439/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department is supporting Kildare County Council in the major refurbishment and new build social housing scheme at St. Patrick's Park, Rathangan. Kildare County Council has advised that Phase 1, involving the refurbishment of 34 homes, was completed in October 2019 and that Phases 2 and 3 of the programme have been developed following public consultation workshops with the residents. This next work involves the demolition of 15 existing homes, construction of 7 new homes, refurbishment of 25 homes and a range of site and landscaping works. This will be carried out on a phased basis to minimise disruption to existing residents.

Phases 2 and 3 are currently progressing through design stage, with the intention to consult further with the residents and seek Part 8 approval by the end of this year. This will enable Kildare County Council to complete the tendering process in 2022 with works to begin subsequently and completion expected in 2024.

While this is a complex project, it is being advanced by Kildare County Council so that improved conditions are delivered for the residents. Further information should be available directly from Kildare County Council which is managing the implementation of the programme.

### **Housing Provision**

325. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of persons on the housing list in each local authority area; the expected wait time for new entrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29441/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area is provided in the annual statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA).

The most recent summary, conducted in November 2020, shows that 61,880 households were assessed as qualified for, and being in need of, social housing support. This represents a decrease of 6,813 households or 9.9% on the last assessment in June 2019. Since 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 61,880, a reduction of 32.4%.

Below is the link to the summary report for 2020 which includes breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories.

With respect to the expected wait time on the housing lists for new entrants, my Department does not hold that information. However, Figure 2.8 and Table A1.8 provide details on the length of time households have been on the record of qualified households (the Waiting List).

It should be noted that if a household meets the eligibility and need criteria, it qualifies for the suite of social housing supports, including HAP, and is placed on the housing list to be

considered for the allocation of suitable tenancies in accordance with the authority's allocation scheme. HAP is a flexible and immediate support which is available to all eligible households in all local authority areas across the State.

It should also be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists.

## **2020 Report**

[www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/)

## **Fire Service**

326. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage further to Parliamentary Question No. 408 of 29 September 2020, if the external validation group process relating to the fire service has begun; when it is expected to report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29442/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. My Department, primarily through the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM) supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, issuing national standards and guidance on operational and other related matters, providing a central training programme and providing capital funding for equipment and priority infrastructural projects.

Fire services are provided in Ireland by local authorities in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. There are 31 fire authorities which provide fire prevention and fire protection services for communities through 27 service delivery structures. Local authority fire services are delivered by approximately 3,300 local authority staff engaged at 218 fire stations nationwide.

Over the course of 2014/ 2015, an External Validation Group (EVG), commissioned by the Management Board of the NDFEM, visited every fire service in the country as part of a new external validation process arising from implementation of the 2013 "Keeping Communities Safe" national policy document. In April 2016, the Management Board published the first EVG Report titled "Local Delivery - National Consistency". The Report, which sets out details of the process as well as findings is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/fire-and-emergency-management/fire-services-ireland-local-delivery-national>

This first EVG report was welcomed as a benchmark of local authority provision of fire services in Ireland, and reviewed a number of themes. For the first time, it reported on the matching of provision of fire services with assessed fire risk. It reviewed fire safety work and undertook an assessment of the impact of national guidance on safety, health and welfare of staff in fire services. The Report concluded that the public are served well by the locally authority provided fire service arrangements and can retain confidence in the integrity and professionalism of those with responsibility for managing and delivering fire safety and fire services in Ireland.

In May 2019, the Management Board of NDFEM considered a proposal for a second round of external validation, or EVG II. Stakeholder engagement was undertaken in preparation for a thematic review process, which was scheduled to commence in Q1 2020. However, due to Covid-19, the Board made a decision to postpone this process.

As an alternative, in May 2020, the Board mandated staff in the NDFEM to undertake a review of the impact of Covid-19 on local authority fire service resilience and response, as well as on fire safety work and to look at fire services roles in supporting Covid-related emergency management. The objective was to capture issues arising, lessons to be learned and good practice which worked during the first phase of Covid-19 response, so that essential services could continue to be maintained in case of further surges.

This review was undertaken by means of ‘virtual visits’ (i.e. by Webex link) to each of the 27 fire services and three Regional Communications Centres. This ‘virtual’ process was undertaken by an NDFEM team, working in association with Chief Fire Officers and their staff and local authority executives. These visits were undertaken between the 24th of June and the 22nd of September 2020. A composite report on themes related to the impact of Covid-19 on fire services, titled ‘Response and Resilience’ was compiled and presented to the NDFEM Management Board in October 2020. While this is an internal report to facilitate sharing of good practice and has not been published, a copy can be made available if required.

The position in relation to undertaking another round of External Validation will be kept under review by the NDFEM Management Board, taking account of the experience of the virtual approach in 2020 and in light of the evolving Covid-19 situation.

### **Constitutional Convention**

327. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will establish a constitutional convention to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution. [29443/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** A Convention on the Constitution was established in 2012 to discuss proposed amendments to the Constitution. The Eighth Report issued by the Convention dealt with the matter of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and was published in March 2014. The most popular option for reform was the insertion of a provision into the Constitution that “the State shall progressively realise economic, social and cultural rights, subject to maximum available resources and that this duty is cognisable by the Courts”. In relation to which specific rights should be enumerated in the Constitution, these included rights to housing, social security, essential health care, rights of people with disabilities, linguistic and cultural rights and the rights covered in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The commitments in relation to constitutional reform in the Programme for Government provide for the holding of a referendum on housing. The Programme for Government also commits to establishing a Commission on Housing to examine issues such as tenure, standards, sustainability, and quality-of-life issues in the provision of housing. It is planned that the Commission on Housing will review the commitment to hold a referendum on housing, once it has been formally established in September this year, and the Terms of Reference and Membership of the Commission have been finalised. The Report of the Convention on the Constitution will be available for consideration by the Commission.



## **Housing Provision**

328. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of sites that have been provided under the serviced sites scheme in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29453/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** To date, my Department has issued two broad-based Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) calls for proposals to local authorities. Funding of almost €200 million has been approved in principle in support of 40 infrastructure projects in 14 local authority areas across 9 counties, which will assist in the delivery of almost 4,200 affordable homes for purchase or for rent.

Details of 35 SSF projects which received approval in principle under the two SSF calls to date are available on the Rebuilding Ireland's website as follows. In advance of making an SSF funding submission, local authorities were issued with full details, briefing material and application forms which outlined the information required and assessment criteria upon which applications are assessed.

Call 1 [rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-gives-the-go-ahead-for-ten-local-authority-sites-for-affordable-housing-under-the-serviced-sites-fund/](http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-gives-the-go-ahead-for-ten-local-authority-sites-for-affordable-housing-under-the-serviced-sites-fund/).

Call 2 [rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-funding-of-e84m-to-support-delivery-of-1770-affordable-homes-under-the-ssf/](http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-funding-of-e84m-to-support-delivery-of-1770-affordable-homes-under-the-ssf/).

In addition to these projects, approval in principle has also been given to five further applications for SSF funding, namely, Dublin City Council's projects in Emmet Road and Oscar Traynor Road, Fingal County Council's projects in Ballymastone, Donabate, and Hayestown, Rush and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council's project in Shanganagh.

In making an application for SSF, each local authority must demonstrate that an affordability issue exists in the area in question and that it is viable to deliver homes, for purchase or rent, with a price reduction of at least 10% below open market values.

In accordance with a Programme for Government commitment to extend the SSF, a review of the Fund is currently ongoing.

## **Tax Code**

329. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his attention has been drawn to the impact of the recently announced changes to stamp duty in respect of the bulk buying by investment funds of houses, on organisations active in the mortgage to rent sector (details supplied) and that are in the process of purchasing homes under the mortgage to rent scheme in order to lease back to distressed homeowners; if he has been in contact with the Minister for Finance with regard to identifying a way in which such organisations may be exempted from the new stamp duty regime under certain circumstances and informed by the way in which approved housing bodies have been exempted under the new system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29478/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme provides for an Approved Housing Body (AHB) or since 2018 a private funder to acquire ownership of a property with an unsustainable private mortgage from a lender, which also enables the household to remain in their home as a social housing tenant. The scheme is an established part of the overall suite of social housing options and

an important part of the mortgage arrears resolution process. The household must be eligible for social housing and the property must meet the appropriate standards for social housing.

To the end of March 2021, 1179 households with unsustainable private mortgages have completed the MTR scheme since its introduction nationally in 2013. The 1179 households in the scheme represent 1970 adults and 1699 children who have remained living in their homes and communities. There are currently 1079 active cases being progressed under the scheme.

The Dáil approved, by way of a Financial Resolution, on 19 May 2021 a new higher stamp duty rate of 10% that will apply to the multiple purchase of houses. This measure was introduced in response to the multiple purchase of residential units by certain institutional investors in the Irish property market. Disincentivising the bulk buying of homes will enable these homes to be made available for purchase by owner occupiers, particularly first time buyers.

As some multiple purchases of property are undertaken by bodies specifically for the purpose of providing social or affordable housing, the higher stamp duty rate will not apply in such instances e.g. Local Authorities, AHBs and the Housing Agency. The Minister for Finance also indicated when bringing in the Financial Resolution, and after consultation with me, that in addition to the exemptions provided for Local Authorities, AHBs and the Housing Agency from the 10% stamp duty rate, exemptions for other social and affordable housing arrangements would also be considered.

It is my intention that exemptions from the higher stamp duty rate in respect of homes acquired for social and affordable housing, including homes acquired under the MTR scheme, will be included in the legislation that will come before the Oireachtas in the next few weeks to permanently underpin this Financial Resolution. Addressing this matter through legislation over the next number of weeks should ensure that MTR transactions in progress by Home For Life are concluded. Those MTR cases being progressed by iCare will proceed as normal.

## Fire Service

330. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of station officer positions in the retained fire service that are vacant by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29502/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority on a whole time equivalent basis.

However, granular data, in terms of the detailed breakdown of the local authorities which might have vacancies at these grades is not collected and consequently is not available in my Department. The relevant information would be available from individual local authorities.

## Fire Service

331. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of junior officer rank of driver or mechanic positions that are vacant in the retained fire service by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29503/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority on a whole time equivalent basis.

However, granular data, in terms of the detailed breakdown of the local authorities which might have vacancies at these grades is not collected and consequently is not available in my Department. The relevant information would be available from individual local authorities.

### **National Parks**

332. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his Department is currently considering applications or initiatives to develop new national parks; the process in place to support and facilitate such initiatives; the criteria that exists for being designated a national park; and his policy on developing new national parks. [29542/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** Through the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), my Department manages an extensive network of natural heritage sites of some 87,000 hectares. The 6 existing National Parks of Ireland account for circa 65,000 hectares of this network with a further 22,000 hectares comprising nature reserves and other heritage sites.

Our National Parks are managed as Category II National Parks under the criteria set out by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Under this Category, ownership and management should normally be by the highest competent authority of the State. Accordingly, all National Parks in Ireland are fully owned and managed by the State through the NPWS Division of my Department. It is the policy of my Department to abide by the criteria and standards for the National Parks laid down by the IUCN which can be found at [www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/about/protected-areas-categories/category-ii-national-park](http://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/about/protected-areas-categories/category-ii-national-park)

The 6 existing National Parks are managed from a conservation perspective, and attract in excess of 4 million visitors annually. Given the resources available for capital investment within our National Parks and Nature Reserves, I am ever mindful of the need to focus on the core responsibilities relating to the management of the existing Parks and Reserves lands and have no plans at present to increase the number of National Parks in the country.

In line with the Programme for Government - Our Shared Future, the NPWS is actively looking at Biosphere designation nationwide, and is currently working on an application for submission to UNESCO for the Lough Ree Area. The Programme for Government also contains a commitment to realise our outstanding target of 10% marine protected area (MPA) coverage in Ireland's waters as soon as is practicable, aiming for 30% by 2030. In this regard we have committed to deliver comprehensive legislation for the identification, designation and manage-

ment of MPAs in Ireland. It is within the framework of such legislation that the Government will deliver the establishment of clearly defined marine protected areas, including processes for their identification, designation and management.

The NPWS is continually implementing “Experiencing the Wild Heart of Ireland”, its tourism interpretative plan for our National Parks and National Reserves. This document sets out a road map for investment at these important nature conservation, public amenity and tourism sites and underpins the objectives of Project 2040. While my Department has no specific plans to expand the park network at present it is actively ensuring the preservation, protection and presentation of the assets it already owns. Recent land acquisitions in this regard underpin the Government’s on-going commitment to the preservation of our natural heritage for future generations of citizens and visitors alike to enjoy. These include the extension of Wicklow Mountains National Park through purchasing almost 4,900 acres of Dublin Uplands at Glenasmole in 2016 and a further 79.08 hectares at Carrigcurra in 2020 ; the 2018 expansion of Wild Nephin National Park to create a State – owned wilderness project of over 11,000 hectares; and in 2021, the acquisition of 21.96 hectares at Knockauns adjacent to the Burren National Park.

### **Waterways Issues**

333. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage further to Parliamentary Question No. 62 of 4 November 2020, the number of sluice gates open and closed by the ESB and Waterways Ireland; and the number of boards removed at Meelick Weir and Athlone for May 2021 and the corresponding water level reference point north of each location, in tabular form. [29549/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** Waterways Ireland have provided my Department with the attached table showing the number of sluice gates open and closed by the agency and the ESB and the number of boards removed (there were no boards in place) up to 27 May 2021.

[data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\\_pq333-01-06-2021\\_en.xlsx](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01_pq333-01-06-2021_en.xlsx)

### **Rental Sector**

334. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will increase the housing assistance payment caps in County Kerry given the significant increase in rents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29553/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** Increased rent limits for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the Rent Supplement Scheme were introduced in 2016. These limits were agreed in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection (DSP). In reviewing the rent limits, my Department worked closely with DSP and monitored data gathered from the Residential Tenancies Board and the HAP Shared Services Centre. The HAP rent limits were increased significantly, in the order of 60% in some cases.

Maximum rent limits for the HAP scheme are set out for each housing authority area by the Housing Assistance Payment (Amendment) Regulations 2017. The current maximum HAP rent limits are available on the Irish Statute Book website at the following link:

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/si/56/made/en/print?q=housing&years=2017>.

Local authorities also have discretion, because of local rental market conditions, to exceed the maximum rent limit by up to 20%, or up to 50% in the Dublin region for those households either in, or at immediate risk of homelessness. It is a matter for the local authority to determine whether the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case by case basis and also the level of additional discretion applied in each case.

In considering this issue, I am conscious that increasing the current HAP rent limits could have negative inflationary impacts, leading to a detrimental impact on the wider rental market, including for those households who are not receiving HAP support.

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

### **Local Authorities**

335. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the local authorities that have a social inclusion unit or officer; the social inclusion training that is provided by his Department to local authorities to meet the aims and objectives of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29593/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority on a whole time equivalent basis.

However, granular data, in terms of the detailed breakdown of the local authorities which might have vacancies at these grades is not collected and consequently is not available in my Department. The relevant information would be available from individual local authorities.

The Housing Agency provides training to local authorities to support them in providing housing for people with disabilities under the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability. Each local authority has a Housing and Disability Steering Group the function of which is to plan for the housing of people with disabilities over a 5 year period within the development planning process. The Groups, which are led by the local authority Director of Housing Services are made up of local authority housing officials, HSE officials and members of disability organisations. The Housing Agency provides training to these Groups to enable them to understand and fulfil their role under the Strategy. It also provides training to local authorities in the management of persons with mental health disabilities who are seeking housing supports and has published a manual for use by local authorities.

Age Friendly Ireland, the Shared Service that is tasked with implementing the UN Age



Friendly Programme in Ireland, (which my Department funds jointly with the Department of Health) provides training to local authorities in relation to housing for older persons within the context of the Joint Policy Statement Housing Options for our Ageing Population. The training covers many aspects of housing for older people including site selection, optimal design for older persons, assistive technology and crime prevention through environmental design. Each local authority has appointed a ‘technical adviser’ as an Action under the Joint Policy Statement of Housing Options for our Ageing Population. These advisers have undertaken comprehensive training provided by Age Friendly Ireland and are now involved in a wide range of housing activity within local authorities. Their role is to be a resource for older people, for the local authorities, and indeed for anyone who wants to access information about age friendly housing.

### Protected Disclosures

336. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29637/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires each public body to publish an

annual report setting out the number of protected disclosures received in the preceding year and the action taken. The annual reports for my Department are available on the Department’s website at the following link: [www.gov.ie/en/collection/20f06-protected-disclosures-annual-reports/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/20f06-protected-disclosures-annual-reports/)

My Department received fifteen protected disclosures between 2016 and to date in 2021, all but one of them from workers of other bodies in relation to which I have legislative functions, as provided for under Section 8 of the Act.

A breakdown of receipt by year is set out in the table below.

Year	Number of Protected Disclosures
2016	1
2017	2
2018	4
2019	4
2020	3
2021 to date	1

In addition to the above, one case purporting to be a protected disclosure was recently forwarded to my Department. That case is currently under consideration.

### Planning Issues

337. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the construction of an access roadway to a telecommunications antennae which is exempted development requires planning permission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29645/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act),

all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires planning permission.

Section 4 of the Act and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (the Regulations), set out various exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission. In this regard, Class 31 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations provides that certain classes of development carried out by a statutory undertaker authorised to provide a telecommunications service are, subject to specified conditions, exempted development from the requirement to obtain planning permission. Where the conditions and size thresholds specified in the exemption class are not complied with or are exceeded, planning permission is required.

Exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of specific forms of development are provided for when they are considered to be consistent with proper planning and sustainable development.

While access roads are not listed under Class 31 of the Regulations, article 9(1)(ii) of the Regulations states that any development that would:

“consist of or comprise the formation, laying out or material widening of a means of access to a public road the surfaced carriageway of which exceeds 4 metres in width”

shall not be exempted development.

In addition, article 9(1)(iii) of the Regulations provides that where a development would endanger public safety of road users by reason of traffic hazard or obstruction, planning permission is required.

The Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures Guidelines, issued under section 28 of the Act by my Department to Planning Authorities in 1996, state that:

“access roads should be permitted only where they are absolutely necessary and great care should be taken that they will not appear as a scar on a hillside. It should normally be a condition of permission that such roads are grubbed up at the end of the construction period”.

Where a question arises on whether development is or is not development, or is or is not exempted development, any person may seek a declaration from the relevant planning authority under section 5 of the Act. A planning authority that is in receipt of a section 5 application is required to make its decision in respect of the application within four weeks of the date of receipt of the application. A decision made by a planning authority in respect of such an application may be appealed to An Bord Pleanála.

Under section 152 of the Act, it is obligatory for the planning authority to follow up substantive written complaints of breaches of the planning code, unless it considers the complaint to be trivial or vexatious, or without substance or foundation.

Once a planning authority has received a written complaint and forms the view that unauthorised development may have been, is being or may be carried out, it must issue a warning letter to the owner or person carrying out the development unless the development in question is of a trivial or minor nature.

## **National Parks**

338. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of educational liaison officers appointed to each of the national parks to

work with schools since June 2020 to date in tabular form. [29647/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):**

The Programme for Government – Our Shared Future commits to appointing Education Liaison Officers in our National Parks to work with schools across the country, to promote the importance of biodiversity and the natural world, and to involve pupils in the work that goes on in our National Parks. My Department is in contact with the Department of Education and Skills to progress matters.

The National Parks and Wildlife Guide Service which operates from our National Parks and a number of other Centres across the country are a separate matter to this specific measure. These Centres run events for the general public, offer visits for community groups such as senior citizens and scouts and welcome both primary and secondary school groups for nature days and fieldwork. This service has continued over the course of the pandemic, where appropriate, and my Department expects another busy summer for the Parks and Wildlife Centres as the numbers of people holidaying at home in Ireland are expected to remain at a high level this year.

### **Housing Provision**

339. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of private, social and affordable houses built in each of the years 2005 to 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29685/21]

340. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of private, social and affordable houses built in each of the years 1995 to 2005, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29710/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 339 and 340 together.

My Department publishes comprehensive programme level statistics on social housing delivery activity. This data includes details on the number of social houses built between 2004 - 2015 and from 2016 onward. This data is published on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link: [www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/).

Since 2016, in addition to the statistical overview of activity in each local authority, the Social Housing Construction Status Report is published each quarter which provides scheme level detail on new build activity in each local authority. The most recent publication covers the period up to the end of Q1 2021 and is available at the following link: [rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-obrien-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q1-2021/](http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-obrien-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q1-2021/).

The Central Statistics Office are responsible for the quarterly publication of all New Dwelling Completions. This data is complete to the end of 2020 and can be found at: [data.cso.ie/product/NDC](http://data.cso.ie/product/NDC).

Increasing the supply of public, social and affordable homes is priority for this Government. The Government will shortly be publishing our new housing strategy, Housing for All, which will set out our policies for housing delivery.

*Question No. 340 answered with Question No. 339.*

### **National Parks**

341. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if documents (details supplied) will be provided for 2017 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29714/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** The boundaries and maps of the 6 National Parks are currently being reviewed by my Department and will be made publicly available on completion.

The records the Deputy is requesting relate to the day-to-day routine operations of 87,000 hectares over the course of 13 years. As such, they would be voluminous and it would be resource intensive and neither a feasible nor effective use of those resources. In addition, it is not practical to identify the entirety of the extensive cache in the time available.

### **National Parks and Wildlife Service**

342. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide correspondence, commissioned third party reports, research studies or other policy documents produced by or for the NPWS on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29715/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** The remit for deer management for my Department is in relation to the National Parks only, and, as such, there is no repository of reports, studies etc. outside of this. Deer are wild animals and the management of them is up to individuals and/or landowners that are being affected. My Department issues licences under Section 29 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2018 for deer hunting and Section 42 of the same Act provides that where protected wild animals e.g. deer, or birds are causing serious damage to food, livestock, poultry or agricultural crops the owner or occupier may on application to the Minister seek a permission to take appropriate steps to stop the damage.

My Department is committed to the active management of deer within National Parks. As part of its regular ongoing management operations in respect of these state lands, my Department carries out deer surveys and census reports as required or appropriate. Such operational reports are of course sensitive and their contents could be an incentive for wildlife crime (such as deer poaching). Officials are currently examining the documents comprehended by the Deputy's request in the context of a Freedom of Information request, and once a decision has been made on their releasable contents, given such operational sensitivities, my officials will send a copy of them to the Deputy also.

### **National Parks**

343. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide copies of deer management plans for each of the national parks for 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29716/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** My Department is committed to the active management of deer within National Parks. As part of its regular ongoing management operations in respect of these state lands, my Department carries out deer surveys and census reports as required or appropri-

ate. Such operational reports are of course sensitive and their contents could be an incentive for wildlife crime (such as deer poaching).

Officials are currently examining the documents comprehended by the Deputy's request in the context of a Freedom of Information request, and once a decision has been made on their releasable contents, given such operational sensitivities, my officials will send a copy of them to the Deputy also.

### Heritage Sites

344. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the basis for his anticipation of receiving applications in respect of the Burren, Glendalough, Passage Tomb Landscapes of Sligo, Royal Sites and Valentia Cable Station for inclusion on the Tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage status. [29764/21]

345. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the preparatory works carried out by his Department with local authorities in respect of the applications in respect of the Burren, Glendalough, Passage Tomb Landscapes of Sligo, Royal Sites and Valentia Cable Station to be included on the Tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage status. [29765/21]

346. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the basis for not anticipating an application in early monastic sites other than Glendalough for inclusion on the Tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage status. [29766/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 344, 345 and 346 together.

I refer the Deputy back to the Topical Issue, *To discuss the exclusion of Early Monastic Sites from Ireland's Tentative List for UNESCO World Heritage Sites*, debated in the Dáil on the 26 May 2021 which outlined the processes, supports, and engagements that have been part of the advancement of the revised Tentative List of World Heritage Properties to date.

In January 2019, my Department initiated its review of the Tentative List. My Department has invited all local authorities to submit applications to it with respect to properties of natural and/or cultural heritage within their area of responsibility, which may meet the requirements for inclusion on the Tentative List. The deadline for applications is 30 June 2021.

My Department's policy is for applications to be promoted and sponsored by the relevant local authorities in order to ensure continuity throughout the process. Other organizations, community groups or individuals interested in submitting an application have been encouraged to apply in collaboration with the local authority and support has been provided when appropriate to do so. The role of the local authorities to lead engagement with community organisations on the ground is crucial in order to facilitate public consultation and wider stakeholder involvement, particularly in light of the requirement under the UNESCO Operational Guidelines for participatory planning and stakeholder consultation.

My Department's National Monuments Service has been liaising very closely with those local authorities that have expressed interest in having a site within their county boundaries included on the revised Tentative List, providing advice and guidance on an ongoing basis and encouraging them to engage with relevant stakeholders at a local level.

My Department has engaged with all local authorities who expressed an interest in having a



site within their county boundaries included on the revised Tentative List. This engagement has included facilitating two World Heritage Workshops in collaboration with ICOMOS Ireland, one held in Killarney in February 2020 and a follow-up workshop online in June 2020. These workshops focussed on next steps in the review process, World Heritage knowledge sharing, management of serial and transboundary applications, and the requirements of completing the Tentative List application form. At these workshops the challenges in the preparation of nomination documentation and management plans for prospective World Heritage properties was detailed and the need for wide public consultation and local stakeholder engagement was reinforced.

Following attendance at the workshops, interested parties were requested to submit draft Tentative List applications for review and feedback to ensure that the next Tentative List features properties that are well-placed to progress to World Heritage nomination. Throughout November and December 2020 my Department facilitated feedback in relation to the draft applications through individual online meetings with a World Heritage Expert.

My Department has also commissioned studies to further inform the review process for the Tentative List:

- Peer review of the 2014 Burren Technical Evaluation as a World Heritage Site, 2020;
- Glendalough OUV Study, expected June 2021;and
- Valentia Cable Station and Associated Sites, Heritage Study, 2020.

The basis for not anticipating an application for The Early Medieval Monastic Sites, other than Glendalough Monastic Site, is because despite the huge encouragement there was no engagement with my Department by all the relevant local authorities in respect of a revised application.

The anticipation for receiving applications in respect of The Burren, Glendalough Monastic Site, The Passage Tomb Landscapes of Sligo, The Royal Sites, and Valentia Transatlantic Cable Station is based on the level of engagement with the process by and from the relevant local authorities, working in conjunction with community organisations. Draft applications have been received for these properties and the local authorities are working with relevant stakeholders to demonstrate that there is sufficient support for the project in the community.

*Question No. 345 answered with Question No. 344.*

*Question No. 346 answered with Question No. 344.*

## **Water Services**

347. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the amount paid from the Exchequer to Irish Water, that is, current and capital each year since its inception up to the end of 2020; the provision in the estimate for 2021 for Irish Water; the estimated provision of funding over the next five years to allow it deal with the critical under investment in public water and wastewater services in the past; if Irish Water has confirmed to him that it has the necessary approvals from the Commission for Regulation of Utilities to allow it to proceed with its investment plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29797/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services

planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. State funding provided to Irish Water since its inception in 2014 including the estimate for 2021 is set out in the table below:

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq347-01-06-2021\_en.docx">Table</a>]

The Irish Water Strategic Funding Plan 2019-2024 sets out Irish Water's multi-annual strategic business planning funding requirement of €11bn to 2024, comprising a €6.1bn investment in infrastructure and assets and €4.9bn in operating costs. The Programme for Government commits to funding Irish Water's capital investment plan for drinking water and waste water infrastructure on a multi-annual basis and delivery of the €8.5 billion funding package committed to in Project Ireland 2040. This overall funding commitment is key to addressing Ireland's shortcomings in water and waste water infrastructure.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is the independent economic regulator of Irish Water. In August 2020, the CRU published its determination on Irish Water's third revenue control (RC3) setting out the total level of allowed revenue that Irish Water can receive, through Government subvention and from customers, to cover its efficiently incurred costs during the period 2020 to 2024. Irish Water's annual exchequer funding for domestic water services is determined through the annual estimates and budgetary process, having regard to the CRU determination under the economic regulatory process.

It may be helpful to note that Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at [Oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:Oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

### **Local Authorities**

348. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a lack of planning enforcement officers in Cork City Council; if the Council has sought additional funding for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29822/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority on a whole time equivalent basis.

However, granular data, in terms of the detailed breakdown of the local authorities which might have vacancies at these grades is not collected and consequently is not available in my Department. The relevant information would be available from individual local authorities.

### **Housing Provision**

349. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heri-

tage the number of properties brought back into use by Galway County Council through the buy and renew, repair and lease and the Housing Agency Fund in tabular form. [29844/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department publishes comprehensive programme level statistics on a quarterly basis on social housing delivery activity. This includes detailed data on the Repair and Lease (RLS), including data on delivery through RLS for each local authority since 2016. The data is available to the end of Quarter 1 2021. Housing statistics are published on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link: [www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/)

Since January 2017, the Housing Agency has managed an acquisitions fund of €70 million, which is a revolving fund was established with the objective of acquiring 1,600 social housing homes in the period to 2021. This has enabled the Housing Agency to actively engage with banks and investment companies in relation to the acquisitions of properties. Since 2017, 22 social housing homes have been acquired through the Housing Agency Acquisitions Fund in Galway County Council.

Capital funding is also provided to local authorities to acquire a range of properties for social housing use. To assist local authorities pursuing vacant properties, the Buy & Renew Scheme makes funding available to facilitate local authorities in acquiring and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing. Galway County Council has supported an approved housing body to deliver two new homes through Buy and Renew in Ballinasloe under the Capital Assistance Scheme.

My Department is working to support increased Buy and Renew activity in local authorities. Galway County Council is actively pursuing opportunities to deliver new social housing through acquiring and remediating vacant properties and will utilise the Buy & Renew Scheme for this purpose.

## Rental Sector

350. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of HAP properties inspected in County Galway by Galway County Council in 2018, 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [29845/21]

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

Local authorities report to my Department on numbers of overall inspections carried out and enforcement actions undertaken on a quarterly basis. The most recent data received in respect of the number of inspections of all private rental properties and those with HAP tenancies is set out in the table below:

HAP Inspections carried out in 2019	Total Inspections carried out in 2019	HAP On-site Inspections carried out in 2020	Total On-site Inspections carried out in 2020	HAP Virtual Inspections carried out in 2020	Total Virtual Inspections carried out in 2020
23,424	40,728	12,031	24,315	991	1,388

The following is the HAP Inspections breakdown for Galway County Council:

	Inspections of HAP Dwellings
2018	661
2019	719
2020	808
2021 to end of Q1	7

Significant Exchequer funding has been made available to local authorities in recent years to aid increasing inspections. Funding has increased four-fold from €2.5m in 2018 to €10m in 2021. The increase in rental inspection figures in Galway reflects this increase in resources. Galway has been pro-active with regard to inspections and their 2020 figure would most likely be higher if not for Covid.

Given the need for inspectors to enter tenants' homes, Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have impacted on the inspection of all rented dwellings – not just those with HAP tenancies. The City and County Management Association's Local Authority Resilience and Recovery Plan for living with Covid-19 (October 2020) and its subsequent Local Authority Services Framework for Future Covid-19 Pandemic Response (January 2021) do not permit rental inspections in Levels 4 and 5. This is in order to protect tenants, landlords and rental inspectors.

In response to the difficulties caused by pandemic restrictions, some local authorities have been piloting virtual inspections. Dublin City Council have led this initiative which entails landlords receiving a checklist for self-assessment and being required to submit photographic/video evidence by email, tenants being invited to raise any non-compliance issues they are aware of and being asked to confirm that any remedial works requested by the local authority have been completed, and the Council reserving the right to conduct a physical on-site inspection when it is safe to so.

While virtual inspection systems present certain challenges and limitations, they do offer a way of improving the standard of rental accommodation despite the pandemic. I support these initiatives and my Department is encouraging local authorities not involved in the pilots to consider adopting them. I have committed to providing Exchequer funding for those that do. Galway County Council have expressed interest in the virtual inspection process.

### Local Authorities

351. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the fact that to date since the regulations were introduced Galway City Council has only received five planning applications for change of use for short-term letting and that staff appointed by his Department to deal with short-term letting have not yet been appointed as following a recruitment process, no suitable candidates were available to take up a two-year contract; and his further views on whether there is a need for greater resources in this area to support stretched staff in council planning departments. [29850/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** On 4 June 2019, my Department wrote to planning authorities with Rent Pressure Zone designations (RPZs) - to which the short-term letting regulations apply - seeking estimated resource funding requirements for the implementation and enforcement of the new short-term letting (STL) provisions, to cover the period to the end of 2021. My Department wrote again to planning authorities on 2 July and 26 September of that year seeking new or revised estimates following the designation of additional RPZs in certain parts of the country,

which extended the application of the STL provisions to these areas. Details of the resource requirements sought primarily relate to the recruitment of additional enforcement staff, but also include, inter alia, associated legal, IT and other administrative costs.

Since then, further communication has taken place between my Department and all relevant planning authorities seeking clarification and refinement of the resourcing requests, as well as in relation to the practical implementation of the STL provisions.

For 2020, €2.5m was made available by my Department to support planning authorities in the implementation and enforcement of the STL legislation. Similarly, a further €2.5m has been made available in respect of 2021.

In December 2019, Galway City Council, further to its resourcing funding request, received approval to incur expenditure on dedicated STL implementation and enforcement resources, and funding of up to €241,500 in 2020 and €262,500 in 2021 was made available from my Department to cover this expenditure.

I understand that Galway City Council commenced a recruitment process for dedicated STL staff however, no suitable candidates were found to take up the contract on offer. The Covid-19 pandemic then put a hold on new recruitment. While staffing is a matter for individual local authorities, the Council has advised that the recruitment process for dedicated STL staff is currently being reviewed and my Department is awaiting an update on its progress in this regard. Currently, the planning enforcement section in the Council is responsible for the enforcement of the STL legislation.

To date, Galway City Council has drawn down a small amount of the funding approved for the enforcement of STL, to cover legal costs. In this connection, the outstanding funding for 2021 remains available to the Council should it wish to submit any further claims, including in respect of any dedicated enforcement staff recruited.

Regarding the five planning applications for change of use received, it should be noted that change of use planning is just one way to ensure compliance with the STL legislation. Properties can also be registered with the Council in accordance with the STL Regulations, can cease STL activity altogether and can be returned to the long-term rental market. In this connection, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the number of properties being made available for short-term letting purposes, with many - at least temporarily - now operating in the long-term letting sector.

### **Legislative Measures**

352. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to develop comprehensive legislation for the identification, designation and management of marine protected areas in Irish territorial waters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29865/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Programme for Government - Our Shared Future contains a commitment to realise our outstanding target of 10% marine protected area (MPA) coverage in Ireland's waters as soon as is practicable, aiming for 30% by 2030. In this regard the Government has committed in the Programme for Government to deliver comprehensive legislation for the identification, designation and management of MPAs in Ireland.

As an initial step in the current MPA process, an independent MPA Advisory Group chaired



by Professor Tasman Crowe, Director of the UCD Earth Institute, was convened by this Department in 2019. Minister Noonan and I received the final report of this expert group, entitled “Expanding Ireland’s Marine Protected Area Network”, on 22 October 2020 during EU Green Week.

A public consultation process focusing on the report and its key findings began on 17 February 2021 and will remain open until 30 July 2021. I and my colleagues in Government are encouraging all stakeholders and the wider public to submit their views on how Ireland’s network of MPAs should be expanded into the future.

Following this extensive consultation period, and a detailed analysis of the submissions received from all quarters, my Department will commence the development of legislation as stated in the Programme for Government. This work is expected to begin this autumn, with ongoing development of legislation planned into 2022.

### **National Parks**

353. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he is taking to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment to examine the establishment of an offshore maritime area as Ireland’s seventh national park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29866/21]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** The Programme for Government - Our Shared Future contains a commitment to realise our outstanding target of 10% marine protected area (MPA) coverage in Ireland’s waters as soon as is practicable, aiming for 30% by 2030 including the examination of an offshore maritime area as a national park.

In this regard the Government has committed in the Programme for Government to deliver comprehensive legislation for the identification, designation and management of MPAs in Ireland. It is within the framework of such legislation that the Government will deliver the establishment of marine protected areas, including processes for their identification, designation and management.

As an initial step in the current process, an independent MPA Advisory Group chaired by Professor Tasman Crowe, Director of the UCD Earth Institute, was convened by my Department in 2019. Minister Noonan and I received the final report of this expert group, entitled “Expanding Ireland’s Marine Protected Area Network”, on 22 October 2020 during EU Green Week.

A public consultation process began on 17 February 2021 and will remain open until 30 July 2021. This includes public consideration of what should be protected (for example, certain species and/or habitat types) and what type(s) of MPAs could usefully be underpinned in the new legislation.

Following this consultation period, and a detailed analysis of the submissions received from all quarters, my Department will commence the development of legislation. This work is expected to begin this autumn, with ongoing development of legislation planned into 2022.

### **Common Travel Area**

354. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps being taken to

normalise the common travel area. [29650/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Common Travel Area (CTA) has continued to operate throughout the pandemic and, over the last number of years, significant steps have been taken by the Irish and British Governments and the European Union to safeguard CTA rights and privileges for the future.

Over the last year, in a range of areas, the two Governments have legislated to ensure continued access to CTA rights and privileges for Irish and British citizens, following the end of the Brexit transition period. We agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Common Travel Area healthcare arrangements and brought into force an Ireland-UK Social Security Convention in late 2020. Work on finalising an MoU on education arrangements in the CTA is also at an advanced stage.

Importantly, both the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement and EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement explicitly take account of the Common Travel Area between Ireland and the UK. This allows for the protection of established bilateral arrangements so that Irish and British citizens can continue to live, work and study - and access healthcare, social security and public services - in each jurisdiction.

The Government has had to introduce a range of restrictions on domestic and international travel to address the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. These restrictions were developed on the basis of public health advice and are being amended on the basis of such advice, as conditions allow. The restrictions remain consistent with the CTA, in that they apply equally to all passengers arriving into Ireland, including Irish citizens, with only very limited exceptions.

The CTA of course allows for Irish and British citizens to move freely between Ireland and the UK. I want to see this travel taking place in as seamless a manner as possible, as soon as this is feasible and safe. The CTA plays a vital role in facilitating the way in which Irish and British people live on these islands, and it will continue to underpin our bilateral relationship.

### **European Council**

355. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the issues discussed at the recent European Council; if the interception of a flight (details supplied) over the air space of Belarus was discussed; and if so, the outcome of such discussions. [29032/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** On 24 May EU leaders discussed Belarus, Russia, relations with the UK, and the situation in the Middle East and in Mali. The coercive forced landing of a Ryanair flight over Belarus to detain a journalist and opposition activist featured prominently during those discussions. The Taoiseach communicated clearly Ireland's view that a strong EU response is needed.

EU leaders called for the immediate release of Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega, and for an urgent investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Leaders also agreed on introducing new sanctions, including economic sanctions, calling on airlines to avoid Belarussian airspace and commencing work to ban Belarussian airlines from EU airspace. Work on operationalising these concrete steps has already commenced and Ireland is working closely with the EU and Member States to that end.

Relations with Belarus were discussed at an informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on 27 May and the next steps in implementing the steps agreed by European Leaders were consid-

ered with a clear consensus on the need make rapid progress.

Ireland has rejected the false narrative of the Belarusian Government and Minister Ryan called for a transparent and independent investigation during a special International Transport Forum meeting on 27 May. ICAO has since confirmed that they will investigate the incident and Ireland fully supports this decision. Along with our EU and international partners we will remain focused on ensuring that those responsible for endangering the passengers and crew, and for the ongoing repression in Belarus, are brought to account for their actions.

### **Middle East**

356. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when the Government will honour its commitment in the Programme for Government to recognise the state of Palestine. [29065/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question no. 61 answered on 11 May 2021.

I have been clear in my engagement with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority of the commitment of this Government to advancing a Two-State solution, in line with the agreed parameters for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Programme for Government states that the Government will “Honour our commitment to recognise the State of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement of the conflict, or in advance of that, when we believe doing so will progress efforts to reach a Two-State solution or protect the integrity of Palestinian territory”.

As I have stated previously, in the absence of progress towards a Two-State solution, I would be prepared to recommend to the Government early recognition by Ireland of a State of Palestine, if and when it might be helpful, and this is a matter which I discuss with EU colleagues.

### **Departmental Functions**

357. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the reason his Department and the Department of Defence approved the landing and presence of a US Navy helicopter at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell on 13 May 2021 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29146/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As I set out in my reply to the Deputy on this matter on 19 May last, the request for diplomatic clearance for this landing confirmed that our required conditions were met. Permission was granted on that basis.

### **Foreign Policy**

358. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the US Senate is considering a draft Bill that targets jurisdictions with inadequate enforcement of data protection law (details supplied); and if he will furnish details of any enquires his Department has made to the US Senate or any other relevant body regarding the potential impact this could have on Ireland. [29156/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department and our officials in the Embassy in Washington DC are aware of the draft legislation proposed in the US Senate. The proposed bill aims to amend the US export control regime in order to limit the sale and transfer of US citizens' data to countries which are deemed to have insufficient safeguards for the protection of personal data and inadequate enforcement of data protection legislation.

The draft legislation was proposed in April and is still in the very early stages of the US legislative process. It may be the case that the final legislation differs from what is proposed, or indeed that the draft legislation will not become law. As such, it is not appropriate for me to comment on the draft legislation or any impact it may have.

I would also recall that rules and legislation regarding the transfer of data to countries outside the EU is a competence of the European Commission. The transfer of personal data from the EU to third countries is carried out under a number of transfer mechanisms set out in Chapter V of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The default transfer mechanism is known as an 'adequacy decision'. This is an implementing decision by the Commission which guarantees that the third country in question provides an equivalent level of protection of personal data as exists in the EU. Once a third country has been assessed by the Commission as providing an equivalent level of protection, transfers of EU citizens' data can take place between the EU and the selected third country under that adequacy decision, without limitation or additional safeguards.

Following a recent court case, the European Commission and the US authorities are currently engaged in discussions regarding a new adequacy decision, focusing on enforceable rights and safeguards for EU citizens' data.

Officials in our Embassy in Washington DC continue to monitor developments regarding EU-US data transfers and proposed legislative changes concerning same.

### **Third Level Education**

359. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his Department will have the planned additional scholarships for the College of Europe designed to put Irish persons in a position to win posts in the European institutions in place for the coming academic year. [29165/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** On 6 May last, Minister of State for European Affairs Thomas Byrne launched "A Career for EU", Ireland's new strategy to increase our representation among the staff of the EU's Institutions and Agencies.

Ireland is facing a "demographic cliff" in its representation among the staff of the EU's Institutions, as many senior Irish officials will soon retire. Not enough Irish people are applying for and securing permanent posts in the EU Institutions to make up for their departure.

It is very important that Irish citizens continue to serve in the EU Institutions at all levels and all policy areas. By doing so, Irish officials will remain at the heart of Europe and use their unique experience and capabilities to contribute to the development of the Union.

The new Strategy contains a number of commitments to increase awareness of EU careers. It also sets out a number of concrete measures designed to support and assist Irish people interested in a career in the European Union.

The Strategy has a commitment to increase the supply of suitable candidates for EU roles

by increasing the number of scholarships we provide to Irish students studying at the College of Europe to at least ten. At present, three Irish people are granted College of Europe scholarships annually by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

From 2022, the new Strategy will require additional funding amounting to €1.5 million. We will seek a proposed additional €200,000 to cover the additional seven scholarships at the College of Europe.

The call for applications for the coming academic year at the College of Europe (2021/2022) was launched in late 2020, prior to the launch of the Strategy, and three scholarships have already been allocated to prospective students on the basis of the funds available for 2021. The increase in funding available for additional scholarships at the College of Europe will therefore come into effect in advance of the opening of the selection process for the academic year 2022/2023.

The timeline for the 2022/2023 selection process will be announced in October of this year. It is expected that the deadline for applications will close in January 2021, with interviews taking place throughout the spring. Information on the timeline for this selection process will be made available on the College of Europe's website later this year.

### **Data Protection**

360. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29309/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department necessarily collects, processes, and stores significant volumes of personal data from our customers, staff, and service providers. In particular, the effective delivery of passport and consular services for Irish citizens at home and abroad is a central component of the Department's work and necessitates the processing of personal data.

My Department endeavours to safeguard the personal data that it processes and takes its responsibilities in this regard very seriously. We monitor closely our compliance rate; in 2020, just 0.025% of the total number of passports and Foreign Birth Registration certificates that issued were subject to a suspected data breach. We continue to work towards lowering this figure further in 2021.

Since 2018, the data breaches recorded by this Department have been deemed low or medium risk to the data subject. The main cause of data breaches is human error. Examples of such an error causing a data breach would include incorrectly addressed correspondence issued by post and email. The remainder of breaches are largely due to external unintentional acts. These are mainly attributable to documents that are correctly addressed but are lost in transit through the postal system.

### **Consular Services**

361. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the assistance that has been provided to the family of a person (details supplied) who died in Thailand. [29320/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has been providing consular advice, support and assistance to the family,



through our Consular Assistance Unit in Dublin and our Embassy in Bangkok, since first notified of the case in December 2020.

Embassy officials have liaised extensively with relevant local authorities, including health and police authorities, with a view to ensuring that information is communicated to the family in relation to their concerns.

As noted in our Consular Assistance Charter, my Department is precluded from intervening directly in a legal process in another jurisdiction. Where further inquiries on specific issues require the services of a legal representative, our officials stand ready to provide a list of local English-speaking lawyers. Our officials remain in ongoing contact with the family and will continue to provide all possible assistance in line with our Consular Assistance Charter.

### **EU Meetings**

362. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if EU-Singapore ties were discussed at the most recent EU Foreign Affairs meeting. [29485/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** EU-Singapore ties were not on the agenda at the most recent Foreign Affairs Council meeting.

I welcome the deepening of EU relations bilaterally with Singapore and through the strengthening of relations with ASEAN regionally. In December last, 2020, I participated in the 23rd ASEAN-EU Foreign Ministers Meeting where the EU-ASEAN relationship was upgraded to the level of strategic partnership.

This provides opportunities for increased cooperation in the areas of economy, security, sustainable connectivity and sustainable development including climate action. The Strategic partnership also provides renewed support for the negotiation of an EU-ASEAN Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement

The EU has also agreed a Free Trade Agreement with Singapore, which entered into effect on 21 November 2019. This agreement offers good opportunities to Irish and European companies businesses in the region to trade more easily and to lower the costs of doing business.

Singapore, in particular, is a major trading partner for Ireland in Asia Pacific. Trade in goods and services with Ireland in 2019 was more than €10bn. This highlights the importance of Singapore as a destination for Irish business.

### **Foreign Policy**

363. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his plans to have working holiday authorisations with the United Arab Emirates and South Africa. [29486/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Department of Foreign Affairs currently administers nine Working Holiday Authorisations (WHAs), with Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and the United States. There are no plans to introduce a WHA programme with South Africa or UAE at this time.

The processing of Working Holiday applications by our Missions abroad has been temporarily suspended in response to the current global health crisis. Other countries and regions

with which we have bilateral programmes have likewise temporarily suspended their reciprocal arrangements.

My Department will continue to monitor the evolving situation here and in the relevant locations abroad, in terms particularly of public health advice, travel restrictions, job opportunities and the availability of short-term accommodation. We will instruct our Missions abroad to re-open the application processes when circumstances allow young people to benefit from a working holiday here. The potential addition of other WHA programmes will also be considered at this time.

### **Protected Disclosures**

364. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29635/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Department of Foreign Affairs has not received any protected disclosures to date in 2021 nor in any of the past five years.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

365. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if Irish citizens who reside here but work in Northern Ireland and have been vaccinated as part of the system in Northern Ireland will be in a position to apply for an EU Covid-19 digital green certificate when it is introduced here in cases of; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29756/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The EU Digital COVID Certificate is designed to facilitate the safe free movement of citizens within the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be valid in all EU Member States, including Ireland, and will be provided by the Member State within which the vaccination or Covid-19 test took place.

Individual Member States will determine how the EU Digital COVID Certificate will be used as part of their national public health measures. Information on how the Certificate will apply in each country will be made available by Member States and on Re-open EU. Under the Regulations, individuals who have been vaccinated or tested in the Member State, who are EU citizens or third country nationals legally in the State, have a right to be issued these certificates on request.

The Department of Health is leading on the cross Departmental development of the EU Digital Covid Certificate and the HSE are developing the IT and required operational procedures. However, the timeframe is very challenging and the new operational processes required to support this interoperable certificate framework is yet to be established. Further, the cyber-attack on the HSE is likely to impact on the timeframe to deliver the Certificates. The focus will therefore initially be on delivery of the vaccination certificates, with recovery and test certificates to follow.

With regard to persons not vaccinated in Ireland, including EU citizens vaccinated in Northern Ireland, the Regulation gives the option to issue vaccination certificates to persons vaccinated elsewhere, with EMA approved vaccines, upon receipt of appropriate proof.

Currently, the main development focus is on the delivery of the obligations of the EU Regulation with respect of persons who received a vaccination or a test in Ireland. The possibility of providing vaccination certificates to persons not vaccinated in Ireland will be kept under

consideration.

### **Passport Services**

366. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29828/21]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service scaled up operational levels on 4 May 2021, in line with the phased easing of restrictions set out in “COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 – The Plan Ahead”.

Passport Online will continue to be the priority channel given the efficiencies that are in-built into the system for both the applicant and the Passport Service. The processing of an online application is up to four times as fast as a paper application. In addition, the use of Passport Online can facilitate social distancing, given that a renewal application for an adult does not require the signature of a witness.

Passport Online can be accessed by first time applicants, both children and adults, in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Europe, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. All Irish citizens, including children, can use the online system to renew their passports from anywhere in the world.

The Passport Service has a great deal of experience in dealing with peaks in demand, and we are confident, taking into account measures to ensure a safe workplace, that the Passport Online applications on hand can be cleared in six to eight weeks.

With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service was in contact with the applicant’s mother on 28 May 2021 to provide an update on the status of the passport application.

### **Data Protection**

367. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Defence the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29304/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The majority of data breach incidents that have occurred in my Department since 2018 have related to mis-addressed correspondence by email and post. In most instances, data breaches have involved no risk or a low risk to the data subject. In cases where there was a low risk to the rights and freedoms of a data subject, the Data Protection Commission was notified. A singular case arising in the above similar circumstances, but deemed to be a high risk to the rights and freedoms of an individual data subject, was notified to the data subject and the Data Protection Commission, in line with GDPR requirements.

My Department takes its data protection responsibilities very seriously and makes every effort to ensure that personal data is safeguarded at all times. Technical and organisational measures, as required under GDPR, are implemented to ensure the security of personal data being processed. Data security and data privacy are central topics of all data protection awareness campaigns rolled out to staff on a regular basis. Also, my Department has a data breach protocol in place for the management of data breach incidents.

## EU Programmes

368. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department or the Defence Forces are preparing a national strategy for military mobility; if so, if such a strategy will be presented to the PESCO Military Mobility Project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29340/21]

369. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Defence his views on whether it is appropriate for Ireland to be involved in an observer capacity in view of the public statements by the Dutch head of the PESCO Military Mobility Project, that this is an important boost for EU NATO co-operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29341/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 368 and 369 together.

There is currently a PESCO Military Mobility project on military mobility across the EU and Ireland has observer status on this project. The purpose of this observer status is simply to identify and review any implications which may potentially arise for Ireland from this project.

The Military Mobility project is seen as a key priority for the EU and its member states and is part of a broader set of initiatives to improve military mobility, not just at national levels, but also within EU and NATO. for both exercises and operational reasons The project is led by Netherlands.

There are no plans currently by Ireland to seek approval to change Ireland's observer status, which allows us to attend meetings and provides us with access to information that is not restricted to the participating Member States. There is no financial impact to our observer status on this project. Meetings are attended by Brussels based Department of Defence staff.

## Defence Forces

370. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 450 of 18 May 2021, if he will provide a further breakdown in origin for the outstanding Defence Forces Workplace Relations Commission complaints; if he will provide a complete breakdown of the 28 WRC complaints by origin per service, that is, Army, Naval Service and Air Corps in tabular form; and if he will provide a breakdown and further details regarding the other category. [29475/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** A complete breakdown of the 28 WRC complaints received by my Department, by origin per service in the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) is as follows:

Type of Complaint	Army	Naval Service	Air Corps	Other
Won - not upheld*		1	3	2
Lost - upheld			1	
Settled or Withdrawn**	1	1	10	
Ongoing	3	1	3	2

As per correspondence dated to your office on 28th May 2021:

\* The correct number of Complaints Won (not upheld) should have read 6 in PQ 26471

\*\* The correct figure for Complaints Settled or Withdrawn should have read 12 in PQ 26471

The category titled "Other" in the table above refers to complaints made to the Workplace

Relations Commission by non-PDF members, including members of the Reserve Defence Force and the general public regarding issues concerning the Defence Forces.

### Defence Forces

371. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Defence the number of vacancies by rank in the military police; if a recruitment campaign for same will occur in quarter 3 2021. [29488/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Vacant positions in the Military Police Corps (MP Corps) are filled by serving members of the Permanent Defence Force and so no external recruitment campaigns are envisaged.

Serving personnel, on successful completion of the required courses, are inducted into the MP Corps. Such courses are ongoing and, in addition to the current training pipeline, further courses are being considered and another is due to commence shortly.

For operational security reasons it would be inappropriate to release the strength figures of the MP Corps.

### Protected Disclosures

372. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Defence the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29630/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The following table sets out the number of protected disclosures received from 2016 to date.

Year	Number of disclosures
2016	2
2017	11
2018	4
2019	4
2020	12
2021 (as of 27th May)	9

This figure relates to all Protected Disclosures which have been made both to the Department and to the Defence Forces.

In accordance with the terms of section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 an annual report in relation to the total number of protected disclosures made in the preceding year is prepared and published on the departmental website [www.defence.ie/what-we-do/protected-disclosures](http://www.defence.ie/what-we-do/protected-disclosures). The report for 2020 is being prepared.

### Cybersecurity Policy

373. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence if upgrades will be made to the Defence Forces internal IT systems in view of the cyber attack; the funding being made available; the headcount of personnel being dedicated to defence IT cyber defence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29669/21]



**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I want to assure you that my Department and the Defence Forces implement a programme of continuous review in relation to ICT security in order to keep up to date with current threat levels.

The Defence Forces are constantly researching new and emerging technologies in order to enhance the security of the Defence Forces' network infrastructure. Significant and substantial security enhancements have been made to the Defence Forces' networks in recent years. For operational security reasons, the headcount of the personnel dedicated to IT Cyber Defence will not be disclosed as it would be inappropriate to provide information that may in any way assist those with malicious intent.

### **Defence Forces**

374. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel vaccinated; the hierarchy of defence personnel to be vaccinated; if the roll-out is dependent on HSE staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29670/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am informed by the Military Authorities that, as of 27 May 2021, 3,055 Defence Forces personnel have received their first dose of a vaccine and a further 1,223 personnel have received their second dose.

The COVID-19 vaccine Allocation Strategy was developed by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) and the Department of Health, endorsed by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), and approved by Government. It sets out a provisional list of groups for vaccination. The Defence Forces has established vaccine prioritisation which is in line with this national allocation strategy.

Initial vaccination priority is for Defence Force personnel who are providing front line support to the HSE and National Ambulance Service (NAS) in the national effort to combat COVID 19. Defence Forces personnel have been, and continue to be, heavily engaged in providing front line support in a number of key areas which includes but is not limited to; Testing program support, Vaccination program support, and the Mandatory Quarantine Scheme.

In addition, where possible, Defence Forces personnel selected for overseas service, will be vaccinated prior to their deployment. This will be subject to availability of a vaccine which is coordinated through the HSE.

Defence Forces personnel have been vaccinated by both HSE personnel (including NAS) and by Defence Forces medical personnel..

As the national vaccination programme continues to gather pace, other Defence Forces personnel will also be vaccinated as they fall into the designated age categories for vaccination.

### **Air Corps**

375. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the status of the purchasing of dedicated troop carriers for the Air Corps; the expected costs and timeline involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29671/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My priority as Minister for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service is maintained to the greatest extent possible. This is primarily to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their

roles assigned by Government as set out in the White Paper on Defence. Equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and Equipment Development Planning (EDP) process.

In this context, the principal aim over the period of the White Paper is to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements at home and overseas. Budget 2021 provides a Capital allocation of €131m for investment in Defence equipment and barracks infrastructure and will enable continued investment in major equipment platforms such as Defence Forces vehicle fleet. The increased capital funding for 2021 builds on increased levels of capital expenditure totalling €392m over the years 2018 – 2020.

In relation to air-based capability, my immediate priorities have been the acquisition of three Pilatus PC-12 aircraft in the Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) role and for two Airbus C295 maritime patrol aircraft. An additional PC-12 was also acquired in response to the Covid 19 situation. Some €276 million, including VAT, has been committed to the acquisition of these enhanced capabilities. No decisions have been made for the acquisition of additional aircraft in other roles such as dedicated troop carriers.

While the option of acquiring a wider military lift capability has been mentioned, it is not identified as an action for acquisition in the present 5 year Equipment Development Plan, which was developed through a joint civil-military approach. Much of this longer range lift capability for military purposes is provided by way of chartering aircraft through a competitive procurement process on an as-required basis. To date, this has been considered to be the most cost effective approach taking account of the acquisition, running and maintenance costs of larger aircraft in the context of their expected usage and contingency requirements. The overall priorities in the EDP will remain under review as it is progressively implemented and taking account of funding availability

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have the necessary resources available to them, including a modern and effective range of equipment which is line with best international standards in order to fulfil all roles assigned to them by Government.

## **Defence Forces**

**376. Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence if all documents and data on serving and retired personnel is held in digitised or paper form; if this is GDPR compliant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29672/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Personal data on behalf of both serving and retired personnel is held compliant with GDPR. This data can be stored in paper or digitised form.

The Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) is the Data Controller for Óglaigh na hÉireann and is responsible for the processing of personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. Óglaigh na hÉireann engages with the Data Protection Commission on an ongoing basis to ensure best practice. Óglaigh na hÉireann takes its data protection responsibilities very seriously and makes every effort to ensure that personal data is appropriately safeguarded. Further, there is a data breach protocol in place for the management of data breach incidents that may occur.

## Defence Forces

377. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the expenditure on Defence Forces food in 2019 and 2020; the starting income and other allowances for Defence Forces chefs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29673/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Defence Forces food requirements, both at home and overseas and encompassing rations, pack rations, provisions and front of house catering services, are provided for from within Subhead A.14.3. (Defence Forces: Catering and Provisions) of the Defence Vote. The amounts spent on Defence Forces food requirements in 2019 and 2020 are set out in the table below.

Year	A.14.3: Defence Forces: Catering and Provisions
2019	€7.3 million
2020	€7.4 million

Public Sector pay and allowance rates are determined centrally by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. All Defence Forces personnel are in receipt of basic pay and applicable allowances as determined by their rank, length of service and qualifications.

Currently, the ranks serving as Chefs in the Defence Forces are all pre-2013 entrants and range in rank from Corporal to Company Quartermaster Sergeant. The weekly basic pre-2013 pay rate of a Corporal extends from €628.69 to €662.63, with an additional entitlement to a weekly Military Service Allowance payment of €133.05. The weekly basic pre-2013 pay rate of a Company Quartermaster Sergeant extends from €785.38 to €845.05, with an additional entitlement to a weekly Military Service Allowance payment of €141.63. In addition, all pre-2013 Defence Forces Chefs with the appropriate qualifications also receive an additional Chef's Allowance payment of €56.77 per week.

## Defence Forces

378. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the current and capital funding dedicated to the Army Ranger Wing and Naval Service divers in 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29674/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Vote 36 Defence is managed through a single programme with all operational outputs delivered from a single set of forces encompassing the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. Dedicated current and capital expenditure costs for the Army Ranger Wing and Naval Service divers are not identified separately, but are included in the overall programme costs across the appropriate subheads of the Vote.

Defence Current and Capital expenditure in 2019 and 2020 is as set out in the table below.

Vote 36 (Defence)	Current Expenditure €m	Capital Expenditure €m
2019	618.3	137.8
2020	622.4	158.6

## Defence Forces

379. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of purchasing petrol and diesel for Defence Forces vehicles in 2019 and 2020; the number of electric vehicles; the

number of electric vehicle charging points in Defence Forces installations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29675/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The acquisition of new equipment and the upgrading of equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for the Defence Organisation. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment priorities planning process.

In this context the principal aim over the period of the White Paper is to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements at home and overseas. Budget 2021 provides a Capital allocation of €131m for investment in Defence equipment and barracks infrastructure and will enable continued investment in major equipment platforms such as Defence Forces vehicle fleet. The increased capital funding for 2021 builds on increased levels of capital expenditure totalling €392m over the years 2018 – 2020.

Certain purchasing is carried out by the Defence Forces directly under delegation of financial responsibility which permits the Defence Forces to procure a wide range of goods and services directly, this includes the purchasing of non-armoured vehicles and fuel for the entire fleet.

I am advised by the military authorities that the total cost (inclusive of VAT) of purchasing petrol and diesel for the Defence Forces fleet of vehicles in the years in question is as set out in the table below.

Year	Diesel	Petrol	Total
2019	€2,423,915.65	€28,178.83	€2,452,094.48
2020	€1,797,550.62	€19,897.71	€1,817,448.33

I am further advised by the military authorities that the Defence Forces vehicle fleet currently consists of approximately 1,700 individual vehicles of different types and configurations. Of this number there are currently forty one (41) electric powered vehicles (EVs) and three (3) hybrid vehicles.

The table below gives the full breakdown of the forty four vehicles by vehicle type and year of purchase.

**Table 1: Breakdown of Defence Forces electric and hybrid vehicles by vehicle type and date of purchase**

Vehicle Type				
Year of Purchase	Saloon	Forklift	Stores Vehicle	Electric Buggy
2002		2		
2005		3		
2008		2		
2013		3		
2016		1		
2017		1		
2018			1	
2019	3 (hybrid)			
2020	8			11
2021	8			1
Total	16 + 3 (hybrid)	12	1	12

The Defence Forces maintain two fleets of vehicles; the military fleet and the administrative

fleet. The military fleet, which consists of military specific vehicles such as armoured vehicles, trucks and off-road SUVs, comprises approximately 55% of the fleet. The administrative fleet are vehicles that can be purchased commercially such as saloon, stores vehicles and minibuses. They comprise approximately 45% of the Defence Forces fleet.

In line with Government policy in relation to the Clean Vehicle Directive, the Defence Forces are committed to procuring vehicles that have reduced carbon emissions.

Due to the specific nature and requirements of the military fleet of vehicles and the locations where they are likely to operate, these vehicles are Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) type and will be replaced, as required, with fossil fuel ICE vehicles for the reasons outlined above. The Defence Forces, however, endeavours to replace these ICE vehicles with more energy efficient models where possible. For example, the new SUV and Troop Carrying Vehicle (TCV) fleets will be replaced with EURO 6 compliant engines which will result in a 50% reduction in emissions compared to the older EURO 3 engines which they replace.

The Defence Forces has committed to replacing the administrative fleet with energy efficient (green vehicles) as the technology allows. To date the investment in energy efficient vehicles as outlined in Table 1 above amounts to €1.2m inclusive of VAT. The Defence Forces has committed to spend a minimum of 6% of the DF vehicle replacement budget on EV starting in 2020 and a minimum of 8% in 2021, with a commitment to increase investment by a minimum of 2% of budget each subsequent year. Already in 2021 the Defence Forces have taken delivery of eight (8) EV saloons and an electric buggy. A further eight (8) EV stores vehicles have been ordered with delivery expected in Q2.

The Corps of Engineers have also invested in supporting infrastructure with the installation of 19 EV chargers across 16 Defence Forces locations to sustain the enlargement of the Defence Forces Electric Vehicle fleet into the future.

I am satisfied that, with these new acquisitions and the planning for future clean vehicle procurements, the Defence Forces will continue to have the necessary modern and effective range of equipment available to them in order to fulfil all roles assigned to them by Government.

### **Defence Forces**

380. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the estimated cost of providing tech pay to defence personnel in the CIS corps in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29676/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** For reasons of operational security, It would be inappropriate for me to comment on specific matters relating to the Defence Forces' Communications and Information Service (CIS).

### **Defence Forces**

381. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence if there will be a recruitment competition aimed at attracting skillsets such as cyber security, statisticians and data analysts in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29677/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** It has not been possible to gather the required information in the turnaround time for PQs. I will revert to the Deputy when the information has been gathered.



### Defence Forces

382. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the number of courses cancelled or postponed in 2020 and to date in 2021 due to Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29679/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In 2021, 19 courses were paused in January in response to COVID-19 pandemic conditions at that time and rescheduled for later in the 2021 training year. One (1) course of training was cancelled and deferred until 2022 pending a Training Needs Analysis.

In 2020, the DF Training Management System records that 77 courses were cancelled. 153 courses are recorded as pending, commenced, deferred or suspended.

### Defence Forces

383. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Permanent Defence Forces personnel who have applied to re-enlist to date; the number reinducted by rank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29680/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Last April, the former Minister with responsibility for Defence, launched a scheme to re-enlist former Permanent Defence Force (PDF) enlisted personnel. The focus of the scheme was those former PDF personnel with particular skillsets, identified by the Chief of Staff, where shortages exist. The scheme allows for initial re-enlistment for a minimum of six months and up to 3 years and the duration of the re-enlistment offered depends on the vacancies that exist.

As of 30 April 2021, following recommendations from the Chief of Staff, 56 personnel have been inducted. The number of personnel, by rank, that have re-enlisted to date under the scheme for the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps, is broken down as follows:

Rank	Army	Naval Service	Air Corps	Total
CQMS	0	1	1	2
Sergeant	5	0	2	7
Corporal	8	0	2	10
Private	35	1	1	37

I welcome the re-enlistment of these personnel and wish them well in their renewed careers in the Defence Forces. Their important contribution to the operational effectiveness of the Defence Forces is appreciated.

I understand that the Chief of Staff will make further recommendations for personnel to be re-enlisted in the coming period.

### Defence Forces

384. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Defence the status of all Naval Service ships currently not at sea; the reason they are not at sea; when they will be ready to be deployed once again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29681/21]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Naval Service is the State's principal sea-going agency tasked with a variety of defence and other

roles. In this context, I would highlight the security role of the Naval Service, a role which by its nature can go unrecognised or unacknowledged. I am advised that the fleet is managed to ensure maximum availability to meet operational requirements.

The Naval Service has nine ships. Two ships are currently in operational reserve but can be called upon for surge operations in times of national emergency, as was the case when a ship was taken out of operational reserve and deployed to Cork City for COVID-19 support to the HSE for a number of weeks last year. In addition one ship is in the process of a mid-life re-fit which is expected to last 18 - 24 months. There are 6 operational ships that remain available at present.

The Deputy will appreciate that, for operational and security reasons, it would not be appropriate to disclose details of the operational deployment of any individual vessel in the Naval Service. I can assure the Deputy that notwithstanding current challenges being experienced, the Naval Service continues to carry out the roles assigned by Government, including fishery protection and maritime security operations.

### **Special Educational Needs**

385. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Education the number of transport places that were made available for children to take part in the summer education programme for children with complex needs in 2020; the number of children to avail of transport during the programme for children with complex needs in 2020; the cost of transport for the programme for children with complex needs in 2020; the proportion of this which was spent on direct transport; the proportion of this which was spent on transport grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29477/21]

410. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Education the number of transport places that were made available for children to take part in the Summer Education Programme 2020; the number of children to avail of transport during the programme; the cost of transport for same; the proportion of this which was spent on direct transport; the proportion of this which was spent on transport grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29476/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 385 and 410 together.

School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education. In the current school year over 114,100 children, including over 14,700 children with special educational needs, are transported on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country at a cost of over €224.7m in 2020.

With regard to transport arrangements for the Summer Programme 2020, as the provision of transport was not possible due to Covid 19 restrictions at that time, my Department committed to providing grant funding to support families with the cost of transport arrangements for those children who were eligible for school transport and who were approved to participate in the school based Summer Programme.

School Transport Section has processed payment of these grants to all eligible families for which all required details have been received. To date, payment has been made to over 900 families at a cost of over €400,000. School Transport Section is continuing to process payments of these grants to families who are eligible as information is received.

## **Special Educational Needs**

386. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Education the provisions she is taking to increase special class capacity in County Wexford for specific learning disability reading for the 2021-2022 academic year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29090/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A new model for allocating special education teachers (SETs) to mainstream schools was introduced from September 2017, based on the profiled needs of schools. Over 13,600 SETs are currently provided to mainstream schools to support the learning needs of pupils who have additional needs in literacy, including those arising from specific learning difficulties.

It is the policy of my Department, in accordance with the principles of inclusive education, that pupils with such additional learning needs are supported in mainstream classes with additional provision made by a special education teacher.

In September 2018, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was requested to develop Policy Advice on Education Provision in Special Classes and Special Schools to examine whether placement in specialist settings brings about improved educational outcomes and experiences, relative to their ability, for students with special educational needs.

This Policy Advice is expected to be completed in the coming weeks.

My Department is also arranging for a review of the policy on reading classes and schools. This review will inform future policy for supporting children with special educational needs and the place of this specialist provision in those supports.

## **Special Educational Needs**

387. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Education if she will ensure that the 124 special schools open for the 2021 July provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29091/21]

417. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education if she will provide a home-based programme for eligible children and young persons who cannot avail of the 2021 summer provision scheme in a local school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29586/21]

418. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Education the dates a school is allowed to run the 2021 summer provision scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29587/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 387, 417 and 418 together.

The Government has approved the provision of significantly expanded summer education programmes for pupils with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage, as a COVID-19 pandemic response measure, for summer 2021.

This ensures that for first time all primary and post-primary schools have the opportunity to provide summer programmes for students with complex needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage.

The total funding available to provide the programme is up to €40 million, a one hundred per cent increase on the allocation for summer provision in 2020.

The programmes for mainstream students in primary and post-primary schools are new programmes for 2021, building upon previous summer programmes for pupils with complex special educational needs and those in provided in DEIS schools last year. The existing Special Class and Special School Programme has been expanded from 4 to 5 weeks.

While participation in the programmes is voluntary, enhanced measures have been put in place to encourage schools to offer the programme, including measures to reduce the administrative burden, provision of funding to schools towards preparation and overseeing of the programmes, earlier payment of school staff and provision to recruit newly qualified teachers graduating this summer to work on the programme.

The programme's aims are to support students to re-engage with education, to build their confidence and increase their motivation, promote wellbeing and for some who are at key transition stages, help to ensure they can move on to their planned educational placement next September along with their peers.

A home-based summer programme will continue to be available for students with complex needs where their schools are not providing a school-based programme.

The programmes were developed following extensive engagement with education and disability stakeholders. Information issued to all schools last week regarding the school-based programme, including the link to an online portal where schools can register their interest in participating. All the documentation has also been published on [www.gov.ie/summerprovision](http://www.gov.ie/summerprovision).

Information on the home-based programme, including application forms, will be provided to primary schools in the coming days.

I encourage the school communities to take full advantage of this opportunity and offer this valuable programme to their students.

### **Schools Amalgamation**

388. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Education the consultation process required when an application for amalgamation of schools has been made; and if there is a statutory duty in this regard. [29121/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** As the decision-making authority for any amalgamation is the patron/trustees of the schools concerned, it is open to any patron to submit proposals to the Department for consideration.

Any proposed change involves extensive negotiations at local level and must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of students, parents, teachers, local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system.

The Patron and relevant stakeholders are also advised to consider the implications that any amalgamation proposal may have on items such as school accommodation, funding, staffing and school transport so that an informed decision can be made.

### **School Curriculum**

389. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education if efforts will be made to ensure inclusivity and visibility of breastfeeding families in school textbooks and curricula; and if she

will make a statement on the matter. [29124/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** Some curriculum specifications and the various syllabuses have specific curriculum content related to this topic. In subjects or modules where it is not specifically mentioned the topic of breastfeeding may occur during class conversation and through interactions with students.

For example, from a nutritional aspect the subject of breastfeeding may come up in Post Primary Home Economics when discussing healthy lifestyles and nutritional requirements across all ages. In the Leaving Certificate Applied Childcare/Community care module on the care of babies and young children, Unit 1 addresses breast and bottle feeding.

From a social aspect, Junior Cycle Home Economics includes Strand Two on exploring the roles and responsibilities of the family while Leaving Certificate Home Economics includes Topic 3.1.6: Family As A Caring Unit. In Leaving Certificate Applied Social Education, the module on Social and Health Education, Unit 2: Relationships – the topic may be covered while discussing parenting and the needs that children have at various stages of their development.

Further relevant subjects would be within the SPHE curriculum. Junior Cycle SPHE Strand Two: Minding Myself and Others contains learning outcomes 2.3: describe what promotes a sense of belonging in school, at home and in the wider community and their own role in creating an inclusive environment and 2.4: distinguish between appropriate care giving and receiving. At Leaving Certificate level, SPHE aims to develop health literacy, both for the individual student and for groups. Health literacy is the capacity of individuals to obtain discerningly, interpret and understand health information; this includes the confidence to access health services and the competence to use such information and services in ways that enhance health. Once students' health literacy skills are developed, they will be able to seek out relevant knowledge and information using a variety of sources including digital sources.

Additionally, the Department of Health has produced a Breastfeeding Information Pack for Junior Cycle students in Irish Secondary Schools.

The Information Pack was commissioned jointly by the Department of Health and the HSE Population Health Directorate, and developed by researchers from Health Promotion, Training & Support Services and Elm Training under the direction of a multidisciplinary, multisectoral expert advisory committee with representation from the relevant statutory and voluntary health services, SPHE coordinators and teachers from the relevant education sectors. The views and opinions of Junior Cycle students from a diversity of urban and rural schools were also pivotal in the development of the Information Pack.

The rationale for the initiative is contained in Action 42 of 'Breastfeeding in Ireland: A Five Year Strategic Action Plan' (Department of Health and Children, Oct. 2005), which recommended introducing breastfeeding information and promotion to schoolchildren at all levels of education within the context of the SPHE curriculum.

In general, my Department does not have a role in approving, commissioning, sponsoring or endorsing any content in any educational textbook. The current policy within my Department is not to endorse any particular product or publication, including textbooks. There are a small number of exceptions where my Department has procured textbooks or resources in order to fill a need – for example with Leaving certificate Japanese and Italian. However, as with all textbooks there is no obligation for a school to use these in their delivery of the curriculum. Apart from a small number of prescribed texts at post-primary, determined by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the decisions on which textbooks to use in primary and post-primary schools are taken at school level.



The majority of textbooks are commissioned and published by educational publishers, and schools select their books from those available from a number of publishers. The Irish Educational Publishers Association (IEPA) meets with the NCCA in order to discuss the curriculum and to be made aware of any requirements in the curriculum. However the content of any individual textbook is determined by the publisher themselves, and therefore any queries regarding specific content in any particular textbook should be directed to the publisher.

The role of the school is to provide an appropriate education for all its pupils. A stable, secure learning environment is an essential requirement to achieve this goal. Schools have autonomy in choosing the resources and programmes that best support the work within their own classrooms

### Education Policy

390. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Education if a policy is in place to ensure that in areas in which new schools are needed that the facilities of existing schools do not become neglected which could lead to an undesirable migration to the newer schools with the more modern facilities as in the case of Howth, Dublin 13, planning area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29157/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** New schools are established by my Department on the basis of identified demographic demand in an area, and only after consideration of the capacity of existing schools to absorb the expected school place demand. Furthermore, such new schools are required to build their enrolments incrementally, with an intake of Junior Infants or First Years each year, in order to mitigate any impact on the enrolments at other schools in the area. As the new school's enrolment capacity, therefore, increases in tandem with emerging demographic demand, it is not expected that there would be a shift in pupil attendance from existing to newer schools.

Under the National Development Plan (NDP), increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand. The main focus of resources over the last decade and for the coming period is on provision of additional capacity to cater for increasing demographics. The second half of the NDP (from 2023 onwards) will see an increasing focus on the upgrade and refurbishment of the existing school stock.

Under the Ireland Project 2040, we will invest €8.4 billion (compared to €4.9 billion in the previous decade) in primary and post primary school buildings.

The immediate priority of my Department is providing new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place.

### Schools Building Projects

391. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education the status of contacts with a school (details supplied) in respect of the need for a new building programme at the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29189/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The school referred to by the Deputy contacted my Department's Planning and Building Unit last year seeking a new school build-

ing. The school authority were advised that as their school was not on the Department's Capital programme, it was not possible to proceed with a new school building project at this time. They were advised that as part of the Schools Deep Energy Retrofit Programme, all schools built prior to 2008 will be eligible under the national programme of works within the National Development Plan commencing from 2023 to have an energy retrofit carried out with a view to increasing comfort levels and reducing CO2 emissions and energy bills.

The school authority were also advised that the Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme is available should the school require additional accommodation and the Emergency Works Scheme could be used to address any immediate Health and Safety issues.

### **Departmental Properties**

392. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education her plans for an unused site at (details supplied) which was previously used for temporary accommodation; if her attention has been drawn to the local interest in the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29190/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** My officials are currently reviewing this matter and will follow up directly with the Deputy's office.

### **School Funding**

393. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education the status of an application to the emergency works scheme by a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29239/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question have submitted an application under my Departments Emergency Works Scheme. The school have been asked to provide additional information in support of their applicaiton, this information has not been received to date.

On receipt of the additional information the application will be assessed and a decision will issue to the school via Esinet.

### **School Curriculum**

394. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education if secondary school principals have the authority to remove a subject from the school syllabus for leaving certificate if there are fewer than ten students willing to participate in that subject; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29240/21]

395. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education the options available to fifth year students whose school refuses to offer them their subjects of choice for the leaving certificate thus affecting their career path and future when there is a dedicated teacher in the school already teaching the subject; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29241/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 394 and 395 together.

Teacher allocations to all second level schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. In accordance with these rules, each school management authority is required to organise its subject options within the limit of its approved teacher allocation. It is a matter for the school to employ teachers up to the limit of its approved allocation and at its discretion to deploy those teachers to the subject areas that the school chooses to provide.

A school authority may, from time to time, encounter unanticipated difficulty which it has not been in a position to immediately resolve, through its school planning and management processes in meeting essential curricular commitments to pupils within the normal staffing allocation. In such circumstances, my Department will consider requests by a school authority for a staffing concession as short-term support i.e. curricular concessions.

If a School Authority is not satisfied with the decision of the Department in regard to its application for a curricular concession, it may appeal to the Post Primary Independent Appeals Board. The Post Primary Appeals Board, which operates independently of the Department, considers appeals by school authorities against decisions of the Department in regard to teaching staff allocations to all Second Level Schools. The Board will only consider appeals made by the relevant school management authority and its decisions are final.

### School Staff

396. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to a matter regarding a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29243/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

For the 2021/22 school year, an improvement of one point in the appointment threshold in primary schools has been introduced and schools will be provided with class teachers on the basis of 1 teacher for every 25 pupils which is a historical low ratio. In addition, a three point reduction in the retention scale has also been introduced for September 2021. These measures will help to ensure that less pupils are required to recruit or retain a teacher.

The staffing process contains an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Primary Staffing Appeals Board. The school referred to by the Deputy submitted a staffing appeal which was refused by the Appeals Board as the grounds of the appeal did not warrant a departure from the staffing schedule. The school has been notified of this decision. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

My Department has published a suite of helpful guidance for the safe and sustainable operation of schools including illustrative Primary Classroom Layouts to facilitate physical distancing requirements for primary schools. Each school should use their COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe operation through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in line with the public health advice. This guidance is focused on the practical steps school must take to minimise the risk of transmission of infection.

The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. The Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom ac-

commodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.).

### **School Accommodation**

397. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to a matter regarding a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29244/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that my Department has been in contact with the Parish in relation to potential acquisition of Booterstown Parish Hall.

An assessment and valuation of the hall is currently being carried out and once completed, my Department will be in a position to enter into negotiations for the potential acquisition of the hall.

### **School Accommodation**

398. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education if a school (details supplied) has accepted its offer of temporary accommodation for September 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29247/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The school to which the Deputy refers was established in September 2019 and is currently located in interim accommodation at Kill Lane, Deansgrange, Co. Dublin, which can accommodate 2 x mainstream classrooms plus ancillary space. It should be noted that the school authorities were informed before occupying Kill Lane that it would be for a two year period only; they were aware that a move to alternative interim accommodation would be required for the 2021 academic year to cater for the schools growing enrolments.

There is insufficient accommodation in the existing building to cater for the 2021 academic year. As a result, officials in my Department have put the necessary arrangements in place to relocate the school to a premises at Eblana Avenue in Dún Laoghaire, which is under the ownership of Dublin Dún Laoghaire Education Training Board (DDLETB). This alternative interim accommodation will suitably accommodate the schools growing enrolments for the academic years 2021 and 2022 pending provision of their permanent school project. My Department issued both verbal and written communication on Wednesday 28 April 2021, informing the Patron of these arrangements and my officials understand that the school was in turn informed of this communication the same day.

My Department has made these arrangements and communicated them to the school through its Patron Body.

### **Special Educational Needs**

399. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to the case of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29248/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A new model for allocating Special Education Teachers to mainstream schools was introduced from

September 2017, based on the profiled needs of schools.

The allocations were updated for schools with effect from September 2019, with limited readjustments being applied for at that time.

The allocations have remained in place for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years, with some adjustments made over the course of the model for schools which achieved developing status, or successfully appealed on the grounds of exceptional circumstances arising in their schools. Allocations are also provided for new schools which open each year.

DES Circulars 007 and 008 2019, stated that the allocations being made for 2019 would initially remain in place for a minimum of two years, following which, revised profiled allocations would be considered for schools from September 2021.

The NCSE Policy advice 'A Proposed new Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs (2014)' on which the SET allocation model is based, recommended that 'the additional teaching supports be left in place initially for a two-year period. As the new model becomes embedded in the system, this may be extended to three years.'

In order to minimise disruption for schools, in the current circumstances, and to provide for continuity of allocations, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Special Education and Inclusion have agreed to maintain the existing Special Education Teacher Allocations for schools for the 2021/22 school year, with re profiled allocations now due to be made from September 2022.

Additional allocations will continue to be made for new schools, schools which achieve developing status, or for exceptional circumstances arising in schools, in the interim.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in the Primary and Post Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2021/22 school year.

Schools who qualify for additional mainstream developing school posts in accordance with these criteria also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

There are now over 13,600 Special Education Teachers allocated to mainstream primary and post primary schools.

This represents an increase of 40% in the total number of special education teachers allocated to schools since 2011, at which time 9740 teachers were allocated.

Maintaining the existing allocations of Special Education Teachers for the 2021/22 school year means that schools will not have to engage in an extensive redeployment of posts, or re-clustering, this year.

It also means that schools will have greater levels of certainty as to the staff that they will have in place for September.

No school will see a cut, or reduction, to their special education teaching support next year.

Where schools have growing enrolments year on year, they will receive an increased allocation, pending the next re-profiling.

Even in circumstances where some schools were anticipating a greater level of increase year on year, if full re profiling had occurred next year, the increased allocations for developing status combined with the existing allocation of the school will show an increased overall teacher



allocation for these schools in 2021/22.

The allocations for 2021/22 which are being maintained comprise the allocations which were made for schools from September 2019 plus any additionality achieved since plus any developing hours for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years.

It is also acknowledged that there are some circumstances, which may arise in schools, which fall outside the allocations for developing school status.

These relate to exceptional or emergency circumstances which could not have been anticipated e.g. where the school profile changes very significantly, or where other exceptional circumstances have arisen in a school and which may require a review of schools capacity to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need it in the school, or of their utilisation of their allocations.

A process is available where schools can seek a review of their allocations by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

I understand that this school has advised that they intend to submit an application for a review of their special education teacher allocations to the NCSE, and this application will then be considered by that body.

Based on the enrolments projected by the school for September 2021, the school is also due to receive some additional allocation of Special Education Teaching hours for September, based on the fact that the school will have increased enrolments.

### **School Staff**

400. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to the case of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29249/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment on the previous 30 September. The criteria for the allocation of posts are communicated to school managements annually and are available on the Department website (circular 0005/2021).

Each school receives an allocation in respect of Guidance Provision, calculated in accordance with circular 0005/2021 and by reference to the approved enrolment.

The allocation for Guidance Provision is provided separately and transparently on each school's staffing schedule. These posts have been ring-fenced so they can only be used for guidance activities and to meet the guidance needs of the school in accordance with the school's Guidance Plan.

As part of COVID-19 operational supports for the current school year, an additional allocation in respect of Guidance Provision has been provided to all schools to support student well-being. This additional allocation has also been allocated to schools for the 2021/22 school year.

### **State Examinations**

401. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Education if consideration will be given to seizures as a result of epilepsy prior to or during State examinations being included in the scheme of reasonable accommodations at certificate examinations; if examination candidates who suffered a seizure will be given the opportunity to re-sit any impacted examinations with the same examination cycle; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29285/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **Schools Building Projects**

402. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education the status of and the time schedule planned for the completion of a school (details supplied) in County Dublin. [29295/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The permanent school building project for the school referred to by the Deputy has been assigned to my Department's Design & Build delivery programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Manager to progress the project through the relevant stages of architectural planning, tender and construction.

The design stage is nearing completion and the Project Manager for the Design & Build programme is working towards submission of the planning application in Quarter 2 2021. An on-line meeting to share the plans with the school representatives has been held.

Until such time as planning permission has been secured, it will not be possible to provide a timeline for progression of the project to tender and construction stages.

### **School Funding**

403. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education the funding options available for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29297/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department has received an application for capital funding, under the 'Additional School Accommodation (ASA) Scheme', from the school authority in question. This application is under assessment by my officials and a decision will be issued to the school authority upon completion of this assessment process.

### **Data Protection**

404. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education the nature of the data breaches experienced by her Department since 2018. [29305/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** As the Deputy is aware, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect on 25 May 2018 and any personal data breaches since its introduction are dealt with under the regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Article 4 of the GDPR defines a data breach as ““a breach of security leading to the accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration, unauthorised disclosure of, or access to, personal

data transmitted, stored or otherwise processed”.

Over 90% of the data breaches that occurred in my Department since 2018 are classified as unauthorised disclosure of personal data, while the balance involved the loss of personal data. Data breaches which occurred in my Department were reported to the Data Protection Commission in line with the requirements of the legislation.

### **Schools Building Projects**

405. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education the position regarding an application by a school (details supplied); if design approval for this building project will be approved shortly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29339/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding was approved under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2019 to enable the school in question to build one mainstream classroom with ensuite toilets. Approval to combine a summer works project for a roof upgrade along with enabling works to provide toilets for this September has also been granted as part of this project.

The project has been devolved for delivery to the School Authority and a consultant has been procured. My Department is currently awaiting a Stage 1/2A report to be submitted for assessment.

### **School Staff**

406. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education the estimated cost of a reduction of one at all points of the staffing schedule for primary schools from September 2022; and the net number of teaching posts involved in view of her Department’s predictions of a continuing fall in primary school enrolments. [29342/21]

407. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education her plans to reduce class sizes in primary schools in budget 2022 in view of the finding in the statistical bulletin of July 2020 of her Department that there has been little change in average class size in primary schools over the past 20 years and her public comments in support of further reducing class sizes. [29343/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 407 together.

Under the Programme for Government there is a commitment to seek to make further progress in reducing the pupil teacher ratios in primary schools.

For the 2021/22 school year, an improvement of one point in the appointment threshold in primary schools has been introduced and schools will be provided with class teachers on the basis of 1 teacher for every 25 pupils which is a historical low ratio. Lower thresholds are in place for DEIS Urban Band 1 schools. In addition, a three point reduction in the retention scale has also been introduced for September 2021. These measures will help to ensure that less pupils are required to recruit or retain a teacher.

The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratio show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 16:1 to 15:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2019/20 school year. Average class sizes improved from 24.9 to 24.1 in the same period. The

recent improvement in the staffing schedule will continue the positive trend of improvement in the pupil teacher ratio and class sizes.

Each one point adjustment to the primary staffing schedule requires in the region of 300 posts, at an approximate cost of €14.5 million.

Any further improvement in the staffing schedule will be considered in the context of the annual budgetary process.

### Education Policy

408. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education the estimated annual cost of providing on an ongoing basis release time for administrative and management purposes of one day per week for each teaching principal of a primary school; her plans to bring this about as standard in view of the increased workload and demands on principal teachers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29344/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** As part of the supports provided under The Roadmap for the Full Return to School, specific funding was provided to support Principals who undertake teaching duties in primary schools. This funding provides each teaching principal with a minimum of one release day per week. More than 1,700 primary schools with teaching principals have benefitted from the increase in release days.

The annual cost of one release day per week for each school with a teaching principal is in the region of €17 million.

Schools have been advised that, in the context of COVID-19, the additional allocation of Principal Release Days outlined in Circular 45/2020, “COVID-19 Operational Supports for the Full Return to School” will remain in place for the 2021/22 school year and each school with a teaching principal will have 37 Principal Release Days.

Making standard one release day per week for teaching principals is a budgetary matter and therefore would have to be considered in the context of the annual budgetary process.

### School Staff

409. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education if she will address a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29469/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

For the 2021/22 school year, an improvement of one point in the appointment threshold in primary schools has been introduced and schools will be provided with class teachers on the basis of of 1 teacher for every 25 pupils which is a historical low ratio. In addition, a three point reduction in the retention scale has also been introduced for September 2021. These measures will help to ensure that less pupils are required to recruit or retain a teacher.

My Department has published a suite of helpful guidance for the safe and sustainable opera-

tion of schools including illustrative Primary Classroom Layouts to facilitate physical distancing requirements for primary schools. Each school should use their COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe operation through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in line with the public health advice. This guidance is focused on the practical steps school must take to minimise the risk of transmission of infection.

The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. The Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.).

The staffing process contains an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Primary Staffing Appeals Board. My Department has not received a staffing appeal from the school referred to by the Deputy. The next meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board will be held in June. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

*Question No. 410 answered with Question No. 385.*

### **Schools Refurbishment**

411. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education the amount spent to date on the refurbishment of a school (details supplied); when this project will move to the next phase of works; and the estimated total cost of this project. [29484/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department has provided capital grants of circa € 2.25 million to the school referred to by the Deputy since 2008 for various refurbishment works.

As the Deputy will be aware, a major capital project for the school is included in the Department's school building programme and my Department is currently engaging with the school patron in this regard. The estimated cost is not available at this stage.

### **Special Educational Needs**

412. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education if she will review the decision to refuse additional special education teaching supports in mainstream classes on the grounds of exceptional circumstances for a school (details supplied) in view of the increased number of students who are in need of additional supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29501/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A new model for allocating Special Education Teachers to mainstream schools was introduced from September 2017, based on the profiled needs of schools.

The allocations were updated for schools with effect from September 2019, with limited readjustments being applied for at that time.

The allocations have remained in place for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years, with some adjustments made over the course of the model for schools which achieved developing status, or successfully appealed on the grounds of exceptional circumstances arising in their schools. Allocations are also provided for new schools which open each year.



DES Circulars 007 and 008 2019, stated that the allocations being made for 2019 would initially remain in place for a minimum of two years, following which, revised profiled allocations would be considered for schools from September 2021.

The NCSE Policy advice ‘A Proposed new Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs (2014)’ on which the SET allocation model is based, recommended that ‘the additional teaching supports be left in place initially for a two-year period. As the new model becomes embedded in the system, this may be extended to three years.’

In order to minimise disruption for schools, in the current circumstances, and to provide for continuity of allocations, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Special Education and Inclusion have agreed to maintain the existing Special Education Teacher Allocations for schools for the 2021/22 school year, with re profiled allocations now due to be made from September 2022.

Additional allocations will continue to be made for new schools, schools which achieve developing status, or for exceptional circumstances arising in schools, in the interim.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in the Primary and Post Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2021/22 school year.

Schools who qualify for additional mainstream developing school posts in accordance with these criteria also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

There are now over 13,600 Special Education Teachers allocated to mainstream primary and post primary schools.

This represents an increase of 40% in the total number of special education teachers allocated to schools since 2011, at which time 9740 teachers were allocated.

Maintaining the existing allocations of Special Education Teachers for the 2021/22 school year means that schools will not have to engage in an extensive redeployment of posts, or re-clustering, this year.

It also means that schools will have greater levels of certainty as to the staff that they will have in place for September.

No school will see a cut, or reduction, to their special education teaching support next year.

Where schools have growing enrolments year on year, they will receive an increased allocation, pending the next re-profiling.

Even in circumstances where some schools were anticipating a greater level of increase year on year, if full re profiling had occurred next year, the increased allocations for developing status combined with the existing allocation of the school will show an increased overall teacher allocation for these schools in 2021/22.

The allocations for 2021/22 which are being maintained comprise the allocations which were made for schools from September 2019 plus any additionality achieved since plus any developing hours for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years.

It is also acknowledged that there are some circumstances, which may arise in schools, which fall outside the allocations for developing school status.

These relate to exceptional or emergency circumstances which could not have been an-

anticipated e.g. where the school profile changes very significantly, or where other exceptional circumstances have arisen in a school and which may require a review of schools capacity to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need it in the school, or of their utilisation of their allocations.

As this school is aware, a process is available where schools can seek a review of their allocations by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

As the NCSE is an independent body which has a statutory function to access and review the resources required to provide for special education, where a school has concerns about the outcome of a review conducted by the NCSE, the school should raise that matter directly with the NCSE.

### **School Accommodation**

413. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education the status of the approved extension for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29506/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that the school referred to was approved under the Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2016 for a 2-classroom SEN Base and 1 mainstream classroom.

A Flood Risk Assessment was carried out prior to the granting of Planning Permission which was Department approved and the school was refused planning following this assessment. Refusal for planning was made pre-November 2019 and ongoing consultation and meetings were held with the planning authority to attempt a resolution to this matter.

The Department has engaged the services of Cavan Monaghan ETB to assist in the delivery of this project and to find a design solution that meets Local Authority requirements and mitigates the flooding risk. A Stage 1 preliminary design submission is currently required to be returned to the Department for assessment.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

414. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to the repairs needed to the roof of a school (details supplied); and when it will be fixed. [29510/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to inform the Deputy the Emergency Works Team have not received an application for roof repairs from the school in question.

If the leak in the roof is preventing the school or part thereof from opening they may apply for funding to have the roof repaired under the Emergency Works Scheme which is available on the Esinet portal, otherwise they may use their Minor Works Grant to carry out the repairs.

### **Schools Building Projects**

415. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Education further to Parlia-

mentary Question No. 463 of 18 May 2021, if the site is located in the Booterstown-Blackrock school planning area as voted on during the patronage process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29530/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is at an advanced stage of negotiations with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council regarding the acquisition of a site in their ownership. This site is well located to serve the Booterstown Blackrock School Planning Area.

The school patron has been informed of this development but due to statutory procedures, confidentiality and sensitivities it is not currently possible to advise them of the location of the site. The location will be confirmed to them as soon as it is possible to do so.

My Department is very conscious of the difficulties the school authorities and the families have to contend with and, in this regard, the Department will continue to treat this acquisition as urgent.

### **Period Poverty**

416. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to the important work on the issue of period poverty carried out by the youth advisory panel with the Ombudsman for Children; if she will acknowledge the indignity experienced by young persons who cannot afford appropriate period products every month and the statement made by the UN Committee on Rights of the Child's General comment No. 20 (2016) on implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence; if she will take steps to ensure that all public buildings including schools are equipped to provide free period products; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29577/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I am aware of the important work that is being carried out by the recently established Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) with the Ombudsman For Children on the issue of period poverty and also the statement made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General comment No 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence.

A sub-committee on period poverty chaired by the Department of Health was established in 2019 by the National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG) Committee, led by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. My Department was represented on the sub-committee and contributed to the Discussion Paper on Period Poverty in Ireland, published earlier this year, arising from the work of the sub-committee.

The Programme for Government 2020 makes the following specific commitment under 'Better Opportunities through Education and Research' to provide a range of free, adequate, safe, and suitable period products in all educational publicly-funded settings (including schools, colleges and HEIs), to ensure that no students are disadvantaged in their education by period poverty

In February of this year, the Government took the decision to support the Private Members' Bill, the Free Provision of Period Products Bill, 2021 (Bill 4) which seeks to make period products freely available to all those who need them. The Government has further agreed that the recommendations of the Period Poverty in Ireland Discussion Paper be taken into account in terms of further development of the Bill and that cross-government, interdepartmental, inter-agency and societal support for the Bill and related implementation measures should be sought, including from voluntary and private sector organisations that provide services funded by the

State as well as from public service providers.

The Department of Health is currently establishing an Implementation Group, with representation requested from all Government Departments, to achieve cross sectoral input and to co-ordinate oversight of both the Bill and implementation measures as recommended in the Discussion Paper. My Department has nominated a representative to participate on the Implementation Group and will continue to support the work of the Group in addressing the indignity experienced by those who may need period products every month but cannot afford them.

*Question No. 417 answered with Question No. 387.*

*Question No. 418 answered with Question No. 387.*

### **Departmental Budgets**

419. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Education the funds returned unspent to the Exchequer from her Department's budget in each of the years 2017 to 2020, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29597/21]

420. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Education the funds returned unspent to the Exchequer from her Department and the NCSE assistive technology grant budget in each of the years 2017 to 2020, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29605/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 419 and 420 together.

Details of the surplus to be surrendered from Vote 26 (Department of Education and Skills for 2017-19 and Department of Education for 2020) in respect of the amounts provided by Dáil Éireann are set out in the annual Appropriation Accounts published following audit of the accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The surplus to be surrendered to the Exchequer is the amount of funds voted for the Department's services by Dáil Éireann remaining unspent at year end and also takes account of additional income amounts received during the year. It is considered proper financial management of public voted allocations to retain a certain minimum level of contingency for surplus to surrender each year.

For the information of the Deputy the surplus surrendered by the Department of Education and Skills in each of the years 2017 to 2019 is as follows:

2017: €24.54 Million which equates to 0.3% of the voted budget for that year.

2018: €114.464 Million which equates to 1.2% of the voted budget for that year. The main reason for this surplus surrender was due to EU receipts of €109 million being received late in December 2018 that were expected to be received in January 2019.

2019: €6.263 Million which equates to 0.06% of the voted budget for that year.

The surplus for surrender for 2020 will be finalised at the conclusion of the audit of the Appropriation Account for the Department of Education. However, the provisional figure for 2020 is €138 Million, which equates to 1.6% of the voted budget for the year. This surrender arose due to the reduced costs of certain services within the schools sector due to public health restrictions in place in 2020 and some surplus on the ring-fenced Covid financial supports for schools.

While the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of Special

Education Needs Officers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for assistive technology support, the relevant funding comes from the Department's Vote. The amounts expended in relation to the provision of assistive technology support and the variation against the amount allocated for each of the years 2017 to 2020 (figures for that year being provisional) is set out in the attached table. Any amounts remaining unspent at year end form part of the surplus surrendered to the Exchequer.

The assistive technology scheme is demand led. The Covid pandemic impacted on the amount expended on the scheme in 2020 with the number of grants paid having reduced compared to previous years.

Table:

Total				
Assistive Technology	Expenditure	Allocation	Variation €	Variation %
2017	2,444,727			See Note 1
2018	2,382,785	2,956,583	-573,798	-19%
2019	2,577,180	3,493,593	-916,413	-26%
2020 (Prov.)	2,013,236	3,498,527	-1,485,291	-42%

Note 1: In 2017, the assistive technology for pupils with special education needs allocation for the primary sector was included within an overall allocation for special education initiatives. These initiatives included funding associated with schools for children with autism, Middletown Centre for Autism, visiting teacher service for the hearing and visually impaired and travel expenses for resource teachers. Therefore, while the 2017 assistive technology expenditure outturn is available a specific annual allocation for this year is not.

*Question No. 420 answered with Question No. 419.*

### Education Schemes

421. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Education the number of full-time visiting teachers for the visually impaired by region, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29606/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Visiting teachers for children who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired provide additional supports for such children, their families, and schools. Details of the services which are provided to schools and families by the visiting teacher service are available at *ncse.ie/visiting-teachers*.

The Visiting Teacher Service now forms part of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service for schools.

Visiting Teachers are now recruited, managed, and deployed by the NCSE. Accordingly, I have referred this question, as to the number of full-time visiting teachers for the visually impaired, who are currently in place, by region, to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### Education Schemes

422. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Education if an accurate costing will be provided for the expansion of the visiting teacher service by five full-time posts; and if she will



make a statement on the matter. [29607/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Visiting teachers for children who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired provide additional supports for such children, their families, and schools. Details of the services which are provided to schools and families by the visiting teacher service are available at [ncse.ie/visiting-teachers](http://ncse.ie/visiting-teachers).

The Visiting Teacher Service now forms part of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service for schools.

Visiting teachers are qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of hearing loss and/or visual impairment. They offer longitudinal support to children, their families and schools from the time of referral through to the end of post-primary education.

Each visiting teacher (VT) is responsible for a particular region and is allocated a caseload of students. The VT supports children/young people, parents, guardians, teachers and other professionals involved with the child. The frequency and nature of support takes into account a range of factors based on the individual's needs. The work of the VT involves liaising with other professionals and agencies such as audiological scientists, ophthalmology services, speech and language therapists, low vision specialists, psychologists, early intervention teams, school staffs, and with parents.

The approximate cost of employing an additional five full time visiting teachers is €350,000 per annum for a full year. However, the actual cost of each post will vary depending on the point of scale of the teacher employed or seconded to the post, and the extent of costs associated with travel and visits undertaken, within a region, in any given year.

### Protected Disclosures

423. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education the number of protected disclosures made to her Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29631/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** In accordance with Section 22 of the Protected Disclosure Act 2014, my Department has published information on protected disclosures received during 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 on its website: [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Annual-Report/](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Annual-Report/).

In summary, there have been a total of 18 Protected Disclosures made between 2016 and to date in 2021. This figure relates to Protected Disclosures that were made to me under Section 8 of the Protected Disclosures Act from workers in the Education sector.

The attached table gives a breakdown by year of the disclosures.

PQ 29631/21 Department of Education

To ask the Minister for Education the number of protected disclosures made to her Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021.

Disclosures 2016 to date (includes anonymous disclosures)	
Year	Number
2021 to date	3

Disclosures 2016 to date (includes anonymous disclosures)	
Year	Number
2020	2
2019	1
2018	4
2017	7
2016	1
Total	18

### School Staff

424. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the number of posts of responsibility that would be needed in primary schools to restore posts at the level which pertained prior to the moratorium; the estimated number of posts which were lost through the moratorium; the number that have been restored to date; and the estimated cost of full restoration to the pre-moratorium level for the school year 2021-2022. [29657/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** Budget 2017 allowed for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model and meant lifting the longstanding moratorium on these posts with effect from the 2017/18 school year. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

In total 1700 additional leadership posts have been invested in our primary schools since 2017 which has led to 1 in 3 teachers now holding promoted positions. The Department has committed to annually revising the allocation of Posts of Responsibility to take into account retirements during the school year which ensures that the current level of Posts of Responsibility are maintained in the school system. The most recent update was published earlier this month and is available on the Department's website (circular 0025/2021).

The estimated cost of lifting the moratorium on posts of responsibility and restoring them to pre-moratorium levels at primary level would be in the order of €19m per annum. The most recent comparison of the number of AP posts is attached.

### Number of APIs and APIIs in primary schools

-	2008/09	Primary 2019/20*
APIs	1,605	958
APIIs	8,575	6,382

\*2019/20 figures include the following posts of responsibility which were restored.

APIs - 268

APIIs – 1432

### School Funding

425. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the estimated cost to restore the standard capitation rate for pupils in primary schools to €200 which was the rate

in 2010 prior to cuts; and her views on whether this is a diminishing cost in view of the falling enrolments in primary schools. [29658/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I understand the need for improved capitation funding and I am pleased that budget 2020 has been able to provide for a further 2.5% increase in standard capitation funding for primary schools that applied from the start of the 2020/21 school year. This builds on the 5% increase in capitation announced in budget 2019.

The combined increases given in 2019 and 2020 mean that circa 40% restoration will be achieved.

All schools have received the benefit of the capitation increases awarded to date. It is my intention to seek funding for further capitation increases in future budgets.

While these increases have provided for further restoration, annual funding would need to be increased by an additional €20m approximately to restore grants to pre-2011 levels. This would cost circa €10m at Primary level and €10m at Post-Primary level based on current enrolments.

While Primary enrolments have peaked in the 2018/19 school year those at second level are increasing. By 2024/25 these enrolments are expected to be in excess of 397,580 for the first time in the history of the State.

### **State Examinations**

426. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education the assistance available to a student with severe colour vision deficiency to assist with their junior certificate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29667/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **State Examinations**

427. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Education the assistance available to a student with severe colour vision deficiency to assist with their junior certificate; if the severity of their colour deficiency is taken into account; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29668/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **School Staff**

428. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education if she will ensure that urgent

consideration is given to the request by a school (details supplied) in respect of a teaching allocation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29711/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A new model for allocating Special Education Teachers to mainstream schools was introduced from September 2017, based on the profiled needs of schools.

The allocations were updated for schools with effect from September 2019, with limited readjustments being applied for at that time.

The allocations have remained in place for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years, with some adjustments made over the course of the model for schools which achieved developing status, or successfully appealed on the grounds of exceptional circumstances arising in their schools. Allocations are also provided for new schools which open each year.

DES Circulars 007 and 008 2019, stated that the allocations being made for 2019 would initially remain in place for a minimum of two years, following which, revised profiled allocations would be considered for schools from September 2021.

The NCSE Policy advice ‘A Proposed new Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs (2014)’ on which the SET allocation model is based, recommended that ‘the additional teaching supports be left in place initially for a two-year period. As the new model becomes embedded in the system, this may be extended to three years.’

In order to minimise disruption for schools, in the current circumstances, and to provide for continuity of allocations, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Special Education and Inclusion have agreed to maintain the existing Special Education Teacher Allocations for schools for the 2021/22 school year, with re profiled allocations now due to be made from September 2022.

Additional allocations will continue to be made for new schools, schools which achieve developing status, or for exceptional circumstances arising in schools, in the interim.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in the Primary and Post Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2021/22 school year.

Schools who qualify for additional mainstream developing school posts in accordance with these criteria also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

There are now over 13,600 Special Education Teachers allocated to mainstream primary and post primary schools.

This represents an increase of 40% in the total number of special education teachers allocated to schools since 2011, at which time 9740 teachers were allocated.

Maintaining the existing allocations of Special Education Teachers for the 2021/22 school year means that schools will not have to engage in an extensive redeployment of posts, or re-clustering, this year.

It also means that schools will have greater levels of certainty as to the staff that they will have in place for September.

No school will see a cut, or reduction, to their special education teaching support next year.

Where schools have growing enrolments year on year, they will receive an increased alloca-

tion, pending the next re-profiling.

Even in circumstances where some schools were anticipating a greater level of increase year on year, if full re profiling had occurred next year, the increased allocations for developing status combined with the existing allocation of the school will show an increased overall teacher allocation for these schools in 2021/22.

The allocations for 2021/22 which are being maintained comprise the allocations which were made for schools from September 2019 plus any additionality achieved since plus any developing hours for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years.

It is also acknowledged that there are some circumstances, which may arise in schools, which fall outside the allocations for developing school status.

These relate to exceptional or emergency circumstances which could not have been anticipated e.g. where the school profile changes very significantly, or where other exceptional circumstances have arisen in a school and which may require a review of schools capacity to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need it in the school, or of their utilisation of their allocations.

A process is available where schools can seek a review of their allocations by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

If a school wishes to make an exceptional needs review, they may do so at the following link: [ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Primary-Schools-Review-Application-2020.doc](https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Primary-Schools-Review-Application-2020.doc).

### School Staff

429. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education if school caretakers employed by school boards in receipt of grant aid from her Department in recognised primary and post-primary schools who are pregnant are also encouraged to adhere to guidance (details supplied); and if not, if the necessary changes will be made to allow for same. [29724/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** Guidance issued to employers, including schools, by my Department on arrangements in the context of staff at risk from COVID-19 are all guided by public health advice. *Circular 0021/2021* deals with arrangements specifically in relation to teachers and SNAs in a classroom setting. *Information Note TC 0013/2021* also sets out the working arrangements for the Very High Risk and pregnant teachers/SNAs for the remainder of the current school year. The Department is awaiting updated guidelines from the HSE in relation to pregnant teachers and SNAs. When these guidelines have been updated, the Department will advise employers.

The arrangements for non teaching staff in the context of staff at risk from COVID-19 are set out in *Circular 54/2020*. As above, where there is any updated advice from public health in relation to school staff, the Department will advise employers.

### School Admissions

430. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education if she has received a request from a school (details supplied) to increase the number of places in the school given the short-



age of school places in its catchment area; the consideration being given to this request; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29758/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving an application for additional accommodation from the school in question. However, should an application be received it will be considered and the school authority informed of the outcome.

### **Schools Building Projects**

431. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education if there are or have ever been plans for a primary school on or adjacent to the site known as Abeline Lodge, Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, County Dublin; and the details of any investigatory work, including exploratory documents, drawings or meetings undertaken by her Department in this regard. [29794/21]

432. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education if it was the intention of her Department to award land on or adjacent to the site known as Abeline Lodge, Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, County Dublin to the winner of the 2018 primary school plebiscite; if that site was offered for this purpose; if that intention has since changed or such offer retracted; and the grounds upon which such decisions were made. [29795/21]

433. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education if lands on or adjacent to the site known as Abeline Lodge, Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, County Dublin have been deemed unsuitable for the building of a primary school; and if so, if there are no current or future plans for a primary school to be built on the lands. [29796/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 431, 432 and 433 together.

As the Deputy is aware, in 2018 my Department announced plans to establish 42 new schools between 2019 and 2022. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, including multiple school accommodation requirements in the general South Dublin City area.

In response to this, my Department purchased the site referred to by the Deputy to provide an option in terms of school provision. In this context, a number of potential uses were explored and it was ultimately decided that this site, which is located in the Dún Laoghaire School Planning Area, will best accommodate the new post primary school announced to serve the two school planning areas of Booterstown/Blackrock and Dún Laoghaire.

Design work is ongoing in relation to the proposed development of the post primary school on this site.

*Question No. 432 answered with Question No. 431.*

*Question No. 433 answered with Question No. 431.*

### **School Transport**

434. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education further to Parliamentary

Question No. 994 of 21 April 2021, if the child (details supplied) is eligible for school transport. [29811/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education. In the current school year over 114,100 children, including over 14,700 children with special educational needs, are transported on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country at a cost of over €224.7m in 2020.

The purpose of the Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet their special educational needs. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO).

The child referred to by the Deputy is eligible for transport under the above scheme and was sanctioned to a bus service in April 2014. An additional pupil was sanctioned to the same service for the 2020/21 school year. A larger vehicle to accommodate both pupils and a Bus Escort was sanctioned by School Transport Section in November 2020. This larger vehicle commenced operation on 1st March 2021. The pupil's parent has been contacted and a grant payment has been processed for the period the larger bus service was not available to the parent.

### **School Accommodation**

435. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education

further to Parliamentary Question No. 551 of 10 March 2021, if there has been further progress in advancing a much needed building project at a school (details supplied) in view of the concerns of the wider school community regarding delays in having this much needed additional and upgraded accommodation provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29829/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm to the Deputy, that the long-term accommodation needs of the school in question have been identified and agreed with the school management authority. The brief for building project is currently being developed and will be issued to the school authority for delivery as quickly as possible.

### **School Staff**

436. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the estimated costs of establishing and running the supply panels for primary and special schools in the school year 2020-2021; and her views on retaining this important staffing support in the 2021-2022 school year to ensure that pupils are taught by qualified teachers in the event of teacher absence in a school. [29846/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Roadmap for the Full Return to School provided for comprehensive supports across a range of areas to allow for the safe re-opening of schools, including additional funding of €41.2 million, to provide primary schools with substitute staff. This funding provides more certainty on the availability of substitutes for

primary schools and cover substitutions that are not covered by existing schemes.

The Substitute Teacher Supply Panel has been expanded from a pilot scheme consisting of 6 base schools to 115 Substitute Teacher Supply Panels nationwide, with almost 330 newly appointed Supply Panel teachers employed, providing substitute cover to almost 2,300 schools across the country.

The proficiencies of the Substitute Teacher Supply Panels is being monitored throughout the school year and the schools involved in the supply panels have been informed that the panels will continue for the 2021/22 school year.

### **School Funding**

437. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education if there is funding available to primary and post-primary schools to purchase sensory room equipment for children with additional needs, including autism and Down syndrome; and if not, her plans to provide adequate funding to schools in the future (details supplied). [29847/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** There is funding available to enable the start up of a sensory room within a school.

In order to be eligible for the grant, the school must prove they have an NCSE approved ASD class and that there is a suitable room to house the sensory room – i.e. photos of the room, drawings of school layout with room clearly marked - please note the sensory room must be a separate room from that of the ASD class. This information can be emailed to [furnitureequipment@education.gov.ie](mailto:furnitureequipment@education.gov.ie) where the application for funding will be assessed.

### **Schools Building Projects**

438. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the progress made and time-lines for the provision of a permanent building for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29849/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** With regard to the permanent accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy, officials in my Department are working closely with officials from Galway County and City Councils under the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable permanent location for the school.

A number of site options have been identified and discussions with these landowners are ongoing.

When the site has been acquired the project will then progress to the architectural design and planning stages.

### **Schools Building Projects**

439. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education the status of the project for a school building to replace the prefabs that have been used for several years by a school (details supplied); and if building work will commence in June 2021 as planned. [29855/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Letter of Intent (LOI) issued on 23rd

April 2021 to the preferred tenderer. This allows the preferred bidder to put in place the Bond, Insurances and confirmations of all legal arrangements required under the Contract.

Following receipt of all the necessary documentation, my Department will be in a position to issue the Letter of Acceptance (LOA), which will allow the contractor to mobilise on site.

My Department will keep the Board of Management informed as the project progresses and advise them when the LOA issues.

### **School Facilities**

440. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Education the status of the permanent site for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29856/21]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is at an advanced stage of negotiations with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council regarding the acquisition of a site in their ownership. The acquisition of a site for the school in question is an urgent priority for the Department. This site is well located to serve the Booterstown Blackrock School Planning Area.

The accommodation proposed by my Department in the Eblana Avenue building in Dun Laoghaire is deemed to be suitable on an interim basis for this school.

### **Special Educational Needs**

441. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education the status of clearing the backlog of delays on assessments for children with special needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29857/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** An Assessment of Need is a service provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) for children or young people with a disability. The assessment identifies the child's health needs and what health services are needed to meet the child's needs.

Matters in relation to the provision of health-related services and the assessment of need should be directed to the HSE or to the Department of Health.

My Department has no role in the matter.

### **Pension Provisions**

442. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there are plans to review the changes in pension eligibility and contribution rules introduced in 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29145/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On 23 January 2018, the Government agreed to a proposal to allow pensioners affected by the September 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated on a Total Contributions basis, including provision for up to 20 years of a new home caring credit.

The interim Total Contributions Approach for those who reached pension age after Septem-

ber 2012, called the Aggregated Contribution Method (ACM), resolves many of the anomalies arising from the “Yearly Average” calculation model, as the year a person commenced paying social insurance contributions is no longer a key determining factor for pension entitlement rate calculation. Instead, the totality of social insurance contributions paid and credited are central to the calculation. The new method also, for the first time, acknowledged home-caring periods prior to 1994.

This was an equitable approach as pension outcomes were more in line with the total number of contributions paid and credited, with significant provision for years of caring in the home.

Work began on the examining the social insurance records of over 90,000 pensioners in September 2018 and review outcomes, provided for under the Social Welfare, Pension & Civil Registrations Act 2018, began issuing from 13 February 2019 - the day after the necessary Regulations were signed.

Where the review resulted in an increase in the pensioner’s rate of payment, the increase was backdated to 30 March 2018 or the pensioner’s 66th birthday, whichever was the later. As at the end of October 2019, with the project completed, 94,258 reviews were finalised. Of these, 53,092 (56%) were women and 41,166 (44%) were men.

Of the 53,092 women reviewed 28,528 (54%) received an increase while the rest remained on their existing rate. Of the 41,164 men reviewed, 9,956 (24%) received an increase and the remainder continue to receive their same rate of payment. No pensioner had their pension reduced as part of this review. For those who received an increase in their rate of payment, the average weekly personal rate increased by €20.27 per week (Women €24.23; Men €8.82).

From April 2019, all new State pension contributory applications are assessed under all possible rate calculation methods, including the new total contributions approach, with the most beneficial rate paid to the pensioner.

The estimated additional cost in the full 2019 year to the Exchequer from this review was circa €40.1 million and this included circa €0.9 million of increases for Qualified Adult payments, which increased in line with the pensioner’s personal rate of payment. The 2018 cost of back-dating the increases awarded from end of March 18 to end of December 18 was circa €26.6 million, including circa €0.6 million for increases in respect of qualified adult increases.

As the Deputy is aware, a Commission on Pensions has been established to examine a range of issues of options for the Government to consider and specifically with respect to pension calculation methods, the Pensions Commission has also been asked to examine and consider options to meet the Programme for Government commitment to “Introduce a Total Contributions approach, aligning a person’s contributory pension more closely with the contributions they make”. This will include a provision for credited contributions and homecaring periods, ensuring that people who take time off work to care for loved ones are not disadvantaged.

Once it has concluded its deliberations, it is hoped the Commission will report to Government by June of 2021. The Government has committed to taking action having regard to the recommendations of the Commission within 6 months of receiving the Commission’s report.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Payments**

443. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if all payments



and arrears due to a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [29180/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The person concerned had been awarded an Invalidity Pension with effect from 15 October 2020 under EU regulations, using a combination of his EU and Irish contributions.

His weekly payment was calculated as €139.80 and he received his first weekly payment on 25 March 2021. The person concerned was in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance from 22 October 2020 to 17 March 2021. Therefore no arrears are due for this period.

My Department received notification that the person concerned passed away on the 8 May 2021.

A cheque issued to his spouse on the 20 May consisting of 6 weeks of After Death Benefit. I can confirm no other payments are due.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Eligibility**

444. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the partial capacity benefit will be examined in the situation of a diagnosis of relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis, RRMS, (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29182/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) allows a person who has been in receipt of Invalidity Pension or Illness Benefit (the latter for a minimum of six months) and who may not have full capacity for work, to return to employment or self-employment and continue to receive a partial or full payment. There are no restrictions on earnings from employment or number of hours worked under the PCB scheme.

PCB extends the illness benefit and invalidity pension schemes to recognise and respond to the reality that some people with disabilities have a capacity to engage in employment while continuing to need to receive some income support from the State.

From 2012, PCB replaced the previous process whereby people had to apply to the Department to seek an exemption for work that was rehabilitative or therapeutic in nature, and keep their social welfare payment. PCB allows persons to continue to receive, in addition to their earnings from employment, all or a percentage of their illness benefit or invalidity pension payment rate while working.

The personal rate of payment of PCB is based on a medical assessment of a person's restriction regarding their capacity for work, whether the person was in receipt of Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension and their current rate of payment. After the medical assessment, if a person's disability is rated as moderate, severe or profound their previous payment continues at 50%, 75% or 100% respectively.

PCB has been designed so that:

- There is no requirement that a person must only undertake work that is of a rehabilitative or therapeutic nature. Therefore no exemption needs to be applied for from the Department;
- There is no restriction on the number of hours worked;
- There is no restriction on earnings;

- A person who participates on the PCB scheme may return to an Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension payment if, for example, the employment ceases or if the person cannot continue to work;

- A person on PCB, with an underlying entitlement to IP, will retain their Free Travel Pass for a period of five years, that is for five years while in employment.

PCB scheme supports people in receipt of IB or IP to return to work while also continuing to provide them with income support through the social welfare system.

### **Social Welfare Payments**

445. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for an exceptional needs payment to cover funeral expenses for their spouse will be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29242/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My officials have advised that the person concerned submitted an application for an Exceptional Needs Payment to assist with funeral expenses on 08/12/2020. The application was assessed and refused on the basis that a need had not been established due to the disclosure of significant Credit Union savings.

A decision letter dated 10/12/2020 issued to the person concerned advising her of the outcome of her application and affording her the option of seeking a review of the designated officer's decision.

My officials have advised that a request for a review has not been received from the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### **Departmental Reports**

446. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will publish a report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29257/21]

462. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the current status of the Cost of Disability report; the timeline for the publication of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29596/21]

464. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the publication of a report (details supplied) given that there is a mounting concern that the delay in publishing the report will negatively impact its consideration and inclusion in Budget 2022; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29717/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 446, 462 and 464 together.

My Department has commissioned Indecon International Consultants to carry out research into the cost of disability. I expect to receive the final report in the coming days. I look forward to examining the findings of this very important report which will provide a valuable input to inform policy direction in relation to the adequate provision of supports to meet the needs of

people with disabilities. Given that this is a matter for the whole of Government, and considerably wider than the income support system, I will be bringing the report to the attention of my Cabinet colleagues for consideration in advance of its publication.

A key element of the research was a survey undertaken by Indecon which was sent to a random sample of over 34,000 individuals in receipt of disability related payments. It is worth noting that at the outset of the process, the target response rate to the survey element was 1,000 respondents. However, a remarkable 4,700 responses were received from people living with a disability. This represents one of the most detailed surveys ever undertaken in Ireland of individuals with disabilities. Although the processing of such a large response extended the expected delivery time of the final report, I am satisfied that the longer time it took to conclude the project will have ultimately strengthened the research and increased the usefulness of the final report.

In line with the principles of consultation and engagement with the disability sector that have underpinned the conduct of this research project, it is my Department's intention to hold a briefing on the research with the relevant organisations at an appropriate time. The input of these organisations has been invaluable to the research and survey work undertaken by Indecon.

I trust this clarifies the matter at this time.

### **Community Employment Schemes**

447. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on extending the employment of all persons in the community employment programme until at least 31 December 2021 given the difficulty in replacing persons during the Covid-19 pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29258/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** Community Employment (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.

At the onset of the Covid-19 emergency last year my Department introduced a number of contingency measures to support CE schemes including the extension of participant contracts. These measures have continued in particular during Level 5 periods of restriction in place over the course of the last fifteen months.

The current position is that CE participants due to finish on schemes since October 2020, have had their contracts extended on a number of occasions. Over 7,000 CE and Tús participants are benefitting from the latest contract extension date of 2nd July 2021.

This latest extension date is now under active review by my Department, in line with the planned, gradual reopening of the wider economy. It is important to note that when CE participants are eventually due to finish on their respective schemes, this will be undertaken on a coordinated, phased basis over a number of months. This will facilitate the recruitment of new CE participants while ensuring service continuity for the CE schemes.

Some CE schemes, in particular those that provide essential community services, have been able to maintain service delivery while complying with public health restrictions over the Level 5 periods while the activities of many other CE schemes have been significantly curtailed. While referrals to CE placements have continued where possible, numbers have been limited due to the related public health restrictions.

CE schemes face a number of challenges over the coming months as they re-establish the full range of community services available. My priority is to ensure all CE schemes are in a position to get services fully back up and running over the next few months, in line with the phased opening up of the economy, while continuing to comply with public health restrictions.

CE sponsoring authorities are encouraged by my Department to continue to promote the benefits of CE in their local communities. They can advertise their vacancies on [www.jobsireland.ie](http://www.jobsireland.ie), the Department's online job advertising and recruitment service for job candidates and employers, including CE sponsors.

Jobseekers are advised to register their interest through this website or by contacting a case officer in their local Intreo Centre who will determine their eligibility for the CE scheme. The facility to register interest in CE schemes was introduced on the website in August 2020 in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

I am fully committed to the future of CE and will continue to support and improve the programme for the benefit of the CE participants and the valuable contribution being made to local communities throughout the country.

### **Social Welfare Eligibility**

448. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the income limits will be reviewed for carer's allowance applicants; when these limits were reviewed most recently; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29280/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The main income supports for carers provided by my Department include Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance, and the Carer's Support Grant. At the end of April, there were 89,549 people in receipt of Carer's Allowance and the estimated expenditure on Carer's Allowance in 2021 is approximately €953 million. In total, over 135,000 carers benefit from regular income supports and combined spending on these payments in 2021 is expected to be in the region of €1.5 billion. The value of income transfers to family carers has increased by over 50% since 2015.

Carer's Allowance acts as an income support for those who cannot earn adequate income in the open labour market due to their caring responsibilities. This allowance is part of the system of social assistance supports that provide payments based on an income need. The means test plays a critical role in determining whether or not an income need arises as a consequence of a particular contingency – such as disability, unemployment or caring. This ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need and that resources are targeted to those who need them most.

A comprehensive Policy Review of Carer's Allowance, including an examination of the means test, was prepared by my Department and was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas at the end of August 2019. In addition, in August 2019, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published a Spending Review of Carer's Supports, including Carer's Allowance. Among its key findings was that of the €1.04bn spent on Carer's Support Programmes in 2018, Carer's Allowance accounted for 77% of total support spend on carers. Given how little time has elapsed since these two in-depth reports on carer's schemes were published, I do not propose to conduct another review on the area at this time.

The means test for Carer's Allowance is one of the most generous in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. The amount of weekly earnings disregarded is €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. By comparison,

the income disregard applied to Disability Allowance is €120 per week. As per Budget 2021 this will increase to €140 per week from June 2021. For Jobseeker's Allowance, it is €20 per day up to a maximum of €60, and the balance is assessed at 60%. For Jobseeker's Transitional Payment, the weekly income disregard is €165 with 50% of the balance assessed as means.

Changes to schemes are considered in an overall expenditure and policy context and from an evidence-based perspective. Those existing carers whose sole income is the Carer's Allowance would not benefit from an increase in the means disregard. This proposal would benefit just 3% of carers and benefit better-off families. Increases to the disregard would result in the provision of additional payments to people who may have significant sources of income while reducing the scope to provide income supports to lower income households.

I can assure the Deputy that I am very much aware of the key role that family carers play in our society and I will continue to keep the range of supports available to carers under review. However, any improvements or additions to these supports can only be considered in an overall budgetary context and in the light of available financial resources.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

449. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if consideration is being given to automatically awarding a free travel pass to persons who lose their driver licence entitlement for one year due to seizures as a result of epilepsy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29286/21]

450. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to ensure persons who lose their driver licence due to a diagnosis of epilepsy or breakthrough seizures are provided automatic access to a free travel pass; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29288/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 449 and 450 together.

The Free Travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 996,000 customers with direct eligibility. The estimated expenditure on free travel in 2021 is €95 million.

In general, access to a free travel pass for those aged under 66 is linked to a person being in receipt of certain primary Social Protection payments such as Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Blind Pension and Partial Capacity Benefit.

Extending the free travel scheme to people with epilepsy during the period in which they are disallowed from driving cannot be considered in isolation. There are a range of disabilities and medical conditions that can prevent a person from holding a driving licence and to award a free travel pass to any one of these conditions in isolation would immediately result in calls for all people who are not allowed to hold a driving licence because of their medical condition to receive the free travel pass and could result in challenges under the Equal Status Act.

If the Free Travel scheme were to be extended to all people who are not allowed to drive



due to their disability, regardless of whether they receive a qualifying payment, a medical assessment process would be required for all such applications, significantly changing the nature of the scheme and requiring additional administrative processes to be put in place in order to adjudicate eligibility. Significant extra funding would also be required and accordingly, it could only be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, my Department may award a travel supplement, where the circumstances of the particular case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the individual case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 450 answered with Question No. 449.*

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

451. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed. [29294/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered with that office on 3 December 2020. The appeal was referred to an Appeals Officer on 9 February 2021 and the Appeals Officer's summary decision was issued to the person concerned on 19 April 2021.

An Appeals Officer's decision is generally conclusive. However, an Appeals Officer may revise his/her decision under Section 317 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, if new evidence, new facts or any relevant change of circumstances come to light after a decision is made. The Chief Appeals Officer may revise a decision of an Appeals Officer under Section 318 of the Act, if it appears that a mistake was made in relation to the law or the facts.

A request for a review under Section 318 of the Act was received from the Department of Social Protection on 14 May 2021. In his decision the Appeals Officer stated that his interpretation of Article 20(1)(a) of the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) Regulations 2007 was that the person concerned should be deemed incapable of work for the period 10 October 2020 to 3 December 2020 because her GP had certified that she was unable to attend work during that period. In her review under Section 318 of the Act, the Chief Appeals Officer found that the provisions of Article 20(1)(a) of the Regulations did not apply in this case and that the Appeals Officer erred in law in applying the provisions to the appeal. The Chief Appeals Officer revised the Appeals Officer's decision accordingly on 24 May 2021 and the person concerned was advised of this outcome on that date.

A Section 318 review is the final stage in the appeal process. Any person who is dissatisfied with the Chief Appeals Officer's revised decision may appeal that decision to the High Court on any question of law under Section 327 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Payments**

452. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a working family payment application by a person (details supplied). [29296/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in work, income tested payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children. WFP applications are processed based on an applicant's circumstances, including employment earnings and income status that apply at the time of application.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 06 May 2021.

The Department wrote to the person concerned on 12 May 2021, to request further employment related information and documentary evidence. The requested information has not been provided to date. The person concerned has been contacted by the Department on 26 May 2021 and they have confirmed that the requested details will be submitted shortly.

On receipt of the requested information from the person concerned, a decision will be completed on their application without delay, and they will be notified in writing.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Data Protection**

453. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection the nature of the data breaches experienced by her Department since 2018. [29315/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The majority of personal data breaches in my Department were in the following three categories:

- Delivery of correspondence to an incorrect address or to the customer's previous address;
- Accidentally including a document or an item of personal data of a customer in correspondence with another customer.
- Email errors such as auto population to an unintended address, or inadvertently including personal data of another customer.

The number of confirmed breaches should be viewed in the context of the scale of the Department's business, administering over 70 separate schemes and services and processing almost 2 million applications every year.

In particular, in 2020, the Department has provided services to an extraordinarily high volume of customers. At one point, the Department was processing over 50,000 claims per day. At its peak, in early May 2020, 602,000 were in receipt of PUP. Just under 20 million PUP payments have been made to nearly 900,000 people providing income support of more than €7.3 billion to date.

My Department takes its data protection obligations very seriously. In order to minimise incidents regarding these types of data breaches, there are regular reminders for staff to be vigilant

in matters of data protection.

For example, recent Data Protection Awareness Weeks placed particular emphasis on how staff need to remain aware in relation to accidental data breaches. Also, posters were issued to offices throughout the Department with the particular message to be vigilant when sending letters or e-mails, i.e., to double-check address details and letter contents and not to send personal data in bulk e-mails.

It is mandatory for all staff in the Department, and for new entrants, to complete the GDPR e-learning module and to obtain a pass rate of at least 80% at the exam that concludes the module. All new staff (including temporary clerical officers) must complete the module before they are granted access to any system containing customer data.

In addition, Data Protection Unit staff visit the Department's Offices and deliver presentations on data protection and answer staff questions throughout the year. Given the current travel restrictions, video presentations are being developed for staff to view online.

### **Local Authorities**

454. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount provided by her Department to Tipperary County Council in 2020 in respect of rent supplement. [29353/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Rent supplement continues to play a key role in supporting families and individuals in private rented accommodation, with the scheme currently supporting 19,570 recipients (end April 2021).

The scheme provides short-term income support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. The scheme ensures that those who were renting, but whose circumstances have changed due to temporary loss of employment or income, can continue to meet their rental commitments.

Rent supplement is not payable where a customer is in a local authority sponsored housing solution. Accordingly, I can confirm that no rent supplement payments have been made to Tipperary County Council in 2020.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Island Communities**

455. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost, number of recipients and number of applicants of the island allowance in each of the years 2010 to 2020, by offshore island. [29354/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Data requested by the Deputy on the costs and recipients, where available, is set out in Table 1 below. The islands which are enumerated under each county are set out in Table 2. The increase was paid at a rate of €12.70 per week for the period 2012-2020 inclusive, which has been used to approximate the expenditure. The increase is attached to the claim of the main social welfare payment, and as such it is not possible to report on applications for the Island Increase.

**Table 1: Cost and Recipients: 2012 to 2020**

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq455a-01-06-21\_en.docx ">table1</a>]

**Table 2: Specified Islands & County**

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq455b-01-06-21\_en.docx ">table2</a>]

**Island Communities**

456. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the expected increase in total annual cost of the island allowance resulting from the increase to €20 announced in Budget 2021; and if she will provide a copy of any documented analysis conducted by her Department before making the decision to increase the allowance. [29355/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Increase for Living on a Specified Island - or Island Allowance - is an increase in the weekly rate of certain social welfare payments for recipients who are aged 66 or over and are ordinarily resident on an island off the coast of Ireland. It is also paid to recipients aged under 66 on certain schemes. The objective of the scheme is to compensate for the additional costs of living on these specified islands when compared to people resident on the mainland.

As part of the Budget 2021 package, the allowance was increased by €7.30, from €12.70 to €20 per week. This was the first increase to the allowance since the payment was introduced in 2000 and was the basis on which the decision to increase the allowance was made. As Minister with responsibility for the islands, I was acutely aware of the additional costs associated with living offshore.

Based on the current number of recipients, it is estimated that the increase will cost €0.23 million this year.

**Employment Schemes**

457. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons that have availed of employability services in the State in 2020 and to date in 2021, by county in tabular form. [29532/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The EmployAbility service is based on the ethos that participation in employment can be achieved by people with a disability (PwD) when they are able to avail of individualised supports that are based on their choices and preferences.

It should be noted that, due to public health restrictions, referrals to all contracted public employment services including EmployAbility were suspended on three separate occasions during 2020 (March, October and December). Referrals for 2021 commenced in early March. The EmployAbility Service has 2969 active clients as of March 2021. The number of customers referred by my Department to the EmployAbility Services and the active client numbers for 2020 and for 2021 is as follows:

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumenta-

## Disability Services

458. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection the measures in place to support persons with disabilities with employment and employability services; the way additional needs of persons with disabilities will be incorporated into the forthcoming tender for employment services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29533/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department recognises the additional difficulties people with disabilities experience in securing and maintaining paid employment. To this end, my Department has contracts for the provision of the Employability services to help address these difficulties. These services are currently delivered under contract by 24 different organisations located around the country. The total value of the contracts for 2021 is approximately €10m.

The Employability services provide support and advice to people with disabilities to facilitate their integration into paid employment. Integration is an essential feature of the Employability services: People with disabilities have an entitlement to full participation in society and paid employment.

It is not envisaged that the open competitive tendering processes for employment services, which my Department are undertaking this year, will include the supports currently delivered by the Employability service. My Department will be developing a new model of contracting for these Employability services over the next year, with a view to having these important services procured in a manner that is consistent with the State's obligations under national and EU procurement rules. It is envisaged this process will see these services procured in an open and competitive manner during 2022 with new contracts being in place for 2023.

## Social Welfare Benefits

459. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made in relation to an application by a person (details supplied) for a carer’s allowance in view of the fact that it has been marked urgent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29576/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Carer’s Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

I can confirm that my department received two applications for CA from the person concerned on 17 May 2021.

CA was awarded to the person concerned in respect of both care recipients on 26 May 2021 with effect from 10 June 2021. The first payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 10 June 2021.

The person concerned was notified on 26 May 2021 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.



I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Appeals

460. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29584/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered with that office on 3 February 2021. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received on 31 March 2021. The appeal was referred on 7 April 2021 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if necessary, hold an oral hearing. Hearings are currently being conducted online or by telephone. Due to the current level of Covid-19 restrictions in-person oral appeal hearings have been suspended.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Departmental Budgets

461. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Social Protection the funds returned unspent to the Exchequer from her Department's budget in each of the years 2017 to 2020, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29595/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Below in tabular format are the unspent amounts that my Department has returned to the Exchequer for the years 2017 to 2020 inclusive.

Year	Surplus €	Deferred Surrender €	Surplus to be surrendered €
2017	21,019,255	(1,000,000)	20,019,255
2018	39,887,039	(1,000,000)	38,887,039
2019	52,647,107	(1,187,000)	51,460,107
2020*	858,121,283	(910,000)	857,211,283

\*The 2020 Appropriation account is currently subject to audit by the Comptroller & Auditor-General.

*Question No. 462 answered with Question No. 446.*

### Protected Disclosures

463. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of protected disclosures made to her Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29641/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The number of protected disclosure submissions made to DSP, as requested by the Deputy, is set out in the table beneath.

Year	Received	Comments
2016	1	
2017	10	
2018	16	
2019	9	
2020	1	
2021	3	To 28 May
Total	40	

Submissions made under the protected disclosure procedures generally related to financial or other governance or administrative processes, but also included matters relating to: freedom of information procedures; PRSI classification policy; accounting and budgeting procedures; and staff working procedures. They also included issues that were assessed as personal matters or matters not relevant to DSP.

25 submissions were made by Department middle manager grade. All were from one staff member.

6 submissions were received from former or retired staff. All were from 2 individuals.

5 submissions were from employment services contractor staff.

2 submissions were received from Department clerical/administrative grades.

2 were received anonymously.

*Question No. 464 answered with Question No. 446.*

### Social Welfare Benefits

465. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of recipients of the short-time work support jobseeker's benefit in 2021; and the number of recipients by county and month in tabular form. [29720/21]

466. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of recipients of the short-time work support jobseeker's benefit in 2021; and the number of recipients per employment sector or industry by month in tabular form. [29721/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 465 and 466 together.

Over the course of 2021, 6,840 people have been supported by the Short Time Work Support Scheme. The additional information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables below.

#### Table 1: Short Time Work Support by Month and by County

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq465-466-01-06-21\_en.docx ">table1</a>]

#### Table 2: Short Time work Support by Month and by Sector of last known employer

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumenta- tion/2021-06-01\_pq465-465a-01-06-21\_en.docx ">table2</a>]

*Question No. 466 answered with Question No. 465.*

### **Social Welfare Code**

467. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the process for a person to claim a jobseeker's payment in which they are laid off for one day at a time over a period of months with very little notice in circumstances in which the person is working shift work on a 3 day 12 hour shift pattern and 1 day off represents a third of their working week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29852/21]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Customers are entitled to apply for a Jobseekers' payment while on reduced hours. Entitlement to a Jobseekers' payment is subject to the normal qualifying conditions as set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, including Section 62. There are 3 categories of claimant who may qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit while partially employed - short-time workers, part-time workers and casual workers.

Short-Time Work Support is a form of Jobseeker's Benefit and is an income support payment for people who have been temporarily placed on a shorter working week by their employer i.e. where for the time being the number of days systematically worked in a working week is less than the number of days normally worked. Short-Time Work must be systematic and show a clear repetitive pattern of employment. Employees must also work at least 1 day in each week that would normally have been worked.

A person who works on a part-time basis and is employed for a set number of days each week and knows the days on which they will be employed may receive a jobseeker's payment as a part-time worker.

People who are classified as casual workers are normally employed for periods of less than a week, they do not know the number of days or the days of the week on which they will be employed as this varies with the level of activity in the employer's business there is no set roster in place for the period. In addition, on the termination of each period of employment the person has no assurance of being re-employed with the same employer.

Jobseekers payment are made in respect of days of unemployment and are not based on the number of hours per day or the shift pattern normally worked by the claimant.

When the person concerned is laid off they should contact their local Intreo office and make a claim for a Jobseeker payment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Direct Provision System**

468. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on the poll carried out by a group (details supplied) showing that access to period products is still an issue in some direct provision centres. [29117/21]

469. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the way he plans to safeguard against the possibility that some direct provision

centres are invoicing his Department for costs but could still be charging residents under the point system. [29118/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 468 and 469 together.

I am aware of the poll and of the newspaper article referred to by the Deputy relating to the availability of period products in our International Protection accommodation centres.

All our accommodation providers have been contacted recently and they all confirmed that period products are provided to residents free of charge. The International Protection Procurement Service (IPSS) of my Department has not received any further invoices for period products since my last reply to the Deputy on 18 May 2021 on this matter (Question 581 refers).

The IPSS will continue to monitor the invoices in respect of period products on a regular basis to check the position in those centres who have yet to invoice the Department.

This is a matter that my Department does not take lightly. If the Deputy is aware of any accommodation centre charging residents for period products, I would appreciate if he could inform my officials in the IPSS. Equally, if any resident is being charged for period products, they should notify IPAS either through contacting them directly at [ipasinbox@equality.gov.ie](mailto:ipasinbox@equality.gov.ie) or alternatively through the confidential helpline being provided through the Jesuit Refugee Service.

*Question No. 469 answered with Question No. 468.*

### Data Protection

470. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of data breaches in Tusla in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29130/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) May 2018 requires parties to “document any personal data breaches, comprising the facts relating to the personal data breach”. GDPR came into force across the European Union on 25 May 2018 and Tusla has been collecting the required data. Tusla has advised that information on breaches was not routinely collected in the years prior to the introduction of GDPR. Accordingly, the information requested by the Deputy is not available for the years 2016 and 2017.

Tusla has advised of the following number of data breaches in the years 2018 to date (up to 22 April 2021):

Year	Count
2018 (01/01 – 24/05)	data not available
2018 (25/05 – 31/12)	71
2019	130
2020	362
2021 (01/01 – 22/04)	109

Tusla’s work involves the receipt, processing and storage of a large volume of highly sensitive and confidential personal data. The handling and protection of personal data in a safe and

responsible way is the responsibility of each staff member in the organisation. Tusla regrets that data breaches can occur and the significant impact they may have on service users who are affected. Tusla has established a dedicated GDPR programme for the Agency, in order to enhance its compliance with GDPR, and to drive improvements across the organisation in this area.

### **Data Protection**

471. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the steps he will take to ensure the preservation of confidential files maintained by Tusla in view of the recent cyber-attack perpetrated on the HSE and Tusla; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29131/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** As an independent agency, Tusla has responsibility for its own ICT function and has engaged with the HSE, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the Gardaí in relation to this incident. My officials and I have been in daily contact with Tusla and our partners in government since being alerted to the attack on the 14th May, to ensure the risks can be mitigated as much as possible and frontline services can be maintained. I will continue to receive updates on this matter as this work progresses.

The Deputy will be aware of Tusla’s Data Management Strategy 2019 – 2022. The Strategy includes a focus on Data Security Management with a view to minimising the risk of inappropriate access to Tusla data. The timescale and processes contained within the strategy will be reviewed in light of the impact on Tusla of the cyber attack on the HSE.

I’d also like to confirm that the High Court injunction obtained by the HSE requiring anyone in possession of stolen data not to disclose or trade in it also applies to data relating to Tusla, the Child and Family.

### **Childcare Services**

472. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the status of the review into structures of county childcare committees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29132/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** In ‘First Five, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families’, which was launched in November 2018, my Department committed to completing a comprehensive review of the operating model for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) in this country. This includes, amongst other organisations, the 30 City/County Childcare Committees funded by my Department to act as its local agent in the delivery of the national early education and childcare programmes and the implementation of Government policy.

The ELC and SAC sector in Ireland has grown substantially in the past decade. The review’s objective is to ensure that the operating model is fit for purpose to implement Departmental childcare policy relating to quality, affordability and access, to the scale and standards required in an evolving and expanding sector, with the citizens of Ireland at its heart as core beneficiaries.

The final operating system will support high quality, accessible and affordable ELC and SAC services to children and families through the efficient and effective administration of a



number of programmes, schemes, quality initiatives, and other functions such a compliance and communications. This operating model will support service providers, operate transparently and accountably, provide value for money to the Exchequer and demonstrate good governance. The model will also enable appropriate linkages and effective working relationships with all other agencies and Departments charged with delivering better outcomes for children and families.

An independent external contractor has been engaged by my Department to undertake an analysis of the current landscape and consideration of options for a future operating model. In this regard the review will aim to explore a variety of options in relation to how best the ELC and SAC operating model can be overseen by my Department in the coming years.

I am pleased to report that this review is well underway, and is due to conclude in the coming months.

### **Assisted Human Reproduction**

473. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he considered a report (details supplied); if he has taken action in response to the report to ensure that children born through assisted human reproduction have their rights ensured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29141/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The Special Rapporteur on Child Protection reviews and reports to Government on specific national and international legal developments, existing or proposed legislative provisions and litigation in the area of child protection on the request of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

A review of children’s rights and best interests in the context of parentage in cases of donor-assisted human reproduction, including surrogacy, was assigned to the Special Rapporteur as a priority project in June 2020 by the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The project was assigned following a request from the Department of Health and consultation with relevant Departments. A review of how children’s rights and best interests can be protected in the context of the recognition of parentage in cases of assisted human reproduction and surrogacy is a commitment in the Programme for Government.

The Special Rapporteur submitted his report, A Review of Children’s Rights and Best Interests in the Context of Donor-Assisted Human Reproduction (DAHR) and Surrogacy in Irish Law to me in December 2020 and Cabinet approved the publication and presentation to each House of the Oireachtas of the report in March 2021. The report analyses the law governing parentage and the right to identity in DAHR and surrogacy from the best interests of the child principle. The recommendations in the report are primarily for the Department of Health to lead on with input from the Department of Justice.

The Department of Health has responsibility for drafting legislation in the area of assisted human reproduction. However, the issues involved cross a number of Departments, including the Department of Justice and my own Department. I continue to engage with my Cabinet colleagues on this issue, and seek to ensure that any legislation in the area vindicates the rights and best interests of the child.

### **Traveller Community**

474. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on the No End in Sight report from the Ombudsman for Children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29254/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The “No End in Site” report from the Ombudsman for Children which centred on the living conditions of children on a local authority halting site makes for very difficult reading and highlights the need for continued work in supporting the Traveller Community in Ireland.

You will appreciate that responsibility for Housing rests with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and with the relevant Local Authority. I am assured by my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage that his Department is in ongoing communication with the relevant local authority to provide the necessary supports so as to ensure that the recommendations made in the report are implemented in a timely manner.

The Government is committed to improving the lives of the Traveller and Roma Communities in Ireland. The Government strategy to further this goal is the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2017 – 2021. The Strategy brings government departments and agencies together along with representatives of both Traveller and Roma communities.

The NTRIS contains 149 actions, grouped under ten themes including Cultural Identity, Education Employment, Health and Accommodation. It is the responsibility of the respective Government Departments and Agencies to deliver on the Actions contained in the Strategy and to provide updates on progress through the Steering Committee which I chair.

The Programme for Government commits to a Review of the Strategy which is coming to an end this year. This will be an independent review of NTRIS which will be undertaken later this year. I am committed to consulting with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that the next iteration of NTRIS will have a stronger outcomes focused approach.

### **Child Protection**

475. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth further to Parliamentary Question No. 179 of 12 May 2021, the outstanding issues that need to be resolved before the State can proceed to ratify the Second Optional Protocol on the UNCRC which includes the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29281/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department made a comprehensive submission to the Attorney General’s Office in 2019 seeking confirmation as to whether Ireland was in a position to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The advice received from the AGO stated that while Ireland is largely compliant with the terms of the Protocol, there are some outstanding issues that need to be resolved before the State can proceed to ratification.

My Department has been liaising closely with the Department of Justice as the outstanding issues identified by the AGO fall within their remit.

The Department of Justice is examining what legislative amendments may be required to ensure that the full range of offences covered by the Protocol can be prosecuted on an organised and transnational basis.

We hope to resolve these issues as soon as possible and I will subsequently seek Government approval for ratification at the earliest opportunity.

### **Data Protection**

476. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29303/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I can inform the Deputy that of the 46 data breaches that have occurred since 2018 in my Department, 29 of these breaches were deemed to be ‘No Risk’ breaches. The remaining 17 breaches were notified to the Data Protection Commission, in line with its policy that breaches deemed to be ‘Low Risk’ or higher must be notified to it by data controllers. Of those 17 notified breaches, 13 were categorised as ‘Low Risk’, 3 were categorised as ‘Medium Risk’, and 1 was categorised as ‘High Risk’.

The majority of the breaches that have occurred in my Department in the period referred to, were as a result of administrative error. These were generally where an email (or attachment) was sent to an incorrect recipient, where an intended recipient incorrectly received data as part of an email attachment, or where an intended recipient inadvertently had sight of the full email recipient list.

### **Childcare Services**

477. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the crèche facilities that are available for a child (details supplied) who is on the autism spectrum level 1 given their parents have been unable to source a placement to meet the needs of the child. [29356/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department does not have a role in finding places for children in early learning and care or school-age childcare facilities - this is a matter between the parents and a provider. If the parents are experiencing a difficulty in finding a place in an early learning and care or school-age childcare setting they can contact their local City /County Childcare Committee (contact details at [myccc.ie/](http://myccc.ie/)) who will try to assist them in finding a suitable place.

If the parents are seeking a place for their child in primary school or in early intervention class in a school setting, supports are available through the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), affiliated to the Department of Education. If so, I would recommend the parents to contact their local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) for further assistance. The local SENO contact details are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

Many children with disabilities, including autism, take part in mainstream early learning and care services. Participation of children with disabilities in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) universal pre-school programme in mainstream preschool settings is supported by the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). The key objective of AIM is to support early learning and care providers to deliver an inclusive preschool experience, ensuring that children with a disability can fully participate in the ECCE Programme, thereby reaping the benefits of quality preschool provision. More information about the supports under AIM are available at [aim.gov.ie](http://aim.gov.ie).

Eligibility for AIM supports is linked to participation in the universal ECCE pre-school programme. ECCE is a universal two-year pre-school programme available to all children within the eligible age range. A child must have reached 2 years and 8 months of age on or prior to 31 August of the relevant programme year to be eligible for the September start date, and a child cannot turn 5 years and 6 months of age during the course of the ECCE programme year.

### **Youth Services**

478. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he has been appraised of the challenges facing communities with under-age antisocial behaviour in locations (details supplied); if funding will be made available under UBU your place-your space to work with marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable young persons in these communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29470/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The Deputy may wish to also refer to my colleague the Minister for Justice, who has responsibility for overarching national strategies to tackle antisocial behaviour and crime, including among young people. I will set out for the Deputy what is being done in this respect by youth services.

My Department currently allocates targeted youth funding of €41.8 million via the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme, which became operational on 1 July 2020. The mission of the scheme is to provide out-of-school supports to marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable young people in their communities to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential. There is clear evidence that participation in youth work develops a young person’s social and personal competencies and fosters their resilience, all of which are preventative measures against antisocial behaviour to which the Deputy refers.

Funding for the provision of targeted youth services is administered on behalf of my Department by the 16 Education and Training Boards nationwide, which allocate funding via applications to the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme.

Key to achieving the aims of the scheme is the development of the Area Profile and Needs Assessment Tool. The purpose of this tool is to allow each ETB to avail of quantitative and qualitative information to objectively identify the needs of young people within their functional area. This analysis leads to the development of a Service Requirement which is then used as the basis for discussion between ETBs and service providers in terms of service delivery to meet the needs of young people in the area. The approach ensures that we can target funding and supports to the young people most in need of intervention and that funding is allocated on the basis of evidence-informed need.

It is advised that any proposed service in the locations referred to by the Deputy wishing to apply for youth funding should liaise with the relevant ETB in the first instance.

### **Child and Family Agency**

479. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of legal cases that have been brought against Tusla by county in each of the past ten years and to date in 2021. [29624/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic**

**O’Gorman):** As the matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, I have referred the question to Tusla for direct response to the Deputy.

The Deputy will understand that any reply on this matter will be delayed, in the context of the impact on Tusla of the recent cyber attack on HSE systems. Tusla will be able to advise the Deputy of this matter, when operationally possible.

### **Child and Family Agency**

480. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of persons who have reported Tusla or Tusla’s alleged conduct to the Ombudsman for Children by county in each of the past ten years and to date in 2021. [29625/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** As this is a matter for the Ombudsman for Children’s Office, I have referred the question to that Office for a direct response to the Deputy.

### **Protected Disclosures**

481. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29629/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** There have been three Protected Disclosures received by the Department, one in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2019. No Protected Disclosures have been received in 2021 to date.

The protected disclosures received in the period 2016 – 2021 related to the work of Tusla, the Child & Family Agency, which falls under the aegis of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

### **Child and Family Agency**

482. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the date when Tusla began to transfer its files to digital format; the number of files on children and families that are held digitally; the date of advertising for the role of a national digital security director or equivalent and the subsequent filling of same; the date of advertising for a national data security director or equivalent and the subsequent filling of same; the number of other digital security and data managers that have been deemed necessary in the management of this sensitive information; when these posts were advertised and filled; the number who have been appointed to date; the number who are currently in situ in relation the digital files of Tusla given the extreme sensitivity of the information Tusla holds on children and families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29823/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The Tusla Data Management Strategy 2019 – 2022, published on its website, sets out a comprehensive vision for data management and an ambitious road map for the development, promotion and adoption of excellence in Data Management across the Agency. On establishment, Tusla inherited services that operated in environments with limited data maturity



and has worked since establishment to improve data security. It is not possible at this point to identify the number of digital files held by Tusla on children and their families.

Tusla has advised that Tusla Recruit has successfully hired the following employees through bespoke campaigns for the ICT Department:

- A Director of ICT was appointed in 2017;
- 4 Senior Manager roles (General Manager grade) have since been appointed:
  - Applications and Software Development Manager;
  - Data and Business Intelligence Manager;
  - ICT Infrastructure Manager;
  - Service Delivery Manager.
- A General Manager ICT, with responsibility for security Policy & Compliance was appointed in 2021.
- All of the positions have security as part of their specific role.

Tusla has also advised that following the establishment of Tusla ICT, the Agency has engaged an external ICT Security Partner. This is also supplemented with contract security specialists.

### **Child and Family Agency**

483. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of Tusla employees who are still using HSE email addresses; the reason the roles are carried out by these staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29824/21]

484. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the reason seven years after its establishment, Tusla is still not fully decoupled from the HSE; if achieving this decoupling is a priority for his Department; his views on whether the process has been too slow; the date for decoupling to be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29825/21]

485. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on whether the ongoing connection of the Tusla and the HSE systems has put the acutely sensitive data on children and families at unnecessary risk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29826/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 483, 484 and 485 together.

Tusla was established in 2014 with a challenging remit to bring 19 unique and separate services under one Agency. All Tusla staff have an @tusla email address, the majority of which are hosted on the HSE network under a memorandum of understanding between Tusla and the HSE.

The Deputy will be aware of the Agency’s Data Management Strategy 2019 – 2022 under which, Tusla has been working to migrate all Tusla data sources to environments under the

control of Tusla ICT by Q4 2022, thereby addressing the legacy arrangement by which much of Tusla's electronic data sources were managed and supported by the HSE.

I am satisfied with Tusla's progress in the development of its ICT and the approach outlined in its Data Management Strategy. The timescale and processes contained within the strategy will be reviewed in light of the impact on Tusla of the cyber attack on the HSE. The Agency is supportive of government strategy for use of shared services and will continue to avail of corporate support services provided by the HSE where appropriate.

The criminal activity associated with the ransomware attack on HSE servers is a risk for all businesses, government departments and state bodies, and is not unique to the HSE. Tusla is committed to ensuring best practice is followed as it relates to all aspects of Cybersecurity in order to protect the security of all data it holds.

*Question No. 484 answered with Question No. 483.*

*Question No. 485 answered with Question No. 483.*

### **Child and Family Agency**

486. **Deputy Réada Cronin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if the HSE or Tusla is responsible for the holding and security of the data held given the interconnectedness of Tusla and the HSE, seven years after the establishment of Tusla; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29827/21]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** Many of Tusla systems are hosted on the HSE Network under an Memorandum Of Understanding established in 2014 to provide corporate capacity and capability across a range of shared services. The HSE provide ICT services including responsibility for the security of the hosted environment. Tusla is a data controller and processor under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. The HSE is a data processor on behalf of Tusla and a data processing agreement is in place.

### **Research and Development**

487. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of research personnel in enterprise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29183/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Business Expenditure on Research and Development (BERD) survey is published biennially by the CSO. The most recent edition was published in March 2021 and covers the period 2019-2020 ([www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/berd/businessexpenditureonresearchdevelopment2019-2020/](http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/berd/businessexpenditureonresearchdevelopment2019-2020/)).

As part of the survey, enterprises were asked to indicate the numbers of staff who devoted any of their time to R&D activities. R&D personnel includes researchers (PhD qualified and others), technicians and other support staff.

In total, there were 27,755 persons engaged in R&D in Irish enterprises in 2019. Of this total, 59.8% or 16,609 persons were employed as researchers, of which 1,966 were PhD qualified researchers. In addition, there were 6,832 (24.6%) technicians and 4,313 (15.5%) support staff.

Additionally, 31.5% of enterprises have indicated they are quite likely or very likely to recruit at PhD level in the next 5 years. Furthermore, 62% of all enterprises have indicated they are quite likely or very likely to recruit at Research Masters level, this is the same for all Irish and foreign owned enterprises.

The availability and quality of graduates is essential if we are to maintain our attractiveness as a location for investment and grow our reputation. There are a number of key strategies in place at all levels to ensure we meet existing and future skills demands. These include policies designed to ensure a pipeline of suitably qualified science and technical graduates, and initiatives to equip young people and the working population more generally with the skills and capacity to meet these demands. These strategies and initiatives include: the National Skills Strategy 2025; Technology Skills 2022; Springboard+; the Human Capital Initiative and the July Stimulus package.

Postgraduate education delivered by higher education institutions is critical to Ireland's research system. In addition to contributing to knowledge, postgraduate researcher education drives participants to develop their own research and innovation skills that can be applied in a range of environments, in academia or industry, at home or abroad. The Irish Research Council funds postgraduates across all disciplines and is an important component in the wider national strategic pursuit of a strong talent pipeline of research graduates. Science Foundation Ireland has commenced a programme to support advanced PhD skills and training, in collaboration with industry, for the new economy. There are currently six of these SFI Centres for Research Training supporting over 700 PhD students in ICT and data analytics. Through the CRTs, students will be equipped with transversal skills including entrepreneurship and innovation to enable them to adapt and react to rapidly evolving workplaces and making them a very attractive skills pipeline for industry. In addition, I recently launched a new funding programme for early career researchers, the SFI-IRC Pathway Programme. The Programme will support talented postdoctoral researchers from all research disciplines to develop their track record and transition to become independent research leaders.

### Third Level Admissions

488. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of annual enrolments for master and PhD courses for the most recent year available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29184/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The data requested by the Deputy is outlined in the attached spreadsheet. The most recent year available is data for the 2019/2020 academic year.

Programme Type	2019/2020 Enrolments
PhD	8,890
Research Masters	1,639
Taught Masters	24,155
Total	34,684

### International Bodies

489. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science when Ireland will become a participating member of CERN; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29185/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** Innovation 2020, the national strategy for research and innovation, recognises that for Ireland to become a Global Innovation Leader, our research and innovation system must be open with strong international collaboration links. Membership of leading international research organisations is an important mechanism for facilitating this engagement.

For this reason, the Government gave a specific commitment in Innovation 2020 to initiate discussions with several international research organisations. Four organisations were identified – CERN, the European Southern Observatory, ELIXIR and LOFAR - and membership of three of these organisations has been completed. Ireland continues its consideration of CERN membership.

Under the National Development Plan 2018-2027, as part of Project Ireland 2040, the Government outlined its intention to review Ireland's membership of CERN. This would generate opportunities not only for Irish enterprise but also for its research community. While the benefits of CERN membership are recognised as significant, the cost is also significant and must be assessed in the context of other Departmental and national investment priorities.

Following the recent establishment of my new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, CERN membership will be considered in the context of the programme for government and national investment priorities for research and innovation. Ireland continues its consideration of full and associate CERN membership and my Department remains in contact with CERN officials.

### **Education Policy**

490. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he plans to extend the funding for innovative approaches to reskilling for the opportunities that are evolving in many manufacturing sectors due to technology evolution; and his views on whether the post-Covid-19 reopening would be an ideal opportunity for such schemes as displaced workers seek new outlets. [29186/21]

491. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if there is scope for more public private partnership in the design of upskilling courses to meet rapidly changing skill needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29187/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 490 and 491 together.

Close collaboration between employers and education and training institutions is critical in the design of upskilling courses to ensure they appropriately address the needs of industry. Employer input should ensure that courses are structured in a manner that meets the operational realities of businesses, including through the use of flexible and online learning. Engagement with industry also provides vital market intelligence with respect to evolving skills needs. Fast moving sectors are reliant on responsive skills development and training solutions to reflect technology, product and service innovation.

As the Deputy is aware, the Skills to Advance initiative was developed in response to evolving skill needs and assists those facing changes in their work due to technology advances, changing work practices and market diversification. Further education and training (FET) opportunities offered through Skills to Advance incorporate digital, socio-emotional and technical skills development to enhance employee skills and support increased productivity in Irish

SMEs.

As part of the Skills to Advance initiative, SOLAS created the Innovation through Collaboration Fund specifically to support collaborative partnerships by ETBs with the private sector, researchers and academics to meet the skills needs for innovation across economic sectors. Two of ten Innovation through Collaboration projects focus on specific challenges in manufacturing; delivering up-to-the-minute skills using flexible delivery methods, and recognising the existing skills and competencies of technicians while providing upskilling pathways for an increasingly digitised workplace. A new call for this fund is due to be issued in July 2021.

The Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre of Excellence (AMTCE) in Dundalk provides one of the examples of reskilling and upskilling training courses/programmes and services supported by Innovation through Collaboration Fund. Through the AMTCE, Louth Meath ETB (LMETB) is using advanced technologies to provide innovative and creative solutions to address the upskilling needs of those employed in the manufacturing technology areas and to provide employers with the knowledge skills and competencies to make informed decisions regarding planning for the skills requirements of both existing and new employees; including displaced employees, alongside opportunities for reskilling persons who are unemployed. The AMTCE utilises Innovative methodologies to facilitate and deliver training /upskilling, including use of remote, blended online and onsite learning modalities. The AMTCE harnesses innovative technologies such as VR and AI technologies.

The manufacturing sector is undergoing a significant transformation through the adoption of industry 4.0 technologies such as robotics, AI and additive manufacturing. Adoption of these technologies is key to enabling Irish companies to remain competitive in the face of global competition and to drive value-add product and service innovation. There is a need to up-skill the existing workforce to enable companies to adopt and utilise advanced technologies to support and enhance business competitiveness. The growing need for advanced skills within the manufacturing sector also represents a significant opportunity for people to establish new careers in the sector through appropriate reskilling. The AMTCE is addressing these needs through the provision of high-quality training based on industry needs through flexible delivery mechanisms. The AMTCE centre will provide access to state-of-art equipment to ensure learners receive high quality hands-on training which is highly valued by employers.

In addition to the Innovation through Collaboration Fund, funding has also been secured by Cavan Monaghan ETB (CMETB) to progress the development of a new FET Centre of Excellence in Supply Chain Logistics and Procurement supporting business transformation and workforce skills being developed in Cavan to support the North East region and nationally. This project is part of a €3 million investment for local projects under the Border Enterprise Development Fund, an economic stimulus package established for the border region, and additional funding from SOLAS and my Department. The new training centre, which will be located at CMETB's FET Campus in Cavan, will focus on areas such as robotics, 3D Printing, Internet of Things, Blockchain Technology, Big Data Analytics and Drone Technology. The project is a direct response to current industry requirements and emerging skills needs in the region, with a vision to positively impact the region's competitiveness, job security and employment growth.

A capital investment programme in the FET sector is also being rolled out. Among the priorities being addressed are funding for infrastructure and equipment to support reskilling and upskilling needs.

*Question No. 491 answered with Question No. 490.*



### Third Level Education

492. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of widening access to student assistance fund supports for students that have exceeded four years of their PhD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29298/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards costs such as rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. Students on full or part-time courses leading to a higher education award (NQF level 6-10) in the universities, institutes of technology and other approved colleges can apply for the SAF. The core allocation for the SAF is €9.1 million per annum which supports circa 14,000 students. This includes €1 million which was added to the fund in 2017 for part-time students who are lone parents or members of the other access target groups. As part of the package of COVID supports provided by Government last year, €10 million was allocated to an Access Funding package of which €8.1 million was allocated to the Student Assistance Fund. This brought the 2020 SAF allocation to €18.2 million

In all cases, HEIs are responsible for targeting the available resources at those students most in need.

PhD students are eligible to apply for the SAF during the first four years of their studies. PhD students who have completed four years of their studies may also be considered eligible for support on a case-by-case basis.

### Data Protection

493. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29310/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy is aware, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect on 25th May 2018 and any personal data breaches since its introduction are dealt with under the regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Article 4 of the GDPR defines a data breach as “a breach of security leading to the accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration, unauthorised disclosure of, or access to, personal data transmitted, stored or otherwise processed”.

My Department was established on 2nd August 2020. There has been one data breach in total between the date of establishment in 2020 and today’s date, classified as unauthorised disclosure of personal data. This breach was reported to the Data Protection Commission, who closed the case without further action following informal investigation.

### Legislative Measures

494. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the status of the licensing of construction workers Bill. [29331/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins):** In March, Government approved the development of a licensing model for individuals working on certain construction and quarrying related activities, replacing the existing construction and quarrying skills certification schemes. Government also approved moving to preparation of the general scheme of a bill to establish the model. Work is now underway and a draft general scheme will be available by year end. I also plan in the coming weeks to initiate a stakeholder consultation process on the main features of the Bill.

### **Further and Higher Education**

495. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if a detailed schedule will be provided with regard to the €966 million provided in capital funding across the higher education sector in each of the years 2008 to 2019; the institution, location, description or purpose and quantum of funding provided in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29500/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The attached table sets out the total capital funding for infrastructure and equipment by institution over the period requested by the Deputy. The Department has undertaken a reverification process and the following parameters have been applied to the table:

- The table covers capital funding for infrastructure and equipment provided via the Department of Education and Skills over the period 2008-2019.

- The table does not cover funding for research programmes provided via either the Department of Education and Skills or the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation over the period.

- The table does not cover funding for infrastructure and equipment that may have been provided via other Government Departments.

The total, using these parameters amounts to €848 million. We are in the process of compiling the total research programme expenditure over this period and I will forward this to the Deputy when available.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq495-01-06-21\_en.pdf ">funding</a>]

### **Protected Disclosures**

496. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29636/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** In accordance with Section 22 of the Protected Disclosure Act 2014, information on protected disclosures received during 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 has been published on the Department of Education website: [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Annual-Report/](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Annual-Report/)

In summary, there have been a total of 15 Protected Disclosures made between 2016 and to

date in 2021. This figure relates to Protected Disclosures that were disclosed under Section 8 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 from workers in the Higher Education sector.

The attached table gives a breakdown by year of the disclosures.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq496-01-06-21\_en.docx ">disclosures</a>]

### Further and Higher Education

497. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the average cost per springboard+ place created; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29830/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Springboard+ initiative is managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The average cost of a Springboard+ in 2020 was €926 per 10 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This was across all skills areas and NFQ levels. Springboard+ courses typically range from between 10 and 120 ECTS.

The 2021 figures are not yet available.

### Further and Higher Education

498. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the full list of courses approved for springboard+ for each year since 2011; the number of participants on each course in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29831/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** All of the details sought by the Deputy are not readily available in my Department. Officials have requested the information from the Higher Education Authority which will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Further and Higher Education

499. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of springboard+ enrolments in 2020 and 2021, by course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29832/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** All of the details sought by the Deputy are not readily available in my Department. Officials have requested the information from the Higher Education Authority which will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Further and Higher Education

500. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if springboard+ will proceed as part of the ESF programme post-2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29833/21]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** Springboard+ was funded through the National Training Fund and formed part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020. The ESF are currently determining their programme for 2021 and beyond and although not confirmed it is likely that Springboard+ will once again form part of that programme.

### **An Garda Síochána**

501. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice the plans that have been put in place in conjunction with An Garda Síochána to manage the increase in public disorder in communities along the Grand Canal, Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29120/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** As the Deputy will be aware, responding to and preventing crime, including anti-social behaviour, are operational matters for the Garda Commissioner. Neither I nor Minister Humphreys have any direct role in these matters.

However, I am very conscious of how anti-social behaviour affects the quality of life for local communities, and I am assured by the Commissioner that the safety and security of all citizens remains a priority for An Garda Síochána.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there is ongoing liaison with community leaders and schools in the Grand Canal area to discourage anti-social behaviour, along with engagement with residents associations and communities to drive a partnership response to these issues.

I understand that Gardaí met with local community representatives last December following a request at the Joint Policing Committee (JPC) and discussed the issues affecting these areas. Following the meeting, Gardaí engaged with project management companies who are now erecting signage that consumption of alcohol along the Grand Canal is unacceptable. Local Garda management also met with the Docklands Business Forum in February to discuss the issues affecting the area and I understand that a follow up online meeting will be organised prior to the next JPC meeting.

I am informed that local Garda management utilise all legislation in place to address street crime and anti-social behaviour, including drug related crime, along the Grand Canal. This includes a high-visibility uniformed presence in addition to the use of plain clothes Gardaí as appropriate, through overt and covert operations. As of 1 January 2021, a Public Order Unit is deployed every weekend to areas subject to anti-social behaviour and other types of criminal activity.

I am further advised that during the summer months there will be increased uniformed foot and mountain bike patrols along the Grand Canal under Operation GCD, an operation established to counteract incidents of anti-social behaviour and disruption caused by young people swimming in the Canal during the summer holiday period. I understand that this operation has been positively received by the local community and it is envisioned that this operation will be run again in the coming summer months.

The Deputy may also be interested to note that the Department's Justice Plan 2021 contains a number of commitments with regard to tackling anti-social behaviour.

In line with a commitment in the Programme for Government, I have established a special expert forum on antisocial behaviour. A subgroup of this forum has already helped inform a new scheme to tackle the misuse of scramblers and quadbikes and similar sub groups can also be established for other issues where appropriate.

On 15 April last, Minister McEntee and I launched the new Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027. This new strategy will pursue a collaborative response to the situation of vulnerable children and young people, with a strong focus on diverting them away from offending, and building supports to provide prevention and early intervention.

Anti-social behaviour will also be considered by the Local Community Safety Partnerships which are to be set up in every Local Authority under my Department's new community safety policy. Three pilot partnerships are currently being established in Dublin's north inner city, Longford and Waterford and will run for the next two years ahead of the nationwide rollout.

### An Garda Síochána

502. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice the number of gardaí by rank and district in each of the Cork county and city divisions that have retired in 2021; the number that are expected to retire; the number that have given notice of their intention to resign later in 2021, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29158/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy will appreciate, under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel across the various Garda Divisions. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am advised by the Commissioner that projected departures are kept under continuous review and that the level of recruitment is adjusted as necessary in order to maintain the desired strength.

As the Deputy may be aware, the retirement of members of An Garda Síochána is governed by law, which sets the mandatory retirement age for all members at 60 years of age. Members of An Garda Síochána who joined prior to 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension at 50 years of age once they have served at least 30 years and those who joined on or after 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension at 55 years of age with 30 years service.

The table below, which has been provided to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the total number of Garda members by rank in the Cork Division who have retired or submitted their application to retire or are compulsory retirements in 2021, as of the 26 May 2021.

	Com	D/Com	AC	C/Supt	Supt	Insp.	Sgt	Garda	Total
Cork City	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	10	13
Cork North	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	7	11
Cork West	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	4
Total	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	20	28

These figures include voluntary retirements, compulsory retirements, cost neutral early retirements, resignations, medical discharges, dismissals and deaths in service. These figures



are operational and subject to change.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

503. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); when it is planned to bring the application to a conclusion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29253/21]

504. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Justice the status of an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29260/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 503 and 504 together.

An application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy on 6 February 2020. This application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. However, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time. It is not possible to say what the remaining processing time is for an application that is at an advanced stage. The status of an

application changes as it moves through the process.

Unfortunately, processing rates have been impacted by the necessary health and safety related restrictions imposed and we have been unable to hold in-person citizenship ceremonies since March 2020.

In addition to the Covid-19 disruption, a High Court case, which was subsequently successfully appealed to the Court of Appeal, also resulted in significant delays and the loss of over six months' processing time.

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 at: [INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie](mailto:INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie), 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 Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in the cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

*Question No. 504 answered with Question No. 503.*

1 June 2021

505. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice the nature of the data breaches experienced by her Department since 2018. [29312/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the majority (approx. 75%) of data breaches recorded by my Department since 2018 related to incidents where, due to human error, data was provided to incorrect recipients.

Other data breaches include the misfiling of documentation internally, and the loss of encrypted devices such as mobile phones.

The Deputy is advised that my Department is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of all individuals and complies fully with data breach reporting requirements.

### **An Garda Síochána**

506. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice if all interview rooms in each Garda station within DMR are all video and audio recorded; and if not, the estimated cost of installing video and audio recording facilities in each interview room in each Garda station within DMR. [29327/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I have requested a report on the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda authorities, however this was not available in time. I will write to the Deputy once the information is to hand.

### **An Garda Síochána**

507. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice if a new contract to supply new unmarked Garda vehicles has been put out to tender. [29328/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy will be aware, all vehicle tenders and contracts for Garda vehicles are handled through the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) in consultation with An Garda Síochána. As Minister, I have no direct role in this matter.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the OGP has entered into a contract, with effect from 20 November 2020, for the supply of unmarked cars to An Garda Síochána. This contract is effective for a period of two years with the option of a 12 month extension.

I am further informed that An Garda Síochána have ordered 42 unmarked cars for delivery in Quarter 3 of 2021.

### **An Garda Síochána**

508. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice if funding has been secured for the purchase of additional dogs for the Garda dog unit in 2021; and if funding has been secured for the purchase of additional horses for the Garda mounted unit in 2021. [29329/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I have requested a report on the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda authorities, however this was not available in time. I will write to the Deputy once the information is to hand.

**Prison Service**

509. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice if prisoners in Mountjoy Prison are disallowed from writing and receiving letters due to Covid-19 restrictions; if they are on 23-hour lock up as a result of same; if family members are allowed to bring personal items for prisoners; if counselling and rehabilitation services are suspended; when normal services will resume; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29335/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I can advise the Deputy that an outbreak of Covid-19 was confirmed in Mountjoy Prison on 7 May, 2021. This was the most serious outbreak to occur within the prison system to date and resulted in 38 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the general prisoner population.

The outbreak was managed in line with the Prison Service Contingency Plan for the Management of Covid-19, which sets out the actions and measures to be implemented in such situations. The outbreak was managed by an Outbreak Control Team, led by the Director General, and was successfully contained, once identified, resulting in the return of a more normal regime on 21 May, 2021.

I am advised by the Prison Service that prisoners continue to send and receive post throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. During the mass testing process which occurs during an outbreak, however, all outgoing post is suspended.

During the outbreak in Mountjoy Prison, incoming post continued to be accepted, was reviewed by the Censor's Office and delivered as normal. I am also pleased to advise the Deputy that as the prison has exited from the outbreak regime, the outgoing postal services within the prison are again operating as normal.

With regard to prisoner property, I am also advised that, due to infection control restrictions, and the fact that physical visits remained suspended, it is currently the case that family members cannot drop prisoner property off at the prison. Property is only accepted by post and all property is quarantined for seven days before distribution to prisoners.

In accordance with the Contingency Plan, in situations where there is a positive case in the general prison population, all prisoner movement in a prison is restricted while testing, contact tracing and assessment of the risk of the spread of the infection continues. Prisoners involved in the provision of services within the prison (kitchen, laundry etc.) continue to work with an enhanced level of PPE providing they are not a close contact of any confirmed case. Prisoners are fed and medicated at their door and are permitted to leave their cell in a controlled manner to make telephone calls.

Once the results of first round testing of all prisoners and all staff are received, any prisoners with negative test results have a degree of regime restored which strives to meet the minimum out of cell time provision of two hours. Positive prisoners and their close contacts are isolated or quarantined in accordance with HSE guidance.

The measures implemented by the Prison Service have impacted the traditional manner of service delivery by the Psychology and Addiction Counselling Services. Notwithstanding the challenges imposed by managing traditionally close-contact services during a pandemic, it is important to note that these services have not been suspended at anytime to date. The Prison Service continues to provide a range of therapeutic, support and counselling services to prisoners. The primary forms of counselling are provided by the Prison Service Psychology Service and the Merchant's Quay Ireland Addiction Counselling Service. These services have remained in place throughout the pandemic.

The restrictions imposed by Covid-19 have required the development of new ways of working to support prisoners. These prisoner support services have adapted working arrangements to respond innovatively to maximise opportunities for prisoner engagement by employing a combination of mediums including telephony, video-link and one-to-one contact, where deemed clinically necessary.

### **Prison Service**

510. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice the way a prisoner can apply for enhanced remission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29346/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the principles governing the awarding of remission are contained within Rule 59 of Statutory Instrument no 252 of 2007 (the Prison Rules), as amended by Statutory Instrument No 385 of 2014.

In summary, prisoners sentenced to a term of imprisonment, with the exception of prisoners without a determined sentence, for example life sentence prisoners, qualify for one quarter remission on the basis of good behaviour.

In addition, prisoners who have engaged in authorised structured activity may apply to receive enhanced remission of greater than one quarter but not exceeding one third of their sentence, as may be determined by the Minister. In order to grant a prisoner enhanced remission, the Minister must be satisfied that the prisoner is less likely to re-offend and is better able to re-integrate into the community.

A prisoner can apply to the Minister for Justice for Enhanced Remission under Rule 59 of Statutory Instrument no 252 of 2007 (the Prison Rules), as amended by Statutory Instrument No 385 of 2014 by completing an Enhanced Remission Application Form, which is available in all prisons. An acknowledgement letter is then sent to the prisoner informing them of receipt of their application and an approximate date on which a decision will be made on the Enhanced Remission Application.

I can further advise the Deputy that if the application is approved the prisoner will receive a letter informing them of their new release date from the Minister. If the application is declined, a letter will also issue to the prisoner informing them of this decision.

### **Prison Service**

511. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice when counselling services will be reinstated for prisoners; the way rehabilitation services are accessed prior to release; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29347/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I wish to inform the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service has advised that it provides a range of therapeutic, support and counselling services to prisoners. These services remain in place throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to contain the risk of infection during the COVID-19 pandemic, a range of measures, including restrictions on the type of access to prisons and prisoners has been required to protect the prison population in line with public health advice. These measures have impacted the traditional manner of service delivery by the Psychology and Addiction Counselling Service-

es. However, notwithstanding the challenges imposed by managing traditionally close-contact services during a pandemic, it is important to note that these services have not been suspended at any time to date.

The restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have required the development of new ways of working to support prisoners. Prisoner support services have adapted working arrangements to respond innovatively to maximise opportunities for prisoner engagement by employing a combination of mediums including telephony, video-link and one-to-one contact, where deemed clinically necessary.

Throughout the public health crisis, every attempt has been made, and continues to be made, to maintain psychological, addiction and other counselling services for those with an identified need. All prisons and prison-based services have displayed flexibility and adaptability and have used all mediums available to engage with the prison population.

In order to maintain a safe environment and limit the spread of infection for prisoners and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to permit access to prisons for some additional external community-based offender support, and peer support services and programmes.

However, where possible, video-link appointments with some of these community-based services have been facilitated in line with the recommendations of the community integration plan and identified needs of the particular prisoner.

Access to prisons for external services remains under continuous review and will be guided by public health advice to minimise the risk of infection to people who live and work in prisons.

In terms of accessing rehabilitative services prior to release, the Prison Service has dedicated prison officers called Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) Coordinators which are operational in all prisons and open centres. Additional ISM Coordinators work in partnership with the Probation Service to manage prisoners selected for participation in the Joint Agency Response to Crime, Community Support and Community Return Schemes.

These Integrated Sentence Management Coordinators are supported by prison management and the prison-based multi-disciplinary team, which includes the Psychology Service, the Education Service, the Work Training Service, the Chaplaincy Service, the Probation Service, the Training & Employment Service, the Resettlement Service, the Addiction Service and the Healthcare team, who work together with operational staff to deliver sentence management and services to prisoners.

### **Prison Service**

512. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice if her attention has been drawn to groups providing advocacy services to prisoners currently serving sentences; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29348/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The Irish Prison Service currently has a range of rehabilitative, therapeutic and counselling services available for prisoners at all times. I can inform the Deputy that I am also aware that prisoners have access to some additional external community based in-reach services who provide community-based offender support, and peer support services and programmes.

The Deputy will understand that in line with public health guidelines and to limit the spread



of Covid-19 within our prisons, in-person visits have had to be suspended periodically over the past year. As such, since the start of the pandemic, it has not always been possible to permit consistent access to prisons for the external community-based organisations.

The Irish Prison Service is currently carrying out a risk assessment to determine when and how the restrictions put in place in recent months can be eased, while controlling the risk of the spread of infection and ensuring good order and security in the prisons.

The risk assessment currently being undertaken includes reviewing the physical access for community-based organisations that provide in-reach services to prisons, including Traveller peer support services, prison links workers and visitor centre supports. Where possible, video-link appointments with some of the external community-based services have been facilitated in line with the recommendations of the prisoner's sentence plan and identified needs.

It should be noted that prison-based services, including prisoner healthcare, training and education services, psychology, addiction counselling services and resettlement services continue to be available within the prisons. To mitigate against the impact of these services not being consistently available in a traditional manner, I understand the Prison Service has put in place a dedicated phone service for prisoners to reach out to chaplains, psychologists and addiction counsellors and that it has increased the use of technology to ensure these essential services continue.

The Prison Service has continued to facilitate access to prisons and prisoners for those organisations with a statutory role such as the Office of the Inspector of Prisons and Prison Visiting Committees to ensure continued oversight during the pandemic.

If there is a particular advocacy group the Deputy would like to bring to my attention and that of the Prison Service I would be happy to receive that information.

### An Garda Síochána

513. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice the number of Garda stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Kildare on 1 June 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29438/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the general management and administration of Garda business under the Garda Síochána Act 2005. This includes the deployment of members of An Garda Síochána throughout the State and, as Minister, I have no role in these independent functions.

I can inform the Deputy that my Department publishes the figures requested for each month on the Department of Justice's website at the below link:

[www.justice.ie/en/jelr/pages/an\\_garda\\_siochana\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.justice.ie/en/jelr/pages/an_garda_siochana_facts_and_figures).

For the Deputy's information the below table displays the Garda members assigned to the Kildare Division as of 30 April 2021, the latest date for which figures are available.

Division	District	Station	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
KILDARE	KILDARE	ATHY	29	5					34
		CASTLE- DERMOT	1	1					2
		KILDARE	37	6	1	1			45

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Division	District	Station	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
		MONAS-TEREVIN	4	1					5
		NEW-BRIDGE	45	10	1				56
		RATHANGAN	2	1					3
		TOTAL	118	24	2	1			145
	LEIXLIP	CARBURY	4	1					5
		CEL-BRIDGE	11	2					13
		KILCOCK	6	1					7
		LEIXLIP	67	9	3	1			80
		MAY-NOOTH	12	1					13
		TOTAL	100	14	3	1			118
	NAAS	CLANE	10	1					11
		KILCULLEN	6	1					7
		NAAS	111	15	5	1			132
		ROBERTSTOWN	3						3
		TOTAL	130	17	5	1			153
KILDARE Total			348	55	10	3			416

### Restorative Justice

514. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice the extent to which restorative justice is used in Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29444/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** As the Deputy will be aware, restorative justice is a criminal justice process which has been shown to help victims recover from crime, reduce reoffending and save public resources and it is now widely accepted that restorative justice is compatible with the traditional criminal justice systems of both common law and civil law jurisdictions.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to work with all criminal justice agencies to build capacity to deliver restorative justice safely and effectively. In this context, the Probation Service has formally recognised restorative justice since the 1990s as one method within a suite of measures to provide an effective response to crime. In 2000, two dedicated community based projects were established; the Restorative Justice Service, and Restorative Justice in the Community, both of which have since extended their catchment areas and now offer services across the Greater Dublin area, as well as Tipperary, Laois and Offaly, respectively. These were established and funded through the Probation Service and both projects provide a restorative justice service to the courts through the use of reparation panels and /or victim offender mediation.

Significant developments since then include a report of the National Commission on Restorative Justice which was published in 2009 and the Report of the Penal Policy Review Group published in 2014. Both reports supported the wider application of Restorative Justice in probation practice. The Commission's report recommended that the Probation Service continue to be the lead agency in implementing the wider application of restorative justice.

In addition, Section 78 of the Children Act (2001) made provision for the introduction of the

Probation Family Conference. Following the commencement of the Act in 2005, this was rolled out through Young Persons Probation, a dedicated part of the Probation Service established to deliver the community sanctions provided for in the Act. While conferencing has now been integrated in to the supervision of some young people, the number of referrals from the courts has declined in recent years.

More recent developments in this area include the establishment in 2018 of the dedicated Restorative Justice and Victims Services Unit in the Probation Service in response to the enactment of the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017. Furthermore, the Joint Action Plan for the Management of Offenders 2019-2021 also contains a commitment to develop joint arrangements, including victim/offender mediation, for providing victims of crime with opportunities for positive, restorative responses to the harm they have experienced.

The Probation Service and my Department are stakeholders in a four year cross-European project (2019-2023), Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change (RJS4C), with partners from ten countries collaborating to implement the Council of Europe Recommendation that restorative justice should be available at any stage of the Criminal Justice process to any victim and any offender. To this end, the RJS4C has produced an Restorative Justice Collective Strategy for Ireland 2019-2023 to promote and increase awareness and accessibility to Restorative Justice.

The delivery of Restorative Justice safely and effectively is one of the strategic objectives for the Department over the next three years. Five high level actions have been identified and outlined in the Justice Plan 2021, two of which have been completed to date, including the mapping of the current state of play of Restorative Justice and the activation of a Restorative Justice case study website. In January this year Minister of State Browne launched [restorativejustice.ie](http://restorativejustice.ie). which is funded by the Department. This website maps the use of Restorative Justice in criminal justice in Ireland and contains over 35 case studies of both restorative justice and restorative practice and other resources.

Further actions planned for quarter three and four include; the development of options for an appropriate mechanism and process to create awareness and availability of Restorative Justice at all stages of the criminal justice system, with consistency of service ensuring quality in training and practice; consultations with stakeholders; and the finalisation of a policy paper. It is intended to publish the policy proposals by year end.

To further progress and deliver on the above, it is proposed that an Action Plan will be developed by my Department and the Probation Service this year. Key components will include establishing a mechanism and process to create greater awareness and availability of Restorative Justice interventions at all stages of the criminal justice system and further training and development for those delivering Restorative Justice interventions - ensuring consistency and quality of service provision. In accepting this as a policy driver, the main challenge to applying it in practice is national accessibility and consultation with key stakeholders which will be central to development of the Action Plan.

I believe that it is also important to note that the Department's plan to help victims and vulnerable witnesses in sexual violence cases, Supporting A Victim's Journey, also contains commitments to scope requirements for a more integrated consistent, visible and high quality Restorative Justice service for vulnerable victims who wish to pursue that pathway.

### **An Garda Síochána**

515. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice the amount that has

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been seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau since it was established in 1996, in tabular form. [29471/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) is a multi-agency statutory body established under the Criminal Assets Bureau Act, 1996. The Bureau's remit is to target the assets, wherever situated, of persons which derive or are suspected to derive, directly or indirectly, from criminal conduct. Officers from the Social Welfare, Revenue and Revenue Customs also seize assets that were unlawfully gained by persons under investigation by the CAB.

I am advised by CAB that the table appended to this answer represents the various assets that were seized by the CAB from its inception until 2020. Please be advised that the figures for 2020 are provisional pending the publication of the CAB Annual Report 2020.

Year	Section 2 – Interim Orders IRISH PUNTS	Section 2 Interim Orders EURO	Section 2 Interim Orders STERLING	Section 2 Interim Orders US DOLLARS	Total sent to Exchequer from Section 4(1) & 4A
1996	2,101,000.00				0.00
1997	2,334,680.00				0.00
1998	1,682,554.65				0.00
1999	1,500.00				0.00
2000	838,536.00		52,230.00		0.00
2001	1,872,654.72		491,114.09		0.00
2002		3,709,086.00	17,802,004.00	5,558,377.00	0.00
2003		3,045,842.00	12,150.00		0.00
2004		1,027,152.18	6,115.00		275,875.43 First Section 4 Disposal Order of the Bureau
2005		5,860,335.00		314,619.54	2,002,738.41 S4A power was given by the CAB Amendment Act in 2005
2006		2,974,856.03	294,289.39		2,970,589.51
2007		9,804,193.14	30,690.00		254,651.94
2008		5,022,050.89	4,860.00		2,802,460.37
2009		11,012,543.00	20,630.00	760,051.86	1,421,332.11
2010		7,019,475.88	63,535.00		3,114,312.59
2011		5,384,559.73	6,725.00		2,734,715.22
2012		2,110,334.78			4,850,540.17
2013		2,821,302.00			1,038,680.52
2014		6,760,182.00			467,152.37
2015		941,078.59			1,642,962.29
2016		643,063.07			1,412,920.41
2017		7,020,539.20			1,698,721.08
2018		8,263,582.30			2,271,799.92
2019		64,985,550.30			1,559,726.31
2020*		5,814,206.00			1,838,507.25

\* 2020 stats are provisional pending the publication of the CAB Annual Report 2020

**Taxes and Interest**

Year Ending	Taxes Collected
31/12/1996	£0.00
31/12/1997	£198,230.00
31/12/1998	£621,749.00
31/12/1999	£2,361,280.00

Year Ending	Taxes Collected
31/12/2000	£6,769,218.00
31/12/2001	£18,556,321.00
Total IR £	£28,506,798.00
Converted Euro	€36,196,166.91
31/12/2002	€10,003,816.00
31/12/2003	€9,991,022.00
31/12/2004	€16,408,649.00
31/12/2005	€16,376,598.71
31/12/2006	€19,192,906.56
31/12/2007	€10,009,459.27
31/12/2008	€5,891,624.85
31/12/2009	€5,100,494.72
31/12/2010	€4,084,498.00
31/12/2011	€3,804,867.00
31/12/2012	€1,967,925.00
31/12/2013	€5,418,000.00
31/12/2014	€3,017,000.00
31/12/2015	€2,038,000.00
31/12/2016	€2,106,000.00
31/12/2017	€2,374,000.00
31/12/2018	€3,097,000.00
31/12/2019	€2,206,000.00
31/12/2020	€2,138,000.00

### Social Welfare Statistics

Year Ending	Sums Recovered
31/12/1996	£0.00
31/12/1997	£0.00
31/12/1998	£0.00
31/12/1999	£0.00
31/12/2000	£0.00
31/12/2001	£154,583.00
Total IR £	£154,583.00
Converted Euro	€196,280.00
31/12/2002	€51,909.36
31/12/2003	€199,702.77
31/12/2004	€273,073.61
31/12/2005	€293,948.00
31/12/2006	€139,524.42
31/12/2007	€136,623.59
31/12/2008	€182,198.30
31/12/2009	€160,335.00
31/12/2010	€181,272.00
31/12/2011	€454,037.49



Year Ending	Sums Recovered
31/12/2012	€393,797.00
31/12/2013	€287,380.00
31/12/2014	€335,911.00
31/12/2015	€185,354.32
31/12/2016	€297,430.12
31/12/2017	€319,720.31
31/12/2018	€302,673.36
31/12/2019	€324,055.73
31/12/2020	€317,236.57

### Crime Prevention

516. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice if her attention has been drawn to the serious level of drug-related intimidation in Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29472/21]

517. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice the number of incidents of drug-related intimidation that were reported to An Garda Síochána in the Dublin metropolitan area in each year since 2019, in tabular form. [29473/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 516 and 517 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, proactively tackling all forms of drug crime is a priority for An Garda Síochána. The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau (GNDOCB) is having significant success in disrupting the supply of illicit drugs by organised crime groups. Its work is supported by Divisional Drugs Units nationwide and by all Gardaí working in local communities, while working closely with international law enforcement partners.

The National Drugs Strategy, “Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025 “, is unique among national drugs strategies across EU Member States in recognising the need to address drug-related debt intimidation at a community level.

The Strategy includes an action (4.1.42) which specifically relates to strengthening the effectiveness of the Drug-Related Intimidation Reporting Programme. The programme, which was developed by An Garda Síochána in partnership with the National Family Support Network (NFSN) to respond to the needs of drug users and family members who may be subject to the threat of drug related intimidation, has been implemented on a national level since 2013. In addition, the Programme for Government, Our Shared Future, includes a commitment to support the Drug-Related Intimidation Reporting Programme.

An Garda Síochána regard drug-related intimidation as a hugely serious issue which impacts significantly on communities throughout Ireland. An Garda Síochána advise people to seek help and support from their local Gardaí, even where a person has felt compelled to pay money to those who engage in drug related intimidation.

In dealing with any complaint of drug related intimidation, or advice sought in relation to this issue, An Garda Síochána have the utmost regard to the safety and most effective means to afford the person or family subject to the threat the best level of security, advice and support. Confidentiality and security of the persons concerned are paramount for An Garda Síochána

when dealing with reports under the programme.

In Dublin's North East Inner City specifically, there has been work done by the NEIC Programme Implementation Board on the issue of drug-related intimidation through the Ana Liffey Drug Project. This work is being taken forward by a sub group of the Implementation Board.

I consulted with An Garda Síochána in relation to the Deputy's query on the number of times support has been sought from and provided under the drug related intimidation reporting programme since it was established. As the Deputy will appreciate, I am informed by the Garda authorities that this information is highly sensitive and not suitable for release into the public domain.

*Question No. 517 answered with Question No. 516.*

### **An Garda Síochána**

518. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice the amount of revenue generated through the issuing of Garda age identity cards in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [29487/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Age Card is issued under the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1988 and it is not an age identity card but is only issued as proof of age (i.e. being over 18). The fee to purchase an Age Card is €10.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the information requested is commercially sensitive as the Age Card is due to go to tender this year and as such the requested information cannot be provided.

To be of assistance, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the below table sets out the number of cards issued from 2018 to 2020, and up to end of April 2021:

Year	Number of cards issued
2018	44,364
2019	36,516
2020	24,492
2021 (to end April)	4,010

### **Naturalisation Applications**

519. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the progress to date in the determination of an application for residency status and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); when the application will be brought to a conclusion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29505/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** The person concerned has current permission to remain in the State, on immigration stamp 4 conditions up to 20 September 2021, as a result of the automatic extension of immigration permissions to that date. The extension is on the same basis as their existing permission and the same conditions attach.

I can also advise the Deputy that the person concerned has lodged a formal application for renewal of their permission to remain, which will be processed to completion in due course.

Additionally, an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person concerned on 4 December 2017. This application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. However, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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 at: [INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie](mailto:INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie), 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 Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in the cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

**520. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for long-term residency and naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29509/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** I am informed by the Immigration Service of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 17 February 2017. This Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of Deportation Orders is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB).

Representations have been received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). A decision will then be made to either affirm or revoke the existing Deportation Order. This decision will be communicated in writing. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place and the person concerned is still required to present to the GNIB on any dates specified by them.

My Department has adopted a pragmatic and compassionate approach to immigration arrangements in the context of COVID-19. In line with this approach, Deportation Orders are being enforced only in circumstances where an individual may be a threat to national security or whose presence in Ireland would be contrary to the public interest.

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 ([inisoireachtasmail@justice.ie](mailto:inisoireachtasmail@justice.ie)), 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.

### Question Heading for question(s) 521

521. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice her views on a matter (details supplied); and her plans with an organisation regarding same. [29528/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I can inform the Deputy that while responsibility for this matter rests with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, my Department has engaged with all relevant stakeholders, including the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with a view to having it resolved.

It is my understanding that the matter is under consideration by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and will be examined further in the context of wider public pay policy and the implications for public expenditure.

### Departmental Reports

522. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice the party that will bear the costs for the barrister training recommended by the O'Malley report. [29527/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I would like to thank the Deputy for raising this matter as the full implementation of the recommendations of the O'Malley Review has been a priority for Minister McEntee and that will continue during my time as Minister of State in the Department of Justice.

Following publication of 'Supporting a Victim's Journey' - our plan to implement the recommendations of the O'Malley Review - the Department established three specific sub-groups to work on implementing some of these recommendations. One of these sub groups is focused on meeting the training needs of a wide range of front-line staff and professionals, including legal professionals.

Work in this subgroup is ongoing and the funding required to develop and deliver the training under the O'Malley Review recommendations will be discussed once it has been established what training is currently provided and what additional training is needed.

A representative from the Bar Council of Ireland sits on this group. As the Deputy is aware, the Council of The Bar of Ireland is the representative body for barristers who are members of the Law Library. The Bar of Ireland's existing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme is robust and equipped to incorporate relevant multidisciplinary training, as envisaged by the O'Malley Review. The CPD programme already incorporates training for barristers dealing with vulnerable witnesses, and several seminars and workshops have taken place over recent months and years.

The Bar of Ireland has indicated that they will develop a course of Continuing Professional Development suitable for barristers in line with the recommendations of the O'Malley Review. The seminars and lectures for this course will be delivered by people possessing relevant expertise, several of which will require expertise in specific non-legal fields.

### Citizenship Applications

523. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice if a person who has applied for citizenship (details supplied) will be allowed to travel to another part of Europe to take up a job

opportunity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29552/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** An application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy on 29 May 2020. This application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. However, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times, and to have such permission registered. Failure to do so, may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

A person who has made an application for citizenship is permitted to take reasonable breaks from the State for the purposes of holidays or family reasons. However, to take up an offer of employment in another country would not be in keeping with this concession. It is open to the applicant to withdraw their current application and to reapply if or when they return to the State.

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 at: INISOireachtasMail@justice.ie, 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 Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in the cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Protected Disclosures**

524. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice the status of the investigation into a protected disclosure made by a person (details supplied); the details of the investigation; if a decision has been made on the investigation; and if the details of the investigation and the decision made will be made available to the person in question, and publicly. [29627/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy is aware, the Protected Disclosures Act was enacted in 2014 to allow employees to bring alleged wrongdoing to the attention of the appropriate authorities.

The Act also affords very important protections to persons making protected disclosures. I am sure that the Deputy will appreciate therefore that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on, nor confirm the existence of any specific protected disclosure. The protection of those wishing to make a protected disclosure rightly prioritises the confidentiality of the process, which is central to the efficacy of that process.

### **Protected Disclosures**



525. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice the number of protected disclosures made to her Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29638/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I wish to advise the Deputy my Department publishes an Annual Report, on an anonymised basis, in relation to the disclosures received and dealt with under its policy in accordance with the requirements of section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014.

The Annual Reports for Protected Disclosures received by my Department for the years 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 are available on the Department's website, [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

The Annual Report for Protected Disclosures received by my Department for 2020 will be published no later than 30 June 2021, in accordance with the Protected Disclosures Act 2014.

Details of the protected disclosures in each of the past five years and to date in 2021 are outlined in the table below.

Year	Department of Justice	Irish Prison Service
2016	1	2
2017	0	2
2018	0	7
2019	3	2
2020	0	6
2021 (to 31 May)	2	1

### Immigration Status

526. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the progress to date in considering applications to regularise status in the case of persons (details supplied); if all documentation requested has now been received; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29656/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** In response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of final decisions being made.

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 ([inisoireachtasmal@justice.ie](mailto:inisoireachtasmal@justice.ie)), 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.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

527. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice if Irish citizens who reside here but work in Northern Ireland and have been vaccinated as part of the system in Northern Ireland will be in a position to apply for an EU Covid-19 digital green certificate when it is in-

roduced here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29757/21]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I wish to advise the Deputy that matters relating to the EU Covid-19 Digital Green Certificate are under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Due to the recent cyber attack, I understand that the Department of Health is not in a position to provide responses to parliamentary questions at present. Therefore, I am unable to transfer your question to the responsible Department for answer. However, I have referred your question to the Department of Health for their direct written reply as soon as possible.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

528. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an extension of time will be granted to those participants in the GLAS scheme who are due to have wild bird cover sown before 31 May as a result of recent weather conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29128/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** It is open to individual GLAS participants to contact the Department directly, in writing, to request an extension in relation to the planting requirements for the GLAS Wild Bird Cover action for this year. Requests will be examined on a case-by-case basis.

GLAS Division can be contacted by email at [glas@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:glas@agriculture.gov.ie).

### **Forestry Sector**

529. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 707 of 18 May, the obstacles that cause the large discrepancy between 1,937 ha approved and 675 ha planted; if there is a solution that could improve these statistics; the obstacles that result in a carryover of 4,500 approved hectares; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29235/21]

530. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 707 of 18 May, if he will provide clarification (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29238/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 529 and 530 together.

Regarding the figures provided in Dáil question number 707 of 18th May, the 1,937 ha are afforestation licences issued this year. This figure is now 2,336 with the addition of more recent approvals. These licences have a validity period of three years.

Therefore, they remain valid and financial approval may be sought any time up to 2024, and the site planted thereafter. The 675ha mentioned refers to tree planting which has been paid for this year, up to the end of April. A site may be planted and an application for grant-aid may be submitted but it is only counted in our figures as planted when the payment claim is submitted, approved and paid.

As regards the carry over of 4,500 approved hectares, it is entirely up to applicants whether they wish to realise the licence granted. I encourage all applicants to do so and to avail of the

generous premiums available for afforestation. The Department has written to sectoral representatives to consider whether anything else can be done to improve the conversion from approval to planting.

As regards the commitment to issue 4,500 licences this year, an increase of 75% on last year, the proportional estimated breakdown presented was based on those issued in 2020 i.e. 65% of forestry licences issued were tree felling; 20% afforestation and 15% forest roads and is an estimate. This output remains our commitment.

As regards the breakdown of tree felling licences issued between Coillte and the private sector, last year 49.62% were private and 50.38% were Coillte. I remind the Deputy that the Department regularly publishes an extensive range of forestry statistics on the Department's pages of the Government of Ireland website.

*Question No. 530 answered with Question No. 529.*

### **Data Protection**

531. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the nature of the data breaches experienced by his Department since 2018. [29302/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The nature of the breaches experienced in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine since 2018 can be categorised as follows: Disclosure (unauthorised); Paper lost/stolen; Phishing and, Unintended online publication.

Where appropriate, breaches are reported to the Data Protection Commissioner.

### **Coillte Teoranta**

532. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of Coillte felling applications received in March 2021. [29350/21]

533. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when Coillte's felling applications went into the Forest Service in March 2021; the number of applications that had site specific information, that is a harvesting plan and a replanting plan included relevant to those sites as of 14 May 2021; and the number of applications that had site specific information, that is a harvesting plan and a replanting plan included at this stage. [29351/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 532 and 533 together.

The Department received 1,864 tree felling licence applications from Coillte in March 2021. Each of these applications was accompanied by information on harvesting and replanting.

Coillte submit approximately 900 clearfell applications on average each year with details of the location of the site, the area, the objective of the harvesting site, the regeneration method, the species to be felled and the species to be replanted and other information about the environment. The map accompanying the application highlights the application area, the location of any nearby European sites, rivers, lakes, SACs, SPAs, NHAs, forest roads etc. In managing an operation of this size each year it is important that Coillte have environmental and operational standards that they apply and that they have a consistency across the country as to how they

approach each site.

For sites that are screened in for appropriate assessment, which is the majority of sites, Coillte submitted a detailed Natura Impact Statement that provides more detail around the felling and replanting operations. The harvesting information provided, including a harvesting map, included a description of how the timber is to be removed from the forest, techniques for protecting soil while doing so, environmental setbacks and plans for reforestation. In relation to reforestation, the information provided includes species to be planted, stocking density, the reforestation objective and information on ground preparation.

*Question No. 533 answered with Question No. 532.*

### **Agriculture Schemes**

534. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 987 of 24 November 2020, if he has evidence of such endorsement (details supplied). [29433/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The audit carried out by the European Court of Auditors ensured that the process implemented by the Department was entirely in accordance with EU Regulations (with Article 42(5) of Regulation (EC) 1782/2003 and Article 7 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 795/2004).

There were no findings in the final report concerning Ireland's implementation of the consolidation process.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

535. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 996 of 11 May, if the single farm payment is attached to the land in cases in which force majeure does not apply (details supplied). [29434/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** Payment entitlements under the Single Payments Scheme were not attached to specific land. The regulations in relation to the consolidation of payment entitlements on owned and leased land were originally set out in Commission Regulation (EC) No 795/2004 which was repealed by Commission Regulation (EC) No 1120/2009.

Article 46(2) of Regulation 1782/2003 sets out the circumstances for the transfer of payment entitlements under the Single Farm Payment Scheme. The article states that payment entitlements can be transferred by sale or other definitive transfer methods with or without land.

Leased payment entitlements must be accompanied by a transfer of the equivalent number of eligible hectares unless force majeure, or exceptional circumstances apply, in which case the leasing of the entitlements without land may be facilitated.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

536. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 997 of 11 May, the reason payment entitlements under the

single payments scheme were not attached to specific land in cases in which the land in question is specific (details supplied). [29435/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Single Payment Scheme (SPS) was implemented in Ireland in 2005 under European Commission Regulation (EC)1782/2003. Ireland implemented the historical model of the SPS, which meant that the number of payment entitlements each farmer received was based on the average number of hectares farmed in the three reference years – 2000 to 2002.

The total SPS amount belongs to the farmer and did not attach to lands. The Single Payment was based on the amount of payments made to farmers during the 2000 to 2002 reference period. The lands used during the reference period was simply used to break the SPS total payment down to entitlement value and number.

The regulations in relation to the consolidation of payment entitlements on owned and leased land were originally set out in Commission Regulation (EC) No 795/2004 which was repealed by Commission Regulation (EC) No 1120/2009.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

537. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 997 of 11 May, the reason payment entitlements under the single payments scheme were not attached to specific land in cases in which the land in question is specific (details supplied). [29436/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Single Payment Scheme was implemented in Ireland in 2005 under European Commission Regulation (EC) 1782/2003. Ireland implemented the historical model of the SPS, which meant that the number of payment entitlements each farmer received was based on the average number of hectares farmed in the three reference years – 2000 to 2002

The total Single Payment Scheme amount belongs to the farmer and did not attach to lands. The Single

Payment was based on the amount of payments made to farmers during the 2000 to 2002 reference period. The lands used during the reference period was used to break the SPS total payment down to entitlement value and number.

The regulations in relation to the consolidation of payment entitlements on owned and leased land were originally set out in Commission Regulation (EC) No 795/2004 which was repealed by Commission Regulation (EC) No 1120/2009.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

538. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the single farm payment belongs on the land of the lessor in circumstances (details supplied); and if he can interfere with a lease contract freely entered into and decide that the value of the single payment data is the property of the lessee in spite of the contract. [29437/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** Under the milk quota system, the milk quota was attached to lands used for milk production in 1983 – the milk quota reference year - and quota that was attached to leased (or rented) lands was



transferred to the lessee at the end of the lease agreement.

The question also references the single farm payment – in accordance with the provisions of the relevant EU regulations, Single farm payment entitlements were allocated to farmers in 2005 based on the amount of payments made to a farmer and the land declared as farmed by that farmer during the 2000-2002 period. Land that was declared as either owned or rented by the applicant was counted in the calculation of the entitlements. The single farm payment was “attached” to the farmer and did not “attach” to lands.

In the details supplied by the Deputy, the standard lease provision quoted refers to milk quota and how it was to be treated when a lease was expired or terminated. This has no relevance to the question of ownership of single payment entitlements. Clauses in a private contract freely entered into between two parties that contravene those conditions remain for the parties to the contract to resolve.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

539. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to minimise the impact of the eco-scheme on farmers’ basic payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29447/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The CAP legislative proposals set out the mandatory requirement for Member States to introduce ECO schemes, but farmers can choose whether or not to apply. However, participation in ECO schemes will allow farmers to maximise their payments.

The European Parliament and AgriFish Council positions on ECO schemes differ. The Council position advocates a ring-fenced amount of 20% for ECO schemes, along with a two-year learning period at the start of the CAP Strategic Plan to allow Member States avoid any loss of unspent funds due to lower-than-expected take-up of ECO schemes. The Parliament is seeking a 30% ring-fencing amount with no learning phase.

A significant concern for all Member States is the potential loss of unspent funds in the case of low uptake by farmers. This is not a situation I want to see. Current discussions are focusing on how to mitigate this risk. In addition, I will be encouraging farmers to apply for these Schemes and seeking to make them as simple and practical as possible.

I have been consistent in my approach that I cannot accept a potentially serious risk to the loss of CAP funding with the introduction of new ECO schemes. Member States must have the necessary flexibility to manage this.

Agriculture Ministers discussed the CAP legislative proposals, including the green architecture, at the most recent AgriFish Council meeting on 26-27 May. However, following lengthy and challenging discussions, diverging views remain on key aspects of the CAP, including the green architecture. Trilogue discussions will continue with the expectation of reaching a final agreement on the CAP at the next AgriFish Council in June.

Ultimately, I want the ECO Schemes to be as farmer-friendly as possible so payments can be maximised.

### **Agriculture Industry**

540. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to phase out of long-term leasing of entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29448/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The new CAP regulations are still at negotiation stage and, therefore, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive answer regarding the potential conditions relating to long-term payment entitlement and land lease agreements. The position regarding payment entitlements in the next programming period cannot be confirmed until such time as the regulatory provisions are agreed and in place. The proposed new CAP Regulation may affect various aspects of payment entitlements such as the value of payment entitlements which could change due to allocations of funding within the ceiling.

The Department has consulted with relevant stakeholders and will continue to do so. I will continue to negotiate on the proposals for the new CAP at European level to obtain the best possible outcomes for Irish farmers.

### **Agriculture Industry**

541. **Deputy Patricia Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide significant funding to assist the revival of Ireland's sugar beet industry; his plan for the restarting of a traditionally very important industry here; the actions he has already taken to facilitate the return of sugar production to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29449/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** In 2006, the EU introduced a restructuring mechanism intended to reduce overall production of sugar, acknowledging the then global over supply and resultant low prices being achieved. Ireland secured €353 million as part of the reform package with some €220 million being distributed to beet growers and a further €6 million to machinery contractors in the sector.

As part of the reform of the CAP, agreement was secured on the abolition of sugar quotas from 30th September 2017. From that date, investors in the European Union, including Ireland, are free to invest in sugar producing capacity if they wish.

Since 2006, a number of groups have expressed an interest in the redevelopment of the sugar sector, two of whom prepared desktop feasibility studies between 2010 and 2011. In their findings, both proposals sought to develop a new sugar and bioethanol production facility with capital costs, estimated at the time, of between €250 and €400 million.

In 2018, Beet Ireland sought to engage with interested growers in an equity partnership proposal to develop a sugar processing facility in the southeast. However the group announced in June 2019 that it was postponing its plans.

The Department continues to monitor market trends in the sector but it must be noted that the landscape has completely changed since Ireland exited sugar production and EU sugar quotas were abolished. Sugar prices remain depressed due to an oversupply in the world market.

The Deputy will appreciate that any proposals to re-establish sugar production must be industry-led and would need to be supported by a robust business case, having regard to low price being achieved globally for sugar and associated market issues, to attract the substantial level of funding required to support and underpin a new start-up of the scale required to re-establish the sector in Ireland.

## Forestry Sector

542. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position with regard to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29474/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The person named applied under the Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (Ash dieback) because of the impact of ash dieback on their plantation. A reply from National Parks and Wildlife Service, (NPWS) was awaited and this has now been received. The Forestry District Inspector is completing their final review of the application. They will make their recommendations, which will form part of the decision on the application. I expect the decision will issue to the applicant in the coming days.

## Harbours and Piers

543. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the capital works in Howth Harbour are currently fully or partially funded by his Department; the estimated cost of each capital works project; and when each project will be completed in tabular form [29489/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** Howth Fishery Harbour Centre (FHC) is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute.

Funding for capital works is made available on an annual basis by the Department to the Fishery Harbour Centres, via the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. These capital works are fully funded by the Department. Since 2010, €14.68 million has been invested in Howth FHC.

I recently announced a capital investment package of €38.3 million in the 2021 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, and I am pleased to advise the Deputy that €8.295 million has been allocated to works at Howth FHC. Details of the projects included in, and funding allocated to Howth FHC under the Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme 2021 are in the following link.

COVID-19 restrictions have meant the necessary closure of construction sites and related delays for projects at Howth Fishery Harbour Centre.

With the exception of the Middle Pier Berthing Project, the Harbour Dredging Design & Permitting Stage project and the Fisherman's toilet & shower facility, all projects at the construction stage are due to be completed by December 2021.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-06-01\_pq543-01-06-2021\_en.docx">Howth Fishery Harbour</a>]

## Animal Breeding

544. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will clarify the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 65 of 20 May 2021 (details supplied); the way in which the average figure of six pups per litter has been arrived at in the absence of an exact

figure for the number of pups born; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29490/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Irish Coursing Club (ICC) is the organisation charged with the role of Keeper of the Irish Stud Book since 1923. The stud book records pedigrees, ownerships, breeding data and transfers of ownership primarily of all greyhounds. Greyhounds are required to be named with the Club. The ICC is subject to the general control and direction of Rásaíocht Con Éireann.

The ICC has informed the Department that the data requested by the Deputy in PQ No. 65 of 20th May 2021 is not available for the years 2009 to 2020 as their system could report the total number of litters born but not the individual number of pups per litter.

The ICC has informed the Department that the average litter size cited previously is the industry norm across greyhound jurisdictions, approximately six or seven pups per litter. It is an indicative figure only and does not purport to be an exact statistic. The number of greyhounds named each year is an exact number of pups from the previous 12-month period in the main (named between 12-15 months approx) and is representative of the number of greyhounds available for competition.

The ICC registration software system has been subject to recent updates and the information on individual numbers of pups will be available from 2021.

### **Fishing Industry**

545. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the issues raised by the fishers as part of their protest in Cork on 26 May 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29585/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The impact of Brexit on Ireland's seafood sector, and the coastal communities dependent on it, is understandably a major concern for the sector. However, this impact would have been far greater had the Barnier Task Force agreed to UK demands, or had we been in a no-deal scenario which would have seen all EU vessels barred from UK waters and subsequent displacement into Ireland's fishing zone.

I can assure the Deputy that this Government intends to continue to keep the focus on the disproportionate quota reductions for Ireland and to use any opportunity available to seek constructive solutions that would help to alleviate this unacceptable position.

I have raised the matter of inequitable burden sharing at EU level - most recently at the May Agriculture and Fisheries Council - and in bilateral exchanges with other EU Member States, whenever suitable opportunities arise, and I will continue to do so.

I am pursuing every opportunity at EU level to increase the available quotas for our fishing fleet. I have previously stated that I am committed to doing all possible through the review of the CFP to secure additional quota where possible for Irish fishers. I will consider how Ireland will prepare for and participate actively and effectively in the review, including the interaction with stakeholders to prepare Ireland's case and identify priorities.

The impact of Brexit has been a major blow for the Irish fishing industry but I am convinced that this is a sustainable sector with a strong future. There are opportunities for growth if we invest in and add value to our seafood sector - and there is a strong commitment from the Government to do this. My objective is to work with the industry to grow the sector in the years

ahead. Through the Seafood Sector Taskforce, I've brought all voices in the sector together to advise on how we can invest in the sector and I anticipate receiving the interim report from the Taskforce shortly.

Fishers also raised the issue of fisheries control. The monitoring and control of fishing vessels within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone are matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature are exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Naval Service. As Minister, I am expressly precluded from getting involved in operational matters such as this.

I wish to assure the Deputy that this Government is committed to work with the seafood sector to adjust to the impact of Brexit and ensure a clear path for the growth of the sector in the years ahead.

### Protected Disclosures

546. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of protected disclosures made to his Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29628/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The number of Protected Disclosures received in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the past five years and to date in 2021 is as follows:

Year	Number
2016	3
2017	2
2018	1
2019	2
2020	4
2021	1

### Agriculture Schemes

547. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1043 of 17 February 2021, if the requested information has been compiled and is available. [29684/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** This information requested has now been compiled and is provided below. It is important to note some conditions on which the data is based:

- The total value amount is based on Payment Entitlement values only – it does not include greening.

- It takes the value of the entitlement at the time of leasing – so there is no account taken here of convergence, linear adjustments or any other changes to these entitlements.

- The cases here include those made in 2019 for three years, which will revert to the owner in 2022 before the new CAP programme is applied.

- The figures are comprised of all current active leases – for example, five year leases which



began in 2017 are included in these figures.

- It should be noted that the figures include leases from an individual to their own company in addition to those between separate farmers.

Lease Years	Number Entitlements	Lease Value
3	5,278.03	€1,008,525.99
4	4,436.30	€944,199.34
5	45,986.00	€9,365,811.52
>6	114,938.69	24,194,959
Totals	170,639.02	€35,513,496.27

### Livestock Issues

548. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason journeys to continental Europe involving unweaned calves are being authorised by his Department given the calves cannot be fed during transit which is in direct contravention of point 1.4(a) Chapter V of EU Regulation 1/2005 that states unweaned calves must be fed after a maximum of 19 hours; the steps he will take to bring the live export sector in line with legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29752/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine takes its responsibilities in the matter of animal welfare very seriously and exercises close oversight, and deploys considerable resources to the area of animal welfare in general, including in respect of animals being transported. The legal interpretation you have quoted is not one which is shared by the Department.

Notwithstanding, continuing additional measures are regularly taken to further enhance and safeguard animal welfare during transport. In 2020, this included prohibiting transport in temperatures of 30°C or greater, increased space in lorries for young calves, and a requirement on drivers to retrain every three years instead of 10 years. These measures were further enhanced in 2021 with a minimum of 40kg bodyweight set for calves to be exported, and a ban introduced on animal transport to certain countries in July and August, and December/January to avoid extreme temperatures.

Furthermore, Teagasc has begun an intensive research project aiming to help establish ways to further improve welfare during transport, including feeding a high-energy, slow-release meal before transport. In early May, Teagasc scientists accompanied a consignment of calves to Cherbourg to carry out a preliminary study of the scientific indicators of welfare before, during and after their ferry voyage with a view to starting to amass a body of evidence on what further interventions would best enhance their welfare and comfort *en route*.

This trade is important to Irish farming and is highly valued by the farming community as it provides an outlet for dairy calves, which have a limited market in Ireland. These calves are highly valued by European farmers and arrive in good health and welfare conditions relative to calves from other countries: a Dutch peer-reviewed scientific study has shown that farms in the Netherlands which raise mostly Irish-origin calves require significantly less antibiotic usage than those from other countries, indicating more robust health and welfare.

Finally, the Programme for Government contains an undertaking to provide additional funding to support animal welfare in the coming years to which I am fully committed. In this regard, in December 2020, I announced record funding of €3.2 million to 101 animal welfare organisa-

tions throughout the country.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

549. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied). [29813/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I wish to inform the Deputy that the Agriculture Appeals Office operates independently of my Department.

I have been informed, however, that an appeal was received by the Agriculture Appeals Office on 6th April 2021.

The Appeals Office operates in accordance with the Agriculture Appeals Regulations 2002 which require an appeal to be made within three months of the date of the decision letter from the Department. The decision letter from the Department to the person named is dated 21st November 2020 and, therefore, an appeal should have been submitted to the Appeals Office by 21st February 2021.

I am informed that as the appeal from the person named was received in the Appeals Office on 6th April 2021, it was outside of the three month timeframe. I am further informed that the person named was notified that they could request that the Director consider accepting a late appeal where they believe exceptional circumstances exist that caused the delay in lodging the appeal.

The person named was requested to outline the circumstances of such a late appeal by 6th May 2021. However, no such request has been received in the Appeals Office. I am advised that the Director will consider evidence concerning exceptional circumstances should the person named wish to submit details as soon as possible.

### **Flood Risk Management**

550. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if funding is being made available for a project (details supplied) that is urgently required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29835/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** My Department owns, operates and maintains six designated State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl under statute. In addition, the Department also has responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of North Harbour at Cape Clear, as well as the maintenance of a small number of specific piers, lights and beacons throughout Ireland, in accordance with the Marine Works (Ireland) Act 1902, and piers, lights and beacons constructed under the auspices of the Congested Districts Board.

Coastal defences in general fall under the remit of the Office of Public Works.

### **Fishing Industry**

551. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the

Marine if he will consider and advise on a regular payment scheme to support the whitefish and shellfish sectors in order to counteract the huge loss of revenue brought about by a significant drop in market value of their catch due to 15 months of Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29851/21]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Department's European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Programme is the funding programme for the development of our fisheries sector. The Programme supports a wide range of initiatives, including capital investment on board and ashore, advisory services, innovation, training and marketing.

The European Union amended its European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Regulation in 2020 to facilitate aid payments to the fisheries sector in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. The amended Regulation allowed aid for either storage aid market supports or for temporary fleet tie-up. In June to August 2020, the Department implemented a temporary fleet tie-up scheme through BIM. The Regulation provided that these COVID-related initiatives were only allowed up to 31st December 2020.

### Departmental Funding

552. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a request for CSP funding in the name of a group (details supplied) will be reviewed as a matter of urgency; and if the funding requested will be approved given the significance of the project to the local community and the enormous contribution being made by volunteers. [29127/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** My Department's Community Services Programme (CSP) supports over 420 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. The CSP provides an annual co-funding contribution of €19,033 for each fulltime equivalent (FTE) position being supported, and, where warranted, provides €32,000 towards the cost of employing a manager. Qualifying organisations must be social enterprises capable of generating income from their activities in order to meet the full salary costs of the supported posts, for example, from income received from the public use of facilities and services. The scheme is managed by Pobal, on behalf of my Department.

I understand that Pobal is providing ongoing support to the organisation in question and is continuing to engage with their Board in progressing their business planning in connection with their application for acceptance under this programme. Pobal have advised that they have offered the organisation the use of an external business coach to assist them to complete their revised business plan submission. In addition, Pobal's Development Coordinator is in regular contact with their Chair and Treasurer, most recently on 28 May by email.

At this stage, it is not possible to confirm what level of funding, if any, may ultimately be provided to the organisation until a final business plan is submitted and is appraised for funding. However, Pobal will continue to work with the organisation with a view to finalising their business plan in connection with their application under this programme.

### Data Protection

553. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the

nature of the data breaches experienced by her Department since 2018. [29314/21]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I can confirm that my Department has identified 3 data breaches since 2018 - 1 in 2018 and 2 in 2020. No data breaches were identified in 2019, or to date in 2021. The nature of breaches which occurred was due to information disclosed in error. In the case of each incident immediate remedial action was undertaken, and the Data Protection Commission was notified in line with Data Protection regulations.

### **Library Services**

554. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there is an application for a library (details supplied) with her Department. [29541/21]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The delivery of public library services, including the provision of library premises, is a matter for each local authority in accordance with the Local Government Act, 2001. Accordingly, the delivery of library services in Mahon/Blackrock and the surrounding areas is primarily a matter for Cork City Council.

My Department has had discussions with Cork City Council regarding a new library for Blackrock-Mahon, but no request for funding has been received to date. However, as my Department's Libraries Capital Programme is currently fully committed, should Cork City Council submit an application for funding, it will be considered for support if additional capital funding becomes available. Consequently, my Department has advised the City Council to consider submitting an application for funding for this library to the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), which is administered by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

In the event that the City Council submits an application for funding under the URDF, they have also been informed of the requirement to simultaneously submit their application to my Department for technical assessment of the proposed new library, where it will be progressed through the Four Stage Capital Management Process. This is to ensure that the Standards and Benchmarks for public libraries are being adhered to and is the practice for all new public library projects, including those being funded by URDF. I am aware that Cork City Council are currently working towards submitting a Stage 1 application and my Department will support the City Council and work with them to progress this project.

### **Island Communities**

555. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress that has been made on the proposal in the 1996 Strategic Framework for Offshore Islands to establish an island product marketing group. [29543/21]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am working to ensure that sustainable vibrant communities continue to live on the islands, and I have made this one of the key elements of Our Rural Future, the Government's new Rural Development Policy. Furthermore, my Department is currently developing a new National Islands Policy, a central objective of which is to ensure that sustainable vibrant communities continue to live on the offshore islands.

The Interdepartmental Committee referred to by the Deputy was established in June 1993, and went on to publish its report “A strategic framework for developing the offshore islands” in 1996.

Whilst a specific island product marketing group was not established, the intervening years did see the establishment of a number of support initiatives to assist island producers including schemes such as the Areas of Natural Constraints scheme which provides payments to people farming land on offshore islands. It aims to support the continuation of farming in these area by compensating farmers for the additional costs involved in farming such land.

Support for enterprise, cultural and social development has been provided through grants to development companies on the non-Gaeltacht islands and cooperatives on the Gaeltacht islands who provide support services and advice to island communities. These bodies have also played a role to advance LEADER, EU and local LEO projects.

Fáilte Ireland has also developed a range of promotional campaigns, recognising the value of islands as cultural destinations.

The development of a new Islands Policy is an objective within the Programme for Government, and will build on what has been achieved to date. A series of bilateral meetings with various Government Departments are now underway, to apprise the Departments of the findings of the consultations and to explore how Departments might address the issues raised by island communities.

These discussions will contribute to the preparation by my Department of a new 10-year policy for the development of the islands, with associated three-year Action Plans, which will underpin island development for the next decade.

### **Island Communities**

556. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the work that has been done on an all-Ireland basis to ensure the reliance of County Donegal offshore island communities on their nearest city of Derry to meet their economic and social needs is addressed through regional cross-Border planning; if she or her predecessors raised this issue at the North-South Ministerial Council; and if research has been conducted on the negative impact of partition on the economic life and provision of services to offshore island communities and the way this can be addressed. [29546/21]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department recognises that economic sustainability and ready access to services are key to retaining the next generation of islanders and to overcoming the many issues for island communities which arise from their separation from the mainland. As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is currently in the process of drafting a new National Islands Policy. A central objective of the policy is to ensure that sustainable vibrant communities continue to live on the offshore islands, a process which will draw on input from many Departments and national bodies.

Our Rural Future, the new National Rural Development policy covering the period 2021 - 2025 which contains a specific chapter on the islands, also contains a commitment to enhanced cooperation with our counterparts in Northern Ireland on issues related to the economic and social development of rural areas, including the islands.

Last month saw the first meeting of the new North-South Rural Policy Forum at which there



was recognition of the many shared challenges and opportunities faced by rural communities in both jurisdictions.

I have also met with Minister Edwin Poots, both bilaterally and at the North-South Ministerial Council in October and November last year. Unfortunately our recent NSMC Sectoral meeting could not take place as scheduled but my hope is that this meeting can be rescheduled as I recognise the importance of these meaningful engagements.

### **Protected Disclosures**

557. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of protected disclosures made to her Department in each of the past five years and to date in 2021. [29640/21]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I can confirm that my Department has not received any protected disclosures since its establishment in 2017. A Protected Disclosures policy is in place and available to all staff in the Department and its agencies.

### **Departmental Programmes**

558. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the legal basis and advice available to her Department detailing the requirement to make the awarding of the contract for the social inclusion community activation programme subject to a public competitive tendering process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29646/21]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is the government's primary social inclusion intervention.

The current programme commenced on 1st January 2018 and is due to run to 31st December 2022. In advance of the commencement of the programme, legal advice in relation to procurement was sought by my Department. Based on the advice received, it was decided that the programme would be subject to a tender process.

My Department is currently working on the design of the follow on programme to SICAP. This will be a collaborative process involving wide stakeholder consultation. As part of this, the legal requirements and available options for the awarding of contracts for the next programme will be examined and a decision will be taken based on the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and the need to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients.

### **Digital Hubs**

559. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development her plans to support private property owners to convert vacant properties to digital hubs to facilitate remote and blended working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29209/21]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The increased shift to remote working as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has given us the opportunity for a greater regional distribution of jobs and to support a better quality of life for

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many people who previously spent many hours in long commutes. This is a key focus of the Government's new rural development policy Our Rural Future.

Remote working, supported by appropriate infrastructure and facilities, has the potential to encourage more people to live in rural areas while working in good quality jobs, no matter where their employer is based. It can also help revitalise our rural town if remote working hubs are developed in their centres.

My Department continues to invest significantly in the development of new Hub facilities across the country. Since 2015, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme has provided €7.8m in funding to hubs and hub-related projects. Many of the successful projects involve the regeneration of historic town centre buildings as Enterprise and Co-Working Hubs.

I recently announced funding of €15 million that is available under the 2021 Town & Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS). In line with Our Rural Future, a key focus of this year's scheme is to renovate derelict and vacant buildings in our town centres, and specifically supports bringing vacant properties in town centres back into use or repurpose existing community or publicly owned buildings as remote working hubs.

I have increased the maximum grant available under this Scheme to €500,000 to permit projects of significant scale to be funded. The TVRS is administered by Local Authorities, who are currently seeking expressions of interest for suitable projects from local groups in towns and villages within their respective counties. The closing date set for receipt of completed applications by my Department is 16 July.

I should stress that the purchase of a building in isolation, without clearly defined proposals to bring it back into use, is unlikely to be successful.

In addition to funding through the Town and Village Scheme, €65m has also been invested in hub projects through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund since 2018. A further call for projects under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will issue later this year.

There are a range of other initiatives outlined in Our Rural Future which will contribute to addressing vacancy in our towns and villages. In particular, an Inter-departmental Group has been established to develop a Town Centre First Approach, with a focus on vacancy and dereliction, and to bring forward recommendations to Government.