

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 28, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 29 to 87, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 88 to 96, inclusive, answered orally.

Departmental Licences

97. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of foreshore licence applications that are currently in progress or pending relating to wind energy development in the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44218/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): My Department is responsible for regulating the use of the foreshore through a system of leasing and licensing under the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended. Currently foreshore licence applications are being considered for site investigations to assist with site selection and for gathering environmental and technical data to inform the future location and detailed design of proposed offshore wind farms.

Energia currently have two applications for foreshore licences for site investigations on the South East coast. Licences have recently been granted following the assessment of these applications and the relevant notices of determination will be published shortly, as required under section 21 of the Foreshore Act 1933. Details of these applications can be viewed on my Department's website.

There are also a number of pre-applications covering the same area of coastline that are currently undergoing technical review in my Department prior to being put forward to full application and public consultation stage of the assessment process for a foreshore licence.

An Investigative Foreshore Licence does not grant exclusivity to a developer on the area licensed. A licence holder may only carry out the works as specified in the licence and such a licence does not permit the development of an offshore wind farm. Such developments will be the subject of future applications under a new consenting regime which is due to be introduced under the Maritime Area Planning Bill.

Question No. 98 answered orally.

Derelict Sites

99. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will outline his plan to assist more local authorities to acquire derelict properties compulsorily if necessary. [46473/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The 2018 Indecon Report on the Taxation of Vacant Residential Property recommended that a major programme of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) should be activated by Local Authorities to purchase vacant properties, even when these dwellings are not suitable for social housing.

Housing for All: A new Housing Plan for Ireland provides for such a programme of CPO acquisitions, supported by a bridging finance facility from the Housing Finance Agency, which will allow Local Authorities to maximise opportunities to return vacant properties to productive use.

The objective of the programme, which will be introduced by the end of 2021, is for Local Authorities to acquire up to 2,500 vacant units by 2026 and present them to the open market for sale.

The Housing Agency will assist and advise Local Authorities with the CPO process. Vacant Homes Officers, already in situ in each Local Authority, will be responsible for driving this programme forward.

I encourage Local Authorities to be proactive in utilising their legislative powers for compulsory purchase, where necessary, with the aim of bringing the greatest number of recoverable long-term vacant dwellings and sites back into use. In many cases, however, the use of compulsory purchase powers is not necessary, as agreement to purchase can be reached between the local authority and the property owner.

Question No. 100 answered orally.

Wastewater Treatment

101. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the way his Department in conjunction with Irish Water plans to provide modern sewage infrastructure to villages lacking sewerage facilities in County Clare. [46387/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): As with my reply to Deputy Canney, both Minister O'Brien and I are aware of the demand for waste water infrastructure in towns and villages where there is no access to public infrastructure in County Clare, and indeed in other areas around the country. In fact, I understand that on 27 August last, Minister O'Brien visited the village of Broadford in Clare and spoke to residents on this very issue. He has also met with Oireachtas members from the constituency to discuss the matter on numerous occasions and he is fully committed to finding a suitable solution for the people of Broadford.

My Department builds its strategic water policy and infrastructure delivery programmes around the National Planning Framework 2018-2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027. Investment is primarily delivered through Irish Water while my Department operates the Rural Water Programme directly.

The Programme for Government supports the uptake of Irish Water's Small Towns and Villages Growth Programme 2020-2024, which will provide water and waste water growth

capacity in smaller settlements that would otherwise not be provided for in Irish Water's capital investment plan.

Complementary to Irish Water's Programme, my Department is currently examining waste water requirements in the context of villages and settlements that do not have public waste water infrastructure. As mentioned, Minister O'Brien has instructed the relevant officials in the Department to prepare a report on this topic at national level. This report will include the analysis of a baseline survey of all rural local authorities to quantify and qualify the number of villages and settlements concerned. This process is at an advanced stage, and Minister O'Brien will be in a position to consider the matter further in relation to these villages and similar settlements, as identified in the survey, once he has received the final report.

Student Accommodation

102. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on An Bord Pleanála's decision to grant student accommodation change of use given the ongoing student accommodation crisis; if he is planning to ban the practice and provide updated guidance to planning authorities regarding this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46463/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): Under Section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act) I am unable to exercise any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or the Board is or may be concerned. Therefore, I cannot comment on any specific decisions concerning An Bord Pleanála.

On the generalities of the Board performing its functions, when making a decision, the Board in accordance with Section 143 of the Act, shall have regard to the policies and objectives of the Government, a State authority, the Minister, planning authorities and any other body which is a public authority whose functions have, or may have, a bearing on the proper planning and sustainable development of cities, towns or other areas, whether urban or rural. This includes guidance issued by my Department regarding student accommodation.

In the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, student accommodation was defined as SHD for developments of more than 200 units. As of end August 2021, the Board had received SHD applications in respect of 15,684 student bed spaces. 13,660 student bedspaces have been granted planning permission to that date.

My Department issued Circular PL 8 of 2016 regarding the identification of planning measures to enhance housing supply. This included the consideration of the student accommodation to help ease the housing crisis. My colleague the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science has contacted my Department concerning the recent issues regarding student accommodation. An updated circular has issued indicating that in considering planning applications for the change of use of student accommodation for a temporary period, planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála must be satisfied that there are compelling non-Covid related grounds to grant permission for any such proposed change of use, while demand for student accommodation remains high.

Local Authorities

103. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and

Heritage the engagement he or his Department have had with Galway city and county councils with regard to allocating resources for additional staff members in order to have the capacity to deliver on its social housing programmes and the range of infrastructural services required to facilitate such developments as highlighted in the minutes of a meeting (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46394/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In March of this year my Department's Secretary General and other senior officials met with each of the Galway local authority Chief Executives. On 31 May and 2 June and, most recently again, on 13 and 14 September, I met with the Chief Executives of all local authorities including both Galway City and County Councils, where a range of issues relating to the Housing for All plan were discussed, including resources and infrastructure.

Housing for All contains strong commitments on strengthening the capacity of local authorities to initiate, design, plan, develop and manage housing projects. These commitments arise from engagements I have had with all our local authorities - both officials and elected members - including with Galway colleagues, which have directly influenced the new plan.

Supports are being provided to all local authorities through the Housing Delivery Co-Ordination Office (HDCO), which has been established within the Local Government Management Agency.

Housing for All commits to further build focussed housing delivery teams within the local authorities that are equipped to deliver on the scale of ambition in the Plan. It commits that before the end of 2021, we will complete a structured review of the resources, skillsets and training required to ensure that all necessary resources are in place to design, deliver and implement social housing projects, in line with the needs outlined in this Plan. Work is well advanced in this area. The HDCO has met directly with all local authorities including those in Galway, in carrying out an analysis of the additional skillsets and resources required, including project management skillsets.

Housing for All also recognises that housing cannot be delivered unless we have strong integration between housing developments and the surrounding infrastructure and the move to plan-led development will support this integrated system.

Departmental Reports

104. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when the final report of the working group on horticultural peat will be published. [46428/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): I established the working group referred to by the Deputy, under independent chairman Dr. Munoo Prasad, to examine important issues which had been identified during the Review of the use of Peat in the Horticultural Industry.

The working group is comprised of representatives of the relevant Government Departments, State Bodies and Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations and sectors within the horticultural industry.

Dr Prasad has held 11 meetings of the working group to date, and has had a number of presentations, from, for example, the Chair of the UK Growing Media Association, an Associate Professor at the School of Agriculture and Food Science in UCD, Teagasc and from growing media producers and horticultural industry growers.

I understand that the final report is to be completed and sent to me by the end of September 2021. The report is expected to identify possible alternatives to peat and to outline the research required to produce commercially effective alternatives for the Horticulture sector.

Housing Schemes

105. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the incentives he plans to introduce to assist first-time buyers in purchasing second-hand houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46457/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department operates the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, which is targeted at first time buyers who wish to own their own home, have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home.

The loan enables credit worthy first time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range or to self-build.

As part of Housing for All, I announced that a reformed successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, the 'Local Authority Home Loan', will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible.

In addition, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate for new borrowers by 0.25% under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL), as from 10 September 2021; this lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan.

I also announced a 'Fresh Start' principle for applications to State affordable housing and loan schemes. This means that people who are divorced or separated and have no interest in the family home, or who have undergone insolvency proceedings, will be eligible to apply.

Planning Issues

106. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he plans to legislate to grant a further extension to planning permissions for residential housing delayed by Covid-19 and by building supply issues; if he has estimated the numbers of such permissions due to expire without completion in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46345/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): Construction work has been significantly impacted, with both delays and site closures throughout 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Therefore, on 9 September 2021, new provisions were commenced to allow for applications, subject to certain conditions, for further extensions of duration of planning permission of 2 years or until 31 December 2023, which ever first occurs, under section 42(1B) of the Planning and Development Act 2000. This further extension period takes into account the restrictions on construction and disruptions in logistics, supply chains, and the availability of personnel when restarting construction work after the closure of building sites over the last year. Accordingly, I have no plans to provide for further legislation for extensions to planning

permissions for residential housing.

An estimate of the number of planning permissions for residential housing delayed by Covid-19 and by building supply issues due to expire without completion in 2021 is not available in my Department. It is a matter for the relevant planning authority, in respect of any permission due to expire without completion in 2021, to determine on a case by case basis whether the conditions for granting a further extension of the period are satisfied.

Housing Policy

107. **Deputy Francis Noel Duffy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans and those of his Department to reserve units in housing developments for first-time buyers as set out in the Housing for All plan; the timeline for this provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46318/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): Action 1.10 in Housing for All outlines that a form of ‘owner-occupier guarantee’ will be introduced to enable local authorities to specify the proportion of houses and duplexes in a development for owner-occupiers. This is intended to build on the existing higher-rate stamp duty measures and restrictions on planning permissions introduced in May 2021 by way of section 28 Guidelines on the Regulation of Commercial Institutional Investment in Housing.

The current guidelines ensure that new ‘own-door’ houses and duplex units in housing developments are not bulk-purchased by commercial institutional investors in a manner that causes the displacement of individual purchasers and/or social and affordable housing including cost-rental. The guidelines set out two alternative planning conditions to which planning authorities must have regard, in granting planning permission for new residential development that includes 5 or more houses and/or duplex units.

The conditions restrict such properties to first occupation and use by individual purchasers and those eligible for social/affordable housing including cost-rental. To achieve this, the applicant must enter into an agreement with the planning authority, which may be terminated in certain circumstances.

Action 1.10 seeks to allow local authorities, following on from the preparation of Housing Need and Demand Assessments, to specify a proportion of houses and duplexes in a development for individual purchasers. It is not proposed to restrict this measure to first time buyers, however it may assist such individual purchasers. It is proposed to bring proposals forward in Q4 2021 in this regard.

Housing Policy

108. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the reason local authorities are not permitted to purchase homes for tenants by social housing support recipients that are put up for sale but are permitted to enter into long-term lease arrangements for these same properties after the social housing support recipient has been evicted on grounds of a vacant possession notice to quit. [46407/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): In 2021, there is a provision for 800 social housing acquisitions by local authorities and Approved

Housing Bodies. This provision is targeted towards securing specific types of units, including properties for homeless households, one-bedroom properties, housing for individuals with a disability and for households with other priority needs. It is a matter for individual local authorities to allocate social housing homes in accordance with their Scheme of Letting Priorities.

The recently published Housing for All strategy is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade, including an average of 10,000 new build social homes. Under Housing for All, the focus is on increasing social housing through new build, with a reduced reliance on leasing and the acquisition of homes. Long-term leasing will be ended under Housing for All and there will be no new homes delivered through long-term leasing after 2025. There will also be a limited number of social homes delivered through acquisitions, with current projections limiting acquisitions to 200 new social homes per annum.

Construction Industry

109. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on and plans to address the concerns regarding the increasing cost of raw materials in the construction industry with a particular focus on the potential impact of house building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46231/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Housing for All sets out a pathway to economic, societal and environmental sustainability in the delivery of housing. Reducing construction costs is critical to increasing supply. Recent analysis by industry indicates that construction build costs account for approximately 47% of total apartment development costs.

Prices for a large number of construction materials have increased significantly over the last 12-18 months. The CSO Wholesale Price Index shows the annual increase for building and construction materials to be 9.9% to the end of July 2021.

Construction material supply issues are also being experienced in other markets. These issues appear to result from a range of factors including Brexit, the disruption caused by Covid 19 and increased global demand.

Reducing residential construction costs is a key theme within Housing for All, with actions centred on analysis, innovation, research and productivity through a whole-of-government approach in collaboration with Industry. These structures and actions include:

The new Construction Technology Centre under development by Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment will prioritise residential construction - supporting innovation, modern methods of construction and digitalisation.

The Construction Sector Group led by Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will implement a pipeline of cost reducing innovations and productivity measures for the residential construction sector. This group will also carry out an analysis of costs with a view to reducing these costs and increasing standardisation.

The role of enterprise agencies will be expanded to include the provision of funding and supports for innovation and productivity-related projects in the domestic residential construction sector.

The public sector will continue to provide projects to help with the capacity building pro-

cess through public tenders for innovations such as rapid delivery housing.

Whilst recognising that the cost of construction materials is subject to external influences, Housing for All commits the State to playing a more central role in leading and funding these structures with a view to reducing the costs of construction in collaboration with the construction sector.

Question No. 110 answered with Question No. 96.

National Biodiversity Plan

111. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of his plans to participate in the upcoming COP15 on biological diversity in Kunming, China; his involvement and Ireland's role in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46333/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): COP15 will be convened in two parts. The first part takes place in virtual format from 11 to 15 October 2021. The second part will reconvene in Kunming from 25 April to 8 May 2022.

On 12 and 13 October, I will participate in the High Level Segment of part 1. Over the past year, I have taken part in several international initiatives addressing the biodiversity crisis, including the One Planet Summit hosted by France in January. Ireland has also signed up to the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, a global initiative to mobilise political will for a new and transformative global biodiversity framework at COP15.

My Department's National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has already participated in preparatory meetings for COP15, namely SBSTTA-24 and SBI-3. While officials normally attend in person, these meetings have been held virtually as a result of the global pandemic.

NPWS is involved in ongoing work at EU level to develop and agree strong positions for the EU and its Member States at COP15 through regular meetings of the Working Party on International Environment Issues (Biodiversity).

The Irish delegation to COP15 includes officials from NPWS as well as officials from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications.

Local Authorities

112. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the engagement he or his Department had with Galway city and county councils in 2021 to address the funding and legacy debt issues highlighted in the minutes of a meeting (details supplied) in order to minimise their risk in the financing of affordable housing schemes and to maximise the delivery of affordable homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46393/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In March of this year my Department's Secretary General and other senior officials met with each of the Galway local authority Chief Executives. On 31 May and 2 June and, most recently again, on 13 and 14 September, I met with the Chief Executives of all local authorities including both Galway City and County Councils, where a range of issues relating to the Housing for All

plan were discussed, including land, funding and resources.

Housing for All contains strong commitments on strengthening the capacity of local authorities to initiate, design, plan, develop and manage housing projects. Supports are being provided to all local authorities through the Housing Delivery Co-Ordination Office (HDCO), which has been established within the Local Government Management Agency.

In addition, my Department is also supporting local authorities in the area of land acquisition through an early payment arrangement for suitable sites. I hope that both Galway local authorities will be utilising this opportunity to add to their land holdings and take advantage of early payment arrangements. My Department is also working with the Galway local authorities and others to develop housing proposals where possible to utilise sites that carry debt for the authorities.

Galway City Council has availed of the Land Aggregation Scheme (LAGS) which assists in the gradual unwinding of Housing Finance Agency (HFA) loans taken out by housing authorities to purchase land for the social and affordable housing investment programme. Under the Scheme, local authorities could for a nominal fee, transfer residential development land on which there were outstanding HFA loans to the Housing Agency. The Galway City Council site at Ballymoneen Road, Ballyburke was redeemed under LAGS in full at a cost of €7m.

In terms of the delivery of affordable housing schemes, Housing for All delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum and will see 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes built, alongside 90,000 social homes.

Specifically regarding middle-income families wishing to buy homes, the Housing for All strategy contains a multi-pronged approach to improving affordability.

The Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are primarily focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Both of these schemes will be targeted at households constrained by the maximum mortgage and deposit available to them. The gap between the market value and what the household can afford (including with the assistance of the 'Help to Buy' incentive) will be bridged via the provision of equity support. The equity support can subsequently be redeemed at any time at the home-owners discretion, or remain outstanding until the home is sold or passed on.

In terms of delivery of affordable housing interventions by local authorities, my Department together with the Housing Agency has met with the Galway local authorities regarding structures for the procurement and delivery of affordable housing. Local authorities intending to advance an affordable purchase scheme can apply to my Department for Exchequer funding of up to €100,000 per unit under the Affordable Housing Fund. It is anticipated that in most cases nationally, affordable homes will be delivered via partnership arrangements between local authorities and contractors whereby the majority of development funding is provided by the contracted body. Direct sales agreements will provide for the sale of homes directly from the contracted party to the eligible purchaser referred by the local authority. In this way the financial risk for the local authority is minimised.

In addition to these distinct shared equity schemes, Housing for All also provides for the 'Local Authority Home Loan', which will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. From 10 September 2021, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate by

0.25% for new borrowers under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL). This lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan. The Help to Buy scheme is also currently available to help purchasers in accessing homes.

Further to the above, Housing for All also provides the following supports -

- increased funding provided to the Land Development Agency,
- the Croí Cónaithe initiative intended to service sites and refurbish existing vacant properties in regional towns and villages,
- a higher stamp duty rate for institutional investors that purchase family homes,
- increased regulation of short-term letting properties,
- additional measures to reduce vacancy rates, and
- expanded supports for retrofitting existing homes.

Collectively, these measures will improve affordability for all families or individuals wishing to purchase a home.

Local Authorities

113. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide a cost analysis on public funding used by local authorities to rent private homes for social housing over a 25 year lease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46391/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): An analysis of expenditure on housing supports was carried out by the Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service (IGEES) within the Department of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform in 2017. This analysis concluded that cost levels within each of the schemes funded under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme, which includes long term leasing, were generally below average rent price levels in the market, and as such, each of the schemes were meeting their individual operating objectives, and reducing the price impact on the market.

Building on the 2017 review, IGEES carried out a further analysis, published in July 2018, focusing on the comparative analysis of delivery streams particularly related to cost effectiveness. This report found that in certain areas, where house prices are higher - e.g. Dublin and Meath - the net present cost (NPC) of delivering units via current funding programmes such as leasing is higher than construction or acquisition. In areas where house prices are lower – e.g. Mayo and Tipperary - the NPC of leasing and other current funding programmes is either at or below that for construction and acquisition.

Whilst the 2018 report found that relative cost efficiency is an important consideration in terms of the mix of delivery, it also found that it is not the only consideration and must be viewed in the context of policy objectives and wider issues. In this context, as well as relative costs, a number of other considerations must be taken into account in terms of the overall mix of delivery including the speed of delivery, the quality and appropriateness of accommodation, sectoral capacity and flexibility.

Looking at the most recent cost information available, the average cost for a leased unit, based on leased units claimed for the first half of 2021, is €11,904 per housing unit.

Finally, a full spending review of the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), which includes long term leasing, is currently being undertaken by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Housing Schemes

114. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the inclusion of the refurbishment as well as the purchase cost of houses by first-time buyers in the Rebuilding Ireland home plan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46458/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is designed to enable credit worthy first time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range, or to self build.

It does not include undertaking renovation projects and there are no plans to change this requirement at present.

Departmental Funding

115. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the way the new Croí Cónaithe fund will support villages and towns across rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46471/21]

116. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the scale of his ambition for the cities' fund which will help with the cost of high-density units for buyers as outlined in Housing for All. [46472/21]

169. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the Croí Cónaithe fund to increase owner-occupier apartment development in city centres will apply to urban villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46475/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115, 116 and 169 together.

Our recently launched Housing for All plan sets out four pathways to a sustainable housing system. A key objective is that everyone in the State should have access to a home to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and in the right place, offering a high quality of life.

Aligned with our overall National Planning Framework (NPF) objective for compact growth, vibrant, liveable cities and towns must offer options for both owner occupiers and renters, at all income levels. The new Croí Cónaithe fund as outlined in Housing for All, is intended to ensure that aligned with the objectives of the NPF, additional choices are made available to home buyers in our urban cores, and town centres. It will do this by working to extend home ownership options, where the choice is currently limited:

- In urban areas, for apartment living in developments over a certain height/density threshold;

- In towns, where options for building new private dwellings have been constrained by the

lack of serviced sites.

In higher density locations, the number of apartments being built for sale poses a challenge. We are also aware of a high level of unactivated permissions, particularly for apartments, in our urban areas. A Croí Cónaithe (Cities) fund is being established, which through a competitive bid process, will seek to deliver developments at a viable cost for sale to owner occupiers, targeted principally at activating the planning permissions already in place for such homes over the coming five years. It will be managed by the Housing Agency on behalf of my Department.

Different challenges arise for facilitating owner-occupation in towns, where viable sites available for building of new homes are in short supply. There is significant potential for local authorities to support homeownership in these areas by making available serviced sites at a reduced cost or providing support towards the refurbishment of vacant properties where the level of vacancy or dereliction is high. A pathfinder programme will be initiated as part of a Croí Cónaithe (Towns) fund, to facilitate the making available of some 2,000 sites for homes by 2025.

My Department is working with the Housing Agency to develop an operational basis for this new Croí Cónaithe fund, which will work alongside other related funds such as the Affordable Housing Fund and complement measures forthcoming in the Towns Centre First (TCF) policy framework, details of which are expected to be finalised over Q4 2021.

Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 115.

Departmental Policies

117. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the reason for the long delay in the publication of the State architecture policy. [46408/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The National Policy on Architecture (NPA) is at an advanced stage of development. Following analysis of the public consultation submissions, a comprehensive report was prepared during 2020 and early 2021 with the cooperation of the National Policy on Architecture Advisory Group.

The Deputy last raised this issue in July. At that time, the National Policy on Architecture report had been circulated to all Government Departments and relevant bodies. The observations received in response were constructive and are being incorporated into the draft policy text.

The Deputy has acknowledged the fast-evolving policy environment at national and European levels. Up-to-date built environment policy priorities and strategies have been cross-referenced in the consultation report. They include elements of the European Green Deal relating to the New European Bauhaus, the renovation wave, the urban agenda and the circular economy, forthcoming Council Conclusions on high quality architecture and built environment and the forthcoming European Commission report on High Quality Architecture.

The strategic approaches these high-level policies mandate and recommend have become integral influences on the NPA policy report and implementation plan. They will ensure that the new policy is fit for purpose over the long term.

I look forward to engaging with the Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage shortly, as a final consultative step towards completion of the report and imple-

mentation plan. The policy is due to be published Q4 2021.

Derelict Sites

118. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the funding given to Cork City Council to address dereliction given the high dereliction levels in the city. [46404/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): Aside from providing for the derelict sites levy - the proceeds of which are retained by local authorities - and associated provisions, the Derelict Sites Act 1990 does not address the issue of funding for local authorities to address dereliction. The proportion of the overall annual budget of each local authority, including Cork City Council, which is spent on addressing dereliction in this regard is a matter for each local authority and is unavailable in my Department. This information may be available from individual local authorities.

Specific funding, to tackle dereliction in major towns and cities, may be made available through the integrated projects being supported by the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) which was launched in 2018. This fund is targeting financial support in an integrated, dynamic and responsive way to support the regeneration and rejuvenation of our towns and cities. Already, the URDF is providing assistance for major projects that will contribute to meeting the objectives of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan. As part of the two calls for proposals completed to date under the URDF, 6 URDF projects have been approved for Cork City Council with associated financial support for projects in Cork City of €402,886,000 over both calls.

The role of the URDF in ensuring that housing stock is used efficiently is acknowledged in Housing for All, along with a range of actions to bring vacant stock back into use. This includes the publication of the Town Centre First policy in Quarter 4 of 2021.

Domestic Violence

119. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the measures that are being taken to identify and support social housing recipients and applicants along with their families who find themselves in difficult domestic violence situations; the training that is being provided to both public and private housing associations and local authority staff to ensure that these persons are being dealt with appropriately given the various situations that can arise from domestic violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46422/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Responsibility for the development and provision of services to support victims of domestic violence rests with my colleague the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and I understand that the delivery of these services is managed by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

In terms of social housing services, in 2017, my Department issued policy and procedural guidance to housing authorities relating to the role they can play to assist victims of domestic violence. The guidance is also a useful reference for service providers, highlighting where they can be of greatest assistance to their clients, covering a range of scenarios that may arise for victims of domestic violence currently in receipt of social housing support and those seeking

social housing supports. These include provisions around the use of the Housing Assistance Payment scheme, or the Rental Accommodation Scheme, where a victim has a joint interest in the family home, or ownership of alternative accommodation, but would otherwise qualify for social housing support.

In addition, where a victim of domestic violence applies for social housing support in their own right while still a joint tenant, it is a matter for the relevant local authority to address the contractual issues arising in relation to the joint tenancy agreement. Accordingly, the household may transfer out of their existing tenancy and into a new tenancy agreement with the local authority or they may access an independent tenancy in the private rented sector utilising the various housing supports offered by the State.

The guidance was introduced with the objective of supporting a partnership approach by statutory agencies in respect of the delivery of domestic violence services, particularly in relation to helping to prevent and reduce the occurrence of related homelessness and facilitating the provision of long term accommodation for victims of domestic violence.

In addition to the above supports, it should be noted that a new protocol was established in 2020 between the Department of Social Protection and Tusla whereby a victim of domestic violence can apply for Rent Supplement on referral by Tusla or by Tusla-funded service providers.

My Department provides capital funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) for a range of important and emerging areas of housing need and this includes funding for refuges for victims of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

Training is not directly provided by my Department but it is provided by a range of organisations in the sector, including for example, the Irish Council for Social Housing.

Housing Provision

120. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of houses completed by Cork City Council and Cork County Council in the past five years; the expected number of houses to be completed in Cork city and county in the coming three years following the publication of the Housing for All plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46328/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Details on social housing delivery for each local authority, across a range of delivery mechanisms, are included in social housing statistics published by my Department. This data is available to the end of Quarter 2 2021 and is available on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/

A detailed Social Housing Construction Status Report is also published each quarter which provides scheme level detail on new build activity. The most recent publication covers the period up to the end of Quarter 2 2021 and is available on my Department's website at www.gov.ie/en/publication/d7709-social-housing-construction-projects-status-report-q2-2021/. This data includes information for each local authority and includes a list of the individual projects that make up the new build programme for that local authority.

Housing for All is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade. Under Housing for All, the Government will deliver 47,600 new build social homes in the period 2022-2026. Individual targets for the delivery of social housing have been provided to each local authority. The targets for Cork City and Cork

County are set out in the table below.

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Cork City	515	536	548	589	601	2,789
Cork County	560	622	636	683	697	3,198

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum. In terms of interventions that improve affordability, at a national level this includes 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes. These homes will be provided by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency (LDA), as well as through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks.

Under Housing for All, each local authority is required to develop a Housing Delivery Action Plan by December 2021. These Plans will set out details on how and when local authorities will deliver their housing targets, including the delivery of affordable homes. The Housing Needs Demand Assessment Framework and associated tools and data repository are available to inform this work.

Housing Provision

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he can take to reduce the number of applicants on local authority housing waiting lists in the next two years and at the same time make adequate provision for affordable housing demands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46411/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The recently published Housing for All strategy is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade, including an average of 10,000 social homes per annum from 2022-2030. Housing for All is supported by an investment package of over €4b per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency (LDA) and €5bn in funding through the Housing Finance Agency.

Under Housing for All, the Government will deliver 18,100 new build social homes in 2022 and 2023, in addition to a further 2,500 social homes through long-term leasing during this same period. We will also provide additional funding to support households on social housing waiting lists to secure a tenancy, supported by the Housing Assistance Payment, while we increase the supply of housing stock managed by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

The Housing for All strategy contains a multi-pronged approach to improving affordability and increasing the supply of social homes. Some measures such as the Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Other measures such as Cost Rental will deliver approximately 18,000 homes over the period 2021 to 2030.

The strategy also provides for the 'Local Authority Home Loan', which will be in place later in 2021. This is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. The Help to Buy scheme also continues to help purchasers to access homes.

In addition to the above, the Housing for All strategy provides a range of measures to increase and accelerate the delivery of housing, such as increased funding provided to the Land Development Agency, the Croí Cónaithe initiative, measures to reduce vacancy rates, and expanded supports for retrofitting existing homes. In addition, the Government has introduced new, higher-rate stamp duty measures and planning permission restrictions to minimise the bulk buying of traditional family homes.

Collectively, these measures will increase the supply of affordable homes and improve affordability for all families or individuals wishing to purchase a home.

Maternity Leave

122. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the progress to date on establishing and implementing maternity leave arrangements for councillors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46327/21]

140. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on progress relating to the establishment and implementation of maternity leave for councillors; the interactions his Department has had with councillors and other Departments and State bodies on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46207/21]

143. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the progress to date on establishing and implementing maternity leave for councillors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46321/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122, 140 and 143 together.

Councillors, like members of the Oireachtas, are office holders rather than employees. As such, they are not covered by the statutory framework for employees on issues such as maternity leave, sick leave and annual leave.

As matters stand, it is under the provisions of Section 18 of the Local Government Act 2001 that councillors may be absent for maternity purposes. Under Section 18, a councillor shall be deemed to have automatically resigned from membership of a local authority if he or she is absent from meetings for a continuous period of 6 consecutive months. Where the absence is due to illness or “in good faith for another reason”, then the period of absence may be extended first to 12 months and then to up to 18 months by resolution of the Council.

A councillor who is absent for 6 months will continue to receive the full amount of his or her Representational Payment, currently worth €25,788 per annum. Thereafter this payment is reduced by 50% for absences of 6 to 12 months duration. A councillor who is absent for more than 12 months will not receive any further payments regardless of the reason for the absence.

With effect from January 2017, the Social Welfare Acts were amended so that councillors gained access to the same benefits as self-employed contributors. Accordingly, councillors are now reckonable for the purposes of accessing Class S benefits, including Maternity Benefit.

Following the publication of Ms Sara Moorhead S.C.’s Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members, I approved the establishment of a working group of key local government stakeholders, including councillor representative organisations. The working group was tasked with drawing up an Action Plan for examination and implementation

of the non-pay related recommendations in the Moorhead Report. Addressing these non-pay issues, together with the significant pay reforms for elected members that were approved by Government and brought into effect on 1st July 2021, will facilitate the retention of existing councillors, while also maximising the accessibility of local government to future candidates.

As I believe that the issue of maternity leave warrants urgent attention and includes wider matters and supports other than maternity leave, I asked the local government stakeholder working group to establish a subgroup specifically to examine all maternity-related matters for councillors. This group, which is a representative and cross political party group of women councillors, has met a number of times to date, and has given my officials and I greater understanding of the needs of women councillors in this regard.

My officials are working closely with the Office of the Attorney General on the legal issues identified. My intention, over the coming months, is to bring forward a package of maternity-related measures, including proposals for legislative change, which councillors will be able to avail of.

The absence of maternity leave is a perceived obstacle to the participation of women in local government. It is however one that I am determined to address as a matter of urgency, in a progressive and comprehensive manner. This will help to ensure that councillors are more fully representative of the constituents they serve, but also that the role of the councillor is accessible, manageable and sustainable for all.

Housing Policy

123. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide a report on the Housing First model from 2019 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46392/21]

148. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the percentage of the existing housing need that will be met by the revised Housing First targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46016/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 148 together.

Housing First is a targeted housing-led intervention, that enables homeless individuals with high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive housing and health supports to help them maintain their tenancies. The programme is a joint initiative of my Department, the Department of Health, the HSE and local authorities, in conjunction with NGO partners.

At the end of June 2021, a total of 587 individuals were being housed under the Housing First programme including 493 individuals who have been housed since the publication of the National Implementation Plan for 2018-2021. Details on the number of Housing First tenancies are published every three months as part of my Department’s Homeless Quarterly Progress Report, with the next report due for publication in October 2021.

Housing for All commits to the further expansion of Housing First by 1,200 additional tenancies over the next five years. Research is currently being undertaken by the Housing Agency to carry out a region by region assessment of need for the supports provided by Housing First. This research will inform the expansion of the programme and publication of a new National Implementation Plan in Q4 2021.

The most recent monthly homelessness report, for August 2021, was published by my Department on 24 September 2021. The total number of homeless individuals was 8,212. Amongst this number, there were 4,469 single adults (adults who are not part of a family unit) in emergency accommodation. It is important to note that the majority of individuals in emergency accommodation do not require the level of supports provided by Housing First.

House Prices

124. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will respond to concerns raised by the National Competitiveness Council in its Ireland's Competitiveness Challenges 2021 report regarding the sequencing and roll-out of demand-side measures announced by Government and their likely adverse consequences for house price inflation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46451/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I welcome the analysis put forward by the by the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council in Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2021. This report welcomes the scale and ambition of the Housing for All Strategy which will substantially increase housing supply, including affordable housing, over the coming years and in turn ease some of the broader economic and social challenges people face in their lives.

The 'whole of government' approach, and the high level measures to focus on oversight, reporting and delivery are recognised in the report. As a matter of course in the development of housing policy or schemes, account is taken of the intended or potential impacts of the measures under consideration. The governance approach set out in Housing for All will provide the mechanism to address concerns regarding the sequencing and timing of the rollout of demand side measures with delivery of supply side reforms. The Housing for All Delivery Group and my Department will monitor and prioritise delivery and sequencing of actions, having regard to relevant market trends including impacts on house prices, where appropriate.

A formal Government response to the main points raised in Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2021 will be published following detailed consideration. The Government will continue to prioritise delivery of the Housing for All Strategy, and on supporting Ireland's recovery and improving our competitiveness and productivity in the Irish economy in the longer term.

Housing Provision

125. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the finding in a report by organisations (details supplied) that persons with a disability are more likely to experience housing quality issues and are more likely to be in arrears on rent. [46419/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The housing needs of people with disabilities are addressed in the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD). A review of the Strategy is underway with a view to preparation of a successor NHSPWD and consultations are ongoing.

The Government is determined to ensure that housing policy addresses the needs of those who experience exclusion in our society. There is ongoing and extensive engagement with all local authorities across all delivery streams to ensure maximum delivery of homes for those who need them. I meet regularly with local authorities and I know that they are committed to

ensuring that housing is provided to all eligible applicants as speedily as possible and that the support needs of applicants are appropriately assessed.

Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland which was launched earlier this month targets delivery of more homes of all types for people with different housing needs, including delivery of over 10,000 new social homes per year to 2030.

Specifically in relation to housing quality, social housing is built to the design standards set out in the guidelines ‘Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities’ which are available at www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C1979%2Cen.pdf.

In preparing the Guidelines, particular account was taken of the objectives of government policy on sustainability, including access for people with disabilities and meeting varied needs of occupants through their lifetime. The design approach to social housing seeks to eliminate barriers to accessibility for all users - particularly older people and those with mobility impairment or other disability. Where units are being designed for those with disabilities, the Guidelines refer to the National Disability Authority publication ‘Building for Everyone: Inclusion, Access and Use’. More recently, the Housing Agency published a Roadmap titled ‘Designing Housing to Meet the Needs of All’ which has specific regard to the principles of universal design. www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/2019-07/Designing-Housing-to-meet-the-needs-of-all.pdf

To further address the specific housing adaptation needs of disabled people, my Department also provides funding annually for the Disabled Persons Grant (DPG) scheme and the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability scheme, both administered directly by the local authorities. DPG funding is provided for adaptations and extensions to existing social housing stock to meet specific needs of the local authority tenants, while the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants address specific needs of older people and people with a disability in privately owned homes.

In respect of rented properties 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 including those under HAP, comply with the regulations governing the minimum standards for rented accommodation. Under section 41 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, local authorities are required to commence this inspection process within 8 months of HAP being paid in relation to a particular dwelling if not already inspected within the previous 12 months.

The Programme for Government also commits to the ‘retrofit’ of 500,000 homes to a B2/ Cost Optimal Equivalent BER standard by 2030, of which it is expected that approximately 36,500 will be local authority owned homes. A new ten year Energy Efficiency Programme for local authority owned homes was launched in 2021 with a significant increase in funding support to €65 million. This programme will see a significant upscaling (from a ‘shallow’ to ‘deeper retrofit’) on that which has been completed by local authorities in previous years and focuses on ensuring that the fabric of the home is upgraded and an energy efficient heating system is provided.

Rental Sector

126. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the reason the introduction of the deposit protection scheme for renters which was

legislated for in 2015 has been postponed to 2023; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46096/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): Housing for All – a new Housing Plan for Ireland includes an action to examine the creation of a system of holding rental deposits, informed by international experience, by Q2 2023. This timeline was chosen to afford time for necessary research and policy formulation, in consultation with the Residential Tenancies Board.

Section 7 of the Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021 inserts a new section 19B into the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 which applies to tenancies created on or after 9 August 2021, to restrict the total amount that a tenant is required to pay to a landlord by way of a deposit or an advance rent payment to secure a tenancy to no more than the equivalent of 2 months’ rent (i.e. any deposit cannot exceed 1 month’s rent and any advance rent payment cannot exceed 1 month’s rent). A restriction of the equivalent of 1 month’s rent is also placed on the amount that a tenant is obliged to pay as a regular advance rent payment to a landlord during a tenancy. These measures are intended to greatly reduce any financial exposure to tenants, on foot of paying such restricted upfront payments.

Housing Schemes

127. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans to incentivise property owners to refurbish residential properties in towns and villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46460/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland sets out four pathways to a sustainable housing system. At a time of high housing need, when people are homeless and living in unsuitable accommodation, it is vital that existing vacant homes are brought back into productive use. Pathway 4: ‘Addressing Vacancy and Efficient Use of Existing Stock’ addresses this issue and sets out a number of key actions in this regard.

This includes the establishment of a new ‘Croí Cónaithe (Towns)’ Fund for servicing sites to attract people to build their own homes and to refurbish vacant properties in regional towns and villages. My Department is working with the Housing Agency to develop an operational basis for this new fund, which will work alongside other related funds such as the Affordable Housing Fund and complement measures forthcoming in the ‘Town Centre First’ policy framework, details of which are expected to be finalised in Q4 2021.

This Government is firmly committed to a ‘Town Centres First’ approach which will build upon the ambition set out in Our Rural Future, to support the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages. While programmes such as the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF) and the Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) are primarily intended to support wider town regeneration, they also facilitate optimal use and reuse of existing properties. In this regard, Housing for All commits that further calls for funding under these funds will include specific criteria to encourage the activation of vacant properties and to bring stock back into use. This funding will be integrated with proposals on retrofitting and existing support, such as the Better Energy Homes Grant, to ensure the architectural heritage of towns is preserved.

I will also review and extend the regulations that exempt certain vacant commercial premises, such as ‘over the shop’ type spaces, from requiring planning permission for change of use

for residential purposes to 2025.

Many areas of towns and villages, of all sizes, have vacant residential and commercial properties that could be used. If brought back into use, these properties could provide much needed homes and give added vibrancy to our towns and villages. Promoting residential occupancy in our rural towns and villages is at the heart of a ‘Town Centres First’ approach and Housing for All.

Planning Issues

128. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide information on his Department’s review of siting and size conditions for rooftop solar panels on homes and the review of exemptions for educational and community buildings as part of the current development of interim planning regulations; if information on the stated need to consider environmental assessment reporting before finalisation will be provided; when the interim planning regulations will be submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46312/21]

344. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide information on his Department’s review of siting and size conditions for rooftop solar panels on homes and a review of exemptions for educational and community buildings as part of the current development of interim planning regulations; if he will provide information on the stated need to consider environmental assessment reporting before finalisation; when the interim planning regulations will be submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46274/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 344 together.

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. Any such exemptions are subject to compliance with any general restrictions on exemptions set out in the Act or the Regulations and to the specific conditions set out in each class of exempted development in Schedule 2 of the Regulations. Included in the planning exemptions set out in the Regulations are those applying to the installation of solar infrastructure on a variety of building types, including houses, businesses, industrial and agricultural to which specific conditions are attached.

My Department, in the context of the Climate Action Plan and in consultation with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, has undertaken a review of the solar panel planning exemptions set out in the Regulations, with a particular focus on facilitating increased self-generation of electricity.

This review is now complete. Substantial changes to the current planning exemption thresholds for solar panels are proposed, as well as the introduction of new classes of solar panel planning exemptions relating to their use in apartments and in educational/community/religious buildings.

In light of the need to appropriately address aviation safety concerns arising from the “glint and glare” impacts of solar panels and the easing of the solar panel planning exemption thresholds, my Department is in the process of commissioning the development of detailed aviation

safeguarding maps which will identify and delineate specific but limited areas in the vicinity of airports and aerodromes (referred to as exclusion zones) within which the exemptions will not apply. This mapping process will take approximately nine months to complete.

Whilst this work is ongoing, my Department proposes to advance interim regulations, adopting a temporary, albeit more stringent, radial approach incorporating initial defined exclusion zones around airports and aerodromes. These interim regulations, allowing for increased solar panel planning exemptions, will cover the vast majority of the land area of the country, only excluding those limited exclusion zones around airports and aerodromes.

The draft interim regulations have been reviewed under the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC and it has been determined that they are likely to have significant effects on the environment, necessitating the undertaking of a full SEA on the draft proposals. The SEA process, involving a public consultation on the proposals, is currently underway and is expected to be completed by mid-December 2021.

Following the public consultation and consideration of any submissions received, and as required under planning legislation, the proposed exempted development regulations must be laid in draft form before the Houses of the Oireachtas and receive a positive resolution from both Houses before they can be made and the SEA process concluded.

Accordingly, the process for finalising the interim solar panel planning exemptions as referred to above, with interim exclusion zones around airports and aerodromes, is now expected to be completed in early 2022. As outlined, pending the finalisation of the aforementioned aviation safeguarding maps, these interim regulations will allow for the vast majority of the country to be covered by the proposed new solar panel exemptions apart from those areas in close proximity to airports and aerodromes.

Work on the development of the aviation safeguarding maps for airports and aerodromes is expected to be completed in early 2022. The final supplementary set of regulations - delineating the final exclusion areas around airports and aerodromes in which the exemptions will not apply - will be prepared thereafter and, subject to environmental reporting considerations, will subsequently be laid in draft form before the Houses of the Oireachtas for approval in a timely manner.

Water Services

129. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the way that working arrangements between local authorities and Irish Water can be improved in order to enhance the delivery of water services across Ireland. [46446/21]

166. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the reason for the early suspension of the Workplace Relations Commission single water utility led talks over the summer; and the reason the next round of talks have been further delayed until October 2021. [46409/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 and 166 together.

The Government published a Policy Paper entitled *Irish Water - Towards a national, publicly-owned, regulated water services utility* in February 2021 setting out our views and expectations on the next phase of transformation in the water sector, to involve the integration of water services operations within Irish Water's organisation structure.

This will complete the broad policy and legislative reforms which have seen public water services embark on a journey of transformation, from a structure based on locally-organised water services authorities, towards a single, national, water utility in public ownership.

There are significant issues for the workforce to be addressed in integrating the day-to-day operation and delivery of water services within Irish Water. To resolve these, I asked the Workplace Relations Commission to engage with all parties aimed at reaching a collective agreement on a Framework for the future delivery of water services. Following a number of bilateral engagements between my Department and trade unions on the broader transformation agenda (on the issues identified in the Policy Paper) initial talks on the IR issues took place under the aegis of the WRC in July. This was the first face to face engagement on the process since the policy paper was published and allowed both sides to clearly set out their positions on the process. It was agreed by both sides that further clarification was required to enable the talks to continue and it was mutually agreed to adjourn the talks further until the Autumn. It is intended that the talks will recommence in the coming weeks. The Government believes it will be possible to reach a collective agreement which addresses the interests and concerns of all parties.

Planning Issues

130. **Deputy Francis Noel Duffy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will consider removing the section in the draft development plan guidelines which restricts councillors from addressing matters that are the subject of other legislative provisions such as NZEB and passive house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46319/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): My Department is currently updating Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Development Plans. As part of this process, draft Guidelines were published for public consultation last month. The period for making submissions runs from Friday 13th August 2021 until 5pm on Friday 8th October 2021. Further details including relevant documents can be found on my Department's website at www.gov.ie/en/consultation/ef157-public-consultation-on-the-draft-development-plan-guidelines-for-planning-authorities/.

As part of the consultation process, my Department welcomes all proposals on the draft document and in particular I would particularly encourage public representatives to avail of the opportunity to submit their views. All submissions will be considered when the consultation period closes with a view to finalising updated Guidelines by the end of the year.

It must be borne in mind when making a submission on the draft Guidelines, that the statutory development plan process may consider matters within the scope of the development plan as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000. It is also important to note that neither ministerial guidance issued under Section 28 of that Act, nor any individual development plan, may operate to contradict or override other legislative provisions.

As the consultation period is ongoing, it would be premature to comment further on the matter at this time.

Housing Schemes

131. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will consider increasing the cap on housing grants such as the housing aid for older people scheme and the housing adaptation grant for people with a disability to reflect the

increase in building materials which has reduced the effectiveness of these grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46402/21]

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/

As detailed in Housing for All, housing policy objectives 6 and 7 give a commitment to undertaking a review of the range of housing grants available to assist with meeting specific housing needs both for our ageing population and people with a disability. Officials from my Department will begin a review of the existing grant limits and income thresholds applicable to the grant schemes later this year.

Defective Building Materials

132. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the final submission by persons (details supplied) to the defective blocks working group that he established in June 2021. [46012/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In response to concerns being raised by homeowners in relation to the Defective Concrete Block grant scheme, I established a time-bound working group, with representatives from my Department, the local authorities and homeowner representative groups who are tasked with reviewing the operation of the scheme and providing a report with recommendations originally by 31st July.

At the request of homeowners and in order to afford them more time to consider and respond to key issues under discussion, it was agreed at the meeting held on the 27th July that the timeline for the submission of a report by the Working Group would be extended to the end of September, 2021.

While the work of the group continues it would not be appropriate for me to comment on its deliberations. Following conclusion of those deliberations, I will, following consultation with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Attorney General, bring proposals to Government.

Rental Sector

133. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will consider effective rent controls that will both reduce rents and maintain them at an affordable level in view of the failure of the rent pressure zones to make rents affordable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46414/21]

171. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the need to make the entire State a rent pressure zone and introduce a three year

rent freeze in view of a recent rise of inflation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46465/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 171 together.

The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 introduced the Rent Predictability Measure to moderate rent increases in those parts of the country where rents are highest and rising fastest. The introduction of the rent increase restriction of 4% in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) had regard to the constitutionally protected property rights of landlords and takes account of local rental market factors, providing certainty to tenants and landlords with regard to medium-term rent levels.

The Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021 introduced measures in July 2021 to better protect tenants with affordability challenges by extending the operation of RPZs until the end of 2024 and prohibiting any necessary rent increase in a RPZ from exceeding general inflation, as recorded by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). This measure significantly reduces the level of permissible rent increases for the estimated 74% of all tenancies which are in RPZs. The linkage with HICP aims to safeguard continued investment in the sector by existing and new landlords to deliver the much needed supply of high-quality rental accommodation while protecting against a significant increase in rental inflation in the coming years.

When bringing forward this legislation, the need to carefully monitor inflation was recognised. At that time, HICP inflation averaged 0.73% p.a. over the previous 3 years but had risen to 1.6% p.a. in the year ending June 2021. Given the continuing rise in HICP inflation, up to 3% p.a. in August, I intend to bring forward the Housing and Residential Tenancies Bill 2021 to undergo pre legislative scrutiny by the end of this Dáil term, which will re-examine the operation of RPZs to ensure that effective rent controls are in place while new supply of rental accommodation comes on stream.

The Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021 also provides that rent reviews outside of RPZs can, until 2025, occur no more frequently than bi-annually. It remains the position that rent reviews in RPZs can occur no more frequently than annually. The most vulnerable tenants, impacted by Covid-19, also continue to be legally protected from rent increases and eviction under the Planning and Development, and Residential Tenancies, Act 2020.

Having regard to the constitutionally protected property rights of landlords, a blanket extension of the RPZ rent predictability measure to rental properties across the entire country or a three year rent freeze, is considered legally questionable and highly vulnerable to legal challenge. The Housing Agency continually monitors the rental market and may recommend further areas with the highest and fastest growing rent to be designated as RPZs.

Housing Policy

134. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the amendments to the Household Means Policy of March 2021 allow for recent changes in circumstance to be taken into account; his views on whether these amendments mean that persons with significant time on the housing list are being struck-off the list entirely; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46425/21]

165. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if local authorities have discretion in their application of the recent changes to the household means policy issued in March 2021. [46426/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 165 together.

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

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The 2011 Regulations do not provide local authorities with any discretion to exceed the limits that apply to their administrative areas.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI, Universal Social Charge and Additional Superannuation Contribution. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once-off in nature.

The determination of whether an applicant household meets the income criteria is based on a calculation of their preceding 12 months' net average income prior to the date of receipt of application. This ensures that the most comprehensive picture of a household's current and previous income is available at the point of carrying out the assessment.

Social housing support is intended to address a household's long-term housing need. Rent Supplement is a short-term income support for people in the private rented sector. If there has been a recent change in a household's circumstance and the household requires short term support with their rent, it is open to them to make application for rent supplement. It remains open to that household to apply for social housing support at any stage, subject to meeting the eligibility and need criteria at the point at which they apply.

The documentation required with regard to proof of income is set out in the social housing application form. A degree of discretion is permitted to the local authorities as to the extent of documentation the authority deems necessary to ascertain a household's average income over the preceding 12 months in order to satisfy themselves of the household's true income pattern.

Under Regulation 28 of the Assessment Regulations, a household's qualification for support may be reviewed at the discretion of a local authority or where the authority becomes aware of changes in household circumstances and Regulation 29 provides that the household's qualification for support shall be reassessed at the point of allocation of support. If upon review, a household is found to exceed the limits on income eligibility grounds, for example, they would be removed from the list.

Furthermore, authorities are also required, when directed by the Minister, to undertake a statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) to count the number of households on the waiting list for social housing supports whose need has not yet been met. The SSHA process requires all local authorities to review those households who are on their housing list but who are not currently in receipt of housing support.

The oversight and management of the lists of qualified households awaiting accommodation is a matter for the relevant local authority. Decisions on the qualification of specific persons for social housing support and the allocation of that support are a matter solely for the local authority concerned.

Electoral Commission

135. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the progress he has made in establishing an Irish electoral commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46448/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The Programme for Government - Our Shared Future - commits to the establishment of a statutory, independent Electoral Commission. The legislative provisions for the Electoral Commission are being progressed as part of an Electoral Reform Bill, which also provides for the modernisation of the electoral registration process, the regulation of online political advertising during election periods and provisions which are aimed at assisting with the holding of electoral events where Covid-19 restrictions are in place.

Following Government approval of the drafting of an Electoral Reform Bill, the Bill's General Scheme was circulated to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage in January for pre-legislative consideration. The General Scheme is available on my Department's website at www.gov.ie/en/publication/34cf6-general-scheme-of-the-electoral-reform-bill-2020. The Joint Oireachtas Committee carried out a thorough pre-legislative scrutiny process, taking in the views of a wide range of stakeholders and policy experts over seven sessions between January and August of this year. The committee's pre-legislative scrutiny report was published in August and is available from the Oireachtas website at www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/33/housing-local-government-and-heritage/. The recommendations in the report are currently being considered by my Department. My Department is continuing to work with the Attorney General's Office on the drafting of the Electoral Reform Bill and good progress is being made.

In addition to the legislative work that is being advanced, progress is also being made in respect of the practicalities of the Commission's establishment. In this regard, a team was put in place earlier in the year and is working on the preparatory institutional and administrative arrangements for the Electoral Commission, pending its formal establishment.

Housing Provision

136. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he has given consideration to the idea of prefabricated and modular housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46213/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department is working closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of a range of social housing programmes and supports, including through the use of design-build rapid delivery methodologies (including prefabricated and modular build units). Local authorities have been advised that design-build rapid delivery approaches should be adopted where appropriate to deliver social housing projects on local authority-owned land.

To support delivery, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) put in place a framework of design-build contractors in 2017. This framework which expired in February 2021, was available for all local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to use in the interest of accelerated delivery. While some local authorities have progressed projects using the framework, the scope of works was generally limited to certain development sizes and unit types. On this basis, other local authorities have implemented their own frameworks, while some have tendered on individual projects for design-build contractors, on a case by case basis.

The Housing Delivery and Co-ordination Office and my Department are currently working with the local government sector on replacement frameworks which will operate on a regional basis and cater to a variety of development sizes and unit types, including apartments. In addition, Dublin City Council has developed a framework of design-build contractors for the delivery of a volumetric programme of houses and apartments which is available to all local authorities and AHBs to use on larger projects. It is envisaged that over 1,000 fast-track homes will be built using the Dublin City framework, and while the majority of these will be in Dublin, there will also likely be schemes in other large centres.

Many of the issues around delivery that non-prefabricated social housing construction projects face, are also faced by design-build projects, such as preparing sites, services/access to the site, community consultation, planning, etc. There can, however, be savings in terms of programme and construction time with these advantages growing as more use is made of these frameworks and as contractors gain more experience in implementing these methods. Under this mechanism, acceleration is delivered both by the use of the design-build services of specialist contractors and reduced construction time periods due to considerable off site fabrication. As well as off-site construction providing many benefits in terms of delivery and affordability, the new frameworks will provide sustainable and durable quality housing. All new dwellings (including prefabricated and modular build units) must comply with the building regulations and building control requirements and for social housing achieve a 60-year durability for all key elements.

My Department will continue to work with local authorities to maximise delivery and harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional build units, including through design-build schemes.

National Parks

137. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the review of the NPWS; and when the review is expected to be published. [46449/21]

322. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the chairperson has submitted their final report with regard to the Strategic Review of the National Parks and Wildlife Service that commenced on 3 February 2021; if the recommendations made in the review have been agreed and accepted; if so, when the report will be published; if funding for implementation of the recommendations has been agreed; if so, if he will provide a breakdown of the costs, including any funding being sought in the estimates for 2022; and if a copy of the implementation schedule for all agreed recommendations will be provided. [46947/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 322 together.

The NPWS review is currently underway and is at drafting stage following the extensive research and consultation phase. It is hoped that the final report, which is being prepared by the Independent Chair, Prof Jane Stout of Trinity College Dublin, will be completed before the end of the year.

Once the final report and recommendations are received they will be considered by myself and my Department. Until such detailed consideration has taken place it is not possible to comment on the nature of recommendations, cost associated, funding or timeframes.

Housing Policy

138. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will increase the income thresholds given that inflation and the cost of living has increased significantly over the past number of years. [45980/21]

146. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he plans to make the long-promised changes to the income levels for eligibility for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46469/21]

151. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when income eligibility limits for social housing will be increased in counties Cavan and Monaghan given existing limits are low and unrealistic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46346/21]

163. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the progress that has been made to date in reviewing the income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area; and when the review is likely to conclude. [46417/21]

178. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when it is proposed to increase the income eligibility limits for social housing in counties Cavan and Monaghan as existing limits are much too low at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46330/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138, 146, 151, 163 and 178 together.

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

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The 2011 Regulations do not provide local authorities with any discretion to exceed the limits that apply to their administrative areas.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI, Universal Social Charge and Additional Superannuation Contribution. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once-off in nature.

The income bands are expressed in terms of a maximum net income threshold for a single-person household, with an allowance of 5% for each additional adult household member, subject to a maximum allowance under this category of 10% and separately a 2.5% allowance for each child.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced in 2011 also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of

future-proofing.

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

However, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is underway. As set out in “Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland”, the efficiency of the banding model and its application to local authorities will be considered. Equivalisation as between singles and families will also be considered. The review will also have regard to new initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and Cost Rental housing and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Housing Provision

139. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the constraints leading to delays and blockages in the provision of housing; the actions being taken by his Department to overcome these constraints and blockages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46442/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): I believe **Housing for All: A New Housing Plan for Ireland** will transform our housing system, removing the constraints leading to delays and blockages in the provision of housing. In particular, the actions set out under Pathway 3 of the Plan, “Increasing New Housing Supply”, will create the environment needed to enable the supply of over 300,000 new homes by 2030, meaning an annual average of at least 33,000 homes per year.

Crucially, the Plan is backed by historic levels of investment with in excess of €20bn through the Exchequer, the Land Development Agency (LDA) and the Housing Finance Agency over the next 5 years. This will provide the sector with the stability and certainty it needs.

In order to ensure there is a sufficient supply of homes across the country, each Local Authority has been given Housing Supply Targets. These, together with updated planning guidance, will ensure sufficient land is zoned for housing. The Government will support this by providing additional State lands to the LDA, capable of delivering up to 15,000 homes. Local authorities will also be funded to acquire additional land so that they can deliver social and affordable homes at scale.

In addition, **Housing for All** tasks the LDA, through Project Tosaigh, with intervening in slow or stalled developments on non-State lands, through an open and transparent process, designed to ascertain the potential for it to enter into strategic partnerships with landowners in order to unlock and accelerate the delivery of affordable homes.

In tandem with these measures to incentivise the bringing forward of supply, there is a need to balance this with penalties for non-activation of sites. In this regard, the Minister for Finance will bring forward a new tax to activate vacant land for residential purposes (to replace the current vacant site levy).

I am also cognisant that the planning system must be reformed to ensure that there is certainty and stability for those providing housing in Ireland. Under **Housing for All** the Strategic

Housing Development Process will be replaced with new planning arrangements for large-scale residential developments. Such reforms will make decision-making on these developments more efficient whilst returning primary decision-making to the local level.

The judicial review process will also be reformed and planning legislation will be reviewed to ensure the planning system is plan-led, has greater public acceptance and reflects the needs of existing and new populations.

In the shorter term, I want to see non-activated planning permissions activated. In this regard, the Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Fund will stimulate such activation for apartment developments of four floors or more, above certain densities and these apartments will be for sale to owner occupiers.

Finally, the delivery an average of 33,000 homes per year requires an expansion of the current workforce. Through the actions laid out in **Housing for All** industry will be supported in returning existing workers to full employment and there will be proactive engagement with international labour where supply is unavailable locally. There will also be a ramp-up in education and training opportunities, including commitments regarding programmes and apprenticeships and delivery of new courses.

Housing for All takes a genuine whole of Government approach to creating a long-term, sustainable housing system for Ireland. I am confident that the breadth of measures and reforms therein will remove impediments to progress and provide for the much-needed delivery of homes at scale.

Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 122.

Housing Schemes

141. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his views on the current situation in which the funding for housing adaptation grants is inadequate to cope with demand, leading to a situation in which many county councils have significant backlogs which have rolled over from 2020 and are causing long delays given his commitment to supporting elderly persons to live in their own homes; if he plans to increase the funding to local authorities in order to clear the backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46427/21]

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 increasing 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/

The grants include the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, the Mobility Aids Grant and the Housing Aid for Older People, which are 80% funded by my Department, with a 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority. The detailed administration of these schemes including assessment, approval, prioritisation and apportionment between the three schemes is the responsibility of local authorities.

My Department's approach every year is to issue a single full year allocation to each local authority, so they can plan and implement the grants programme. Over the course of the year, my Department works closely with the local authorities to monitor spend and to achieve a full drawdown of the available funding. This means that if underspends arise on the part of some local authorities, they can be redistributed to other authorities which have high levels of grant activity. If a local authority is dealing with a high level of applications and is in a position to allocate additional own resources to the grant scheme in 2021, further additional funding can be requested from my Department and every effort will be made to accede to any such request.

The receipt and processing of housing grant applications can and has continued throughout the pandemic and the carrying out of such works was specifically exempted from the construction restrictions under the public health regulations which were put in place. It is accepted however that the pace has been affected by the effects of wider restrictions and revised work methodologies necessary in response to the pandemic. Inevitably this has led to a backlog of applications in some local authorities. Officials from my Department are engaging with local authorities and emphasising the importance of urgently reducing any existing backlog through the provision of additional resources and ensuring that all applications are dealt with in accordance with Departmental guidelines.

Finally as detailed in Housing for All, housing policy objectives 6 and 7 give a commitment to undertaking a review of the range of housing grants available to assist with meeting specific housing needs both for our ageing population and people with a disability. Officials from my Department will begin a review of the existing grant schemes later this year.

Defective Building Materials

142. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the report from the housing defects working group; if recommendations will be published in advance of Budget 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46462/21]

160. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the progress of the working group on latent defects. [46315/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142 and 160 together.

The Programme for Government sets out a number of commitments in respect of the important policy area of building defects and provides for an examination of defects in housing, having regard to the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing report, "Safe as Houses".

In this context, I established a working group to examine defects in housing. The plenary working group has been meeting monthly since March 2021, (with the exception of August) in addition to subgroup meetings. The group's terms of reference were adopted in May 2021 and include:

1. Examine defects in housing having regard to the recommendations in Item 4 "Addressing the legacy of bad building and poor regulation" in Chapter 4 of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government report - 'Safe as Houses? A Report on Building Standards, Building Controls and Consumer Protection'.

2. Establish the nature of significant, wide-spread fire safety, structural safety and water ingress defects in purpose built apartment buildings, including duplexes, constructed between

1991 – 2013 in Ireland through consultation with affected homeowners, homeowner representative organisations, owners' management companies, relevant managing agents, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, industry stakeholders, insurance providers, mortgage providers and other relevant parties. Including such matters as:

- Identification and description of defect,
- Nature of defect – design, product, workmanship,
- Non-compliance with building regulations or actual damage,
- Severity/risk to life or serviceability of dwelling,
- Period of construction affected,
- Type of dwelling affected,
- Location of dwellings affected.

3. Establish the scale of the issue – estimate number of dwellings affected by the defects identified including those already remediated.

4. Consider a methodology for the categorisation of defects and the prioritisation of remedial action.

5. In the case of defects with fire safety implications, consider how the framework for enhancing fire safety in dwellings can be applied to mitigate the risks arising from fire safety defects pending the remediation of defects and the Code of Practice for Fire Safety Assessment of Premises and Buildings, which is currently being developed by National Directorate of Fire and Emergency Management.

6. Suggest mechanisms for resolving defects, in the context of the legal rights, duties and obligations of developers, builders, building professionals, insurers, mortgage providers, building control authorities, fire authorities, owners' management companies, owner occupiers, renters and landlords, including:

- Technical options for the remediation of dwellings,
- Efficient means of carrying out work,
- individual dwellings or whole building approach,
- routine maintenance/refurbishment or remediation,
- Structures or delivery channels needed to facilitate resolution – advice and support.

7. Evaluate the potential cost of technical remediation options.

8. Pursue options on possible financial solutions to effect a resolution, in line with the Programme for Government commitment to identify options for those impacted by defects to access low-cost, long-term finance.

9. To report to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the Examination of Defects in Housing.

In regard to the working group's deliberations, the group will seek to engage with a range of interested parties, including homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals and industry stakeholders, among others to examine the

issue of defects in housing and report to me on the matter. Consultation with the relevant parties has commenced and further arrangements in this regard are currently being put in place by the working group.

I am satisfied that the group is working effectively and efficiently on this complex matter and I look forward to a report in due course following completion of their deliberation. Once I receive the report I will give full consideration to its contents.

Any further speculation or discussion on the output of the working group is premature at this stage.

Question No. 143 answered with Question No. 122.

Housing Schemes

144. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the options that are under consideration for mid-income families who cannot secure sufficient mortgages in circumstances in which financial institutions will not take their rental payments into consideration on their applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46421/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum.

Over 300,000 new homes will be built by the end of 2030, including a projected 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes.

Specifically regarding middle-income families wishing to buy homes, the Housing for All strategy contains a multi-pronged approach to improving affordability.

The Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are primarily focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Both of these schemes will be targeted at households constrained by the maximum mortgage and deposit available to them. The gap between the market value and what the household can afford (including with the assistance of the 'Help to Buy' incentive) will be bridged via the provision of equity support. The equity support can subsequently be redeemed at any time at the home-owners discretion, or remain outstanding until the home is sold or passed on.

In addition to these distinct shared equity schemes, the Housing for All strategy also provides for the 'Local Authority Home Loan', which will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. From 10 September 2021, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate by 0.25% for new borrowers under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL). This lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan. The Help to Buy scheme is also currently available to help purchasers in accessing homes.

Further to the above, the Housing for All strategy also provides the following supports;

- increased funding provided to the Land Development Agency,

- the Croí Cónaithe initiative intended to service sites and refurbish existing vacant properties in regional towns and villages,
- a higher stamp duty rate for institutional investors that purchase family homes,
- increased regulation of short-term letting properties.
- additional measures to reduce vacancy rates, and
- expanded supports for retrofitting existing homes.

Collectively, these measures will improve affordability for all families or individuals wishing to purchase a home.

With regard to the issue of mortgage requirements, these requirements are governed by the Central Bank of Ireland which retains independence in the establishment of macro-prudential policy and mortgage measures.

Information in this regard, including on exemptions and other matters, is available at the following Central Bank links:

www.centralbank.ie/consumer-hub/explainers/what-are-the-mortgage-measures, and

www.centralbank.ie/financial-system/financial-stability/macro-prudential-policy/mortgage-measures.

House Prices

145. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he has taken to ensure that his housing policies are not inflating prices even further in view of the latest CSO report which shows that house prices have increased by 8.6% in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46015/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): Housing supply has been impacted by Covid-19. The periods of lockdown since early 2020 have reduced construction activity and placed limitations on the ability to conduct normal sales activity, and this has impacted on house prices. The considerable growth in household savings, related to the public health restrictions which reduced consumption, also seems likely to be contributing to recent price inflation.

The ongoing removal of Covid restrictions will allow for a full reopening of the housing market. CSO data regarding new dwellings completions for Quarter 2 shows that the rate of completions is increasing and the effects of the periods of lockdown are abating. Data on planning permissions and commencements are also showing a significant increase over this period.

The full opening up of the housing market and construction activity, along with the increases in supply that will be delivered by the Government’s Housing for All Plan, will ensure that housing market activity normalises, and supply increases to meet demand as the Plan is implemented.

As a matter of course in the development of housing policy or schemes, account is taken of the intended or potential impacts of the measures under consideration. Further, the governance approach set out in Housing for All will provide the mechanism to consider the sequencing and timing of the rollout of demand side measures with delivery of supply side reforms. The

Housing for All Delivery Group and my Department will monitor and prioritise delivery and sequencing of actions, having regard to relevant market trends including impacts on house prices, where appropriate.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 138.

Planning Issues

147. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he will publish the new guidelines for the development of rural houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46456/21]

149. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when the rural housing guidelines will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46390/21]

324. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he will publish the revised rural housing guidelines for planning authorities; the number of times the working group established to examine rural housing, including one-off-housing has met physically or virtually since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46007/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 147, 149 and 324 together.

Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing 2005, were issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and require planning authorities to frame the planning policies in their development plans in a balanced and measured way that ensures the housing needs of rural communities are met, while avoiding excessive urban-generated housing. The Guidelines are available on the Government's website at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/publication/23809-sustainable-rural-housing-development-guidelines/.

Since 2018, the National Planning Framework (NPF) is the national planning policy document providing overall strategic policy for the future development of Ireland. National Planning Objective (NPO) 19 aims to ensure that a policy distinction is made between areas experiencing significant 'overspill' development pressure from urban areas within the commuter catchment of cities, towns and centres of employment, on the one hand, and remoter rural areas where population levels may be low and or declining, on the other.

NPO 19 is aligned with the established planning approach as per the 2005 Guidelines, whereby considerations of social (intrinsic part of the community) or economic (persons working full or part-time) need may be applied by planning authorities in certain rural areas under urban influence in order to prevent urban sprawl.

A working group was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Guidelines and this group met on five occasions between May 2017 and January 2019. During this period, in 2018, the National Planning Framework (the NPF) was published and provides an important strategic basis for interpreting the 2005 Guidelines. National Policy Objective (NPO) 15 of the NPF fully supports the concept of the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades, while simultaneously indicating the need to manage certain areas around cities and towns.

Updated Rural Housing Planning Guidelines are currently being prepared by my Depart-

ment to ensure consistency with new requirements and legislation at national and EU level introduced in respect of areas related to rural housing such as environmental protection, the Gaeltacht and climate action. The new guidelines will ensure a more consistent approach between counties and alignment with NPF objectives, and will be published in draft before the end of 2021.

Question No. 148 answered with Question No. 123.

Question No. 149 answered with Question No. 147.

Housing Provision

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which he can draw down extra funding for house building purposes in the remainder of 2021 and in 2022 to boost output in the public and affordable housing sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46410/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Government's commitment to increase the supply of public housing was underpinned in Budget 2021, which provided €3.3 billion to deliver housing programmes this year. This funding will support social and affordable housing delivery, along with the implementation of a broad range of programmes providing targeted support to meet housing need.

The recently published Housing for All strategy is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade. The table below sets out the annual targets for the delivery of a total of 88,400 new build social homes and 53,800 new affordable homes in the period 2022-2030.

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
New build social homes	9,000	9,100	9,300	10,000	10,200	10,200	10,200	10,200	10,200
New Build affordable homes	4,100	5,500	6,400	6,400	6,100	6,300	6,400	6,300	6,300

Housing for All is supported by an investment package of over €4bn per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency (LDA) and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency.

Details of the Exchequer element of funding for social and affordable housing delivery, including for 2022, will be published each year as part of the annual estimates process.

Question No. 151 answered with Question No. 138.

Natural Heritage Areas

152. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will ensure that Garrylucas bog, County Cork is designated as a natural heritage area.

[46420/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The site referred to by the Deputy is one of 632 proposed natural heritage areas under Section 16(1) of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000. Although proposed natural heritage area sites are not subject to the protection provisions of that Act, their status may be recognised in local authority development plans.

While it is hoped to conduct a review of proposed natural heritage areas in Ireland in the future, the current focus and priority of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department is on fulfilling Ireland's obligations under the Birds and Habitats Directives in relation to Natura 2000 sites i.e. Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

Any review of the status of some or all of these sites by the NPWS would be based on careful analysis of the special scientific interest of each site or its diversity of natural attributes or in light of the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Housing Schemes

153. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of plans to introduce a social housing passport scheme to allow households to move from one local authority list to another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46212/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Programme for Government provides for a package of social housing reforms, including the introduction of a social housing passport to allow households move from one local authority list to another.

It should be noted that the four Dublin local authorities already co-operate in arrangements that enable social housing applicants to apply for housing in one or two of the other Dublin authorities simultaneously. Similar arrangements apply in the two Cork and two Galway local authorities. It is also already possible for households to move and relocate between housing authority areas under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme where the household income is within the appropriate income limits.

The issue of providing for wider tenancy movements is being examined and I will look at proposals in relation to such wider movement along with the other reform package measures.

Vacant Properties

154. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the support that has been provided to each of the respective local authorities to enable them to bring vacant and derelict properties back into use as housing; the number of vacant housing officers in place in each local authority; if they are employed on a full or part-time basis; his plans to provide further support to increase the number of officers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46443/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): The National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy was published by my Department in 2018, this Strategy strives to provide a targeted, effective and co-ordinated approach to identifying and tackling vacancy across Ireland.

Since 2018, my Department has provided funding to each local authority of €50,000 per annum to support the work of a Vacant Homes Office including a Vacant Homes Officer. All 31 local authorities have claimed their funding up to June 2021 and this funding has been secured up to June 2022.

The provision of central funding reinforces the capacity of local authorities to provide information/statistics to my Department from a dedicated contact point within each local authority. The Vacant Homes Office therefore plays a key role in the co-ordination of this work within each local authority.

As part of Housing for All the Government has committed to a range of actions as part of the pathway to address vacancy ensuring the efficient use of housing stock. This includes ensuring that the Vacant Homes Officers based in local authorities are all full-time posts.

The table attached lists the number of Vacant Homes Officers currently in each local authority and whether they are working in a full or part time capacity in that role.

Table of Vacant Homes Officers in Local Authorities			
Local Authority	No. of Vacant Homes Officers	Full-time	Part-time
Carlow	1		1
Cavan	1		1
Clare	1	1	
Cork City	1		1
Cork County	2		2
Donegal	1		1
Dublin City	3	1	2
Dun Laoghaire	1		1
Fingal	1		1
Galway City	1		1
Galway County	1		1
Kerry	1	1	
Kildare	1		1
Kilkenny	1		1
Laois	1		1
Leitrim	1		1
Limerick	1		1
Longford	1		1
Louth	1		1
Mayo	1		1
Meath	2		2
Monaghan	2		2
Offaly	1		1
Roscommon	1		1
Sligo	2		2
South Dublin	1		1
Tipperary	1		1
Waterford	1		1

Table of Vacant Homes Officers in Local Authorities			
Westmeath	1		1
Wexford	1		1
Wicklow	1		1

Housing Policy

155. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he proposes to amend the tenant purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46331/21]

175. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when it is planned to publish new regulations for the tenant purchase scheme as outlined in Housing for All; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46389/21]

349. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if amendments will be made to the tenant purchase scheme as detailed in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46378/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155, 175 and 349 together.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 governing the Scheme provides for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale, including houses provided to local authorities under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, houses specifically designed for older persons, group Traveller housing and houses provided to facilitate people with disabilities transferring from institutional care to community-based living.

The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V homes are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 to ensure that homes delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

A review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation has been undertaken. In addition, Housing for All, A New Housing Plan for Ireland, commits to maintain the right of social housing tenants to purchase their own home with some changes to eligibility. The review and the commitments Housing for All are being examined as part of the work on the broader social housing reform agenda. I expect to be in a position to finalise changes to the Scheme once the work on these reform measures is complete.

Housing Schemes

156. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he plans to introduce supports to assist first-time homeowners to deal with the unprecedented rise in the cost of building materials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46459/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Changes in relation to building material costs are monitored and recorded by the Central Statistics Office (Wholesale Price Index for Building & Construction Materials). The cost and supply issues that have arisen for basic building materials such as steel, timber, concrete and plastics are also occurring internationally. They appear to result from a range of contributory factors including Brexit, the disruption caused by Covid 19, increased global demand and other global events that have impacted on supply chains. Reducing residential construction costs is a key theme within Housing for All, with actions centred on analysis, innovation, research and productivity through a whole-of-government approach in collaboration with Industry.

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum.

Over 300,000 new homes will be built by the end of 2030, including a projected 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes.

Specifically regarding middle-income families wishing to buy homes, the Housing for All strategy contains a multi-pronged approach to improving affordability.

The Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are primarily focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Both of these schemes will be targeted at households constrained by the maximum mortgage and deposit available to them. The gap between the market value and what the household can afford (including with the assistance of the 'Help to Buy' incentive) will be bridged via the provision of equity support. The equity support can subsequently be redeemed at any time at the home-owners discretion, or remain outstanding until the home is sold or passed on.

In addition to these distinct shared equity schemes, the Housing for All strategy also provides for the 'Local Authority Home Loan', which will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. From 10 September 2021, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate by 0.25% for new borrowers under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL). This lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan. The Help to Buy scheme is also currently available to help purchasers in accessing homes.

Further to the above, the Housing for All strategy also provides the following supports;

- increased funding provided to the Land Development Agency,
- the Croí Cónaithe initiative intended to service sites and refurbish existing vacant properties in regional towns and villages,
- a higher stamp duty rate for institutional investors that purchase family homes,
- increased regulation of short-term letting properties.
- additional measures to reduce vacancy rates, and

- expanded supports for retrofitting existing homes.

Collectively, these measures will improve affordability for all families or individuals wishing to purchase a home.

Planning Issues

157. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the position regarding the Departmental working group set up to investigate potential amendments to building regulations to require changing places (details supplied) in suitable public buildings; the number of times the group has met; if he plans to meet with the group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46211/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): New buildings and extensions or material alterations to existing buildings must comply with the legal minimum performance standards for the design and construction of buildings set out in the Building Regulations 1997 - 2021. The Building Regulations are subject to ongoing review in the interests of safety and the well-being of persons in the built environment and to ensure that due regard is taken of changes in construction techniques, technological progress and innovation.

In relation to the Deputy's specific query, Part M of the Building Regulations deals with Access and Use. The associated Technical Guidance Document M provides guidance indicating how the requirements of Part M can be achieved in practice. Where works are carried out in accordance with TGD M, this will, prima facie, indicate compliance with Part M of the Second Schedule of the Building Regulations.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages building owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions where practicable and appropriate.

In December 2020, my Department established a Working Group to examine the provision for a changing places toilet in certain buildings. A changing places toilet offers larger supported facilities that address the needs of people for whom current accessible sanitary accommodation is inadequate. These facilities enable people with complex care needs to take part in everyday activities such as travel, shopping, family days out or attending a sporting event.

The plenary Working Group has met six times to date, in addition to a number of sub-group meetings. Draft documentation, which includes Draft Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2021, Draft Technical Guidance Document M – Access and Use 2021 and a Regulatory Impact Analysis, is currently being prepared to support a public consultation in the matter later this year.

Housing Schemes

158. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will address the excessive processing time in many local authorities for housing applications and HAP applications and the impact of these delays on the ability of persons to access social housing support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46405/21]

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

Regulation 12 of the 2011 Regulations prescribes the timescales for the processing of applications by local authorities and provides that, subject to conditions, a local authority shall deal with an application within a period of 12 weeks. Local authorities will prioritise housing needs assessments for those in greatest need and ensure that such applications are dealt with within timeframes that are significantly shorter than the statutory maximum. Different timescales may apply where the local authority requires additional information from the applicant within the relevant period, as defined in the Regulations, thus leading to possible extensions to the 12 week deadline in terms of completing the application process.

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.

Despite the challenges faced throughout 2020 and into 2021 due to the Covid 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.

Measures that were required to be taken in the context of Covid-19 did, however, have an impact on processing times for HAP applications.

Once a HAP application has been received and confirmed as valid by the relevant local authority, it is entered on the system by the local authority and then submitted for processing and payment by the HAP SSC. If there are delays at the processing stage within a local authority, payment to the landlord may 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.

My Department and the local authorities are aware of the importance of minimising HAP processing times and the critical need to keep this under review at a local level, in order to ensure times are minimised to the greatest extent possible. This has been communicated clearly to the County and City Management Association (CCMA), and my Department is closely monitoring the situation and will continue to do so over the coming months.

Housing Provision

159. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the likely or estimated number of cost-rental units that his Department will approve within the next 12 months. [46317/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Under Action 4.12 of Housing for All, in the period to December 2021 local authorities will be preparing Housing Action Delivery Plans to include social and affordable housing where necessary (affordable purchase and cost rental). This will allow each Local Authority to determine the affordability constraint in their area based on the Housing Need and Demand Assessment.

Over the period 2021 to 2030, it is intended that approximately 18,000 Cost Rental homes will be delivered by Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and the Land Development Agency. This represents an average of 2,000 per year. In building to this scale, the State will

provide certain focused funding supports to help delivery partners provide rental homes that target affordable rents at levels in the order of 25% below market rents.

A range of work is already ongoing to deliver Cost Rental housing, with State support, through a number of avenues. Under Budget 2021, €35 million was allocated to the Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) scheme, designed to facilitate Government loans to Approved Housing Bodies, to finance up to 30% of the capital costs of new homes for Cost Rental. My Department is utilising the expertise of Local Authorities, the Land Development Agency (LDA) and the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), to deliver initial Cost Rental projects.

A total of 390 Cost Rental homes were approved under this first tranche of CREL funding. The first 25 of these homes, and the first Cost Rental homes to be designated in Ireland, were acquired by the Clúid AHB at Taylor Hill, Balbriggan, and the first tenants moved in on 28 August 2021. In addition to these 390 homes, another 50 Cost Rental apartments are currently being constructed at Enniskerry Road, Stepside, alongside 105 social housing units. Construction is due to be completed in Q4 2021, and the tenant selection process is underway.

Question No. 160 answered with Question No. 142.

Housing Provision

161. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the target number of units for affordable houses in counties Laois and Offaly, respectively in 2022 and 2023. [46316/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Under Action 4.12 of Housing for All, in the period to December 2021 local authorities will be preparing Housing Action Delivery Plans to include social and affordable housing where necessary (affordable purchase and cost rental). This will allow each Local Authority to determine the affordability constraint in their area based on the Housing Need and Demand Assessment.

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum.

At a national level, over 300,000 new homes will be built by the end of 2030, including a projected 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes. These homes will be provided by Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency (LDA), as well as through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks.

Specifically regarding middle-income families wishing to buy homes, the Housing for All strategy contains a multi-pronged approach to improving affordability.

The Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are primarily focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Both of these schemes will be targeted at households constrained by the maximum mortgage and deposit available to them. The gap between the market value and what the household can afford (including with the assistance of the 'Help to Buy' incentive) will be bridged via the provision of equity support. The equity support can subsequently be redeemed at any time at the home-owners discretion, or remain outstanding until the home is sold or passed on.

In addition to these distinct shared equity schemes, the Housing for All strategy also provides for the ‘Local Authority Home Loan’, which will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. From 10 September 2021, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate by 0.25% for new borrowers under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL). This lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan. The Help to Buy scheme is also currently available to help purchasers in accessing homes.

Further to the above, the Housing for All strategy also provides for the Croí Cónaithe initiative intended to service sites and refurbish existing vacant properties in regional towns and villages,

Collectively, these measures will improve affordability for all families or individuals wishing to purchase a home.

Housing Provision

162. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the State-owned lands and other sites in Dublin 6W, 8, 10, 12 and 20 which the Land Development Agency has identified or have been indicated to it by his Department as being suitable or available for future housing development; and the size of each site. [46334/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on an interim basis in September 2018, by way of an Establishment Order made under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971. The Land Development Agency Act was recently signed in law and, on enactment, the LDA will be established as a commercial State agency.

There is ongoing engagement between the LDA and my Department in relation to the identification of relevant public lands suitable for the delivery of substantial additional housing in locations with a significant housing need. In the table below, are sites for future housing development which the LDA are currently engaged with in the postcodes requested i.e. Dublin 6W, 8, 10, 12 and 20.

Site	Location	Site Size (hectares)
Cherry Orchard	Dublin 10	13.35
Meath Hospital	Dublin 8	0.3
St Teresa’s Gardens	Dublin 8	5.34
Digital Hub	Dublin 8	3.84

In addition, under Housing for All, it is planned to transfer 4 additional sites in Dublin 8 to the LDA following a due diligence process. These include 3 sites in Inchicore, Dublin 8 owned currently by the OPW, CIE and ESB respectively as well as the CIE Conyngham Road Garage.

Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 138.

Housing Schemes

164. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heri-

tage if he will report on the future plans for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme in the context of the Housing for All plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46322/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): As part of Housing for All, I announced that a reformed successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, the 'Local Authority Home Loan', will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible for a mortgage.

I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate for new borrowers by 0.25% under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL), as from 10 September 2021. This will result in lowering the monthly repayments and/or increasing borrowing capacity for applicants; this lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan.

In addition I also announced a 'Fresh Start' principle for applications to State affordable housing and loan schemes. This means that people who are divorced or separated and have no interest in the family home, or who have undergone insolvency proceedings, will be eligible to apply.

I look forward to announcing further details in respect of the Local Authority Home Loan in the coming months.

The link to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme and FAQ's can be found in the link below:

rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 134.

Question No. 166 answered with Question No. 129.

Heritage Sites

167. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he will visit Knocklofty House, Clonmel to view the state of disrepair of the structure; and if progress has been made in identifying a way to address the damage that is occurring to this heritage-rich structure. [46418/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): My role with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the roles of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners.

Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, gives primary responsibility to local authorities to identify and protect the architectural heritage by including particular structures on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS). As Minister, I can make recommendations to local authorities for buildings and structures to be included on the RPS. These recommendations arise from the surveys of my Department's National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH).

Its inclusion on Tipperary County Council's RPS places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of Knocklofty House and also gives the Council powers to deal with development proposals affecting it and to seek to safeguard its future. I understand that the legal ownership

of the property is being questioned currently. As such, it may not be appropriate for me to visit the building unless at the invitation of its owners.

On 12 May last, I met with local people, along with public representatives, to discuss their concerns about Knocklofty House and I stressed that crucial to the future of this structure is the identification of a viable use or uses with sufficient income to ensure its survival. I outlined the financial supports for owners of heritage structures available under the Historic Structures Fund and the Built Heritage Investment Scheme. My Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage structures through these schemes and I have awarded combined funding, this year, of €6m to 562 projects right across the country.

Details of the 2022 schemes will be made available later this year and, while I understand that the scale of investment needed for the structure mentioned may mean that the level of grant funding available under these schemes would not, on its own, be sufficient, it may provide some support to safeguard it from falling into further disrepair. My Department would welcome a grant application in respect of same.

I fully understand and appreciate the value of our built heritage, including at a local level, and I have asked officials in my Department to remain in contact with Tipperary County Council on this matter.

Defective Building Materials

168. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will commit to the implementation of a 100% redress scheme for homeowners affected by the MICA and pyrite scandal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46450/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In response to concerns being raised by homeowners in relation to the Defective Concrete Block grant scheme, I established a time-bound working group, with representatives from my Department, the local authorities and homeowner representative groups who are tasked with reviewing the operation of the scheme and providing a report with recommendations by 31st July. Included within the terms of reference of the working group is the existing homeowner contribution and the allowable costs under the scheme.

At the request of homeowners and in order to afford them more time to consider and respond to key issues under discussion, it was agreed at the meeting held on the 27th July that the timeline for the completion of a report by the Working Group would be extended to the end of September, 2021.

Until the work of the Group is finalised it would not be appropriate for me to comment on its detailed deliberations. Once the Group has concluded its deliberations, I will, following consultation with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Attorney General, bring proposals to Government.

Question No. 169 answered with Question No. 115.

Rental Sector

170. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of evictions arising from Residential Tenancy Board adjudications; the reasons given for these evictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46464/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department does not hold or collate the information referred to in the Question.

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) which was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2021, operates a national tenancy registration system and to facilitate the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants.

The Clerk of the Dáil requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB set up a dedicated email address for this purpose. The RTB may be contacted at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie to establish the extent to which it may hold the information sought.

Question No. 171 answered with Question No. 133.

Traveller Accommodation

172. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he plans to bring forward legislation to give effect to the key recommendations of the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation with respect to Part 8 and section 183 votes in councils. [46406/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): The Traveller Accommodation Expert Review Report has 32 recommendations which can be broken down into 4 categories which are aimed at:

1. addressing research deficiencies, including how information is gathered and used;
2. removing any potential delays and obstacles in the planning system in terms of delivery;
3. increasing resources and delivery capacity; and
4. strengthening governance arrangements.

The recommendations have been categorised into separate streams reflecting recommendations that can be completed within my Department, recommendations that require the assistance of other Government Departments and Agencies and recommendations that will require the commission of further independent research.

The Programme Board has agreed a work programme for 2021. Projects have been set up to examine in detail the issues which need to be considered in respect of the recommendations which have been made. The Expert Group Report recommendations in respect of the Part 8 planning consent process and local authority land disposal procedures are included in the Programme Boards agreed 2021 work programme and are being worked on.

National Biodiversity Plan

173. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he has plans to enhance biodiversity measures in the Wild Nephin National Park, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46423/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): My Department is deeply committed to the development of the

National Park in Mayo. In 2017 the entire Wild Nephin area was consolidated into the ownership of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The addition of Wild Nephin area and also, separately a private acquisition of 1,200 acres at Altnabrockey has expanded the total size of the Park to over 15,000 hectares of Atlantic blanket bogs and mountainous terrain in the Barony of Erris in northwest County Mayo. The expansion adds significantly to the overall biological diversity of the National Park which will be augmented further under Park conservation management. The culmination of constructive engagement between Coillte and my Department, the expansion of the Park addresses a long standing strategy to align key environmental assets and an exceptional opportunity has been realised for the State. This transfer underlines the State's determination in preserving our natural heritage not only for ourselves, but also for our children and our children's children.

The Wild Nephin Area is an important area for nature conservation and public amenity and through a state – owned re-wilding project we aim to provide increased nature conservation benefits and biodiversity as well as enhanced recreational and social benefits in Wild Nephin National Park. The Nephin Wilderness Project is designed to manage the conversion of the former commercial forestry section of the National Park over a 15-year period which will act as Phase 1 of a long-term vision to restore habitats and biodiversity within an intensively managed area.

The Project is guided by a Wild Nephin Conversion Plan 2022 – 2037 which focuses on the principles of rewilding and habitat restoration to convert an area previously managed for timber extraction of non-native conifers to an area which prioritises biodiversity, restores ecosystems and promotes sustainable interactions between people and nature. This plan will cover the conversion of the area known as the Nephin Forest and its integration into the National Park. The Wild Nephin Conversion Plan (Phase I) will facilitate the rewilding and restoration of the landscapes and habitats of Wild Nephin, allowing natural ecological processes to become the dominant drivers of the landscape, where biodiversity is enhanced, ecosystems restored, and low impact recreation opportunities will connect people with nature across generations.

The rewilding and habitat restoration of Wild Nephin aims to support a natural and biodiverse ecosystem which will provide a connection to a larger community of life by encouraging the enjoyment of nature, solitude and challenging recreation without creating a significant human impact on this area of outstanding natural beauty, where nature is the priority. The project is based on actions to be taken in the first 15 years of habitat restoration through the establishment of goals which are informed by the overall nature conservation objectives of the NPWS alongside national and international legislation, policies and agreements. These include links with the Natura 2000 Network, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Paris Climate Agreement and the Bern Convention alongside links in with strategies such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the current situation globally in regards to biodiversity loss and the climate crisis.

Housing Provision

174. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the submissions for funding, building or purchasing housing in Dublin 6W, 8, 10, 12 that have been received from Dublin City Council in the past five years; the stage of consideration the requests are at; the number of housing units involved; and in the cases of refusal to fund, the reasons that were given. [46335/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

My Department provides both capital and current funding to local authorities across a range of funding initiatives to assist them in providing homes for families and individuals on their social housing waiting lists. To provide transparency on the new social housing projects being advanced, each quarter my Department publishes a Social Housing Construction Status Report and updated Social Housing Delivery statistics for all years from 1999. The report for Quarter 2, 2021 is available at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/collection/cb885-social-housing-construction-projects-status-reports/. These quarterly reports provide details of the social housing construction schemes completed and those in the pipeline for all local authorities including Dublin City Council.

Since 2015 Dublin City Council have also purchased 502 second hand homes and 22 new homes (under Part V legislation) in Dublin 6, 8, 10 and 12 for Social Housing use for which my Department have provided funding.

From 2015 to present only one submission for Capital Funding was refused by my Department. This application was for Turnkey approval in the Dublin 6 area and was refused due to value for money concerns.

Question No. 175 answered with Question No. 155.

Traveller Accommodation

176. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the expert group set up to review the effectiveness, implementation and operation of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 and the report completed by this expert group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46206/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): The Traveller Accommodation Expert Review Report has 32 recommendations which can be broken down into 4 categories which are aimed at:

- addressing research deficiencies, including how information is gathered and used;
- removing any potential delays and obstacles in the planning system in terms of delivery;
- increasing resources and delivery capacity; and
- strengthening governance arrangements.

The recommendations have been categorised into separate streams reflecting recommendations that can be completed within my Department, recommendations that require the assistance of other Government Departments and Agencies and recommendations that will require the commission of further independent research.

A Programme Board been established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report and has agreed a work programme for 2021. Projects have set up to examine in detail the issues which need to be considered in respect of the recommendations which have been made.

Prior to the establishment of the Programme Board, my Department has been progressing a number of recommendations and consulting with and reporting on progress to the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee. For example, a review has been concluded of the arrangements for the disbursement of funding for the provision and refurbishment of

Traveller specific accommodation and a new process implemented for the 2020 allocation of funding.

Defective Building Materials

177. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will consider setting up an expert panel to investigate and quantify the extent of the use of defective concrete blocks in construction to assist local authorities where relevant, in view of the fact it is viewed as a waste of time and resources if each local authority must individually put that expertise in place. [46311/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department has informed councils requesting admittance to the scheme that before any extension of the scheme can be considered, the same rigorous analysis as that put in place prior to the rollout of the scheme to the counties of Donegal and Mayo would have to be undertaken.

Local authorities should endeavour to determine, using the IS: 465 protocol now in place, that issues arising in homes in their counties are in fact due to the presence of excessive amounts of deleterious materials (mica or pyrite) in the aggregate used to manufacture the concrete blocks and secondly quantify the likely extent of the problem in the local authority area. Such analysis will provide the evidential basis necessary for the consideration of any extension of the scheme.

My Department is in ongoing engagement with local authorities in respect of discussions on requests for an extension of the scheme and the relevant local authorities have positively engaged with this process. A submission in this regard has already been received from Clare County Council and that is under review and further submissions are expected from other local authorities with whom my Department is engaging.

In response to concerns being raised by homeowners in relation to the Defective Concrete Block grant scheme, I established a time-bound working group, with representatives from my Department, the local authorities and homeowner representative groups who are tasked with reviewing the operation of the scheme and providing a report with recommendations originally by 31st July. Included within the terms of reference of the working group is the issue of eligible homes and the extension of the scheme to other local authority areas.

At the request of homeowners and in order to afford them more time to consider and respond to key issues under discussion, it was agreed at the meeting held on the 27th July that the timeline for the submission of a report by the working group would be extended to the end of September, 2021. Once the deliberations of the Group have concluded, I will, following consultation with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Attorney General, bring proposals to Government.

Question No. 178 answered with Question No. 138.

Vacant Properties

179. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the turnaround time for vacant council houses in Cork city has now reached 64 weeks; and his plans to work with the local authority to reduce same. [46403/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

While my Department is focused on ensuring that existing housing stock is utilised to its fullest extent, the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, responsive repairs and implementing planned maintenance programmes, is a matter for each individual local authority, in line with Section 28 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 2009.

Notwithstanding the legal obligations on local authorities to manage and maintain their housing stock, since 2014, Exchequer funding has been provided through my Department's Voids Programme to support local authorities in preparing vacant units for re-letting. This funding was initially introduced to tackle long term vacant units and is now increasingly targeted at ensuring minimal turnaround and re-let times for local authority vacant stock.

To ensure these properties are turned around as quickly as possible and to maximise the budget available local authorities were notified that only the minimum works required to comply with the Housing (Private Rented Standards) Regulations, 2019 should be carried out. My Department will continue to actively encourage local authorities to ensure all vacant properties in their stock are brought back into productive use as expeditiously as possible.

Data in relation to average turnaround times are not collated by my Department, however, statistics in relation to the social housing stock are published by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) in their Annual Reports on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities. These reports provide a range of information in relation to social housing stock, including the average time taken to re-tenant a dwelling. The most recent report, relating to 2019, is available on the NOAC website at the following link:

noac.ie/noac_publications/noac-performance-indicators-report-2019/

Housing Provision

180. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the way in which he plans to reach the targets for council-built social housing in Housing for All when the sale of public land to private developers continues most recently with the sale of the council-owned site in Killinarden; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46412/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

The Programme for Government has set out a clear commitment to ensure that everybody should have access to sustainable good quality housing to purchase or to rent at an affordable price and built to a high standard.

The recently published Housing for All strategy is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade, including an average of 10,000 social homes per annum from 2022-2030. Housing for All is supported by an investment package of over €4b per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency (LDA) and €5bn in funding through the Housing Finance Agency. This funding will support the acquisition of land, where required, to deliver new build social homes.

In relation to the sale of the site referred to by the Deputy, South Dublin County Council Members recently approved the disposal of lands at Killinarden to the preferred Economic Operator under Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, to build 372 affordable homes and 123 private residential units within the development site at Killinarden. The Council members agreed in March 2020 to progress the procurement process and proceed to land disposal under

the relevant legislation to accelerate the delivery of much needed affordable homes in the area. In addition, 125 social homes will be delivered as part of this development. The land associated with these homes is not included in the approved disposal.

Wildlife Conservation

181. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the white-tailed sea eagle programme following the release of 21 chicks into the wild over the summer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46461/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): I am delighted to have the opportunity to provide the Deputy with an update on this important and highly successful biodiversity project.

The birds released in August this year were part of the second Phase of this project to reintroduce this magnificent bird to Irish skies. Once a conspicuous part of Ireland's landscape, they were driven to extinction by human persecution here in the late Nineteenth Century. The first Phase ran from 2007-2011, managed by NPWS and the Golden Eagle Trust, when 100 chicks were released into the wild. Since then, over 35 Irish-born chicks have fledged here, some of whom have begun to rear their own chicks. Indeed, this year one nesting pair on Lough Derg produced three chicks. This is uncommon, even in the very extensive wild populations in Norway.

The Second Phase was launched last year, when ten Norwegian-born chicks were flown into Ireland and released into the wild on the Shannon Estuary and Lough Derg. Of these ten, an astonishing nine are still alive, and have travelled throughout the country, with one even travelling to Scotland.

In August 2021, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department and partners released a further twenty-one Norwegian-born Eagle chicks into the wild to bolster Ireland's existing White-Tailed Eagle population from a number of locations in Cork, Kerry, Clare and Waterford. They were collected from nests by the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research in June this year, and were imported to Ireland via Kerry Airport. They were kept in purpose-built enclosures while they grew, matured, and developed the feathers and muscles necessary for flight.

All 21 of the chicks are out in the natural environment and doing well. The birds will remain local for another 4/5 weeks and will then move out to explore and find new areas. All of the eagles are satellite tagged and readings are taken every day to discern their movements and locations.

The success of both this year's and last year's releases was thanks to the hard work of both the NPWS staff and the input and assistance of other interested parties. These include representatives of the IFA, the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, and in particular local landowners and farmers, without whose enthusiastic support in monitoring nest sites and care of birds the Project could not succeed. The Project represent the ongoing cooperation of these different groups who are seeking to restore a lost element of Ireland's natural heritage.

Returning this lost flagship species to Irish skies will be a huge step in restoring Irish natural heritage and improving Irish conservation efforts, and will benefit Irish biodiversity more broadly.

Local Authorities

182. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans to improve the compulsory purchase powers of local authorities following the publication of Housing for All; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46474/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Local Authorities have a range of legislative powers available to them to deal with under-utilised and derelict properties in their functional areas, for example, through the compulsory purchase powers and under Derelict Sites and Housing legislation.

I encourage Local Authorities to adopt a proactive approach in utilising their available legislative powers for compulsory purchase, where necessary, with the aim of bringing the greatest number of recoverable long-term vacant dwellings back into productive use. In many cases, however, the use of compulsory purchase powers is not necessary as agreement to purchase can be reached between the Local Authority and the property owner. To assist them in pursuing vacant properties, my Department introduced the Buy & Renew Scheme to facilitate the acquisition and remediation of vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing. Through this support mechanism, Local Authorities have delivered over 700 social housing homes to date and as outlined Housing for All I am keen to see further delivery in this way.

In addition, action 19.5 of Housing for All provides for a programme of CPO acquisitions, supported by a bridging finance facility from the Housing Finance Agency, which will allow Local Authorities to maximise opportunities to return vacant properties to productive use.

The objective of the programme, which will be introduced by the end of 2021, is for Local Authorities to acquire up to 2,500 vacant units by 2026 and present them to the open market for sale.

The Housing Agency will assist and advise Local Authorities with the CPO process. Vacant Homes Officers, already in situ in each Local Authority, will be responsible for driving this programme forward.

Departmental Expenditure

183. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Taoiseach the cost of providing secretarial services to all retired Taoisigh in each of the years 2017 to 2020. [46047/21]

The Taoiseach: The spend by my Department on the provision of secretarial assistance to those former Taoisigh availing of the service, is detailed in the table below.

Year	Cost
2017	0
2018	0
2019	€26,090.82
2020	€139,257.55

Employment Data

184. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Taoiseach the percentage of households that have one or more self-employed member of the household. [46365/21]

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

The most recent LFS figures available are for Quarter 2 (Q2) 2021.

In Q2 2021, 9.1% of households had one or more persons who were classified as self-employed in their main job. The share of households in which there was at least one person who was self-employed in their second job was just 1%.

Covid-19 Pandemic

185. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the number of businesses that have closed either temporarily or permanently in total and separately due to Covid-19 in 2020 and to date in 2021. [46478/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jack Chambers): The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available. Annual statistics on the business population are generally published by the CSO with a time lag of 18 months, as these statistics depend on business tax returns which may be submitted to Revenue up to 11 months after the reference year. The latest business demography results show that there were 272,531 enterprises in Ireland in 2019. To provide faster information since the onset of COVID-19, the CSO has conducted surveys on business impact and has also introduced a Business Signs of Life series.

The results of the CSO's survey on the Business Impact of COVID-19 on SMEs 2020 were published on 3 June 2021. The results indicated that an estimated 56% of responding SMEs had ceased trading at some point in 2020. Of those that did close at some point in 2020, 43% reported closing multiple times while 57% closed just once. Responding enterprises closed for an average of 18 weeks in 2020 and more than 70% of responding enterprises reported a decrease in turnover in 2020 compared to 2019.

The CSO's second report on Business Signs of Life was published on 28 April 2021. The report provided indicators on the interaction between employment-related State payments and business activity, from the beginning of the pandemic up to January 2021, based on an analysis of administrative data sources. Using this analysis, the percentage of enterprises in which all staff in the business were receiving the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) provides an indirect indicator of the percentage that are not trading at any given time. This analysis shows that 6.8% of enterprises had all their staff in receipt of PUP throughout the period from the initial lockdown in March / April 2020 to January 2021, i.e. they did not trade during that period. However, this is not an official indicator of enterprises that have ceased trading.

Monthly data from March 2020 to January 2021, showing the percentage of businesses in the Irish Business Economy in which all employees received the PUP, is set out in the following table:

Percentage of business that had all staff in receipt of Pandemic Unemployment Payment

Month	Percentage
March 2020	27.1%
April 2020	29.5%

May 2020	28.8%
June 2020	23.8%
July 2020	15.5%
August 2020	11.9%
September 2020	10.3%
October 2020	14.0%
November 2020	14.6%
December 2020	15.1%
January 2021	21.5%

A third report on Business Signs of Life, including estimates of the percentage of businesses no longer trading, is being prepared by the CSO for publication in the fourth quarter of 2021.

Covid-19 Pandemic

186. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Taoiseach if he will ensure that all staff in his Department and public bodies and agencies that operate under his remit who, by necessity of their work have to come into close proximity with others, including other employees or members of the public are provided with medical grade masks in the EN14683 category [44384/21]

The Taoiseach: My Department will continue to comply with latest public health advice and the Work Safely Protocol in relation to attendance by staff in the workplace. Attendance by staff continues to be on the basis of maintaining social distancing at all times in the workplace so the wearing of face masks is not mandatory. The same position applies in the National Economic and Social Development Office, which is the only body under the aegis of my Department. Face masks which comply with EU regulatory requirements are available to staff and visitors in both offices.

State Bodies

187. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Taoiseach the locations of all offices and buildings either owned or used by his Department or by public bodies and agencies that operate under his remit which are usually open to the public to access services. [44923/21]

The Taoiseach: My Department has no offices which are usually open to the public to access services and neither does the National Economic and Social Development Office, which is the only body under the aegis of my Department.

Departmental Communications

188. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach if he has deleted text messages or email correspondence related to Government or official communications at any point since January 2020 to date. [45047/21]

The Taoiseach: It is not my practice to delete text messages or email correspondence related to Government or official communications.

Covid-19 Pandemic

189. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will consider the suggestion by a person (details supplied) that everyone who died during the Covid-19 pandemic would be remembered in a national commemoration. [45086/21]

The Taoiseach: As we continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic it will be important as a people that we pause and reflect, take time to remember and pay tribute both to those who have lost their lives in this terrible pandemic and to everyone who has contributed to how we have faced and are facing the challenges together.

The loss of a loved one is always a painful and traumatic event but the pandemic also disrupted our traditional ways of grieving and memorialising that loved one. The Government acknowledges that this is an extremely difficult time for families and friends who are bereaved and is giving careful consideration as to how we might collectively share in remembering those we have lost during this tragic time.

Cabinet Confidentiality

190. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach the position regarding Cabinet confidentiality; if his attention has been drawn to any member of Cabinet who has contravened Cabinet confidentiality since the formation of Government; and if so, the measures he has taken to address such a breach. [45114/21]

The Taoiseach: Cabinet confidentiality is provided for at Article 28.4.3 of the Constitution. It provides that the confidentiality of discussions that take place at the Government's meetings shall be respected in all circumstances save where it is decided otherwise by the High Court. The Article provides that the High Court may determine that disclosure may be made in a particular matter in the interests of the administration of justice by a Court or where, on application by a tribunal, there is an overriding public interest at stake in the context of a tribunal inquiring into a matter of public importance.

This requirement to maintain confidentiality is set out in these terms in the Cabinet Handbook and all Cabinet members are expected to abide by it.

Census of Population

191. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Taoiseach if a census of population will be conducted. [45115/21]

On the advice of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Government decided on 15 September 2020 to postpone the 2021 Census to 3 April 2022.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jack Chambers): The decision to postpone the Census scheduled from 18 April 2021 until 3 April 2022 was not taken lightly and was based on a number of factors. Foremost in the decision making, was the need to ensure the safety of the general public and CSO field staff, coupled with the need to deliver a Census that achieves the highest possible response rate, across all facets of Irish society.

Furthermore, the Census of Population is a major logistical operation and COVID-19 restrictions prevented or delayed many key planning activities from taking place over recent months.

On consideration of these challenges the Government decided to postpone the 2021 Census until April 2022 to enable the CSO to undertake a comprehensive, inclusive and safe Census in 2022 which will provide valuable and accurate data for our country in the years ahead.

Flexible Work Practices

192. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Taoiseach the steps taken by his Department to support the implementation of the national remote work strategy Making Remote Work; the approximate number or percentage of staff within his Department who have access to cloud services for remote videoconferencing and the capacity to work remotely; his plans to increase this percentage; and the framework under which procurement for this is managed. [45359/21]

193. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Taoiseach the steps taken by agencies under the remit of his Department to support the implementation of the national remote work strategy Making Remote Work; the approximate number or percentage of staff within these agencies who have access to cloud services for remote videoconferencing and the capacity to work remotely; if there are plans to increase this percentage; and the framework under which procurement for this is managed. [45360/21]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 193 together.

Like all Government Departments and Offices, my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO), the only body under the aegis of my Department, are currently working in line with Government COVID-19 guidance, which provides for a gradual return to the office for staff from the 20th September having regard to individual operational arrangements. A significant proportion of staff have been working from home in full or on a part-time basis since March 2020, and such staff have secure access to the Department's systems to allow them to work remotely. Access to all standard corporate ICT services is provided including video collaboration and conferencing tools. All equipment and services are procured in line with government procurement guidelines and utilise Office of Government Procurement Frameworks where possible. In line with the rest of the Civil Service, the Department will finalise and progressively roll-out its blended working policy for the longer-term which will be guided by the Central Policy Framework for Blended Working in the Civil Service currently being finalised by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Question No. 193 answered with Question No. 192.

Cybersecurity Policy

194. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Taoiseach if his Department's IT infrastructure is monitored for security breaches on a 24/7 basis; and the guidance provided from Government on same. [45319/21]

The Taoiseach: In common with other Government Departments, my Department has in place comprehensive arrangements to support ICT security and receives regular advice on these matters from the relevant authorities including the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and the National Cyber Security Centre. The Deputy will understand that it is not the practice, for sound operational and security reasons, to disclose the detail of these arrangements.

Departmental Expenditure

195. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Taoiseach further to Parliamentary Question No. 152 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; and the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen. [46191/21]

The Taoiseach: My Department has a comprehensive learning and development programme to ensure that staff at all levels have the required skills and knowledge to perform their individual roles and deliver the strategic objectives of the Department.

In addition to training provided by One Learning, the Civil Service Shared Learning and Development Centre, staff are encouraged to avail of the Refund of Fees Scheme, attendance at Conferences and Seminars on topics related to their roles, and participation in other training and development programmes in line with their individual training and development needs as agreed with their manager.

The programme in question was identified by the participant and their line manager as being the most appropriate programme available to meet specific leadership development needs.

Work Permits

196. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the reason home care sector workers cannot be recruited from outside the European Economic Area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46000/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): The State operates a managed employment permits system maximising the benefits of economic migration and minimising the risk of disrupting Ireland’s labour market. The system is intended to act as a conduit for key skills which are required to develop enterprise in the State for the benefit of our economy, while simultaneously protecting the balance of the labour market.

The system is managed through the operation of the Critical Skills and Ineligible Occupations Lists which determine employments that are either in high demand or are ineligible for an employment permit where there is a surplus of those skills in the domestic and EEA labour market.

In order to maintain the relevance of these lists of occupations to the needs of the economy and to ensure the employment permits system is aligned with current labour market intelligence, these lists undergo twice-yearly evidence-based reviews which are guided by research undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), the Skills and the Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU), SOLAS and involves public/stakeholder consultation. Account is taken of education outputs, sectoral upskilling and training initiatives and known contextual factors such as Brexit and, in the current context, COVID-19 and their impact on the labour market. Consideration is also taken of the views of the Economic Migration Interdepartmental Group, chaired by the Department and of the relevant policy Departments, in this case the Department of Health.

The most recent review did not recommend removal of the occupation of care worker/home carers from the Ineligible Occupations List as the evidence suggests that other factors, such as the contracts of employment on offer and employment terms and conditions being offered are a factor in the recruitment challenges faced by the sector, rather than a demonstrable labour market shortage. The sector has also previously been advised that a more systematic and structured engagement with the Department of Social Protection needs to be demonstrated.

If a sector wishes to propose a change to the occupations lists, they need to submit a detailed evidence-based business case to substantiate their request. A review is currently underway, with submissions received, including submissions from the Home Care sector, under consideration. It is expected that the current review will be finalised in the autumn.

Work Permits

197. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the reason for extending eligibility for an employment permit to non-EEA healthcare assistants to work in hospital and nursing home settings but not in home care settings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46048/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): The State operates a managed employment permits system maximising the benefits of economic migration and minimising the risk of disrupting Ireland's labour market. The system is intended to act as a conduit for key skills which are required to develop enterprise in the State for the benefit of our economy, while simultaneously protecting the balance of the labour market.

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Work Permits

198. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the changes that are being proposed within the employment permits section of his

Department to combat the acute skills shortage at present within the Irish labour market specifically construction, healthcare and hospitality; and the action plan that is being implemented at the pace required to meet the needs of many companies across all these sectors. [46104/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): Policy responsibility for the construction, healthcare and hospitality sectors is a matter for my colleagues, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Minister for Health and the Minister for Tourism Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media respectively.

Housing For All, the government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade, includes measures to support availability of the land, workforce, funding and capacity to enable both the public and private sectors to meet the targets.

From the outset of the crisis, in order to assist the HSE and all other medical providers in the State to respond to, and to assist with, the public health response to the threat of Covid-19, all medical employment permits are expedited with immediate effect.

The Tourism and Hospitality Careers Oversight Group, under the auspices of Fáilte Ireland, was established in 2019 to coordinate relevant bodies to agree and implement a work programme addressing labour supply and skills requirements in the tourism and hospitality sector.

The employment permits system is designed to facilitate the entry of appropriately skilled non-EEA nationals to fill skills and/or labour shortages, in circumstances where there are no suitably qualified Irish/EEA nationals available to undertake the work and that the shortage is a genuine one.

In order to maintain the relevance of these lists of occupations to the needs of the economy and to ensure the employment permits system is aligned with current labour market intelligence, these lists undergo twice-yearly evidence-based reviews which are guided by research undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), the Skills and the Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU), SOLAS and involves public/stakeholder consultation. Account is taken of education outputs, sectoral upskilling and training initiatives and known contextual factors such as Brexit and, in the current context, COVID-19 and their impact on the labour market. Consideration is also taken of the views of the Economic Migration Interdepartmental Group, chaired by the Department and of the relevant policy Departments.

A review is currently underway with submissions received, including submissions from the construction, healthcare and hospitality sector, under consideration. It is expected that the review will be finalised in early Autumn.

Trade Agreements

199. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will publish the Four EU Free Trade Agreements – Opportunities and Impacts for Ireland report. [46139/21]

200. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will publish the Four EU Free Trade Agreements – Opportunities and Impacts for Ireland report which has been distributed to other Departments. [46142/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varad-

kar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 199 and 200 together.

The report “Four EU Free Trade Agreements - Opportunities and Impacts for Ireland” was published on my Department’s website on 28 April this year and is available at

enterprise.gov.ie/en/Publications/Four-EU-Free-Trade-Agreements-Opportunities-and-Impacts-for-Ireland.html.

Question No. 200 answered with Question No. 199.

Departmental Expenditure

201. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46192/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy was advised in response to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 15th September, my Department has not had any contracts with the companies in question since the 1st January 2015. The companies have not provided any courses or training services to the Department during this period.

Grant Payments

202. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if a list will be provided of all grants and supports by grant type and amount provided to a company (details supplied) by organisations under the remit of his Department in each of the years 2016 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [46233/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): Due to commercial sensitivity, Enterprise Ireland is not in a position to release payment information by grant type. The table below details the total payments made to the company referred to in the Deputy’s question, for the period 2016 - 2020 and to date in 2021.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 to date (23.09.21)
Payment Value	€0	€0	€0	€7,200	€0	€1,773.53

Legislative Process

203. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the progress made on plans to update the Transnational Information and Consultation of Employees Act 1996, specifically the provisions on European works councils dispute resolution processes; if he will publish the recent communications between the European Commission and his Department on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46502/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): A European Works Council (a “EWC”) is a body that facilitates information and consultation with European employees on transnational issues. EWC are subject to the law of the Member State in which they are located. They derive from Directive 1994/45/EC (the “EWC Directive”) as transposed into Irish law by the Transnational Information and Consultation of Employees Act 1996. A recast by Directive 2009/38/EC was given effect by European Communities (Transnational Information and Consultation of Employees Act 1996) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 380 of 2011).

The purpose of the recast Directive is to improve the right to information and to consultation of employees in Community-scale undertakings and Community-scale groups of undertakings. The general provisions of the Irish Regulation follow the provisions of Directive 2009/38/EC faithfully providing mechanisms for dispute resolution. There is no case law to support an assertion that the provisions of the Regulation are insufficient.

My Department has replied to queries raised by the European Commission in relation to a complaint it had received. The estimated assessment date associated with this process is 18th November 2021. As the process is incomplete it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Redundancy Payments

204. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the former workers in a company (details supplied) will be eligible for the special payment announced by him on 21 September 2021 for employees made redundant who have lost reckonable service while in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment or another jobseeker’s payment during the pandemic. [46532/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): Reckonable service is service that is included in the calculation of a redundancy lump sum payment. The existing provisions of the Redundancy Payments Act 1967 provide that a period of lay-off within the final three years of employment before redundancy is not allowable as reckonable service.

Therefore, as matters stand employees who have been laid-off due to Covid-19 restrictions, and in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) or an equivalent jobseeker’s payment, would not have this period allowed to be counted towards reckonable service in the event that they have already been, or will be made redundant within the next 3 years.

Because the necessary Government-enforced lockdowns caused layoff situations which resulted in this loss of reckonable service for some employees, the State will make a payment in respect of periods of layoffs due to Covid-19 in situations of redundancy.

The payment will apply to workers who have been, or who will be made redundant in the next 3 years, and who have lost reckonable service due to layoffs caused by Covid-19 restrictions, and who were in receipt of PUP or other jobseeker’s payment for the period up to 30th September 2021, the date Section 12A of the Redundancy Payments Act will expire.

The amount an eligible worker will receive will depend on the length of time they were placed on layoff due to Covid-19 before the date they were made redundant.

It is expected that the application process will open in the first half of 2022. It is only at the application stage that the Department of Social Protection will be in a position to determine

any worker's eligibility for this payment, based on the information provided in the application.

EU Directives

205. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of EU directives relating to his Department that currently require transposition into Irish law; the number of such directives for which the deadline for transposition has passed; the communications both formal and informal that he has received from the European Commission regarding the failure to transpose said directives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46536/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The requested details of EU Directives relating to my Department that require transposition into Irish law are set out in the attached table.

EU Directives that require transposition into Irish law	Transposition deadline passed Yes/No	Details of Communications from Commission on failure to transpose Directive
EU Directive 2020/1833 of 2 October 2020 amending the Annexes to Directive 2008/68/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards adaptation to scientific and technical progress.	Yes	A Formal Letter of Infringement against Ireland has been received and a response has issued along with a copy of the draft transposing Regulations. It is expected that the Regulations will be finalised within the next month.
EU Directive 2019/1152 on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions	No	N/A
EU Directive 2019/790 on Copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market	Yes	The Commission, in correspondence dated 23rd July 2021, issued a formal notice to the State in respect of non-transposition of the Directive. The Department responded to that notice within the specified deadline confirming that work is still ongoing to Transpose EU Directive 2019/790, taking due note of recent guidance from the EU Commission on certain matters. Transposition is expected to be finalised in the coming weeks.

EU Directives that require transposition into Irish law	Transposition deadline passed Yes/No	Details of Communications from Commission on failure to transpose Directive
Directive (EU) 2019/2121 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2019 amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132 as regards cross-border conversions, mergers and divisions	No	N/A
Directive (EU) 2019/1 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 to empower the competition authorities of the Member States to be more effective enforcers and to ensure the proper functioning of the internal market (ECN+)	Yes	The Commission sent a Letter of Formal Notice on 18th March 2021 in relation to the failure to transpose the Directive. No further correspondence has been received to date. The Directive will be transposed through legislation expected to be published in this session.
EU Directive on Representative Actions for the protection of the collective interests of consumers – EU 2020/1828 of 25 November 2020	No	N/A
Directive (EU) 2019/770 of 20 May 2019 on certain aspects concerning contracts for the supply of digital content and digital services	Yes	No communications received to date. The Directive will be transposed through legislation expected to be published in this session.
Directive (EU) 2019/771 of 20 May 2019 on certain aspects concerning contracts for the sale of goods, amending Regulation (EU) 2017/2394 and Directive 2009/22/EC, and repealing Directive 1999/44/EC	Yes	No communications received to date. The Directive will be transposed through legislation expected to be published in this session.
Directive 2019/2161 of 27 November 2019 as regards the better enforcement and modernisation of Union consumer protection rule-amending Directives 93/13/EEC, 98/6/EC, 2005/29/EC and 2011/83/EU	No	N/A
Directive 2019/1023 on restructuring and insolvency	No	N/A

EU Directives that require transposition into Irish law	Transposition deadline passed Yes/No	Details of Communications from Commission on failure to transpose Directive
Directive (EU) 2019/1023 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on preventive restructuring frameworks, on discharge of debt and disqualifications, and on measures to increase the efficiency of procedures concerning restructuring, insolvency and discharge of debt, and amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132 (Directive on restructuring and insolvency)	No	N/A

Redundancy Payments

206. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the estimated cost of the redundancy scheme and plan which he recently announced in the media that his Department is working off. [46551/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): Reckonable service is service that is included in the calculation of a redundancy lump sum payment. The existing provisions of the Redundancy Payments Act 1967 provide that a period of lay-off within the final three years of employment before redundancy is not allowable as reckonable service.

Because the necessary Government-enforced lockdowns caused layoff situations which resulted in this loss of reckonable service for some employees, the State will make a payment in respect of periods of layoffs due to Covid-19, in situations of redundancy.

The payment will apply to workers who have been, or who will be made redundant in the next 3 years, and who have lost reckonable service due to layoffs caused by Covid-19 restrictions, and who were in receipt of PUP or other jobseeker's payment for the period up to 30th September 2021, the date Section 12A of the Redundancy Payments Act will expire.

The calculation for the period of lay-off will be based on the existing provisions of the Redundancy Payments Act 1967. In summary, an eligible employee is entitled to two week's remuneration per year. If the lay-off period is not an exact number of years, the "excess" days are credited as a proportion of a year. The weekly remuneration is subject to a ceiling of €600 per week.

The amount an eligible worker will receive will depend on the length of time they were placed on layoff due to Covid-19, and not otherwise working, before the date they were made redundant.

It is difficult to assess how many redundancies are likely to unfold in the economy which, in turn, informs cost projections. While many sectors are expected to rebound relatively quickly once restrictions are lifted, redundancies in some businesses are still likely.

It is worth emphasising that there has been an effective ban on employees claiming redundancy since March 2020 and there has been very few insolvencies during this time. It is expected that this will inevitably change as the economy fully re-opens and Covid related financial supports for businesses are phased out.

Departmental Data

207. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of venues that have applied to be a designated venue under the Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021 since it was enacted. [46585/21]

208. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of venues his Department has deemed to be a designated venue under the Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021 since it was enacted. [46586/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Robert Troy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 and 208 together.

To date, three applications have been received by my Department seeking venue designation under section 7 of the Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021.

These applications, which were received in recent days, are currently being examined and a decision will be made on them shortly.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 207.

Work Permits

209. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if it is proposed to approve permit applications in respect of workers for meat processing plants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46653/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): The employment permits system is designed to facilitate the entry of appropriately skilled non-EEA nationals to fill skills and/or labour shortages, in circumstances where there are no suitably qualified Irish/EEA nationals available to undertake the work and that the shortage is a genuine one.

In order to maintain the relevance of these lists of occupations to the needs of the economy and to ensure the employment permits system is aligned with current labour market intelligence, these lists undergo twice-yearly evidence-based reviews which are guided by research undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), the Skills and the Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU), SOLAS and involves public/stakeholder consultation. Account is taken of education outputs, sectoral upskilling and training initiatives and known contextual factors such as Brexit and, in the current context, COVID-19 and their impact on the labour market. Consideration is also taken of the views of the Economic Migration Interdepartmental Group, chaired by the Department and of the relevant policy Departments.

In May 2018, a pilot quota-based scheme was introduced to remove certain agri-food oc-

cupations from the ineligible occupations list. The scheme provided for 2,500 General Employment Permits for the meat processing industry, 500 for horticulture and 150 for the dairy sector to address the immediate needs of the sectors in sourcing labour. In addition, a quota of 300 permits was granted in respect of meat deboners. To date this pilot scheme has proved very successful for a range of employers in the sector. All quotas expired in December 2019.

A review is currently underway with 26 submissions received, including from the meat processing sector, under consideration. It is expected that the review will be finalised in early Autumn.

Labour Market

210. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 164 of 15 September 2021, the actions that have been completed in his Department since 14 June 2021 with regard to the situation being kept under review; the actions specifically regarding the horticulture sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46713/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English): As previously advised, policy responsibility for food production is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The State's employment permit system is designed to supplement Ireland's skills and labour supply over the short to medium term by allowing enterprises to recruit nationals from outside the EEA, where such skills or expertise cannot be sourced from within the EEA at that time.

As already outlined, the employment permits system is managed through the use of lists designating highly skilled and ineligible occupations. The lists are reviewed twice a year to ensure their ongoing relevance to the State's human capital requirements. The lists are subject to twice yearly evidenced based reviews which are guided by research undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) and the Skills and the Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS, a public consultation process, input from the relevant policy Departments and the Economic Migration Inter-Departmental Group, chaired by the Department. Account is also taken of contextual factors such as Brexit and, in the current context, COVID 19 and their impact on the labour market. Officials from the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, are represented on the Economic Migration Interdepartmental Group.

In order to add or remove an occupation from the lists, evidence is sought demonstrating that recruitment difficulties are solely due to genuine shortages across the EEA and not to other factors such as salary and/or employment conditions. Sectors are also required to engage structurally with the public employment service of the Department of Social Protection. The review process invites stakeholders, through the public consultation, to provide data to substantiate claims of lack of skills or labour available in a detailed evidence-based business case.

A review of the occupation lists commenced with a public consultation on 1st July. The closing date for receipt of submissions was 12th August and 26 were received from a range of sectors including the horticulture sector. As outlined above the review process involves engagement with the relevant policy Departments as well as consideration of the submissions and available labour market research by the Economic Migration Interdepartmental Group which is currently underway. It is expected that the review will be finalised in the early Autumn.

Trade Agreements

211. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will provide the Copenhagen Economics Report into the trade deals which he referenced at the Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment on 22 September 2021. [46749/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The report "Four EU Free Trade Agreements - Opportunities and Impacts for Ireland" was published on my Department's website on 28 April this year and is available at enterprise.gov.ie/en/Publications/Four-EU-Free-Trade-Agreements-Opportunities-and-Impacts-for-Ireland.htm.

Enterprise Support Services

212. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of advanced technology buildings by local authority currently under consideration by the IDA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46817/21]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar): IDA Ireland is partnering with a number of local authorities to secure planning permission for 11 new buildings, 10 of which are Advanced Technology Buildings, as shown below

Region	Advanced Technology Buildings
Border	Monaghan, Carrick on Shannon, Cavan, Letterkenny
Mid East	Navan
Mid West	Clonmel
Midlands	Tullamore, Mullingar
South East	Wexford
West	Ballinasloe

National Broadband Plan

213. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the projected percentage of homes in the National Broadband Plan intervention areas that will be connected to fibre broadband under the plan in each county in each of the years 2021 to 2025, in tabular form. [45989/21]

215. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the projected percentage of homes in the National Broadband Plan intervention areas that will be connected to fibre broadband under the plan in each county in each of the years 2021 to 2025, in tabular form. [46018/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 215 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 some 699 schools. The NBP roll out is currently a 7 year plan under the contract and deployment is due to be complete by the end of 2026.

I am advised by NBI that, as of 17 September, over 250,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed with over 108,000 premises under construction in Counties Cork, Cavan, Galway, Limerick and Monaghan.

In addition to the challenges to the delivery of the NBP due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NBI has faced a range of other challenges due to the sheer scale and complexity of rolling out fibre to the home in a rural environment. These include significant tree trimming to ensure cable can be placed on overhead poles, remediation of ducting that has been in place for many decades, the co-ordination of hundreds of contracting crews and addressing the many issues arising week on week which could not have been foreseen until the build crews commenced work on the ground. My Department has worked closely with NBI to put in place a remedial plan under the Contract. This plan addresses delays experienced by NBI, primarily arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and re-baselines milestones for 2021. Work is underway to re-baseline milestones for 2022 and beyond.

The network rollout for the National Broadband Plan is divided into 227 Deployment Areas (DAs) across the country. These are typically an area of approximately 25km in radius and in total they cover 96% of Ireland's landmass. The architecture of the network design is specifically based on the design of the NBI network coming from the eir exchanges or the state owned metropolitan area networks (MANs). It is based on an engineering design that allows NBI to get to every premises as quickly as possible working within the confines of how fibre networks are built. Given the nature of the build and ongoing work to address the impact of Covid-19 related delays, it is not possible to give specific details on a per county basis out to 2026. NBI has indicated that c. 130,000 to 145,000 premises will be passed across all counties over 2021 and 2022.

National Broadband Plan

214. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason for the delay in providing a broadband connection point under the National Broadband Plan to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46013/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the 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. My Department has now prioritised primary schools with no high speed broadband and continues to work with the Department of Education in this regard. An acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan will see some 677 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by the end of 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. It is expected that well in excess of 200 will be installed by the end of this year.

I can confirm that Leckaun National School is a priority school as part of this initiative and will be provided with a wireless solution by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) in the next few months.

While the dates referenced by the Deputy were sourced from the NBI website, I understand that the dates relates to the wider network deployment in the area in which the school is located

and does not reflect the schools acceleration programme which will see this school connected within a matter of months. My Department has asked NBI to update their website to show that individual schools are being prioritised for early connection through these wireless solutions.

Question No. 215 answered with Question No. 213.

National Broadband Plan

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications when high quality access to broadband will be provided in the case of a person (details supplied); if there is a proposed timeframe for providing broadband to this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46129/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the 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. 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 17 September, over 257,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed. Surveys are complete or underway in County Kildare in Killashee, Oughterard, Naas Rural, Rathmore, Kill, Killeel, Carnalway, Giltown, Ballymore Eustace, Bodenstown, Naas Urban, Newtown, Donaghcumper, Athy, Coneyboro, Aughaboura, Ballinapark, Castlemitchell, Bert, Kilberry, Kilkea, Leixlip, Celbridge and Maynooth. Areas which are close to the Wicklow border have commenced build works as part of the Blessington Deployment Area.

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. 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. NBI has a dedicated email address, 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 17 September, 373 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 connected at Crookstown Further Education and Training and Community Centre, Bigstone Community Hall, and Lullymore Heritage Park. Further details can be found at nbi.ie/bcp-locations/.

Saint David's National School, Piper's Hill Campus, and Rathmore National School have been installed 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 Interven-

tion 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/.

Departmental Expenditure

217. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications further to Parliamentary Question No. 191 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46193/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The course referred to in Question No 191 of 15 September 2021 was requested through my Department's Education Support Assistance Programme (Refund of Fees). Under the Refund of Fees Circular 23.2007, officers pursuing courses for educational support and business needs may have the appropriate course refunded to them by the Department that approved the application. This course was specific to the officer's education support application so no service was procured.

Electricity Supply Board

218. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the ESB is obligated to notify his Department of the number of reported power faults that take place on a national, regional or county level; if his Department will seek such information from the ESB for 2020 and to date in 2021, including the duration times for such faults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46238/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): This is an operational matter for ESB and not one in which I as Minister have a statutory function. I have asked the ESB to write directly to the Deputy on the matter.

Electricity Generation

219. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications when a feed-in tariff will be provided for the microgeneration of sustainable energy in Ireland; the number of solar farms currently plugged into the national grid; and the number of houses that have been deep retrofitted in each of the past five years. [46297/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department outlined proposals for a new Micro-generation Support Scheme (MSS) in a public consultation that closed in February last. A summary report of the submissions received has been published on my Department's website. It is intended that a suitable payment for excess electricity generated on site and exported to the grid will be available to all renewables self-consumers later this year, subject to regulatory arrangements, and in line with transposition of Articles 21 and 22 of the recast Renewable Energy Directive. My Department is engaging with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on transposing these Articles into Irish law and it

is envisaged that this will be achieved before the end of the year.

It is expected the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) will publish a draft framework in the coming weeks outlining the details, including eligibility criteria and timescales for introduction, of the Clean Export Guarantee tariff for exported renewable electricity. This framework will introduce an obligation on electricity suppliers to offer remuneration to their customers, by way of a Clean Export Guarantee payment, for excess renewable electricity exported to the grid by eligible micro- and small-scale generators. I understand that the CRU consultation will last four weeks, with a decision expected to be published in November. My Department does not hold information relating to the number of solar farms connected to the grid, which is an operational matter for the Transmission and Distribution System Operators.

The following table outlines the number of SEAI supported deep retrofits to BER B2 or better in each of the past 5 years. It is important to note that local authority supported retrofits are additional to these figures.

	2017*	2018*	2019	2020	To August 2021
SEAI supported retrofits to BER B2 or better	662	817	2,189	3,210	1,895

*Figures for 2017 and 2018 relate only to the Deep Retrofit Programme, the Better Energy Homes scheme and the Solar PV scheme. Figures for 2019, 2020 and 2021 include all SEAI residential and community schemes.

Departmental Schemes

220. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans for the expansion of current and introduction of new schemes for retrofitting of homes and the urgent need to deal with current applications and delivery of such schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46309/21]

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 or cost optimal and to install 400,000 heat pumps in existing buildings over the next 10 years. A new National Retrofit Plan will be published in quarter 4 of this year. The plan is designed to address barriers to energy efficiency investments in four key areas: customer proposition and demand generation, financing and affordability, supplier capacity, and governance.

SEAI grant schemes will be a central element of the Government's approach to achieving our retrofit targets. It is intended to launch a new National Retrofit Scheme focused on achieving B2 retrofits later this year. The existing SEAI grant schemes will be aligned with the National Retrofit Scheme as appropriate.

This year, some €221.5 million in capital funding has been provided for SEAI residential and community retrofit programmes, including the Solar PV scheme and the Building Energy Rating programme. This represents an 82% increase on the 2020 allocation and is the largest amount ever for the schemes. It is important to note that extensive COVID-19 related restrictions on construction activity between January and mid-April had a significant impact on activity this year. Output has also been negatively impacted by challenges associated with avail-

ability and longer lead times for materials. Every effort is being made to maximise output now that construction activity in the residential sector has recommenced.

National Broadband Plan

221. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason that a road (details supplied) has been excluded from the intervention area for the National Broadband Plan, particularly in view of the fact that a number of hospitality businesses are located there and broadband speeds from the private provider are too slow to cater to their needs; when this road will be included in the NBI intervention area; the analysis which has been carried out into the possibility of including this road in the intervention area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46314/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth): The road referred to in the Question is located in the BLUE area on the NBP High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie.

BLUE areas are not included in the State intervention area covered by the National Broadband Plan as commercial operators are already providing high speed broadband or have indicated future plans to do so. 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.

Complaints about service provision are a matter to be dealt with between the consumer and the service provider in the first instance. If this avenue has been exhausted without a satisfactory resolution, 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.

Notwithstanding this, my Department has undertaken an initial investigation into the matter and I understand that the road referred to is connected to the local exchange in Cong and therefore premises on this road should be able to access high speed broadband from a commercial operator.

National Broadband Plan

222. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will meet with a cross party delegation of county councillors and members of the Houses of the Oireachtas from County Donegal to discuss serious concerns regarding the current timeframe for delivering high speed fibre broadband under the National Broadband Plan to the thousands of homes still not connected in the county; and if his office will liaise with Donegal County Council to confirm such a meeting at the earliest opportunity. [46342/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the 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 peo-

ple living and working in the over 544,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms along some 699 schools. The NBP roll out is currently a 7 year plan under the contract and deployment is due to be complete by the end of 2026. There are 32,734 premises in the Intervention Area in County Donegal that will receive access to high speed broadband under the National Broadband Plan. Government investment in Donegal in the NBP will be in the order of €128 million. I am advised by National Broadband Ireland that, as of 17 September, some 7,388 premises in County Donegal have been surveyed. Surveying is the first step towards delivering the new fibre network and informs design solutions for provision of the fibre network.

In addition to the challenges to the delivery of the NBP due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NBI has faced a range of other challenges due to the sheer scale and complexity of rolling out fibre to the home in a rural environment. These include significant tree trimming to ensure cable can be placed on overhead poles, remediation of ducting that has been in place for many decades, the co-ordination of hundreds of contracting crews and addressing the many issues arising week on week which could not have been foreseen until the build crews commenced work on the ground. My Department has worked closely with NBI to put in place a remedial plan under the Contract. This plan addresses delays experienced by NBI, primarily arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and re-baselines milestones for 2021. Work is underway to re-baseline milestones for 2022 and beyond.

While delivery of the Programme is the responsibility of NBI under the Contract, my Department continues to monitor delivery very closely in accordance with the Department's role under the contract. In parallel with the ongoing oversight of the contract with NBI, the Department has also been working with the 31 Local Authorities, the County and City Management Agency (CCMA), the Roads Management Office (RMO), Broadband Officers and other Government Departments, where appropriate, to ensure that any possible barriers that might delay the rollout are addressed as soon as possible. This also includes engagement with other bodies such as Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Irish Rail and ComReg.

I also understand that NBI has had engagement with elected representatives from Donegal in relation to the roll out of the National Broadband Plan in recent months and I have asked NBI to ensure that this outreach continues. My officials and I are also available to meet with elected representatives in relation to matters falling under the remit of the Department.

National Broadband Plan

223. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will address a situation in which a number of properties are struggling to get connection to adequate broadband and the installation date has been pushed back yet again by NBI (details supplied). [46349/21]

239. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will urgently address extended connection timeframes (details supplied) currently being provided by NBI. [46782/21]

240. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will examine the potential availability of fibre broadband to a group of homes (details supplied). [46698/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223, 239 and 240 together.

The Questions all refer to 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. 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 as a result of 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 17 September, over 257,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed. Surveys are complete or underway in County Westmeath in Mullingar, Sonna, Stonehall, Taghmon, Jamestown, Hopestown and Athlone. Pre-build works have commenced in the areas around Mullingar.

Further details are available on specific areas within County Westmeath 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. 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. NBI has a dedicated email address, reps@nbi.ie, which can be used by Oireachtas members for specific queries.

In addition to the challenges to the delivery of the NBP due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NBI has faced a range of other challenges due to the sheer scale and complexity of rolling out fibre to the home in a rural environment. These include significant tree trimming to ensure cable can be placed on overhead poles, remediation of ducting that has been in place for many decades, the co-ordination of hundreds of contracting crews and addressing the many issues arising week on week which could not have been foreseen until the build crews commenced work on the ground. My Department has worked closely with NBI to put in place a remedial plan under the Contract. This plan addresses delays experienced by NBI, primarily arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and re-baselines milestones for 2021. Work is underway to re-baseline milestones for 2022 and beyond. This has resulted in some changes to timeframes for connection for end users.

Given the scale and complexity of delivery of the new high speed broadband network under the NBP, I am advised that any dates provided by NBI on its website are based on the best available information at the time and may be subject to change. NBI has recently published details of its full deployment schedule on its website, www.nbi.ie, which enables all premises within the intervention area to have an anticipated service activation date range.

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 17 September, 373 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 connected at Castledaly Community Centre, Ballycomoye GAA Club, Milltown Emper Community Centre, Whitehall Community Centre, Streete Parish Park & Community Hall, and Clonkill Hurling Club. Further details can be found at nbi.ie/bcp-locations/.

Naomh Micheal, Scoil Náisiúnta Bhríde, and Scoil Náisiúnta Aodha Naofa have been installed 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/.

North-South Interconnector

224. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will give further consideration to the renewed call of a local authority in relation to the proposed north south interconnector (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46401/21]

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 report of October 2018 was that an overhead line remains the most appropriate option for this critical electricity infrastructure.

Notwithstanding this, I 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 to appoint an independent expert to undertake the review. International consultants have now been appointed subject to final contract compliance requirements being fulfilled. I expect that the review will be completed later this year.

Water Supply

225. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if his Department has carried out research on water wells running dry in the Robinstown Shambo, County Meath; if the excavations carried out by a company (details supplied) are impacting on the water source of these wells; if the company has a licence to pump underground water from the mines into the Boyne river; if the company is currently pumping water from the underground mines into the Boyne river; if so, the amount that is being pumped; the person or body that is policing the licence; and if he will ensure that the research capability of the EPA is being used to ensure that excavations by the company are not disturbing the water supply for this area. [46507/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Boliden Tara Mines DAC operates under Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Industrial Emissions Licence Registration No. P0516-04. Details on the control and monitoring of emissions (including emissions to water) from the mine are set out in the Annual Environmental Reports on the EPA website www.epa.ie. The mine is also regulated by Meath County Council under planning legislation and by my Department through a State Mining Facility issued under the Minerals Development Acts 1940 to 1999.

The regulatory authorities are working together to examine whether there is any potential

link between the activities of the company at Tara Mines, including in the Gainstown area, and the lowering of the water table around Robinstown–Shambo.

National Broadband Plan

226. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason a property (details supplied) was updated on the NBI website with a possible connection date of 2022, given that this date has now been extended to between January 2025 and December 2026; the reason for this delay; the way his Department plans to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46537/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the 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.

I am advised by NBI that, as of 17 September, over 250,000 premises across all counties have been surveyed with over 108,000 premises under construction.

In addition to the challenges to the delivery of the NBP due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NBI has faced a range of other challenges due to the sheer scale and complexity of rolling out fibre to the home in a rural environment. These include significant tree trimming to ensure cable can be placed on overhead poles, remediation of ducting that has been in place for many decades, the co-ordination of hundreds of contracting crews and addressing the many issues arising week on week which could not have been foreseen until the build crews commenced work on the ground. The Department has worked closely with NBI to put in place a remedial plan under the Contract. This plan addresses delays experienced by NBI, primarily arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and re-baselines milestones for 2021. Work is underway to re-baseline milestones for 2022 and beyond. This has resulted in some changes to timeframes for connection for end-users.

Given the scale and complexity of delivery of the new high speed broadband network under the NBP, I am advised that any dates provided by NBI on its website are based on the best available information at the time and may be subject to change. NBI has recently published details of its full deployment schedule on its website, www.nbi.ie, which enables all premises within the intervention area to have an anticipated service activation date range.

My officials queried the specific issue raised in the Question with NBI who confirmed that this Eircode was always scheduled to be in the later end of the build programme. The network rollout for the National Broadband Plan is divided into 227 Deployment Areas (DAs) across the country. These are typically an area of approximately 25km in radius and in total they cover 96% of Ireland's landmass. Counties are generally made up of a number of DAs which means there are differing timescales for connection across county areas.

I appreciate people's frustration when they are living so close to a fibre network but cannot get a connection to that network in the immediate term, 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.

Electricity Grid

227. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the current electricity grid capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46538/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): 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. The 2020 Generation Capacity Statement is available on EirGrid's website www.eirgridgroup.com. In addition, EirGrid are expected to publish the 2021 Generation Capacity Statement very shortly. 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 and the finalised report is expected to be published shortly.

Electricity Grid

228. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the improvements that are considered necessary to the electricity grid in order to meet Ireland's climate action targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46539/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Matters relating to the cost of grid investment and projects funded are operational matters for EirGrid and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). EirGrid is the transmission system operator and its responsibilities include the appropriate development of the grid and power system to achieve our energy policy objectives and underpin economic development. The CRU is the independent energy regulator and, through a formal price review process, it decides on appropriate spend by EirGrid on a five-year basis. The most recent price review decision by the CRU in December 2020 on the allowable spend on our electricity grid over the next five years signalled a significant and necessary increase in funds for grid enhancement. EirGrid already seeks to optimise the existing electricity grid to minimise the need for new infrastructure through upgrades, refurbishment or up-voltaging of existing infrastructure, where possible. However, in light of the Government's ambition to have at least 70% renewable electricity on the power system by 2030, and with demand profiles increasing as we continue to electrify more sectors of our economy, including heat and transport, further investment in the power grid will be required over the coming decade.

The CRU as part of its oversight has issued a final determination for funding over the next five years to the end of 2025 (PR5 - Price Review 5) which can be found on the CRU website. It indicates a capital investment of €4bn across the transmission and distribution network.

Earlier this year EirGrid carried out 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. Publication of the outcome of the consultation is expected later this year.

Electricity Generation

229. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the total solar energy production in Ireland since 2010, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46540/21]

230. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the wind energy production in Ireland since 2010, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46541/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 229 and 230 together.

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. The 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 production and consumption can be found in the SEAI report Energy in Ireland 2020 which is available at www.seai.ie/data-and-insights/seai-statistics/key-publications/. The Energy in Ireland report is updated on an annual basis and published in the last quarter of the year. Information on energy production and consumption for the year 2020 may be found in the SEAI 2020 Provisional Energy Balance.

Question No. 230 answered with Question No. 229.

Environmental Policy

231. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the areas that he will be highlighting in relation to Ireland's decarbonisation role for COP26; if it is intended to put forward proposals in relation to hydroelectric power from tides or tidal flows; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46544/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):
Ireland is committed to concerted global action to address the climate crisis and engages in negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement through its membership of the European Union (EU). Ireland is actively engaging with its EU partners in preparation for the 26th Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COP26) in Glasgow. The EU's official position paper will be presented for Ministerial agreement at the Environment Council on 6 October, and will set out shared EU objectives on core issues for the negotiations.

In line with the official EU position, Ireland has a number of key areas of focus for the National Delegation at the COP which will feed into global decarbonisation efforts. A primary objective is the finalisation of the Paris Rulebook, which will allow for the full operationalisation of the Paris Agreement. This includes agreement on matters such as transparency, climate finance, and adaptation, as called for by developing countries. Throughout the negotiations, Ireland will also advocate for environmental integrity, the participation of non-party stakeholders, and approaches guided by the best available science.

While international cooperation is essential to effective climate action, it is important that we match these actions domestically. Ireland has committed to reaching at least 70% renewable electricity by 2030. Advancements in wave and tidal energy are monitored by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and are supported at national policy level through the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDP). Work on a revised OREDP is currently under-

way in my Department, and will provide an evidence base for the assessment of areas suitable for deployment of wind, wave, and tidal technologies.

Departmental Schemes

232. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will introduce a grant support scheme to assist charities in carrying out retrofit of their facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46561/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Programme for Government and the Climate Action Plan set ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from buildings by 2030. In 2021, my Department has provided a total of €221.5 million in funding to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) for the operation of a range of schemes aimed at supporting homeowners as well as communities to upgrade their buildings and facilities to high standards of energy efficiency and renewable energy usage, thereby reducing fossil fuel usage, energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions. The Communities Energy Grant scheme (CEG) received €30 million funding in 2021. The CEG supports community-oriented projects based on cross-sectoral, partnership approaches that deliver energy savings to a range of building types including public, commercial and community buildings, including charitable organisations, with a particular focus on using the projects to deliver home retrofits. A new call for CEG projects for 2022 will issue from the SEAI in quarter 4 of 2021. More information on the Community Energy Grant scheme, including details of Project Co-ordinators, is available on the SEAI website or SEAI may be contacted directly on 1850 927 000 or by e-mail at bec@seai.ie.

National Broadband Plan

233. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if a school (details supplied) will be connected under the National Broadband Plan given that it is unable to access the schools broadband programme due to location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46591/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the 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. My Department has now prioritised primary schools with no high speed broadband and continues to work with the Department of Education in this regard. An acceleration of this aspect of the National Broadband Plan will see some 677 primary schools connected to high speed broadband by the end of 2022, well ahead of the original target delivery timeframe of 2026. It is expected that well in excess of 200 will be installed by the end of this year.

Kilmurry National School forms part of this initiative and has already been surveyed by National Broadband Ireland (NBI). NBI has informed my Department that a wireless solution has been proposed and installation will commence shortly. The Department of Education are aware of this development.

National Broadband Plan

234. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communi-

cations if reps@nbi.ie is still responsible for answering representation from Houses of Oireachtas members; if there is a delay in the system; the approximate timeline to reply to queries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46594/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth): The email address referred to is a dedicated email address operated by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) which can be used by Oireachtas members for specific queries relating to the roll out of new high speed broadband network under the National Broadband Plan. My Department has no direct role in relation to this email address and any queries regarding same are a matter for NBI. I have passed the queries raised in the Question to NBI and asked them to respond directly to the Deputy.

National Broadband Plan

235. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of premises in County Mayo; the number of premises that have had NBI surveys completed in County Mayo; the number of premises in which NBI surveys are ongoing in County Mayo; the number of premises that have been passed and available for internet connection in County Mayo; the number of premises that have been connected in County Mayo in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46597/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the 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 some 699 schools.

There are 84,299 premises in County Mayo of which 47,872 are in the commercial area and 36,793 are within the NBP Intervention Area. I am advised by NBI that, as of 17 September 2021, over 257,000 premises in the Intervention Area across all counties have been surveyed and over 108,000 premises are under construction across 30 Deployment Areas.

I am advised by NBP that the following represents the deployment progress in County Mayo as at the 17 September.

Mayo - Surveys complete	Mayo - Surveys ongoing	Anticipated dates for premises to be passed and available for connection
8,281 Premises in areas around Castlebar (2,139), Ballina (2,678) Newport (1,826) Carrowmorelacken (1,638)	1,008 Premises in areas around Killadoon.	Castlebar H1, 2022 Ballina H2, 2022

In addition to the challenges to the delivery of the NBP due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NBI has faced a range of other challenges due to the sheer scale and complexity of rolling out fibre to the home in a rural environment. These include significant tree trimming to ensure cable can be placed on overhead poles, remediation of ducting that has been in place for many decades, the co-ordination of hundreds of contracting crews and addressing the many issues arising week on week which could not have been foreseen until the build crews commenced work on the ground. My Department has worked closely with NBI to put in place a remedial plan under

the Contract. This plan addresses delays experienced by NBI, primarily arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and re-baselines milestones for 2021. Work is underway to re-baseline milestones for 2022 and beyond. This has resulted in some changes to timeframes for connection for end users.

Further details are available on specific areas within County Mayo 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. 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. NBI has a dedicated email address, 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 17 September, 373 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 connected at The Black Tom Freeman Sport and Community Amenities Centre, Islandeady Community Centre, Kilmovee Community Centre, Killaser Community Centre, Clare Island Community Centre, Cushlough Community Centre, Carrowkennedy, Keel Community Centre, Belderrig Community & Research Centre, Finny Community Centre, Taugheen Community Centre, and Bofeenaun Community Centre. Further details can be found at nbi.ie/bcp-locations.

Valley National School, Dookinella National School, Midfield National School, Cloonliffen National School, Errew National School, Gortskehy National School, Kinaffe National School, Rathbane National School, Tavraun Central National School, Saint Coleman's National School, Rathnamagh National School, Cloghans National School, Meelick More National School, Facefield National School, and Scoil Néifinn, Keenagh, have been installed 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/.

National Broadband Plan

236. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason a national broadband connection date for a property (details supplied) in County Kerry has been moved forward five years from summer 2021 to December 2026; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46651/21]

Minister of State at the Department of the 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.

I am advised by NBI that, as of 17 September, over 250,000 premises across all counties

have been surveyed with over 108,000 premises under construction.

In addition to the challenges to the delivery of the NBP due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NBI has faced a range of other challenges due to the sheer scale and complexity of rolling out fibre to the home in a rural environment. These include significant tree trimming to ensure cable can be placed on overhead poles, remediation of ducting that has been in place for many decades, the co-ordination of hundreds of contracting crews and addressing the many issues arising week on week which could not have been foreseen until the build crews commenced work on the ground. The Department has worked closely with NBI to put in place a remedial plan under the Contract. This plan addresses delays experienced by NBI, primarily arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and re-baselines milestones for 2021. Work is underway to re-baseline milestones for 2022 and beyond. This has resulted in some changes to timeframes for connection for end-users.

Given the scale and complexity of delivery of the new high speed broadband network under the NBP, I am advised that any dates provided by NBI on its website are based on the best available information at the time and may be subject to change. NBI has recently published details of its full deployment schedule on its website, www.nbi.ie, which enables all premises within the intervention area to have an anticipated service activation date range.

My officials queried the specific issue raised in the Question with NBI who confirmed that this Eircode was always scheduled to be in the later end of the build programme. The network rollout for the National Broadband Plan is divided into 227 Deployment Areas (DAs) across the country. These are typically an area of approximately 25km in radius and in total they cover 96% of Ireland's landmass. Counties are generally made up of a number of DAs which means there are differing timescales for connection across county areas.

I appreciate people's frustration when they are living so close to a fibre network but cannot get a connection to that network in the immediate term, 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 under way.

Waste Management

237. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if details of the destination of waste shipped from waste management facilities in Cork city will be provided. [46695/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): 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. Provisions of the Waste Shipment Regulation require that all exports of waste from the European Union destined for disposal shall be prohibited. The enforcement and monitoring of shipments of waste to and from Ireland is maintained by the National Transfrontier 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.

The NTFSO maintains records for all amber list waste import and export shipments which take place in a particular calendar year. A record is also maintained of all green list waste returns filed with the office by registered brokers/dealers. These lists provide details on the destination country associated with the respective shipments. The NTFSO Waste Registers are available at the following link www.dublincity.ie/residential/environment/national-tfs-office/ntfso-waste-shipment-registers

Pension Provisions

238. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the way in which a person (details supplied) can obtain their records for pension purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46718/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): From an initial records search, my Department has not received any correspondence in relation to the case referred to by the Deputy. My Department's Human Resources unit is investigating the case and examining if there are archive records as described, and will follow up both with Peoplepoint and the person concerned in relation to this case.

Question No. 239 answered with Question No. 223.

Question No. 240 answered with Question No. 223.

Departmental Schemes

241. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the criteria for application under the farm and community biodiversity initiative which saw Lough Ennell excluded from the 17 projects announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46810/21]

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The administration and management of the Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) Habitats and Conservation Scheme 2021 is an operational matter for IFI and I and my Department have no function in this matter. IFI has established a specific email address for queries from Oireachtas members so that such queries can be addressed promptly, in line with IFI's objective to deliver services to the highest standards. The email address is oireachtas@fisheriesireland.ie.

Driver Licences

242. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Transport if he plans changes to driver licensing arrangements in order that AM class vehicles will be allowed to be driven on a B licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45958/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Prior to October 2006, full category B (car) licence holders, on passing a driving test, were permitted to drive category M (the old category for mopeds) vehicles. This practice ceased for new category B licence holders with the implementation of the third EU driving licence Directive in 2013. Currently, to apply for a driving licence for category AM (mopeds) a person must have completed initial basic training, which consists of a series of modules set out in legislation. I do not have plans to change this policy.

Driver Licences

243. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Transport if he will re-examine licensing laws surrounding mopeds recognising the excessive qualification criteria for use in Ireland which are out of step with the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46055/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): Prior to October 2006, full category B (car) licence holders, on passing a driving test, were permitted to drive category M (the old category for mopeds) vehicles. This practice ceased for new category B licence holders with the implementation of the third EU driving licence Directive in 2013. Currently, to apply for a driving licence for category AM (mopeds) a person must have completed initial basic training, which consists of a series of modules set out in legislation. I do not have plans to change this policy.

Rail Network

244. **Deputy Joe O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport if a timeline for the completion of the DART+ coastal north project will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46081/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The DART+ Programme will transform rail services across the Greater Dublin Area when fully rolled-out.

As the Deputy is probably aware, DART+ actually comprises five different, but complementary, projects of which DART+ Coastal North is one. The other four projects are :

- DART+ West;
- DART+ South West;
- DART+ Coastal South; and
- DART+ Fleet.

Naturally there is a sequencing to the delivery of these different projects as each sits within the overall programme framework and it is also the case that the success of some of the projects depends on the early delivery of other projects.

Key to the overall programme is the delivery of DART+ West which is the most advanced project. Its early delivery is particularly important due to the new depot to be constructed which will facilitate the huge expansion of the fleet. I understand the second round of public consultation is underway in relation to the project with a closing date of 6th October.

Next is DART+ South West on which an initial public consultation has already taken place, with a second one planned before the end of the year.

Turning to the DART+ Coastal projects, I am informed that a design team was appointed earlier in the year. Work has begun on the preliminary design and the preparation of an emerging preferred option which will then be the subject of a public consultation and will inform the preparation of the necessary planning documentation. It is only when these necessary steps are much more advanced that a more definitive project timeline will emerge.

Finally, there is DART+ Fleet which is of particular importance to the current Northern Line as it will enable improved services on the line in advance of the later electrification. This

will be achieved through the use of battery-electric units on the current Northern Line and will mean improved and expanded services for passengers. A preferred bidder has been identified however, it is too early at this stage to give an indicative date as regards when one can expect to see the new fleet introduced into service but that should become a lot clearer in the next few months as contracts are signed and commitments made.

However, I would note that the Northern Line will also benefit from the introduction in 2023 of new ICRs which are currently under construction and which will provide a welcome boost to capacity and services in the short term.

Appointments to State Boards

245. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport the reason he has refused to appoint a new chair of the Shannon Group; and when he plans to do so. [46085/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I would like to thank the Deputy for this question.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that following the conclusion of the process administered by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) in relation to filling the Chair vacancy on the board of Shannon Group, and having met the shortlisted candidates identified by PAS as being suitable for appointment, I am happy to advise the Deputy that I have decided to appoint Mr Pdraig Ó'Céidigh to the position.

In line with normal arrangements for the appointment of Chairs to State Boards, the Chair designate will be required to appear before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications before being formally appointed as Chair of Shannon Group.

Departmental Communications

246. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport if he has had any communication from the Taoiseach or his office regarding the need for funding of a new pedestrian bridge at Ardfinnan, County Tipperary; and if so, the details and dates of such communications. [46087/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): A request was received by my office on 14 September 2021 seeking a briefing note for An Taoiseach outlining the current road traffic system for Ardfinnan bridge along with details of funding options for structural repair works and a new pedestrian bridge. Subsequently, an additional request from the Office of An Taoiseach seeking further information on the topic was received on 20 September 2021. Responses to these requests were provided on 15 September and 27 September 2021 respectively.

The responses outlined the details of the works on the existing Ardfinnan bridge which are being funded by my Department through the National Transport Authority (NTA). These include the construction of a permanent footpath on the bridge, a pedestrian crossing on the north side of the bridge to facilitate safe crossing onto the existing Barrack Street footpath, and the installation of traffic-sensor traffic lights on both ends of the bridge which will result in shorter waiting times for motorists and should improve the traffic flow.

The responses also outlined that the NTA are happy to consider any proposal for an additional pedestrian bridge in Ardfinnan, provided that Tipperary County Council submit all necessary economic analyses and any additional required assessments as part of that proposal, as is the case with all capital project applications from local authorities.

Rail Network

247. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport the status of investment in the Cork light rail project under CMATS. [46094/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS), which was published last year, adopts the multi-modal approach to transport planning that has proven successful in many city regions internationally; it provides the necessary evidence-based, and plan-led framework that can guide investment in Cork over the short, medium, and longer term.

CMATS has a number of significant public transport proposals across bus, commuter rail and light rail, together with the proposed transformation of active travel infrastructure in the city region. including the proposal to develop a light rail service running on an east to west corridor across the city.

As required under the Public Spending Code, the National Transport Authority has submitted the Strategic Assessment Report for Cork Light Rail to my Department. This is known as Decision Gate 0 and the Code stipulates that the Strategic Assessment Report must be reviewed by my Department and the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform.

This Decision Gate is a Ministerial approval point rather than a Governmental one, and, if approved, the project will then proceed to the next Decision Gate in the Public Spending Code - Decision Gate 1 Preliminary Business Case.

Road Projects

248. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the provision of a bypass for Killaloe, County Clare including the construction of a new bridge crossing the River Shannon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46107/21]

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 Councils' own resources supplemented by State road grants.

The National Development Plan (NDP), as it stands, identifies 12 regional and local road improvement projects for development, subject to necessary approvals, and the Killaloe Bypass, Shannon Bridge Crossing and the R494 improvement scheme is one of those projects.

Under the Public Spending Code and the terms and conditions applying to regional and local road grants, capital projects are subject to review and approval at a number of stages. In this context, my Department gave approval in June 2021 for this project to proceed to tender for the main construction contract. This process is currently under way.

Bus Services

249. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Transport when the F spine of the Bus-Connects programme in Dublin will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46125/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I have respon-

sibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including BusConnects.

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

Cycling Facilities

250. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Transport the status of progress of the Finglas to Killester cycleway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46126/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public and sustainable transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development and implementation of public transport and active travel infrastructure, allocating the funding provided by my Department at project level and working in conjunction with the relevant local authorities. This includes the project mentioned by the Deputy, namely the Finglas to Killester cycle route.

Noting the NTA's responsibilities in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety

251. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport if the lack of lighting at the entry and exit ramps of junction 6 Celbridge and Leixlip, County Kildare will be examined (details supplied); if the matter will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46131/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport I have responsibility for overall policy and securing exchequer funding in relation to the National Roads Programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 and in line with the National Development Plan (NDP), the operation and management of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. This is also subject to the Public Spending Code Guidelines and the necessary statutory approvals. In this context, TII is best placed to advise you.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Expenditure

252. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 228 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46194/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Continuous development is an important

feature of the work of my Department to ensure that work is delivered by individuals with up to date skills.

In terms of the course in question, at that time the course provided a good development opportunity for 2 senior staff in my Department, including facilitating senior managers from both the private and public sectors. My Department has not sent staff on the course since 2015. The cost of the course was such that the Department was not required to publish a public advertisement under the National Public Procurement guidelines. The Department's Staff Development Unit reviewed the market to ensure that the training was relevant and cost appropriate.

Rail Network

253. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the status of and position regarding the DART interconnector in the context of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035. [46260/21]

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 the ongoing review of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035, in the first instance.

I understand DART Interconnector (also known as DART Underground and now DART+ Tunnel) is being considered as part of that review. The review will include a comprehensive analysis of changes to population projections, development density, employment forecasts and future travel demand patterns across the Greater Dublin Area. The draft Strategy will be published in Q4 along with all of the background papers that informed its development. The publication of the documentation by the NTA will coincide with the launch of a public consultation process on the revised Strategy and I would encourage all interested parties to participate in that consultation process.

Air Services

254. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if he will provide a schedule of air routes and airlines he has engaged with in respect of the restoration of pre-pandemic air routes: if he plans to financially incentivise airlines to reinstate routes; and the amount in total he has to expend on this project. [46296/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Minister Ryan and I have engaged extensively with aviation stakeholders, including through the Aviation Recovery Taskforce and the National Civil Aviation Development Forum.

To mitigate the negative economic impact of COVID-19 the Government has put in place a range of supports for all businesses, including those in the aviation sector. These include the wage subsidy scheme, the waving of commercial rates, the deferral of tax liabilities, the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme, the Credit Guarantee Scheme, and the Working Capital Scheme. At end June it was estimated that more than €300 million has been made available to the aviation sector through a number of these general cross-economy schemes. Liquidity support through commercial lending in the order of €190m has been made available to Aer Lingus and the daa through the Irish Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF).

In addition, a further €80 million is being provided to support the airports, as announced last year, through the Regional Airports Programme and the additional flexibility that is allowed under EU State aid rules to redress damage arising from exceptional events such as the global pandemic. This will enable the airports to offer route incentives to restore connectivity.

The Economic Recovery Plan launched, in June this year, with the goal of achieving rapid job creation and economic growth after the COVID-19 pandemic, set out new measures, and provided for the continuation of business supports. This plan also recognised the potential need for additional supports for the aviation sector. Officials in my Department are currently considering options for further targeted supports for aviation, with a view to accelerating the restoration of connectivity.

Electric Vehicles

255. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport the number of fully electric buses and separately plug-in electric buses that have been purchased by the State in each of the past five years. [46297/21]

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, including the procurement of the PSO bus fleet.

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.

Departmental Budgets

256. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport the budgets allocated by or on behalf of his Department for transport projects in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 in Dublin, Galway, Cork and Limerick cities in terms of roads, rail, light rail, bicycle-related and other transport allocations by city in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46305/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The information requested is being collated by my officials and a reply will issue within 10 working days.

Driver Test

257. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to address the anomaly by which if a person has paid their motor tax online, but not yet received the motor tax certificate, they are unable to book a driving test. [46307/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): The Deputy will be pleased to learn that he has been misinformed. There is no such anomaly.

There is nothing in the Road Safety Authority driver test booking system which links the driving test with motor tax, so that not having motor tax, or proof of motor tax, at the time of booking is irrelevant to the test application process. The only motor tax requirement connected to the driving test is that the vehicle in which the person presents themselves to take their test

must have a valid tax disc on the day of the test.

I would like to point out that people can use another vehicle – they do not have to undertake their test in their own if for some reason (tax, insurance, NCT) it is not available on the day. Many people rent the car for their test from their driving school, for example.

Driver Test

258. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Transport the number of persons currently on the waiting list for the standard driver test in test centres in County Wicklow; the mechanisms being put in place to alleviate this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46341/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Specific details on individual test centres are an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred this part of the question 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.

Due to the suspension of driver testing services in the initial pandemic response, along with the health protocols required since the resumption of services, services are operating well below normal capacity and a significant backlog has developed.

In line with the gradual reopening of services this Summer, driving tests for all those who are eligible to take the test and have been waiting longest have now recommenced. Critical frontline workers continue to be the priority for the driver testing service.

My Department is liaising with the RSA on an ongoing basis to meet the growing demand for tests. An additional 40 temporary driver testers have been authorised along with 36 approved for retention or rehire in 2020. These testers have been recruited and trained and commenced testing in July.

In addition, sanction was granted at the end of June to add a further 40 testers to the cohort.

The RSA is looking to increase the number of tests from 6 to 7 per tester per day shortly as well as extending operating hours and expanding facilities at existing centres or opening new centres where appropriate.

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.

Electric Vehicles

259. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport the number of public power points for electric vehicles in County Donegal; the locations of same; and his plans to increase this number. [46343/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Deputy will be aware that the Government is fully committed to supporting a significant expansion and modernisation of the electric vehicle charging network over the coming years. A national charging infrastructure strategy is being developed which will set out a pathway to stay ahead of demand over the critical period out to 2030. My Department has begun an engagement with relevant stakeholders to inform this

work and it is envisaged that the strategy will be published later this year.

€10 million was committed from the Climate Action Fund (CAF) to support ESB investment in the charging network and this has leveraged a further €10 million investment from ESB, with the infrastructure to be in place by the end of 2022. This intervention alone will result in:

- 90 additional high power chargers, each capable of charging two vehicles
- 52 additional fast chargers, which may replace existing standard chargers
- 264 replacement standard chargers with more modern technology and with each consisting of two charge points

Further details on the progression of this project can be found at esb.ie/ecars/our-network/network-upgrades.

In light of the ESB eCars responsibility in the matter of the installation of charge points per county, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the ESB for direct response. Please contact my Office if no reply is received within 10 working days.

In terms of existing supports for public charging, the Public Charge Point Scheme continues 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 the 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 instead rely on parking their vehicles in public places near their homes to charge their EVs. My Department has committed to reviewing the Scheme shortly to ensure that it is as effective as possible in driving the decarbonisation effort.

Thirteen local authorities have been in touch with SEAI in relation to the scheme but this does not include Donegal County Council.

Traffic Fines

260. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to raise the fixed-charge penalty that may be issued by traffic wardens and members of An Garda Síochána for parking offences related to preventing use of active and sustainable transport infrastructure, including parking on footpaths, cycle lanes and bus lanes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46432/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): My Department is currently working with both the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and An Garda Síochána in relation to such offences.

Waterways Issues

261. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to issues regarding a barrier on a walk and cycle route of the Royal Canal (details supplied); and the guidance and or policy regarding barriers and the way in which they are deployed along greenways. [46503/21]

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

responsibility for setting Guidelines for the construction and maintenance of Road infrastructure, including for Greenways and Active Travel. Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have certain powers for National Roads and the National Transport Authority (NTA) have certain powers for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) in relation to traffic and public transport.

As part of the increased rollout of such infrastructure I have convened a group to oversee and co-ordinate overall guidelines and standards. This includes work under way by my Department in relation to the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) and the Traffic Signs Manual, by the NTA in relation to the National Cycle Manual and the TII in respect of Greenways. It should be noted that a review of the National Cycle Manual is being undertaken by the NTA and that the revised document will incorporate/reference all relevant cycle design standards for both urban and rural areas. This group will engage with stakeholders as part of it work.

A specific element of the work of the oversight group is a request, by me, to examine the issue of access controls on Greenways and other Cycle Infrastructure. I will pass on the suggestion to consider the UK guidelines in this regard to the group. It is my aim to provide Universal Access to Greenways and thus to ensure that people on wheelchairs, people on all types of bicycles as well as people with buggies can access the great outdoor amenity that Greenways provide.

In relation to the specific issue regarding Jackson's Bridge, I have asked for an update from Kildare County Council and Waterways Ireland and will forward that update to the Deputy when received.

Departmental Schemes

262. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport if the electric car grant will be extended until 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46559/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In the first instance, budget considerations are a matter for my colleague, the Minister of Finance, and he and I have had very useful and productive engagement on budget matters relating to Electric Vehicles in recent weeks.

Providing a sustainable, low-carbon transport system is a key priority of my Department. The Programme for Government commits to 7% average annual emissions reduction to 2030; ultimately, the goal is for a zero-emission mobility system by 2050. Electrification will be key to achieving this objective in the transport sector.

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. This target is challenging but indicates the scale of the transformation that is needed across all sectors if Ireland is to achieve its climate targets in the coming years. The forthcoming updated Climate Action Plan 2021 retains this commitment to transforming the national vehicle fleet to a zero emissions fleet, and contains a range of measures to support the public and business in transitioning to electric vehicles.

Considerable progress has already been made, as a result of the work of the Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce, to ensure that conditions and policies are in place to support citizens in making greener vehicle choices. As the Deputy will be aware, a comprehensive suite of measures is available to EV drivers, including purchase grants for private car owners and taxi drivers, VRT relief, reduced tolls, home charger grants, favourable motor and BIK tax rates, as well as a comprehensive charging network. These measures have collectively contributed to increased

take up of EVs in Ireland in recent years, albeit from a low base, to over 43,500 now.

In addition, my Department convened the Electric Vehicle Policy Pathway (EVPP) Working Group to produce a roadmap to achieving the 2030 EV target. The EVPP Working Group comprises senior officials and has considered regulatory, financial, and taxation policies to help drive a significant ramp-up in passenger EVs and electric van sales.

The recommendations of the EVPP Working Group were approved by Government and the full report is now available online.

In order to support the transition to EVs, the Group recommended that:

- The generous suite of EV supports already in place in Ireland should be retained until at least end-2022. Additional measures to further incentivise EVs and/or disincentivise fossil fuelled vehicles will also be necessary. Cost-effective, targeted policy supports should continue to be developed and strengthened over the coming years; and

- An Office for Low Emission Vehicles should be established, as a matter of priority, to co-ordinate the implementation of existing and future EV measures and infrastructure. The new Office should also take charge of developing and launching an extensive communication and engagement campaign, whole of Government in coverage, to drive the availability and understanding of key information regarding EVs, tailored to household, business and public sector consumers.

Overall, the Department is acutely aware that the cost of electric vehicles remains an issue for many consumers. To this end, electric vehicle policy is kept under continuous review to endeavour to make low emission vehicles affordable.

Rail Network

263. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport if he will address concerns regarding potential delays to the DART plus and MetroLink projects; the actions that are being taken to ensure that delays will not have an impact on the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46596/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): DART+ is a programme which actually comprises five different projects, each of which is moving at different speeds and is at different stages of development, while MetroLink is likely the largest ever public investment project in the history of the State. Both face imminent and important milestones in the coming months and these milestones will determine the progress of each in the coming years.

Firstly, there is Government's approval of the Preliminary Business Case and secondly there is the submission of a Railway Order application to An Bord Pleanála. On that first milestone, my Department has received draft Preliminary Business Cases for both. This represents Decision Gate 1 under the Public Spending Code and those Preliminary Business Cases are currently under review.

For major projects, like DART+ and MetroLink, the Public Spending Code requires a Government decision and I expect to seek such a Government decision in the near future. If approved by Government, that will allow the contracts to be signed in relation to DART+ Fleet and will also allow MetroLink and DART+ West move into the statutory planning system, subject to the completion of the necessary planning and environmental documentation.

The second impending milestone is the submission of Railway Order applications for DART+ West and MetroLink. Those applications require the finalisation of an extensive set of documentation, including environmental impact assessment reports, and that work is ongoing in relation to both projects.

On MetroLink I understand that an extensive body of work remains in relation to finalising the preliminary design, completing the required environmental impact assessment reports and closing out property referencing issues. This should be completed during Q1 next year and, subject to the Government decision mentioned above, the project will then be ready to seek planning permission.

On DART+, the most advanced of the proposed infrastructure projects is DART+ West. The second round of public consultation on DART+ West has recently been extended until 6th October. Issues raised during this consultation process, including those raised by public representatives, will need to be fully considered by the company and appropriately addressed before they're ready to enter the planning system. Once that has been completed, and similar to MetroLink, DART+ West can then move into the planning system subject to the aforementioned Government approval and finalisation of planning documentation.

I trust this clarifies the current position.

Public Transport

264. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Transport the steps that are being taken to improve public transport services from rural areas to designated cancer centres for scheduled day case treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46620/21]

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

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

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

For the information of the Deputy, the remit of my Department and its Agencies, including the NTA, relates to public transport services, rather than individualised or personalised travel supports.

Public transport services are open services which are planned, coordinated and delivered as a means for the general public to access a wide variety of services and allow all passengers to travel together, in so far as possible. Transport services that do not fit this description are deemed to be 'closed' services, for example, dedicated door-to-door disability or health services, and do not come under the remit of my Department or the NTA.

In addition, the funding allocated to my Department and its Agencies is for public transport services, for example Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding, and the Local Link Rural Transport Programme, rather than for individual travel or mobility grant support schemes.

Traffic Management

265. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Transport if consideration has been given to allowing the use of bus lanes by volunteer drivers transporting persons to and from medical facilities, hospitals specifically, for the treatment of serious and life-threatening conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46682/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): While I acknowledge the hard work and very valuable contribution made by volunteer charity drivers, I do not intend at this time to extend scarce and valuable bus lane access to additional users without careful consideration of the impacts, including the potential for delays to buses and emergency services who currently have such access, and consultation with those affected, including such services, the Garda Síochána and relevant state agencies.

The current bus lane network was created at considerable expense to the public with the express purpose of providing on-street priority for bus-based public transport. Bus lanes are designed to make bus journeys both faster and more reliable so as to encourage members of the public out of their cars and onto public transport. This, in turn, reduces both congestion and air pollution and is considerably more environmentally sustainable than car-based transport in the long run. As the populations of our urban centres multiply and public awareness of the importance of sustainable transport grows, it is likely that both bus passenger numbers and, by extension, the provision of bus services and the demand for bus lanes will continue to increase year on year. As a result it is critically important that bus lanes be allowed serve the purpose for which they were installed in the first place.

Since bus lanes were first introduced, there have been many requests to allow other classes of traffic to use the lanes. These have included requests on behalf of motorcyclists, multi-occupancy vehicles, electric vehicles, hackneys, animal ambulances, prison vehicles, and others. My predecessors as Ministers for Transport and myself have always consistently rejected these requests on the grounds that any addition to the categories of vehicle permitted to use the lanes would inevitably reduce their efficiency for performing their original purpose, which has become even more critical in light of the current climate emergency.

Driver Licences

266. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to further extend expiry dates for initial basic training certificates issued from 30 June 2019 given that applicants were unable to practice or sit tests due to the pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46683/21]

267. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Transport the consideration which has been given to those who were issued initial basic training certificates from 30 June 2019; the potential supports that may be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46684/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 266 and 267 together.

The validity period of Initial Basic Training (IBT) certificates is set out in legislation. Making a change to the validity of an existing certificate requires a change in law.

The Road Safety Authority and the Department of Transport announced a further extension

to certificates for motorcycle Initial Basic Training (IBT), in order to take account of the impact of the pandemic.

The extension was made depending on when an IBT cert was issued, for certs issued between 01 March 2018 -30 June 2019.

No further extensions are being considered at this time.

Question No. 267 answered with Question No. 266.

Public Transport

268. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Transport if free travel pass holders are still required to pay a fee when travelling on public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45353/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As Minister for Transport, I am responsible for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in day-to-day operational matters.

The Free Travel Scheme is a non-statutory scheme administered by the Department of Social Protection. The scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme including services provided by companies such as Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators.

The query raised appears to relate to Bus Éireann's commercial service, Expressway, and I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Coastal Protection

269. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport if he has commissioned research on the implications of climate change on the Dublin transport network, particularly the continued impact of rising sea levels on the operations of the coastal rail and DART line in Fingal, Dublin city and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown; his plans to mitigate the impact and to safeguard the continued operations of this critical piece of national infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46703/21]

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 in the first instance.

I understand there is a programme of studies and associated works being undertaken and funding provided to combat the effects of coastal erosion on rail. However, noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply on the implications of climate change on the Dublin transport network and mitigation plans. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Rail Network

270. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Transport the engagement there has been with Westmeath County Council, Irish Rail and other interested parties regarding the reopening of Killucan train station. [46811/21]

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

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

I can confirm that late last year I met with the Council and Iarnród Éireann to discuss the issue generally.

Road Projects

271. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department has provided an assessment or a business case to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in respect of the case for a funding allocation to resource the planned Drogheda northern port access route in the forthcoming revised National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46829/21]

272. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department will commit to funding the Drogheda northern port access route in view of his stated policy commitment to providing for town by-passes to allow for urban centres to reduce traffic and regenerate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46830/21]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 272 together.

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.

The extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the post 2008 recession meant that grant funding for road improvement schemes had to be curtailed because expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to adequately maintain the regional and local road network.

Under the National Development Plan (NDP), as it stands, there has been a significant increase in Exchequer funding for regional and local roads, particularly in the last four years. Funding is not yet at the level needed for the adequate protection and renewal of regional and local roads and so for this reason, the primary focus for capital investment continues to be the protection and renewal of the network with some limited investment in road improvement projects.

Any road improvement projects proposed by local authorities for consideration for fund-

ing are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code (PSC) and my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework (CAF).

It is my understanding that Louth County Council sought funding for the proposed Port Access Northern Cross Route (PANCR) under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) which is administered by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG). There was some discussion between Louth County Council and my Department this year regarding the project appraisal process if the scheme were to be submitted to my Department for consideration. To date no formal application has been received by this Department from Louth County Council in relation to the proposed PANCR and my Department has not had any engagement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform regarding the scheme.

Question No. 272 answered with Question No. 271.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

273. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Finance if the special arrangement for registered early learning and care and school-age children services to be exempt from the employment wage subsidy scheme turnover test will be extended beyond Q3 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46719/21]

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.

While the criteria for eligibility for business in general is based on a reduction in turnover, as a result of the pandemic and having regard to the importance of maintaining the provision of childcare facilities so as to enable parents to continue in, or to take up, positions of employment, the legislation provided that childcare businesses in possession of tax clearance and registered in accordance with Section 58C of the Childcare Act 1991 are eligible for the EWSS.

The objective of the scheme is to support all 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 €4.8 billion and PRSI credit of almost €770 million have been granted to 51,400 employers in respect of over 660,000 workers.

I have been clear that there will be no cliff-edge to the EWSS and, as the Deputy will be aware from announcements made in June, it has been decided that the scheme is now to be extended until the end of December 2021. For Q3 2021, the Government has decided to broadly maintain the status quo for EWSS, including the enhanced rates of support, with a modification to widen eligibility, and maintaining the reduced rate of Employers' PRSI of 0.5%.

Further, as announced today, the Government has agreed that there will be no change to the EWSS for the month of October 2021, which means that the scheme will continue to operate in its current form as per the arrangements for Q3 2021. Issues around the configuration of the scheme beyond October are currently being considered and full details will be announced on

Budget Day, 12 October 2021.

The Government remains fully committed to supporting businesses and employers insofar as is possible at this time.

Tax Collection

274. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if he will defer the local property tax for properties built and purchased since 2013 for a period of 12 months in view of the economic hardship faced by homeowners due to Covid-19. [46740/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government - “Our Shared Future” – includes a commitment to bring forward legislation in relation to the Local Property Tax (LPT) on the basis of fairness and that most homeowners will face no increase in their LPT liability. In addition there is a commitment to bring new homes, which were outside the LPT, into the taxation system.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2021 fulfils the Programme for Government commitments in this area and secures the future of the Local Property Tax (LPT). The 2021 Act provides inter alia that residential properties built since 2013 will be liable for LPT for 2022 onwards. I have no plans to alter this position. The vast majority of residential property owners have been paying LPT since 2013 and their situation vis-à-vis property owners who have remained outside the scope of LPT has become highly inequitable and untenable. I am very concerned that this inequity does not continue into 2022 when property owners at 1 May 2013 are due to pay LPT based on their new value as at 1 November 2021. Deferring LPT as suggested in the deputy’s question would have the effect of continuing this inequitable situation and I do not see any basis for doing so.

Any residential property owners experiencing financial difficulties can avail of a wide range of flexible payment options in respect of LPT. The full range of payment options, which includes phased arrangements, are available to property owners via the LPT portal on the Revenue website. Residential property owners can make direct contact with Revenue at telephone number (01) 7383626 or by writing to LPT Branch, PO Box 1, Limerick, where every effort will be made to agree a suitable payment arrangement.

Revenue has engaged extensively with residential property owners who are experiencing financial difficulties since the pandemic began to agree flexible LPT payment arrangements that best suit their circumstances and avoid unnecessary hardship, and it has assured me that this will continue to be the case.

The LPT legislation provides for the possibility of deferring the charge to LPT in certain circumstances to assist individuals who may have difficulty paying the tax. The deferred tax remains as a charge on the property and must be paid before a sale or transfer can be completed. Interest is charged on the deferred amount. The Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2021 provides that for 2022 the deferral income thresholds will be increased to €18,000 for a single owner and €30,000 for a couple. In addition, the rate of interest charged on deferred LPT liabilities will be reduced from 4 per cent to 3 per cent annually.

Tax Code

275. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a mat-

ter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45945/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As previously advised to the Deputy in my reply to Dail Question No. 261 (Ref No. 43268-21), on the 15th of September, the filing date for self-assessed taxpayers who file their 2020 return (Form 11) and pay any liabilities due through ROS, including preliminary tax for 2021, has already been extended from 31 October 2021 to 17 November 2021 and no further extension is envisaged.

However, Revenue has assured me that it will take a pragmatic approach to any taxpayer or tax agent that experiences exceptional difficulties in meeting the filing deadline because of COVID-19, for example, where an unavoidable absence of key personnel or an office closure due to the pandemic occurs. In such circumstances, the taxpayer or tax agent should contact Revenue as quickly as possible, via the MyEnquiries service, setting out the exceptional difficulties being encountered so that an alternative arrangement can be agreed and put in place.

The ‘best estimate’ arrangement is in place to facilitate taxpayers or tax agents in rectifying errors that occurred because all the relevant information required was not to hand at the time the return was filed due to COVID-19 difficulties. The arrangement allows for self-correction of the return without incurring penalties.

Finally, and as previously advised to the Deputy, the timely filing of tax returns is essential so that taxpayers and businesses can continue to avail of the very substantial Government supports that are available to offset the extreme economic difficulties caused by COVID-19. Where returns are outstanding, it is not possible for Revenue to calculate outstanding liabilities for the Debt Warehousing scheme or to provide tax clearance, which is a key eligibility requirement for the other subsidy schemes (EWSS, CRSS and BRSS).

Banking Sector

276. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance if there are plans to require mortgage providers to display their approval from the Central Bank; if additional protection will be provided to consumers when undertaking a mortgage in order to ensure they are engaging with accredited mortgage providers including those based overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45988/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Within the regulatory framework of the Central Bank of Ireland, only authorised credit institutions or retail credit firms may provide mortgage credit to consumers in Ireland. Under EU law, credit institutions authorised in another EEA Member State can provide specified banking activities, including lending, in other Member States provided that the home country supervisor (which in Ireland is the Central Bank) is satisfied.

In relation to the display of such an authorisation, the Central Bank has advised that while there is no specific requirement for a regulated entity to display their authorisation on their premises, Provision 4.10 of the Central Bank’s Consumer Protection Code 2012 requires that a regulated entity must use a regulatory disclosure statement in either of the following formats, depending on the EEA Member State where it has been authorised, registered or licensed:

a) “[Full legal name of the regulated entity, trading as (insert all trading names used by the regulated entity)] is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland”; or

b) “[Full legal name of the regulated entity, trading as (insert all trading names used by that regulated entity), is authorised/licensed or registered by [insert name of the competent authority from which it received its authorisation or licence, or with which it is registered] in [insert name of the Member State where that competent authority resides] and is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland for conduct of business rules.”

A regulated entity must not insert any additional text into the wording of the regulatory disclosure statements as set out above.

A regulatory disclosure statement as outlined above must be included on business stationary, websites and on electronic communications with consumers (excluding SMS) and regulated firms may only use the regulatory disclosure statement in communications with a consumer where such communications relate solely to a regulated activity.

Consequently, any firm operating in Ireland under EU passporting rules will also have to use a regulatory disclosure statement, indicating the EEA country where it has been authorised but highlighting that it is regulated in Ireland for conduct of business rules.

In relation to consumer protection, the Central Bank has advised that further information on how to check if a firm is authorised can be found on the Consumer Hub section of the Central Bank website which contains Registers of all regulated firms alongside an Explainer for consumers on how to check the regulatory status of a particular firm and the importance for consumers to only deal with authorised firms.

Budget 2022

277. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider fully extending tax relief to counselling and psychotherapy as a qualifying health expense in Budget 2022; and if he will reconsider the application of VAT exemption now rated at 13.5% on earnings over €37,500 for counsellors psychotherapists from 2022. [46005/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for tax relief in respect of qualifying health expenses. Section 469 defines “health expenses” as “expenses in respect of the provision of health care including the services of a practitioner”.

A practitioner is defined in the section as “any person who is:

registered in the register established under section 43 of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007,

1. registered in the register established under section 26 of the Dentists Act, 1985, or,

2. in relation to health care provided outside the State, entitled under the laws of the country in which the care is provided to practice medicine or dentistry there”.

In the case of counselling or psychotherapy, the relief is available where the counsellor, psychologist or psychotherapist carrying out the treatment is a qualified practitioner, or where a patient is referred by a qualified practitioner for a diagnostic procedure.

This is similar to the position that applies to other medical expenses, and I am satisfied that the legislation provides sufficient flexibility for expenses that should qualify for tax relief. Accordingly, there are no plans to change these arrangements at this time.

Comprehensive guidance material on medical expenses can be found on Revenue’s website

in Tax and Duty Manual Part 15-01-12 www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-15/15-01-12.pdf

With regards to the application of VAT exemption now rated at 13.5% on earnings over €37,500 for counsellors and psychotherapists, the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. Under domestic legislation, professional medical care services recognised as such by the Department of Health are exempt from VAT. Professional medical care services recognised by the Department of Health are generally those medical care services supplied by health professionals who are enrolled, registered, regulated, or designated on the appropriate statutory register provided for under the relevant legislation in force in the State or equivalent legislation applicable in other countries. This includes health professionals registered under the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, the Nurses Act 1985 and those engaged in a regulated profession designated under Section 4 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005.

Statutory Instrument No. 170 of 2018 (Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (Regulations 2018) of 2 July 2018 designates psychotherapists and counsellors as a regulated profession and established the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board. Professional counselling and psychotherapy services provided by persons registered by this Board are exempt from VAT from the date of their registration.

The thirteen members of the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board were appointed with effect from 25 February 2019.

The Board has begun the substantial body of work which must be undertaken before it is in a position to open its registers. Questions on the establishment of the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board and their progress in opening their register are a matter for the Minister for Health.

Tax Reliefs

278. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he plans to make adjustments in the tax saver rail ticket system to facilitate workers who are returning to the workplace on a two day or three-day work basis rather than a five-day commute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46022/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 118(5A) of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA 1997) provides an exemption from benefit-in-kind (BIK) where an employer purchases a travel pass for an employee.

Under section 118B TCA 1997 an employer and employee may also enter into a salary sacrifice arrangement under which the employee agrees to sacrifice part of his or her salary, in exchange for a travel pass.

Where a travel pass is purchased under the BIK scheme or through a salary sacrifice arrangement certain conditions must be met, for example:

- the cost incurred must relate to a monthly or annual bus, railway or ferry travel pass;
- the travel pass must be issued by or on behalf of one or more approved transport providers; and
- the approved transport provider must be contracted or licensed to provide the transport

services covered by the travel pass.

The terms ‘monthly’ and ‘annual’ above refer to the period of time for which the travel pass is valid for use, being a period of 30/31 or 365/366 days respectively. The number of journeys or extent of travel which may be undertaken within the monthly or annual period covered by the travel pass will depend on the terms and conditions of the specific ticket purchased and the relevant transport provider.

Further details on the tax treatment applicable on the provision of a travel pass to an employee can be found on Revenue’s website.

I do not have any proposals to hand regarding a more flexible tax saver product and, as the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

279. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if advice will be provided in relation to an appeal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46024/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, I have previously responded to a question from him in relation to this matter on 9 September. A detailed reply was issued in that instance (Dail Question No. 217 - Reference 42979/21) and there have been no substantive developments or adjustments to the previous answer in the interim period.

The Covid Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), which is provided by Section 11 of the Finance Act 2020, was introduced to support businesses (companies, self-employed individuals and partnerships) significantly affected by restrictions introduced by the Government to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The CRSS operates on a self-assessment basis, and claimants are required to satisfy themselves that they are correctly eligible for the scheme before registering to receive payments. Claimants are also required to review their continued eligibility for the scheme before making a claim for payment in respect of each subsequent claim period.

To qualify for the CRSS, a business must operate from a business premises located in a region that is subject to restrictions introduced in line with the Government’s Living with COVID-19 Plan, requiring it to prohibit or considerably restrict customers from accessing its premises. It is not sufficient that a business experiences a reduction in demand for its services or a reduced footfall because of the general public health guidelines around social distancing and related protective measures which apply to society as a whole. For example, dry cleaning and laundry businesses were not required to restrict customer access under the public health measures and as such do not qualify for the CRSS, even if service demand is reduced. Such businesses may however qualify for the other support schemes introduced to support them during the pandemic.

I am advised by Revenue that the business in question operates a dry-cleaning service and incorrectly claimed and received CRSS payments to which it was not entitled, which must be repaid in due course. Revenue has also confirmed that it accepts that the business genuinely believed that it qualified for the scheme and that repayment of the amount owed as a single payment could cause it financial difficulties. To avoid such a scenario to the greatest extent possible, Revenue will engage directly with the business to agree a suitable payment solution, including the possibility of adding the amount owed to its current warehoused debt under the Debt Warehousing Scheme, even though that scheme does not specifically provide for CRSS

related liabilities.

The company may be also eligible to register for the new Business Resumption Support Scheme (BRSS), which is an additional support for businesses with reduced turnover due to COVID-19 related restrictions. Further details on the BRSS, which is now operational, are available on the Revenue website.

Finally, Revenue has confirmed that in addition to receiving financial support through the Debt Warehousing Scheme, the Business is also receiving payments under the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS).

Primary Medical Certificates

280. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Finance when the resumption of applications for primary medical certificates will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46029/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled, and satisfy at least one of the following medical criteria, in order to obtain a Primary Medical Certificate:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;
- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- be without both hands or without both arms;
- be without one or both legs;
- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;
- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The medical criteria were included in the Finance Act 2020, by way of amendment to Section 92 of the Finance Act 1989. This amendment arises from legal advice in light of the June 2020 Supreme Court judgement that the medical criteria in secondary legislation was not deemed to be invalid, nevertheless it was found to be inconsistent with the mandate provided in Section 92 of the Finance Act 1989 (primary legislation).

With the passing of the Finance Act 2020 assessments for primary medical certificates recommenced from January 2021.

Tax Clearance Certificates

281. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if the tax treatment of a term-time worker (details supplied) in education will be examined. [46031/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Department of Social Protection (DSP) payments are generally classified as income and as such are liable to income tax but not Universal Social Charge (USC) and PRSI. This includes Jobseekers Benefit and any weekly payments

for adult dependants.

The way in which tax is collected from DSP payments is dependent on whether a person is taxed through the PAYE system or through self-assessment. Where a person has a PAYE source of income only, Revenue reduces his or her annual tax credits and rate band to take account of any taxable DSP payments, thereby ensuring the tax due is automatically collected through the payroll system. I am advised by Revenue that this arrangement was correctly applied to the person concerned while she was in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit.

Revenue has confirmed that it has reviewed the tax record of the person and is satisfied that the correct tax credits, standard rate band and Universal Social Charge (USC) allocations have been applied to her current employment, following notification from DSP that her Jobseekers Benefit claim had ‘closed’. The overpayments that occurred for 2021 will be refunded to her through her payroll. Such overpayments arise where any delay occurs in notifying Revenue that a person has resumed employment and is no longer in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit. Revenue has also confirmed that the person is not exempt from USC as her expected income for 2021 will exceed the exemption threshold of €13,000.00.

Finally, Revenue has advised me that it has already had direct engagement with the person in question and has clarified how the overpayments of tax by her occurred and how the amounts owed to her will be refunded. Revenue also clarified her USC status and provided her with a direct contact should she require any further clarification or advice.

Tax Code

282. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance if he plans to publish the submissions received by his Department during the public consultation in the context of OECD proposals for a global minimum effective tax rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46078/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would like to thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. On 1 July 2021, the OECD Inclusive Framework reached agreement but not unanimous consensus on key aspects of the two-pillar solution to address tax challenges arising from digitalisation and globalisation.

I have been clear in expressing my broad support for the agreement but have expressed reservation, in particular, about the proposed global minimum effective tax rate of ‘at least 15%’.

Given the importance of the OECD proposals, I felt it timely to invite views on the OECD proposals. The consultation provided an opportunity to identify the challenges and opportunities of the proposals in respect of Ireland’s corporate tax code and broader industrial policy.

As you will know, on 20 July I launched a public consultation on the OECD International Tax Proposals, the consultation period ran until 10th September.

Responses to the consultation came from a broad spectrum of society including from interested citizens, business, business representative bodies, civil society, accountancy firms and bodies, law firms, and political parties.

The responses received indicated broad support for the OECD process, as a well as a strong level of support for the position the Government adopted in relation to the proposals. There was an acknowledgement that there is need for further detail before committing to any agreement. Additional points raised noted the need to focus on Ireland’s overall FDI attractiveness into the

future including with a focus on non-tax elements. The need to have jurisdictions withdraw unilateral measures, such as domestic digital taxes, was further noted for any agreement to succeed and bring about the stability to the international tax framework that we all crave.

My Officials and I will further consider the technical details of submissions received and this will inform my thinking as we approach what is a critical juncture of these negotiations at the OECD's Inclusive Framework meeting on 8 October.

In respect to the publication of the submissions, it is my intention to publish these submissions on the Department of Finance website, as is the norm for public consultations run by the Department of Finance, in due course.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

283. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the extension of the employment wage subsidy scheme within the hospitality and tourism sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46101/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of concerns that have been raised regarding the pace of recovery for the hospitality and tourism sector. As an economy wide support, the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme has the objective of supporting all employment and maintaining the link between the employer and employee insofar as is possible. The EWSS is open to all businesses, provided the business meets the requisite conditions of the scheme. The EWSS 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 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 €4.8 billion and PRSI credit of almost €770 million have been granted to 51,400 employers in respect of over 660,000 workers.

I have been clear that there will be no cliff-edge to the EWSS and, as the Deputy will be aware from announcements made in June, it has been decided that the scheme is now to be extended until the end of December 2021. For Q3 2021, the Government has decided to broadly maintain the status quo for EWSS, including the enhanced rates of support, with a modification to widen eligibility, and maintaining the reduced rate of Employers' PRSI of 0.5%.

Further, as announced today, the Government has agreed that there will be no change to the EWSS for the month of October 2021, which means that the scheme will continue to operate in its current form as per the arrangements for Q3 2021. Issues around the configuration of the scheme beyond October are currently being considered and full details will be announced on Budget Day, 12 October 2021.

The Government remains fully committed to supporting businesses and employers insofar as is possible at this time.

Tax Code

284. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider supporting the 9% VAT retention up until 2023 within the tourism and hospitality sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46103/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Tax Yield

285. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue raised to the Exchequer from the discretionary trust tax from 2016 to 2020, in tabular form; the estimated revenue that could be raised by a 1% increase in the tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46106/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Discretionary Trust Tax (DTT) is payable by trustees or by an agent acting for trustees. An initial once-off 6% charge applies to the value of all the assets in a trust. An annual 1% charge applies on 31 December each year to the value of all the assets in the trust on that date.

The yield from DTT (in €m) for the years 2016 to 2020 is provided in the table below.

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
3.2	1.96	3.27	6.89	3.51

I am advised that, due to the manner in which the data is returned to Revenue, the yield from the 1% and 6% rates are not recorded separately. In addition, the level of DTT paid in any given year is contingent on decisions made by trustees regarding the amounts held in trusts. It is not, therefore, possible to reliably forecast the likely impact of a change to these tax rates.

Customs and Excise

286. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered implementing a maximum customs processing fee post-Brexit given that different couriers and postal carriers charge vastly different customs processing fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46112/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My colleagues in Revenue inform me that while the rates of Customs Duty are standard and are set at EU level, the administration fees charged by carrier / delivery companies are a matter for the individual companies and for the consumers who use these companies. The fees vary but so does the service offered by the various companies. Queries about these charges should be directed to the individual companies.

Revenue has no role in relation to such fees. Similarly on the tax side, Revenue has no role in relation to tax agent fees.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

287. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance if applicants and or employers who were initially approved to avail of the temporary wage subsidy scheme for domestic employees and or childminders and who were subsequently refused eligibility can appeal the decision to pay the liability issued to them by the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46182/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme

(TWSS) was provided for in section 28 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020. The scheme operated from 26 March 2020 to 31 August 2020 and was replaced by the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) from 1 September 2020. The TWSS was introduced as an emergency measure, providing vital financial support to employers and employees that were severely impacted by the pandemic.

The TWSS operated on a self-assessment basis with the onus on applicants to satisfy themselves that they fully met the eligibility criteria for the scheme before making a claim. To assist employers in determining their eligibility, Revenue published extensive guidance, which clearly set out the qualifying conditions. Revenue also deployed very significant resources to a TWSS Helpline to answer queries by potential TWSS claimants.

The scheme was not intended as a support to domestic employers nor was it ever implied that it applied to them. The employment of domestic staff by a householder is not a business activity. A relevant business in the context of the TWSS generally included manufacturing, buying, selling, or supplying goods or services with a view to making a profit, none of which can be associated with employing domestic staff. It was also not possible for a domestic employer to meet the key criteria of a 25% reduction in turnover in Q2 of 2020 as there is no turnover associated with engaging a domestic employee.

I am advised by Revenue that a small number of employers of domestic staff incorrectly claimed TWSS in respect of domestic staff, the majority of which have since repaid the amounts owed in full. Where these domestic employers did not repay the subsidies owed, Revenue issued assessments for the amounts due as provided for in the legislation. The amounts owed were classified as ‘relevant tax’ and the Notice of Assessment advised the persons concerned of their statutory right to appeal the assessment to the independent Tax Appeals Commission (TAC). Full details of the procedures for making an appeal against any Revenue assessment, including in respect of late appeals, are available on the TAC website at www.taxappeals.ie.

Departmental Expenditure

288. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 258 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46195/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer to information previously supplied in relation to attendance at courses provided by a specific training provider.

Attendance at these training courses by four staff in my Department over the period 2015-2017 was funded as “ad hoc” training, whereby individuals discussed an interest completing the training course with their managers and the Human Resources Unit. As it was a specific course request by a small number of individuals no competitive process was deemed necessary and no tender issued.

Tax Data

289. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the full tax expenditure data relating to the forgone cost of tax expenditures associated with private pensions for the year ending 31 December 2020; the total taxation collected in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46295/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the cost of tax relief on pension contributions for the years 2004 to 2018 (the latest year currently available) are available on the Revenue website at

www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-tax-expenditures.pdf

For 2018, the published items in relation to pension contribution relief are:

- ‘Employees’ Contributions to Approved Superannuation Schemes’,
- ‘Employers’ Contributions to Approved Superannuation Schemes’,
- ‘Exemption of Employers’ Contributions to BIK’, and
- ‘Pension Contributions (Retirement Annuity and PRSA)’.

For the convenience of the Deputy, the following table sets out the relevant tax costs for 2018 as figures for 2019 and 2020 are not yet available.

Pension Type	2018
	Cost €m
Employees’ Contributions to Approved Superannuation Schemes	677.7
Employers’ Contributions to Approved Superannuation Schemes’	173.2
Exemption of Employers’ Contributions to BIK	658.3
Pension Contributions (Retirement Annuity and PRSA)	241.3
Total Cost	€1,750.5m

I am further advised by Revenue that it is not possible to estimate the tax paid on pensions separately from other income sources. This is due to the manner in which all incomes are combined within the tax assessment calculation.

Tax Yield

290. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated additional corporation tax that could be expected to be generated in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, respectively if the bailed-out banks had applied to them a 25% limit on the losses that could be carried forward in a year and a five-year absolute limit in which such losses could be used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46512/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, loss relief for corporation tax is a long-standing feature of the Irish corporate tax system and a standard feature of corporation tax systems in most OECD countries. It recognises the fact that a business cycle runs over several years and that it would be unfair to tax income earned in one year and not allow relief for losses incurred in another. Loss relief works by allowing a deduction for losses incurred in one accounting period against profits earned in another period.

In relation to the Deputy’s query, section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 precludes Revenue officials from directly or indirectly disclosing taxpayer information to third

parties in respect of specific taxpayers. Therefore it is not possible to provide estimates based on such a small cohort of taxpayers. However, based on public information as to pre-COVID-19 profitability levels, a 25% limit on the Corporation Tax losses forward that can be used in one year would likely not yield significant additional tax, due to the amounts of losses forward available to the relevant companies.

A five-year restriction on the carry forward of losses, if applied in respect of losses incurred to date, could mean that these companies are no longer able to use the historic losses that are being carried forward since the financial crisis. The likely additional tax yield from such a measure would depend on future profitability levels of the banks and it is not possible to estimate this accurately at present. It is further noted that, if losses forward are restricted in this manner, future profitability is likely to be offset to some extent by current losses arising during the pandemic.

The Deputy may recall that in 2018, Department of Finance officials produced a detailed technical note for the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on the subject of both bank losses and corporation tax losses more generally (see www.gov.ie/en/publication/436ff7-technical-note-on-the-potential-consequences-of-changes-to-the-treat/). It was further updated and re-circulated to members during the 2019 Finance Bill process.

Banking Sector

291. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance the processes that are in place to enable businesses in Ireland to use online banks which are based overseas with ease; if there are mechanisms in place to remove barriers to businesses banking with online banking systems outside Ireland and to ensure governance in this area remains transparent and customer friendly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46627/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under EU law, credit institutions in EEA Member States only need to seek authorisation to provide services in one member state which is referred to as the Home Country Supervisor (in Ireland, the Central Bank). Authorisations are then valid for the entire EU, under the principle of single authorisation. Passporting of services and activities is made possible as the standard of regulation and supervision of passporting firms is effectively the same throughout the EU. The Central Bank is notified in advance by the Home Country Supervisor of the activities which will be conducted. However, supervisory responsibility remains with the Home Country Supervisor.

It is a matter for each individual institution authorised elsewhere in EEA whether it chooses to passport its services into Ireland or not.

Banks from non EU countries can operate within the EU in two different ways. They can establish a subsidiary in an EU country and then passport across the EU like other Banks or they can to open ‘third country branches’ in the EU countries where they wish to operate. There is limited harmonisation of rules on third country branches on an EU level and it is usually the case that third country branches are confined to the member states where they are established.

Any firm operating in Ireland under EU passporting rules must use a regulatory disclosure statement, indicating the EU country where it has been authorised but highlighting that it is regulated in Ireland for conduct of business rules. In this regard, the Deputy may wish to note that SME borrowers in Ireland have regulatory protections via the Central Bank’s SME lending regulations.

The SME Regulations, centralbank.ie/news/article/regulations-for-firms-lending-to-smes-

from-2016, set out the required treatment of SMEs by regulated entities in relation to various aspects of business lending. This includes detailed provisions around the credit application process, requirements regarding security or collateral, credit refusals and withdrawals, handling complaints, managing arrears and having in place policies for engaging with SMEs in financial difficulty.

Tax Rebates

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance when a rebate in respect of VRT on a personal motor vehicle adaptable for disability will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46646/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities (DPD) scheme provides for the repayment or remission of VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) on the purchase of an adapted vehicle for the transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities. Qualification for the scheme also provides access to the Fuel Grant scheme and for a waiver of motor tax.

Revenue has confirmed that it has not received an application for the scheme from the person in question. Full details of the DPD scheme, including how to make an application, are available on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie/en/importing-vehicles-duty-free-allowances/documents/vrt/online-dd1form-guide.pdf, which may be of assistance to the person.

Departmental Funding

293. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance if an event (details supplied) received public funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46652/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that the Department of Finance has no record of any funding being provided for the event in question.

I wish to note that my response refers only to Department of Finance records and I cannot comment on behalf of other Government Departments.

Tax Reliefs

294. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance the total spend related to the Special Assignee Relief Programme in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021. [46674/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Finance Act 2012 introduced section 825C to the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997. This section, as amended, provides Income Tax relief for certain individuals assigned during any of the tax years 2012 to 2022 to work in the State. The relief is commonly known as SARP (Special Assignee Relief Programme).

The aim of the relief is to reduce the cost to employers of assigning skilled individuals in their companies from abroad to take up positions in the Irish-based operations of their employer or an associated company, thereby facilitating the creation of jobs and the development and expansion of businesses in Ireland.

SARP provides for relief from Income Tax on 30% of income over €75,000, subject to an upper income threshold of €1,000,000, where applicable. There is no exemption from USC. PRSI is payable where the individual is not liable to social insurance contributions in his or her home country. School fees of up to €5,000 per annum and expenses incurred on one trip home per year, where they are paid for by the employer, are not subject to Income Tax, USC or PRSI.

The cost of the scheme for 2018 was €42.4 million. This is the most recent year for which data are available. I expect that the 2019 cost will be available shortly.

Tax Code

295. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance if landlords of apartments and duplexes, excluding local authorities and approved housing bodies, can write off service charges and levies to fund the remediation of defects imposed by owners management companies against their tax liabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46805/21]

296. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated annual value of tax write-offs to the Exchequer by duplex and apartment landlords in relation to service charges and levies to fund the remediation of defects imposed by owners management companies against their tax liabilities; if he plans to extend the facility to write-off service charges and remediation levies against tax liabilities to other apartment and duplex owners, namely owner-occupiers, approved housing bodies and local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46806/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 295 and 296 together.

Section 97 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA) sets out the deductions allowable in computing rental income chargeable to income tax or corporation tax under Case V of Schedule D. Income chargeable under Case V is computed on the gross amount of rent receivable less allowable expenses incurred in earning that rent, as specified in section 97(2). These expenses include, inter alia, the cost of maintenance, repairs, insurance, and management of the premises borne by the person chargeable and which constitute an expense of the agreement under which the rent/receipts were received, but excluding any capital expenditure.

Revenue's Tax and Duty manual 04-08-01 provides detailed guidance on the tax treatment of rental income. Service charges and levies that are imposed by management companies are deductible against the landlord's rental profits.

I am advised by Revenue that it does not have a figure for the cost of deductions claimed by landlords for service charges or levies related to the remediation of defects, as it does not request such detailed information on tax returns.

Local authorities are exempt from income tax and are not subject to corporation tax, and approved housing bodies that have charitable status would benefit from the charitable tax exemption, and therefore tax deductibility of service charges would not be relevant to such entities.

I have no plans at present to extend to other apartment and duplex owners the facility to write off service charges and remediation levies against tax liabilities as mentioned in the Deputy's question.

Question No. 296 answered with Question No. 295.

Tax Data

297. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of a reduction of the rate of VAT on energy bills from 13.5% to 9% for a 12-month period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46807/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that traders are not required to identify the VAT yield generated from the supply of specific goods or services on their VAT returns. However, a tentative estimate (using a combination of data sources) of the cost of a 4.5% reduction on the VAT collected on domestic energy supplies is as follows.

Fuel Type	Cost (€m)
Solid Fuels	12
Home Heating Oils	50
Gas	20
Electricity	88
Total	170

Tax Code

298. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the need for an urgent introduction of a vacant property tax to alleviate the ongoing accommodation crisis; his further views on whether the introduction of a significant vacant property tax has the potential to free up a significant number of empty properties particularly those purchased by large investor funds; the status of his most recent discussion with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46466/21]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have stated on a number of occasions that the primary objective of any vacant residential property tax would be to increase the supply of homes for rent or purchase to meet demand rather than increasing tax revenues. However, before introducing such a tax it is of course vital to have a sound understanding of the quantity, locations and characteristics of long term vacant properties, and the reasons why they are vacant. This is why the recently announced strategy, ‘Housing For All’ states that my Department will collect data on vacancy with a view to introducing a Vacant Property Tax.

The recently enacted Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2021 enables Revenue to collect certain limited information on vacant properties in the LPT return form it will issue to property owners in advance of the new LPT valuation date of 1 November next. This information, together with information from other available sources will be used to assess the merits and impact of introducing a Vacant Property Tax.

While it is the clear intention of Government to introduce a Vacant Property Tax, the matter needs extensive consideration for such a measure to be effective and to determine the properties that should be targeted. Once this information has been collated, we will be in a better position to assess the merits and precise design of a Vacant Property Tax.

It is important to identify the reasons for vacancy and whether this is long or short-term in nature. There may be genuine and acceptable reasons for vacancy such as refurbishment work, the temporary absence of the owner for medical reasons or pending the grant of probate for a deceased person’s estate. Appropriate exemptions from any charge would have to be considered in addition to acceptable periods of vacancy.

As part of 'Housing for All' strategy, the Government has committed to a range of actions as part of the pathway to address vacancy and ensure the efficient use of housing stock. In the context of the development of 'Housing For All' my Department had intensive engagement with relevant Departments including the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. I engaged similarly with ministerial colleagues including of course the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. I expect engagement in relation to the specific issue of vacant residential property taxation will intensify once data on vacancy from LPT returns are available and analysed.

Appointments to State Boards

299. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide the most recent guidance issued by his Department regarding State appointments. [44309/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards was published by my Department in November 2014 and, subject to specific arrangements which apply to NewEra companies, these guidelines apply to all State Boards both commercial and non-commercial.

The guidelines build on earlier work by contributing to greater openness and transparency in the selection of appointees to State Boards.

These guidelines are available online at www.stateboards.ie and a copy is attached.

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/caighdeanOifigiul/2021/2021-09-28_pq-299-28-09_en.pdf] >Table]

An Garda Síochána

300. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a progress report on the refurbishment of a Garda station (details supplied); the indicative timeframe for the reopening of the station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45955/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): While the main construction works to the Garda Station building have been completed, commissioning of certain mechanical and electrical installations has not yet been demonstrated to the required standards.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) has been actively engaging with the contractor on this issue and the contractor has advised OPW that it expects that all of the outstanding commissioning should be concluded by the end of this week which will allow the building to be handed back to An Garda Síochána immediately thereafter. The full re-opening of the Station is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána.

Waterways Issues

301. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of works on a river (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[45957/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Office of Public Works (OPW) has maintenance responsibility for Arterial Drainage Schemes completed under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995. Each year the OPW carries out work to approximately 2000km of channels and about 200 structures around the country as part of its ongoing and rolling arterial drainage maintenance programme.

The River Galey maintenance works programme is carried out by the OPW as part of the Feale Catchment Drainage Scheme (CDS) annual maintenance programme. Works on the Feale CDS are generally carried out on a cyclical basis as part of the general maintenance operation. In addition to this, the channels are ranged, any deterioration is logged and in this regard, works may be brought forward out of the general maintenance cycle. The implementation of maintenance works is subject to a range of factors, including compliance with environmental legislation, landowner agreement, the availability of resources and weather events which allow a relatively small window for some works to be carried out. Works on the River Galey and the Feale CDS were carried out this year and further works will be continued into the future subject to these factors.

Budget 2022

302. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will increase official development assistance as part of Budget 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45996/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has increased year-on-year since 2014 with Budget 2021 announcing an overall allocation of €868 million for Irish Aid.

The ODA allocation for Budget 2022 is currently under review within my Department. My officials are engaging with the Department of Foreign Affairs in relation to this matter which will form part of the annual estimates process discussions.

Flood Risk Management

303. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45999/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Enniscorthy (River Slaney) flood defence scheme is being progressed by Wexford County Council (WCC) on behalf of the Commissioners of Public Works as a scheme under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995. This is a significant scheme within the Office of Public Works €1 billion flood relief investment programme nationally, from which the relevant funding for the Enniscorthy scheme will be made available, and on completion will protect 236 properties in the town.

The Scheme requires formal confirmation from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (MPER) to proceed. This is a statutory requirement under the Arterial Drainage Acts(ADA), which now, under the recent European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Arterial Drainage) Regulations 2019, also requires the MPER to carry out an Environmental

Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposed Scheme. This involves, inter alia, a formal review by MPER of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) commissioned by WCC and recently submitted (along with a Natura Impact Statement) to MPER as part of the formal Confirmation process.

DPER ran the statutory public consultation period required in relation to this process from July 28th to August 28th, 2020. The initial phase of the review of the EIAR and NIS was carried out by consultants engaged for this purpose by DPER, during September and early October. DPER subsequently forwarded submissions from the public consultation, and the EIAR and NIS reviews, to the OPW, along with a request for supplementary information, pursuant to ADA regulations 2019, to ensure that the design of the scheme complies with relevant environmental directives and regulations.

The OPW, Wexford County Council, and scheme consultants Mott Mc Donald formally submitted their response to DPER in the final week of April 2021. DPER confirmed that they have received the independent consultants' review of this information and are finalising their assessment of the supplementary information.

Completion of the above tasks and the progression of the flood relief scheme is a priority for all parties. In parallel with the confirmation process, OPW and Wexford County Council have been working on the following to ensure as efficient progression of the works as possible once the scheme is confirmed –

- Foreshore Licence Application public consultation has been completed, documentation is under review by the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, and approval is expected 2021.

- Technical approvals have been received from Irish Rail for the railway line crossings and from Irish Water for the diversion of services, the legal agreements with Irish Rail and Irish Water are complete, and will be signed post confirmation.

- Tender Pre-qualification for contractors for the bridgeworks was re-advertised and is currently being assessed. This will expedite contractor appointment post-confirmation.

- Service Diversions - the detailed design & tender documents for these works are complete, the tender for these works will be advertised following scheme confirmation.

- Archaeological excavations are ongoing.

- Treatment of invasive species (e.g. Japanese Knotweed) is ongoing.

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

304. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of increasing for the funding for the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General by 10%, 15% and 20%, respectively. [46062/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): The 2021 revised estimate gross figure for the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General was €15.506 million. The estimated cost of increasing the funding by 10%, 15% and 20% is as follows:

Gross Estimate	10%	15%	20%
2021	Increase	Increase	Increase

€m	€m	€m	€m
€15,506	€17,057	€17,832	€18,607

Public Sector Pay

305. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons at secretary general level in the civil service who are receiving payments in each of the four categories or bands of the secretary general grade in tabular form. [46113/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I refer the Deputy to the document attached at TAB A which details the 19 Secretary General posts and level, listed by Government Department.

Other senior posts in the Civil Service with pay rates at these levels are included at TAB B.

TAB A - Secretary General Posts

Level	Post	Number of Posts
I	Secretary General, Finance	
	Secretary General, Taoiseach / Secretary General to the Government	
	Secretary General, Public Expenditure and Reform	3
II	Secretary General, Agriculture, Food and the Marine	
	Secretary General, Enterprise, Trade & Employment	
	Secretary General, Justice	
	Secretary General, Health*	
	Secretary General, Foreign Affairs	
	Secretary General, Environment, Climate and Communications	
	Secretary General, Social Protection	
	Secretary General, Education	
	Secretary General, Housing, Local Government & Heritage	
	Secretary General, Transport	

Level	Post	Number of Posts
	Secretary General, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	11
III	Secretary General, Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	
	Secretary General, Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	
	Secretary General, Defence	
	Secretary General to the President	
	Secretary General, Rural and Community Development	5

**A salary of €292,000 was sanctioned in 2021 for recruitment to the post in the Department of Health. The successful candidate indicated on his appointment in April 2021 that he was waiving the salary increase for the time being*

TAB B - Other posts at these pay levels

Level	Post	Number of Posts
II	Chairman, Revenue Commissioners	
	Comptroller & Auditor General	
	Director of Public Prosecutions	3
III	Chairman, OPW	
	Chief State Solicitor	
	Clerk of the Dáil	
	Commissioner, Revenue (x2)	
	Director General, CSO	
	Director General, Office of the Attorney General	
	Chief Parliamentary Counsel	
	Second Secretary / Ambassador, Foreign Affairs (x3)	
	Second Secretary, Taoiseach	
	CEO, Courts Service	13

Departmental Properties

306. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the length of time an organisation (details supplied) has had use of the buildings at a location free of charge; the reason such an arrangement was permitted; the reason the organisation was accommodated in this way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46190/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I am informed by the Commissioners of Public Works (OPW) that this matter is being reviewed. However as the files have to be recalled from offsite storage it is not possible to provide a response within the usual timeframe for PQs. A response will issue directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Expenditure

307. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 287 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46196/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): Further to my response to Parliamentary Question No. 287 of 15th September last, I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's participation in Common Purpose Ireland leadership programmes is part of the broader continuous professional development framework for staff in my Department. This includes attendance at learning and development courses, seminars and conferences, membership of professional bodies and the completion of various academic courses. The professional development framework is subject to ongoing review and evaluation to ensure it offers value for money, meets the strategic business requirements of my Department and the professional development needs of staff.

Participation in Common Purpose Ireland leadership programmes facilitates exposure to senior level leadership challenges not offered elsewhere. Given this, the contract with Common Purpose Ireland was awarded without the use of a competitive procedure, in line with EU Directives and national policies on procurement.

Heritage Projects

308. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the OPW plans to upgrade the condition of the public car park at Castletown House in Celbridge, County Kildare; the method of upgrading the surface which has been considered; the timelines for implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46374/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is in the process of providing continuing routine maintenance to the surface of the public car park at Castletown, Celbridge, County Kildare. These works are part of the ongoing maintenance works carried out at Castletown on an annual basis. There are no plans to replace the surface at this time.

Office of Public Works

309. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which the OPW manages its customer service process in respect of advising the pub-

lic of the way in which it manages compliments, comments and complaints; the way in which that interaction occurs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46375/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The OPW is first and foremost a service organisation. We are primarily concerned with the delivery of services to our customers. Our ethos is client focus, timely delivery and value for money in a sustainable manner. Through the OPW Customer Action Plan, we are committed to providing a professional, efficient and courteous service to all our customers, as well as the delivering the highest quality of service in accordance with the guiding principles of Quality Customer Service.

As part of the OPW Customer Action Plan, we are committed to:

- Prominently displaying procedures on how to make a complaint on our website www.gov.ie;
- Ensuring our complaint procedure is included in our Customer Charter;
- Undertaking to deal with all comments or complaints promptly, fairly and objectively in accordance with the facts of the case;
- Closely monitoring the number and nature of comments, complaints or compliments received and use this information in effecting any necessary improvements to the quality of our services and decision-making.

If an OPW customer wishes to make a complaint, they can avail our Complaints/Appeals Procedure. In the first instance, make contact with the Customer Service Officer (CSO) for the particular Business area you are dealing with. Contact details for OPW CSOs contained in the Customer Action Plan. If a complaint is in relation to service delivery at Heritage sites, it can be made to the Guide or the Guide Supervisor on the site in question.

Where no guide service is available or if the complaint relates to another aspect of services offered by the Heritage Service, then the complaint should be made directly to the Customer Service Officer responsible for that area.

The OPW regards feedback as the key to understanding the needs and expectations of our customers. To ensure that views and comments – both positive and negative – are communicated to us, we encourage staff to use their day-to-day contact with customers as a means of gathering feedback on quality of service provided. Customers can also email their comments to info@opw.ie.

Departmental Expenditure

310. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total underspend in terms of current and capital expenditure broken down by Department. [46524/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): Regular reporting on spend against profile, on both a gross and net basis, is published each month in the Fiscal Monitor. This is available online at www.gov.ie/en/collection/c1b65-fiscal-monitors-2021/.

The table below outlines the end-August gross position for current and capital spending, including variances from profile, by each Ministerial Vote Group as published in the August Fiscal Monitor.

MINISTERIAL VOTE GROUP	End Aug Profile*	End Aug Out-turn	Variance	Variance
	€m	€m	€m	%
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE	784	701	-83	-10.6%
Current	617	574	-43	-6.9%
Capital	167	127	-41	-24.3%
CHILDREN, EQUALITY, DISABILITY, INTEGRATION AND YOUTH	1,259	1,192	-67	-5.3%
Current	1,243	1,177	-66	-5.3%
Capital	17	16	-1	-6.9%
DEFENCE	655	626	-29	-4.4%
Current	602	581	-21	-3.4%
Capital	53	45	-8	-15.8%
EDUCATION	5,857	5,841	-17	-0.3%
Current	5,403	5,368	-35	-0.6%
Capital	455	473	18	4.0%
ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT	543	474	-68	-12.6%
Current	219	209	-10	-4.4%
Capital	324	265	-59	-18.2%
ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND COMMUNICATIONS	303	216	-86	-28.5%
Current	96	85	-11	-11.7%
Capital	206	131	-75	-36.3%
FINANCE	358	339	-18	-5.1%
Current	344	329	-15	-4.3%
Capital	14	10	-3	-23.8%
FOREIGN AFFAIRS	559	559	0	0.0%
Current	553	556	3	0.5%
Capital	6	3	-3	-45.2%

Questions - Written Answers

MINISTERIAL VOTE GROUP	End Aug Pro-file*	End Aug Out-turn	Variance	Variance
	€m	€m	€m	%
FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE	2,178	2,025	-153	-7.0%
Current	1,898	1,815	-83	-4.4%
Capital	280	211	-70	-24.8%
HEALTH	14,075	13,343	-732	-5.2%
Current	13,568	12,912	-656	-4.8%
Capital	507	431	-76	-15.0%
HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HERITAGE	2,509	2,207	-302	-12.0%
Current	1,493	1,304	-189	-12.7%
Capital	1,015	902	-113	-11.2%
JUSTICE	1,947	1,879	-69	-3.5%
Current	1,802	1,771	-30	-1.7%
Capital	146	107	-38	-26.3%
PUBLIC EXPENDITURE AND REFORM	800	784	-17	-2.1%
Current	707	714	7	1.0%
Capital	94	70	-24	-25.4%
RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	174	156	-18	-10.2%
Current	125	114	-10	-8.2%
Capital	49	41	-7	-15.1%
SOCIAL PROTECTION	20,688	20,950	261	1.3%
Current	20,680	20,946	266	1.3%
Capital	8	4	-5	-57.5%
TAOISEACH'S	143	132	-11	-7.9%
Current	143	132	-11	-7.9%
Capital	-	-	-	-
TOURISM, CULTURE, ARTS, GAELTACHT, SPORT AND MEDIA	626	505	-121	-19.4%

MINISTERIAL VOTE GROUP	End Aug Profile*	End Aug Out-turn	Variance	Variance
	€m	€m	€m	%
Current	560	466	-94	-16.8%
Capital	66	39	-27	-40.9%
TRANSPORT	1,648	1,502	-146	-8.9%
Current	659	633	-26	-4.0%
Capital	990	870	-120	-12.1%
Total Gross Cumulative Voted Spending	55,106	53,430	-1,676	-3.0%
Current	50,709	49,685	-1,024	-2.0%
Capital	4,397	3,745	-652	-14.8%

* Profiles are based on Estimates voted by Dáil Éireann with an aggregate amount of €86,636m for the year.

EU Programmes

311. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the PEACE PLUS cross-Border EU programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46666/21]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I thank the Deputy for her interest in the PEACE PLUS programme. I am pleased to be able to report that this ambitious new North South EU-funded programme is now in the final stages of development.

PEACE PLUS was first proposed by the European Commission in 2018 as part of its package of measures for the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and Cohesion Policy for the 2021-27 period. This proposal was and remains a clear demonstration of the importance placed by the EU, and by the Irish and UK Governments, of ensuring continued investment for peace, prosperity and cross-border cooperation, in support of the Good Friday Agreement.

PEACE PLUS will cover an eligible area of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland (i.e. Counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo). It will replace the current PEACE and INTERREG cross-border EU programmes by combining these two funding streams into one cohesive new North South programme for 2021-27.

The cross-border Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has been leading the development of PEACE PLUS, working in close cooperation with my Department and with the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. The SEUPB has been assisted in this development task by a cross-sectoral Programme Development Steering Group (PDSG). This steering group consists of representatives of central and local government, environmental, rural, voluntary, community, equality, business and trade union groups from both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The development of PEACE PLUS has also been shaped by extensive stakeholder engagement. This has included two major public consultation exercises, which saw events held in every county of the eligible area for the new programme, as well as the collection of several hundred written submissions. There has also been close engagement between Government Departments North and South in order to agree and develop areas of cross-border collaboration

under the new programme.

On foot of this considerable preparatory work, the SEUPB has finalised a draft PEACE PLUS programme based on six thematic investment areas:

- Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities;
- Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation;
- Empowering and Investing in Young People;
- Healthy and Inclusive Communities;
- Supporting a Sustainable and Better Connected Future;
- Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration.

Details of the investment themes are available in the Consultation Information Document on the SEUPB's PEACE PLUS website, and I encourage anyone with an interest in the new programme to visit to learn more.

PEACE PLUS has an anticipated total budget of over €1 billion. This is around twice the value of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes combined, and demonstrates the scale and ambition of the new programme. This cross-border investment is more important than ever, in the context both of the challenges of Brexit and recovery from the pandemic.

I look forward to bringing the draft PEACE PLUS programme to Government for approval shortly. The draft programme will subsequently be submitted to the European Commission for final consideration and approval. This will allow for a formal launch of PEACE PLUS during 2022, with the first funding approvals taking place later that year.

Coastal Protection

312. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of and position regarding plans to counter the impact of climate change, in particular the impact of a rise in sea level and coastal flooding on residents and the public transport network in the coastal areas of Fingal, Dublin city and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46704/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): In 2018, €1bn investment was made available to the Office of Public Works over the lifetime of the National Development Plan 2018-2027 to implement the recommendations of the Flood Risk Management Plans as part of Project 2040. This investment is to underpin the delivery of the existing capital flood relief programme and the additional flood relief schemes recommended in the Flood Risk Management Plans. These plans set out the proposed measures, including physical flood defence works / schemes, to address the significant flood risks identified, in a comprehensive and sustainable way. The proposed measures take into account the potential impacts of climate change, and address the need to assess and mitigate environmental impacts. The plans include a number of schemes in the coastal areas of Fingal, Dublin City and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and updates on these schemes are detailed below.

The Local Authorities work closely with the OPW as the Approving Authority to manage flood risk. Each scheme will be subject to an assessment of adaptability for future climate change within its particular context, and, as appropriate, provisions will be made in the design

and construction of the schemes to cater for potential future changes. The Brief for the detailed development of the schemes includes a requirement for a Scheme Adaptation Plan, which will set out how climate change has been taken into account during the design and construction, and what adaptation or alternate measures might be needed into the future.

The Government has also established an Inter-Departmental Group on Managing Coastal Change to scope out an approach for the development of a national co-ordinated and integrated strategy to manage the projected impact of coastal change to our coastal communities, economies, heritage, culture and environment. The Inter-Departmental Group is jointly chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the OPW and will bring forward options and recommendations for the Government to consider.

Dublin City

Dodder (tidal)

As part of the Dodder River (Tidal) Flood Alleviation Scheme, the flood defence works downstream of Ballsbridge are complete and provide a 100-year standard of protection for the fluvial scenario and a 200-year standard for tidal events including freeboard.

South Campshires:

The South Campshires Flood Protection Project primarily provides flood protection to the South inner city of Dublin from Georges Quay to approximately 50m east of the Samuel Beckett Bridge. The project is now substantially complete following work by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Dublin City Council (DCC).

Sandymount:

Consultants were engaged in 2021 to carry out further work on wave overtopping on the promenade and advise on rock armour sizes for the promenade.

Clontarf:

A number of environmental and topographical surveys have been carried out. The existing sea wall has been drone-surveyed and a structural/leachate survey of the wall has also been carried out. A decision on the flood-wall line is awaited.

A public communications plan is being put in place by the area office and a steering group meeting is to take place with the local councillors in October.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council are currently working closely with the OPW to manage flood risk on three main river catchments in the County. These river catchments are:

Loughlinstown where a Consultant has been appointed and early design work has already commenced in this Catchment

Carysfort-Maretimo and Old Connacht/Wilford, which will both be addressed in the next phase of the FRMP implementation.

Fingal

In some cases, CFRAM identified that technically viable flood relief schemes for certain communities would not be economically, viable based on the level of assessment of the CFRAM Studies. In such cases a Scheme Viability Review (SVR) will be undertaken to review and con-

firm the likely viability of a scheme for the community.

OPW are responsible for procuring a Scheme Viability Review to review and confirm the likely viability of a scheme for the following locations; Skerries, Rush, Malahide & Portmarnock.

Sutton / Howth North

Assessments of the Sutton/Baldoyle area as part of CFRAM Programme confirmed that the progression of the impacts of climate change will be slow and will evolve over a prolonged period. The 'Sutton & Howth North' area has been retained as an Area for Further Assessment under the second cycle of the EU Flood Directive, which is required to consider and plan for the potential impacts of climate change. Based on that, flood protection measures will be assessed and, where viable, implemented in staged process as the impacts of climate change develop.

Sports Funding

313. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media further to Parliamentary Question No. 508 of 27 July 2021, if she will convene a meeting between her officials, the CSSO and a sports club (details supplied) in an effort to release a grant to the club in County Kildare; and if her attention has been drawn to an impasse regarding outstanding issues in respect of documentation. [45994/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): As outlined in my response to the parliamentary question referred to, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme and due to the level of grants received by the club in the past, it is necessary to put in place a number of legal deeds in order to protect the public investment in the facility. Legal formalities in relation to this grant have not yet been finalised as the Chief State Solicitor's Office is still awaiting documentation from the grantee's solicitor. I understand the latest request for documentation was issued by the CSSO on 26 July. My officials are available to meet the grantee if that is considered helpful and the club can contact the Sports Capital Division of my Department directly in this regard. As mentioned previously, once the CSSO receives the outstanding, requisite documentation and confirms receipt of same, there will be no undue delay on the part of my Department in advancing the grant.

Departmental Schemes

314. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if funding has or will be allocated to Fáilte Ireland to enable it to issue another call for applications for grants under the large grant scheme; if so, the amount available for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46433/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): Platforms for Growth is Fáilte Ireland's strategic platform-based approach to large-scale capital investment in tourism product, which targets investment in line with specific 'platforms' (project types) identified as a priority for tourists on the basis of research and insights. Through this capital investment programme, Fáilte Ireland targets specific 'platforms' upon which it can develop and enhance visitor attractions of scale that have the greatest potential to grow tourism across Ireland throughout the year.

To date there have been calls for grant applications on two distinct platforms. The first call for applications in 2019 focused on the platform of immersive heritage and cultural attractions and invited proposals for large-scale projects of €2.5 million upwards. Upon completion of the assessment process, funding totalling over €44 million was awarded for the development of four new world-class tourist attractions in Cavan, Donegal, Mayo and Dublin. For the second platform, launched in January 2020 and involving a targeted call for applications from local authorities, funding of €19 million has been awarded for the development of world-class activity facility centres at 22 waterside locations across the country where water-based activities are a key visitor attraction. Further focused calls on other platforms will follow in due course.

Details of the funding allocations provided by my Department to Fáilte Ireland are published in the annual Revised Estimates Volume issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Fáilte Ireland's overall capital allocation for 2022 will be confirmed in the 2022 Revised Estimates Volume (REV) for Public Services.

Departmental Reports

315. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when she plans to implement the recommendations in the report by the Night-time Economic Taskforce; the timelines for delivery of these actions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46525/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Report of the Night-Time Economy Taskforce recommends 36 actions that are to be delivered across a range of Departments, local Government, Agencies and the Sector itself. It is envisaged that the implementation of these actions will help build, support and sustain the Night-Time Economy sector.

All of the actions and associated timeframes for delivery are included in the Report which can be accessed on my Department's website (www.gov.ie/en/publication/c1ba7-report-of-the-night-time-economy-taskforce). My own Department is leading on and supporting a number of important actions in the report and I expect to see progress on these and all of the actions contained in the report over the coming months.

Departmental Schemes

316. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will introduce a continuity grant scheme for inbound tour operators similar to that introduced in Budget 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46678/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The Ireland Based Inbound Agents Business Continuity Scheme, was introduced to assist Republic of Ireland based Inbound Tour Operators, Destination Management Companies (DMCs) and Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs) who package, sell and distribute Ireland's tourism product overseas and have suffered significant losses as a result of COVID-19.

The overall purpose of the scheme was to help Irish Based Inbound Agents to withstand the impact of COVID-19 by providing a direct financial contribution to support their business continuity plans and to seek position them to continue operating through 2021.

Informed by the recommendations in the latest report from the Recovery Oversight Group, and in the context of Budget 2022, I am working with officials and Government colleagues to establish what further supports can be put in place for the sector.

Grant Payments

317. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the amount of funding allocated to applicants for the sports capital grant in an area (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46726/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): The Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP) 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 SCEP closed for applications on Monday, 1 March 2021. By the closing date, over 3,100 applications were submitted seeking over €200 million in funding. This is the highest number of applications ever received.

The scoring system and assessment procedures were published earlier this year and all applications are being assessed accordingly. Approximately one thousand of the submitted applications were for 'equipment-only' projects. These applications were assessed first and grants with a total value of €16.6 million were announced on 6 August. Full details of these allocations are available at www.gov.ie/en/collection/471ed5-sports-capital-allocations/. The remaining applications for capital works are now being assessed. Given the large number of applications received, this work is likely to take a number of months to complete with allocations expected to be announced before the end of this year.

In relation to older grants, all applications, allocations and payments under the Programme are published on a county basis on my Department's website at www.gov.ie/en/service/d13385-sports-capital-programme/#sports-capital-programme-applications-allocations-and-payments. A breakdown on a constituency basis is not readily available.

Homeless World Cup

318. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media her views on Ireland hosting the Homeless World Cup; if her Department has engaged with an organisation (details supplied) in relation to this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46786/21]

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): The hosting of international sports events, both participative and spectator sports, can provide a positive showcase for Ireland and help attract additional international visitors. I am supportive of the on-going efforts of the tourism agencies and the national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport to attract international events. Any proposal to support the hosting of an event must be subject to an assessment of the costs/benefits involved in any State financial support.

With specific regard to the Homeless World Cup, the organisation in question contacted my office earlier this year and received a response outlining potential sports and tourism supports and the most appropriate channels through which these could be pursued.

From a tourism perspective, subject to a favourable assessment of a detailed proposal for a

Homeless World Cup in Ireland, Fáilte Ireland could consider providing funding and complementary non-financial supports to assist the bid stage, as well as providing assistance and guidance with running the event. Accordingly, the organisation in question was given the email addresses for suitable contact points in Fáilte Ireland's Meet in Ireland team and was advised to contact them directly with further details of the event and its bid proposal in order to pursue possible financial supports and other non-financial assistance.

From a sporting perspective, funding for sport is allocated by Sport Ireland and is channelled through the relevant National Governing Body of Sport, which in the case of football, is the Football Association of Ireland (FAI). The organisation in question was advised to contact the FAI directly to discuss any supports that might be available.

I have asked Fáilte Ireland to provide the Deputy with further details of any potential tourism-related bid supports. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

319. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the criteria set down by her Department to ensure that parity was achieved for smaller or newer clubs within an organisation that received funding or supplementary funding due to the financial impact of Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46809/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): A total Covid-19 funding package of €88.5 million was provided last year 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.

The funding package included support for the three main field sports organisations (the FAI, GAA and IRFU), a Resilience Fund to support the National Governing Bodies of Sport, a Sports Club Resilience Fund to support clubs, and a Sports Restart and Renewal Fund.

The funding was invested through new grant schemes developed by Sport Ireland in consultation with my Department's Sports Policy Division. The criteria and terms and conditions of funding were drafted by Sport Ireland in accordance with Section 11 of the Sport Ireland Act 2015, which provides that Sport Ireland shall establish the criteria and terms and conditions of its grant funding schemes. Funding allocations to NGBs and clubs under the new schemes were determined following a robust grant application and assessment process conducted by Sport Ireland.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for further information in relation to the criteria and terms and conditions of the funding allocated to organisations. Please inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Sport and Recreational Development

320. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if he has engaged with Longford County Council regarding proposals to establish a skate park in Longford town. [46820/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and

Media (Deputy Jack Chambers): In relation to providing financial assistance for new sports facilities, my Department operates two grant schemes.

The Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP) 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 SCEP closed for applications on Monday, 1 March 2021. By the closing date, over 3,100 applications were submitted seeking over €200 million in funding. This is the highest number of applications ever received.

The scoring system and assessment procedures were published earlier this year and all applications are being assessed accordingly. Approximately one thousand of the submitted applications were for ‘equipment-only’ projects. These applications were assessed first and grants with a total value of €16.6 million were announced on 6 August.

The remaining applications for capital works are now being assessed. Given the large number of applications received, this work is likely to take a number of months to complete with allocations expected to be announced before the end of this year. Once these allocations are finalised an announcement will be made in relation to the opening of the next round of the Programme.

The National Sports Policy as published in 2018 provided for the establishment of a Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). The scheme is designed for projects where the grant being sought is greater than the maximum grant available under the SCEP. The first allocations under the LSSIF were announced in January 2020 and thus far, approximately €86.4 million has been awarded to 33 different proposals. The priority in the short term is to advance all of these projects. As it is now over 18 months since the first allocations were made, and in view of the issues faced by grantees as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is timely to review progress on all projects. My Department is engaging with all applicants in this regard. The timing of any new call for proposals is also being considered and it is expected that the Review will be completed in the coming months.

It is open to any relevant organisation with a suitable sporting project, including a local authority, to apply for funding under the SCEP or LSSIF. In this regard, my Department will be in touch with all local authorities when the schemes are open for new applications.

Nitrates Usage

321. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the steps he is taking to promote compliance with the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations namely the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, SI No. 605 of 2017 to ensure that rivers and streams are protected from bovine excrement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46383/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): Clean and well-protected water is important for the continuing success of Ireland’s society and economy.

Protecting and restoring water quality in Ireland requires, among other actions, robust measures to address the loss of agricultural nutrients into our rivers, lakes and groundwater.

My Department works closely with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on these issues.

Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme is a key instrument in achieving good water quality. The current Good Agricultural Practice Regulations run to the end of 2021 and a new Nitrates Action Programme will be published at the beginning of 2022. A second consultation phase on the draft Nitrates Action Programme has just been completed and my officials are currently assessing the responses.

Improving compliance with the Regulations is a key measure in the draft Nitrates Action Programme. It is likely that this new programme will also include measures to improve training for farmers and their farm advisers.

Farmers are provided with detailed information on how to comply with the current regulations and on how to improve farm sustainability more generally. This information comes from local authorities; from the Nitrates Section of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and from Teagasc advisory services as well as through communications from programmes such as the Agricultural Catchments Programme and the Signpost Farms programme.

On compliance assurance, inspections are currently conducted by local authorities with assistance from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides support and coordination to each county council and has a statutory role to supervise the local authorities' environmental activities.

Question No. 322 answered with Question No. 137.

Planning Issues

323. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of times between January 2017 to August 2020 that the board of An Bord Pleanála overruled the recommendation of case inspectors with regards to decisions on planning applications and appeals in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47135/21]

347. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of times that An Bord Pleanála has rejected its own inspector's advice to refuse planning approval over the past five years; the locations of these planning applications in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46360/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 323 and 347 together.

Since the establishment of An Bord Pleanála in 1977, planning legislation has clearly assigned final responsibility for decisions on planning appeals to the Board of An Bord Pleanála. The role of the Board is to consider the Inspector's report, along with all other relevant application documentation and submissions from third parties including observers, in order to come to a final decision. Where the Board's conclusion differs from that of the inspector, the decision must include the reasons for so differing in order to ensure transparency in the decision making process.

Consequently, the data requested is not collated by this Department. Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website, at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/service/9e4ee-get-planning-statistics/.

The data collected relates to the total number of applications and decisions for all developments that require planning permission, broken down by year and planning authority.

Arrangements have been put in place by all bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. This provides a speedy, efficient and cost effective system to address queries directly to the relevant bodies. The contact email address for An Bord Pleanála is Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie.

Question No. 324 answered with Question No. 147.

Student Accommodation

325. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the amount of loans provided by the Housing and Finance Agency to each institute of higher education for each year data is available; the amount of financing drawn down to date from each institute of higher education for each year data is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45964/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Housing Finance Agency (HFA) was established by the Housing Finance Agency Act, 1981 and its function is to advance loan finance to local authorities, the voluntary housing sector and Higher Education Institutes, to be used by them for any purpose authorised by the Housing Acts, 1966-2014, and to borrow or raise funds for this purpose.

The Housing Finance Act 1981 was amended in 2016 by Section 51 of the Planning and Development (Housing) Act Residential Tenancies Act 2016 to allow the HFA to lend to Universities for the purposes of student accommodation.

Since that time almost €170 million of loans have been approved for over 1,400 units of accommodation in UCD, Trinity and UCC. A breakdown of the loans approved are set out in the table below:

Name of HEI	Date Approved	Value Approved €	Date Advanced	Year Advanced	Value Advanced €
UCD	13/09/2018	123,000,000	25/11/2019	2019	60,000,000
UCD	13/09/2018		12/06/2020	2020	10,000,000
UCD	13/09/2018		25/09/2020	2020	20,000,000
Trinity	06/12/2018	12,000,000	11/12/2020	2020	9,000,000
UCC	28/03/2019	33,000,000	04/12/2020	2020	10,300,000
UCC	28/03/2019		23/07/2021	2021	7,800,000
Total		168,000,000			117,100,000

HEIs	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Loan Approvals	€135,000,000	€33,000,000			€168,000,000

HEIs	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Loan Advances		€60,000,000	€49,300,000	€7,800,000	€117,100,000

With regard to Housing for All, Section 3.6.3 (Facilitate Lending for Social and Affordable Housing) foresees the HFA's role being expanded to enhance the supply of student accommodation by allowing them to lend to Technological Universities. A commitment is made to legislate for this and the relevant Action Point is 18.10.

Student Accommodation

326. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of student accommodation providers that have received planning permission to rezone for other purposes in each year since 2011; the number of student beds that this has removed from the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45965/21]

366. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of student beds that have been lost in each year for which data is available due to purpose-built student accommodation being provided with planning permission to convert for alternative uses; if this has been done on a permanent or temporary basis; the duration in the case of temporary permission; the alternative use approved in each case whether short-term, tourist letting, co-living and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46574/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 326 and 366 together.

The specific information requested by the Deputy regarding the number of student beds lost each year due to purpose-built student accommodation being granted change of use planning permission, and the number of student accommodation providers that have received planning permission for change of use of such accommodation either on a temporary or permanent basis, is not available in my Department.

Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website, at the following link:

www.gov.ie/en/service/9e4ee-get-planning-statistics/

However, the data collected relates to the total number of planning applications and decisions for all developments that require planning permission, broken down by year and planning authority (but not broken down by reason for the grant or refusal of permission), by the duration of the permission, nor the type of development involved. Such information may be sought directly from the relevant planning authority.

In addition, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical office, compiles and makes available detailed data on a number of planning related issues including permissions granted and completions by development type and county. Data is available at the following link on the CSO website: www.cso.ie/en/statistics/construction/planningpermissions/

Heritage Projects

327. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of towns awaiting progress for the commencement of phase one of the collaborative

town health check process; the budget allocated by his Department to the Heritage Council for this initiative in 2021; the average costing for an initiative per town based on the experience of operating the programme by his Department and the Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45981/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The Collaborative Town Centre Health Check is an initiative of the Heritage Council which is funded by my Department. Arrangements have been put in place by all bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. This provides a speedy, efficient and cost effective system to address queries directly to the relevant bodies. The contact email address for the Heritage Council is oireachtas@heritagecouncil.ie.

Local Authorities

328. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the breakdown of acquisition funding that has been provided to Clare County Council between 2016 and 2020, in tabular form. [46003/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Funding provided by my Department to Clare County Council under the Social Housing Investment Programme for the acquisition of properties for social housing use for the period 2016 to 2020, is as follows -

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
€3,398,301	€10,780,103	€14,899,484	€9,031,733	€5,757,185

Housing Schemes

329. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he plans to review HAP bands for social housing tenants. [46004/21]

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:

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 should be noted that 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. It is considered 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.

The Programme for Government commits to ensuring that HAP levels are adequate to support vulnerable households, while we increase the supply of social housing. My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. Under Housing for All, my Department will undertake an analytical exercise to examine whether an increase in the level of discretion available to Local Authorities under HAP is required, in order to maintain adequate levels of HAP support.

Defective Building Materials

330. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he or his officials have engaged with and-or liaised with Ministers and-or officials in other jurisdictions in respect of issues impacting houses such as pyrite and MICA; if he will provide a schedule of those engagements; and if he will set out the nature of those engagements. [46020/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Dwellings Damaged by the Use of Defective Concrete Blocks in Construction (Remediation) (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2020 came in to operation on 31 January 2020 and the resulting Defective Concrete Blocks Grant scheme has been open for applications since the end of June 2020.

The Scheme was informed by the work of an Expert Panel and the current maximum grant amounts payable under the 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 terms of reference of the Expert Panel on defective concrete blocks did not extend beyond the jurisdiction of the Irish State.

I have not engaged or liaised with Ministers or officials in other jurisdictions on the matter. I did however receive a written representation from Mr. Colum Eastwood MP on the 21 July 2021. This representation was in relation to a request that consideration be given to the inclusion of non principal private residences under the current Defective Concrete Blocks Grant scheme relating to Donegal and Mayo only. A response was provided in writing on 2 September 2021.

Defective Building Materials

331. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his attention has been drawn to instances in which defective concrete blocks originating from Ireland that made their way into supply chains to other jurisdictions. [46021/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Dwellings Damaged by the Use of Defective Concrete Blocks in Construction (Remediation) (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2020 came in to operation on 31 January 2020 and the resulting Defective Concrete Blocks Grant scheme has been open for applications since the end of June 2020.

The Scheme was informed by the work of an Expert Panel and the current maximum grant amounts payable under the 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 terms of reference of the Expert Panel on defective concrete blocks did not extend beyond the jurisdiction of the Irish State.

Water Pollution

332. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the measures his Department is taking to ensure that safety issues regarding drinking water are quickly identified and communicated to relevant stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46045/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 122 of 2014) requires that where a water supplier discovers a failure to meet the quality standards that person shall notify the relevant supervisory authority for that supply in accordance with such guidelines as the Agency may issue for that purpose.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified two serious incidents in recent weeks at drinking water plants serving Dublin City (Ballymore Eustace plant) and serving Gorey, Co. Wexford. This included, in the case of Gorey, illnesses detected by the HSE in the community served by that water supply. The EPA is continuing to investigate these incidents.

Additionally, I have also met with the Managing Director of Irish Water as well as both the Chief Executives of Dublin City Council and Wexford County Council on 18 September. I have requested Irish Water to immediately undertake an audit of each water treatment plant across the country to ensure that proper processes are in place in terms of dealing with and escalating any incidents which may arise.

I will meet again with Irish Water and the local authorities in question early next week to discuss the response to the above incidents.

Housing Schemes

333. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when the fresh start principle for applications to State-run affordable housing and loan schemes outlined in the Housing for All plan, which would mean that those who are divorced or separated would be eligible to apply for State schemes, will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46065/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Housing for All is the most ambitious housing plan in the history of our State, backed up by an

unprecedented financial commitment of in excess of €4bn per annum. In general, affordable purchase schemes under the plan will be targeted at first time buyers. However, it is intended that a ‘Fresh Start’ principle will apply for applications to both affordable purchase housing and local authority home loan schemes. This would mean that people who are divorced or who have undergone insolvency proceedings, will be eligible to apply.

Housing for All commits to delivering an average of 4,000 affordable purchase homes per annum.

Regarding the Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme, I have already commenced Part 2 of the Affordable Housing Act 2021 regarding Affordable Dwelling Purchase Arrangements. Section 10 of that Act details criteria for the assessment of applicant eligibility by a housing authority and provides eligibility in cases where a marriage, civil partnership or relationship has ended. It is intended the Regulations governing the operation of these provisions will be put in place in the near future.

With regard to Cost Rental affordable homes, the first set of Regulations under the Affordable Housing Act 2021 came into effect on 19 August, and these govern the process by which the owners of dwellings may obtain the designation of their properties as Cost Rental dwellings. With the relevant elements of the Act relating to the local authority affordable purchase scheme (Part 2) and Cost Rental (Part 3) now commenced, it is my intention to make further Regulations governing eligibility and price ceilings that will be applicable to these schemes by November 2021. These regulations will also reflect the ‘Fresh Start’ principle.

Finally, the successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, the ‘Local Authority Home Loan’, which will be in place later in 2021, will also apply this ‘Fresh start’ principle. The ‘Fresh Start’ definition will come into effect with the other changes under the Local Authority Home Loan Scheme later in Q4 this year, when the new Regulations and revised Credit Policy are in place.

Water Supply

334. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the proposed Shannon pipeline for water provision is still being considered by Government; and the timelines and current projected costs for the project. [46086/21]

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, including the Water Supply Project – Eastern and Midlands. Irish Water takes a strategic, nationwide approach to asset planning and investment, and meeting customer requirements. The prioritisation and progression of individual projects is a matter for determination by Irish Water.

Irish Water is also developing a National Water Resource Plan (NWRP) which is a 25 year strategy to ensure a sustainable, secure and reliable public drinking water supply, setting out how Irish Water is to balance the supply and demand for drinking water over the short, medium and long term. It is a strategic framework used to identify deficiencies across the whole water supply system, and to develop plans and programmes to address them through capital investment, demand management and improved operation of facilities and distribution networks. The NWRP consists of the published Framework Plan and the development of the four Regional Water Resources Plans (RWRPs), which Irish Water is currently developing, to identify the combination of preferred approaches within and between regions to address the needs identified

in the Framework Plan.

Under the Water Services Act 2013, Irish Water is required to seek the consent of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage given with the approval of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to enter into capital commitments. Irish Water must seek Ministerial consent prior to entering into any individual capital commitment of a value in excess of €20m. This is a financial control and not a project consent and consideration must also be given to the appropriate application of the Public Spending Code for evaluating, planning and managing the public investment in the project as it proceeds through its lifecycle.

It is anticipated that Irish Water will be submitting a Preliminary Business Case during 2022, including an update to the preliminary cost estimate, to inform the Government's Decision at Gate 1 - Approval in Principle to the Project. The Government's consideration will also be informed by an independent external review of the Water Supply Project – Eastern and Midlands by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities also to be undertaken in 2022 having regard to Irish Water's Preliminary Business Case including the National Water Resource Plan and its associated Regional Water Resource Plans.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Census of Population

335. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the projected timelines for the completion of the national census and consequent Constituency Commission report. [46089/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In September 2020, the Government, on the advice of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), decided to postpone the 2021 Census due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The next census is now due to take place on 3 April 2022. Reviews of Dáil and European Parliament constituencies are linked to the publication of Census of Population data. In practical terms, the publication of preliminary census results triggers the establishment of a Constituency Commission under section 5(1) of the Electoral Act 1997 with the Commission required to present its report on Dáil and European Parliament constituencies to the chairman of the Dáil within three months of publication of final census results.

The timing for the publication of both preliminary census results and final census results are matters for the CSO but typically have taken place within approximately 3 months and 12 months respectively of the holding of the census. The next review of Dáil and European Parliament constituencies will commence following the publication of preliminary census results and will be completed in accordance with the statutory timeframe.

Notwithstanding the above, in January of this year, I published the General Scheme of the Electoral Reform Bill. The general scheme addresses a number of commitments in the Programme for Government - Our Shared Future including the commitment to establish a statutory Electoral Commission. The general scheme has been published on my Department's website at www.gov.ie/en/publication/34cf6-general-scheme-of-the-electoral-reform-bill-2020/.

The Electoral Commission will be independent of Government and will report directly to the Oireachtas. Following its establishment, it will, among other matters, take on several existing statutory electoral functions from the outset, including the work currently undertaken by

Constituency Commissions.

Planning Issues

336. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the measures he is considering within the planning appeals system to curb the challenges of serial objectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46105/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): Public participation is one of the key principles of the planning system in Ireland, and reflects the important principles set out in the Aarhus convention. In accordance with Article 29 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended (the Regulations), any person or body, on payment of the prescribed fee, may make a submission or observation in writing to a planning authority in relation to a planning application within the period of 5 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by the authority of the application.

Under Section 37 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act) an applicant for permission and any person who made submissions or observations in writing in relation to the planning application to the planning authority in accordance with the permission regulations and on payment of the appropriate fee, may, at any time before the expiration of the appropriate period, appeal to the Board against a decision of a planning authority under section 34 of the Act.

It is a matter for the Courts to decide whether to grant leave for Judicial Review in planning cases in accordance with sections 50 and 50A of the Act. While respecting the system of public participation, the Government is planning legislative change to reform judicial review in the planning domain, and also introduce and establish a new division of the High Court to deal with planning and environmental cases. In addition, the Government's Housing for All Plan has committed to a review of planning legislation to ensure it is more accessible and streamlined. These reforms, together with increasing digitalisation, will improve the functioning of the planning regime.

Tax Exemptions

337. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if it is possible for new, incomplete estates to be added to the list of unfinished estates exempted from local property tax; and if so what is the application process. [46108/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The issue of Unfinished Housing Developments related to a particular time period covering the economic downturn, which had given rise to circumstances whereby many developers were unable or unwilling to complete housing developments (estates and apartments). This led to undesirable situations where, for example, some residents were living in partially completed housing developments.

Local Property Tax (LPT) exemptions in respect of certain unfinished housing developments were applied to those developments listed in the schedule to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 91 of 2013). These developments were exempted on the basis of a 2012 survey to identify developments that were in a seriously problematic condition.

My Department notified all local authorities of the details of the approach to the waiver in

early February 2013. My Department asked all authorities to re-examine their classifications to ensure their continued accuracy. My Department also held a seminar on the waiver for local authorities on Unfinished Housing Developments at which the rationale for the approach to the waiver was further explained.

The list of unfinished housing developments eligible for the exemption was compiled by local authorities, utilising the categorisation employed for the purposes of the National Housing Survey. Only developments (and parts of developments) that were deemed by local authorities to be in a “seriously problematic condition”, regardless of whether a developer was on or off site, were included in the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013. These Regulations applied to 421 developments, which remain exempt from LPT. The qualifying conditions are set out in detail on the LPT portal at: www.revenue.ie and are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

The list was compiled and signed off on by each individual local authority in the knowledge that only those developments listed would qualify for the waiver. There is no appeal or review mechanism built into the application of the waiver. There is therefore no scope to add to the list of unfinished estates. With regard to new incomplete estates, it is a matter for local authorities to assess the best options for resolution of developments that are to be taken in charge.

It is of note that new properties purchased from a builder or developer between 1 January 2013 and 31 October 2021 are exempt from Local Property Tax (LPT) until the end of 2021.

Departmental Reviews

338. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when the National Coastal Change Management Strategy steering group, will report on its initial findings and recommendations given that the group was to report within six months of its foundation in September 2020 and given that areas such as Portrane, County Dublin have already been greatly affected by coastal erosion (details supplied). [46128/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): The National Coastal Change Management Strategy Steering Group is jointly chaired by my Department and the Office of Public Works (OPW). The Group is comprised of senior officials from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Met Éireann, and the County and City Management Association. The Group met for the first time on 3 September 2020 and most recently met on 10 June 2021.

Further to the initial meeting of the Steering Group in September 2020, a technical working group was also established under the stewardship of the OPW. The work of this group has focused on the identification and initial analysis of data sources, to underpin the work of the Steering Group.

Since the initial meeting in September, the work of the Steering Group was progressed through a series of bilateral meetings to scope out the extent of the issues, including, inter alia, the threats and effects of coastal change as they relate to the remit of the individual Steering Group members and the wider stakeholders.

The intention of these bilateral meetings has been to give an opportunity to discuss the emerging work of the Group and to stimulate the most effective engagement of these key stakeholders. The meetings to date have been very useful in allowing for issues relating to coastal

change management to be reflected upon and explored in the context of the particular operations of the participating organisations.

The findings of the group are currently being compiled into a report which will be presented to Government later this year.

Departmental Schemes

339. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if funding will be made available to Donegal County Council for the retrofit scheme replacement of single-glazed windows and doors under the retrofit scheme in Radharc an Gleana, Ard an Rátha, Contae Dhún na nGall; the level of funding allocated to Donegal County Council for such works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46138/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Responsibility for the management and maintenance of the local authority housing stock is the responsibility of the local authority under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. My Department supports local authorities with annual funding to support management and maintenance of their social housing stock under a number of funding programmes.

The programmes include the newly revised 2021 Energy Efficiency Retrofit programme in response to the Programme for Government commitment for local authority owned housing. This new ten year programme set a BER performance requirement of “B2” or cost optimal level. It is planned to retrofit 36,500 Local Authority homes to this performance requirement by 2030.

This revised programme, focuses on ensuring that the fabric of the home is upgraded and an energy efficient heating system is provided. Works eligible under the Programme include attic/cavity wall insulation or external wall insulation where required, windows and doors replacement where required, heat pump installation and ancillary and associated works, with all properties upgraded required to reach a Building Energy Rating (BER) of B2 or cost optimal level.

Donegal County Council was notified of an allocation of €1,569,993 for 2021 with a requirement to retrofit a minimum of 58 properties. The decision on what homes are retrofitted under this funding allocation is a matter for Donegal County Council.

Departmental Schemes

340. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if changes to the defective block redress scheme will permit successful applicants to submit a new application, change to another option or submit a change of circumstances when the property has deteriorated since applying for the redress scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46140/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In response to concerns being raised by homeowners in relation to the Defective Concrete Block grant scheme, I established a time-bound working group, with representatives from my Department, the local authorities and homeowner representative groups who are tasked with reviewing the operation of the scheme and providing a report with recommendations originally by 31st July.

At the request of homeowners and in order to afford them more time to consider and re-

spond to key issues under discussion, it was agreed at the meeting held on the 27th July that the timeline for the submission of a report by the Working Group would be extended to the end of September 2021.

While the work of the group continues it would not be appropriate for me to comment on its deliberations. Following conclusion of the deliberations of the Working Group, I will, following consultation with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Attorney General, bring proposals to Government.

Housing Provision

341. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the detail of the provision of housing for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and violence in the Housing for All plan. [46145/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Housing for All commits the Government to continue to provide capital funding for the further development of housing for the specific vulnerable cohorts supported under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), in alignment with support services provided through State agencies and NGOs. The latter has included coordination on the ground with the HSE, Tusla and others.

Under Housing for All, CAS will continue to support the development of new refuges for victims of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence. Available funding under CAS in 2021 is €96 million to support the range of priority housing delivery it targets via the Approved Housing Bodies.

Water Supply

342. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he plans to conduct a plebiscite to ensure that the water supply infrastructure remains in public ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46250/21]

348. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will have the issues outlined in correspondence (details supplied) considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46377/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 342 and 348 together.

The Government published a Policy Paper entitled Irish Water - Towards a national, publicly-owned, regulated water services utility in February 2021 setting out our views and expectations on the next phase of transformation in the water sector, to involve the integration of water services operations within Irish Water's organisation structure.

The matter of a referendum on water ownership is under active consideration at present in the context of the ongoing engagement with ICTU and the relevant affiliated unions on water sector transformation in line with the Government Policy Paper.

343. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of his engagements with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in the context of audits, inspections and or financial examinations of Irish Water; if he will provide an update on plans to include Ervia and Irish Water as bodies that can be subject to scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46265/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Having regard to the provisions of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993, Irish Water's governing legislation, including the Water Services Acts and its Constitution, and Irish Water's current position as a subsidiary within the Ervia Group, the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) does not currently have a role with respect to Irish Water.

However, the issue of audit is relevant in the context of the separation of Irish Water from the Ervia Group, so as to become a standalone, publicly owned, commercial, regulated utility. Following the Government decision in July 2018, on the separation of Irish Water from the Ervia Group, my Department is working on a suite of actions to support the implementation of that Government decision, and to give effect to the Programme for Government's commitment to retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, standalone, regulated utility.

Amending water services legislation is required to facilitate the separation and it will include appropriate accountability arrangements, including a role for the Comptroller and Auditor General with respect to Irish Water. My Department has been liaising with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in this regard. The General Scheme of the Water Services Separation Bill 2021 provides for arrangements in relation to Irish Water's accountability to the Oireachtas and matters connected with it including a role for the Comptroller and Auditor General. A copy of the General Scheme is available at www.gov.ie/en/publication/fb18c-general-scheme-of-water-services-separation-bill-2021/.

Question No. 344 answered with Question No. 128.

Departmental Staff

345. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the estimated full year cost of recruiting seven additional full-time architectural engineering inspectors for his Department in tabular form. [46287/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Based on the salary scales at 1 July 2021 and taking Employers' PRSI into account, the estimated cost in 2022 of recruiting seven additional full-time architectural engineering inspectors at the first point of the scale would be €570,513.

Housing Schemes

346. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he plans to increase the maximum award limits, even temporarily, to local authorities and their housing grant recipients due to the rapid inflation costs in the construction sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46301/21]

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/

As detailed in Housing for All, housing policy objectives 6 and 7 give a commitment to undertaking a review of the range of housing grants available to assist with meeting specific housing needs both for our ageing population and people with a disability. Officials from my Department will begin a review of the existing grant limits and income thresholds applicable to the grant schemes later this year.

Question No. 347 answered with Question No. 323.

Question No. 348 answered with Question No. 342.

Question No. 349 answered with Question No. 155.

Departmental Schemes

350. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of refurbishments carried out under each of the void casual let refurbishment schemes, respectively, by local authority in each of the years 2016 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [46395/21]

352. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the funding provided to Limerick City and County Council for voids refurbishment in each of the years 2010 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [46397/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 350 and 352 together.

Since 2014, Exchequer funding has been provided through my Department's Voids Programme to support local authorities in preparing vacant units for re-letting. Some 16,102 vacant social housing homes were returned to productive use in the period 2014-2020. This figure does not include homes which were returned to productive use by local authorities using funding from their own resources.

Between 2014 and 2020, Exchequer funding of approximately €228.7 million was provided, supporting local authorities in preparing vacant units for re-letting.

The table below provides the full breakdown by local authority of the units and funding provided by my Department during this time:

[Housing]

My Department announced earlier this year that funding will be provided for the refurbishment and re-letting of approximately 3,000 social homes this year. Each local authority has been allocated a number of properties and work in this regard is well underway. Full details in relation to the 2021 programme will be available early in 2022.

Local Authorities

351. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of properties owned by Limerick City and County Council; the number that are occupied; the number that are voids; and the number under offer pending occupancy in tabular form. [46396/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In accordance with the provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) 2009, local authorities are responsible for the management and maintenance of housing stock in their ownership and my Department does not hold the details requested by the Deputy.

Statistics relating to social housing stock have been published by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) in their Performance Indicator Reports. These reports provide a range of information in relation to social housing stock in local authority owned properties and are available at the following link:

www.noac.ie/?search=advancedPublications&categories=Performance+Indicator+Reports&year=

Question No. 352 answered with Question No. 350.

Waterways Issues

353. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will address the situation with Waterways Ireland in which water levels in the Grand Canal, in some cases have dropped by almost two metres making it impossible for barges to navigate. [46400/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): Waterways Ireland continually monitors water levels in the canals and is committed to ensuring their continued use as ecological and recreational corridors.

Canals are fabricated water systems and as such, they rely exclusively on other sources of water to ensure levels can be maintained. Their management needs to be undertaken in a sustainable and adaptive manner, responding to changing weather conditions and the need for the canal and their water sources to recharge following dry spells.

Water levels experienced on the Grand Canal during the summer of 2021 were up to 700mm lower than normal.

Additional measures have been implemented by Waterways Ireland to improve the existing supply of water such as additional weed cutting in the supply channels and inspections on the canals for possible leaks.

A significant leak was uncovered recently and has been repaired. The levels have been recovering over the past number of weeks and with increased rainfall in the Autumn, it is expected that levels will recover fully.

Waterways Ireland keep all stakeholders apprised of the most up-to-date information and Marine Notices were issued in July and August 2021 to inform waterways users of the reduced water levels on the canals, these notices were also posted on the Waterways Ireland website.

As part of a strategic approach to water management, Waterways Ireland is currently devel-

oping a Climate Action Plan to develop projects and processes by which the agency can adapt to changing climate patterns.

Special Areas of Conservation

354. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the engagement he has had with the stakeholders of the Gearagh special area of conservation, County Cork in advancing the site-specific conservation objectives detailed in the 2016 report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46424/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department completed and published detailed site-specific conservation objectives for the Gearagh SAC (000108) in September 2016.

The NPWS does not own or manage any part of this SAC, which is owned largely by the ESB. A management plan scoping exercise was undertaken by ESB International on behalf of the ESB in 2016/2017. The NPWS took part in the stakeholder group that contributed to the report produced as a result of that exercise.

Under the Habitats Directive, Ireland is obliged to report to the EU on the conservation status of all habitats and species of European Community interest, as listed in Annexes to the Directive. Monitoring of SACs are carried out by the NPWS on a cyclical basis. The most recent report was submitted to the EU in 2019 and is available on the NPWS website.

The priority habitat “Alluvial forests with Alder and Ash” is one of the qualifying interests of the Gearagh SAC and a monitoring site for this habitat is located within the SAC. It was most recently surveyed during the 2017-2018 monitoring period, when the area, structure and functions, and future prospects of the habitat in SAC were all assessed as favourable. This is in contrast with the national conservation status of the Alluvial forests habitat in Ireland, which is considered to be bad, and deteriorating.

The Gearagh SAC is also listed for the habitat “Rivers with muddy banks”. In addition to the NPWS survey, results of a 2018 botanical survey were made available to the NPWS by the ESB. The habitat was assessed as favourable in the Gearagh SAC.

The NPWS continues to engage with the ESB on the monitoring of this site. The positive findings from scientific surveys are indicators of a good management regime.

Departmental Schemes

355. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will support a ring-fenced funding allocation of the disabled persons grant scheme and improvement works for use when adapting housing to bespoke requirements of an applicant who is blind or vision impaired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46484/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): My Department provides funding to local authorities under the Disabled Persons Grants scheme to carry out works on social housing stock to address the needs of older people, people with a disability or overcrowded situations. The programme is 90% funded by the Department with a 10% contribution from the Local Authority.

My Department is very supportive of work in this area and has provided funding which has been increasing year on year to help meet the needs of local authority tenants. The detailed administration of this Scheme including assessment, approval and prioritisation is the responsibility of local authorities.

My Department's approach every year is to issue a single full year allocation to each local authority, so they can plan, prioritise and implement the programme. Over the course of the year, my Department works closely with the local authorities to monitor spend and to achieve a full drawdown of the available funding. This means that if underspends arise on the part of some local authorities, they can be redistributed to other authorities. If a local authority is dealing with a high level of applications, further additional funding can be requested from my Department and every effort will be made to accede to any such request.

Housing Schemes

356. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will request that the publication of annual figures by the Housing Agency related to those availing or requesting housing support are segregated by disability or specialised housing need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46485/21]

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 are set out in the annual statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) published by the Housing Agency. The purpose of the SSHA is to capture the total number of households qualified for social housing support across the country whose social housing need has not yet been met, in order to better understand the level of need for such support.

Below is the link to the summary report for 2020 which includes breakdowns by each local authority, across a range of categories, including details on households whose main need for social housing support arises from a disability.

A breakdown of the categories of disability is available in Figure 2.5 and Table A 1.5 of the report, and is available on my Department's website at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists.

Allocations by individual local authorities of accommodation to households with members who have a disability are not published by the Housing Agency. However, the total number of allocations and the breakdown of same on the basis of disability type is published in the Annual Report of the Implementation Group for the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD). The 2019 report is available at www.gov.ie/en/publication/40855-sixth-progress-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-national-housing-strategy-for-people-with-a-disability-2011-2016/. The report for 2020 is expected to be available shortly.

Departmental Data

357. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his Department has invested in revised digital transformation to facilitate an online applica-

tion system for housing support and transfers for persons with sight loss in accordance with the EU Web Accessibility Directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46486/21]

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 authorities for which he or she is responsible. This includes ensuring that the services of the local authority are in compliance with EU law.

Accordingly, information in relation to the digital inclusion strategy of a local authority is available directly from the local authority.

Waterways Issues

358. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his attention or that of Waterways Ireland has been drawn to issues regarding a barrier on a walk and cycle route of the Royal Canal (details supplied); and if he will outline from his perspective and that of Waterways Ireland, the guidance and or policy regarding barriers and the way in which they are deployed along greenways. [46504/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): I am informed by Waterways Ireland that its policy is that staggered approach barriers and the way in which they are deployed along Greenways should be in accordance with Transport Infrastructure Ireland's Guidelines for Rural Cycleway Design (Offline).

I have brought the situation mentioned by the Deputy to the attention of Waterways Ireland, who have indicated that they will, in conjunction with the other agencies involved in the delivering and maintaining of the Royal Canal Greenway, carry out an immediate review of the layout of the staggered approach barriers at the location in question to determine their compliance with the appropriate design standards. This review is expected to be completed before the end of October 2021.

Waterways Ireland has also informed me it would welcome the opportunity to engage with any person(s) directly affected by access issues at the barrier, to try to ensure that access is not impeded by the current access control gate arrangement.

Student Accommodation

359. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will work with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to bring forward a new strategy for student accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46505/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I am committed to working collaboratively with my colleague the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (FHERIS) to improve student accommodation provision through a dedicated working group set up for that purpose.

This will build on the excellent and productive relationship that has been build up between the two Departments over the past number of years. The Department of Housing played a key part in helping to develop the National Student Accommodation Strategy in 2017 the produc-

tion of which was an action under Rebuilding Ireland. The strategy was published by the then Department of Education and Science and includes eight key targets and 27 actions to support the delivery of an increased level of supply of Student Accommodation.

The two Departments also worked in close co-operation in passing the Residential Tenancies Act 2018. That Act contained provisions designed to improve protections and affordability measures for students residing in student-specific accommodation.

I believe that Housing for All : A New Housing Plan for Ireland will transform every aspect of our housing including the area of student accommodation. The Plan is backed by historic levels of investment with in excess of €20bn through the Exchequer, the Land Development Agency (LDA) and the Housing Finance Agency over the next 5 years. Crucially Housing for All takes a genuine whole of Government approach to creating a long-term, sustainable housing system for Ireland. I am confident that the breadth of measures and reforms therein will remove impediments to progress and provide for the delivery of much needed additional accommodation at scale. This will prove to be of benefit to all those seeking safe, affordable and secure accommodation including our growing student population.

Specifically, Housing for All contains a commitment to support technological universities to develop purpose-built student accommodation where such a requirement exists, through access to appropriate financing, and a specific action in relation to legislating to allow for Technological Universities to borrow from the Housing Finance Agency. My Department is already working closely with DFHERIS to deliver on this commitment and I expect to see progress in the near future. I know that The Technological University Dublin – the largest higher education institution in the State – has identified a student accommodation requirement and proposal and there is similar potential to do so amongst other technological universities. Existing more established Universities have already availed of this loan facility to the tune of €170 million over the past 2-3 years to aim to deliver more than 1,400 additional student specific units.

Housing Schemes

360. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans that have been issued to non-first-time buyers who instead qualify due to separation or divorce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46506/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department does not collect data on the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans that have been issued to non-first-time buyers who are separated or divorced.

As regards the policy context, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme enables credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range, where they cannot obtain sufficient mortgage finance from a commercial lender.

As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is currently available to first-time buyers only. This is set out in the regulations governing the Scheme and ensures the effective targeting of limited resources.

Applicants who are separated or divorced may be treated as first-time buyers, in accordance with the regulations, if they meet certain conditions, including:

- they are separated or divorced under a court order or by a separation agreement;

- the property being purchased is the first property since leaving the family home;
- they have left the family home and retain no interest in it; or
- the other party has remained in the family home.

In meeting the conditions as set out above, in particular that the other party has remained in the family home and that the potential applicant has relinquished any rights they had over that property, no financial gain should have been made by the potential applicant in exchange for relinquishing their rights to the property in this manner. Were the individual to have made a financial gain in releasing their rights to the property, such as being bought out by the other party who remains resident in it, they would be deemed to have been compensated for their interest in the property, and therefore not be eligible as a first-time buyer.

The final decision on loan approval is a matter for the relevant local authority and its credit committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the Regulations establishing the scheme and the credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure prudence and consistency in approaches in the best interests of both borrowers and the lending local authorities.

As part of Housing for All, a ‘Fresh start’ principle will apply to applications to State-run affordable housing and loan schemes in future. This means that people who are divorced/separated and no longer have a financial interest in the family home, or who have undergone insolvency proceedings, will be eligible to apply for State loan schemes.

Therefore, the successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, the ‘Local Authority Home Loan’, will apply this ‘Fresh start’ principle. I look forward to announcing further details in respect of the Local Authority Home Loan in the coming months.

Water Quality

361. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the examination by the Bathing Water Expert Group into increasing the frequency of bathing water monitoring; if the expert group has examined the possibility of daily bathing water monitoring in areas in which recurrent sewage and pollution issues have been recorded, such as Clifden, County Galway; his plans to extend the bathing water season; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46542/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): As a result of the increase in people swimming and beach users generally, I have tasked the Bathing Water Expert Group with examining the different measures that could be employed to improve protection of bather’s health outside of the statutory bathing season, within the context of the current review by the European Commission of the Bathing Water Directive. The Bathing Water Expert Group is currently developing terms of reference for an assessment of the different options to ensure all relevant measures are considered.

The EPA as the environmental regulator makes sure that local authorities carry out their functions under the Bathing Water Regulations to monitor bathing waters, to warn of pollution events and to take action where there are water quality issues. The EPA share the latest information provided by local authorities with the public through www.beaches.ie. I would encourage all bathers to use the information on this dedicated website before going swimming, and to always follow the advice of the HSE and Department of Health in relation to social distancing protocols when at the beach.

The Bathing Water Regulations 2008 (as amended), transpose the requirements of the 2006 Bathing Water Directive (BWD) into national legislation. These regulations set the framework for the effective management of bathing waters around the country. The regulations also aim to improve health protection for bathers and ensure adequate information is disseminated in a timely manner during the bathing season.

Currently in Ireland there are almost 150 designated bathing waters identified by local authorities with the help of public consultation. The water quality in these areas is monitored during the bathing season. The regulations define the bathing season to mean the period from 1st June to 15th September in any calendar year and also set out the sampling and monitoring requirements for all designated bathing waters.

The bathing water report for 2020, published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), states 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

362. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage further to Parliamentary Question No. 52 of 24 June 2021, the status of the review of the position in relation to the filling of the post of chief executive of Galway County Council on a permanent basis; the person or body that is carrying out the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46543/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The merger of Galway City Council and Galway County Council to create a single administrative area was recommended unanimously by the Galway Expert Advisory Group in April 2018. This recommendation was endorsed by a Government Decision in June 2018 and provisions to give effect to this policy decision were included in the Local Government Bill 2018. Those provisions passed all stages in the Dáil but were defeated in the Seanad and were withdrawn.

In light of the foregoing, it has been deemed appropriate to review the position in relation to the filling of the post of the Chief Executive of Galway County Council on a permanent basis and I intend to review the matter before the end of the year.

The appointment of a chief executive is not part of the review, however a decision on the timing of such appointment will be made following the review.

There is a requirement for all Chief Executive posts for Local Authorities to be advertised openly on the www.publicjobs.ie website operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

The assignment by Government to PAS of key responsibilities in relation to the operation of the recruitment of Chief Executives to the Local Government Sector is underpinned by factors such as PAS's statutory independence and by the core values that guide PAS's activities, for example, impartiality, fairness and ethical conduct as well as PAS's long-standing experience and deep expertise in carrying out assessment processes.

Local Authorities

363. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the promised review by the Office of the Planning Regulator of Galway County Council under section 31AS of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended,

as part of the Pilot Programme of Reviews of Local Authorities' Systems and Procedures in the Performance of Planning Functions; the timeline for the completion of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46546/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): One of the Office of the Planning Regulator's (OPR) core statutory functions is to conduct reviews of systems and procedures used by local authorities and An Bord Pleanála in the delivery of their planning functions. In this regard the OPR is implementing a programme of reviews under section 31AS of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, whereby each authority in turn will benefit from a review, broadly over a six-year cycle.

The OPR initiated the pilot phase of its reviews programme in late 2020, selecting four authorities for inclusion on the basis of the variety of characteristics, in terms of location, scale, urban / rural settings, etc., across these authorities. The blend of planning contexts offers a good basis for the OPR to test its methodology for conducting reviews and to further inform subsequent phases of the reviews programme.

Galway County Council has not yet been selected for a review. The OPR has yet to select authorities to be reviewed in 2022 and beyond. In scheduling subsequent phases of the reviews programme, the OPR will continue to ensure that a good geographic spread and balance of authorities with varying planning contexts are included.

It should be noted that arrangements have been put in place by all bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. This provides a speedy, efficient and cost effective system to address queries directly to the relevant bodies. The contact email address for the Office of the Planning Regulator is oireachtas@opr.ie.

Local Authorities

364. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the promised review by the Office of the Planning Regulator of Galway City Council under section 31AS of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended as part of the Pilot Programme of Reviews of Local Authorities' Systems and Procedures in the Performance of Planning Functions; the timeline for the completion of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46547/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): One of the Office of the Planning Regulator's (OPR) core statutory functions is to conduct reviews of systems and procedures used by local authorities and An Bord Pleanála in the delivery of their planning functions. In this regard the OPR is implementing a programme of reviews under section 31AS of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, whereby each authority in turn will benefit from a review, broadly over a six-year cycle.

The OPR initiated the pilot phase of its reviews programme in late 2020, selecting four authorities for inclusion on the basis of the variety of characteristics, in terms of location, scale, urban / rural settings, etc., across these authorities. The blend of planning contexts offers a good basis for the OPR to test its methodology for conducting reviews and to further inform subsequent phases of the reviews programme.

Galway City Council is included in the pilot phase of the programme and it is expected that the OPR will complete and publish the review report before the end of the year.

It should be noted that arrangements have been put in place by all bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. This provides a speedy, efficient and cost effective system to address queries directly to the relevant bodies. The contact email address for the Office of the Planning Regulator is oireachtas@opr.ie

Homeless Data

365. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the latest homelessness statistics; his plans for the winter period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46553/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): My Department publishes a detailed monthly report on homelessness, based on data provided by housing authorities. The Report outlines details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. The Reports are available on my Department's website at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/collection/80ea8-homelessness-data/ and via the Government's Open Data Portal www.data.gov.ie/

The most recently published data is in respect of August 2021. There were 8,212 individuals comprising 6,023 adults, 953 families and 2,189 child dependants in emergency accommodation. This represents a year on year decrease of 5.6% on the total figure for August 2020.

Cold Weather Initiatives operate across all local authorities to provide additional emergency beds for rough sleepers where needed. These arrangements ensure that additional temporary beds can be brought into use across a range of existing services and facilities, for singles and couples who need them during periods of cold weather. These beds are temporary in nature and it is a matter for individual local authorities to determine the period of their operation. The cold weather arrangements are typically introduced in November and funding is provided by my Department to meet additional costs associated with these measures.

Supporting individuals and families facing homelessness is a key Government priority. 'Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland', the Government's strategic housing plan to 2030, sets an ambitious overarching objective of working to eradicate homelessness by 2030 and outlines details on how the Government is approaching this challenge. It includes measures targeted specifically at those experiencing homelessness with complex needs. It commits to the continued expansion of the Housing First programme, and, importantly, ensuring that health and mental health supports are provided for homeless persons.

Question No. 366 answered with Question No. 326.

Student Accommodation

367. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans to curtail the conversion of student accommodation to temporary short-term tourist accommodation as supported by a previous Department circular (details supplied) given the current shortage of student accommodation. [46577/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): My Department issued a Circular Letter to all Local Authorities on Friday 24th September 2021 relating to temporary change of use of student accommodation.

In accordance with the circular, in considering planning applications for the change of use of existing student accommodation for a temporary period, planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála must be satisfied that there are compelling non-Covid related grounds to grant permission for any such proposed change of use, while demand for student accommodation remains high. The removal of student accommodation from availability for student use runs contrary to the National Student Accommodation Strategy.

Accordingly, the onus must be on any applicant for change of use from existing purpose-built student accommodation to demonstrate that there is no longer a need for such use in the area in question. Otherwise, student accommodation should be retained, where appropriate.

In 2016, my Department issued in circular PL8 of 2016, the terms of which remain applicable and seek to ensure that student accommodation is:-

- (1) not used for residential accommodation of a permanent nature;
- (2) safeguarded for use by students and other persons related to higher education institutes during the academic year; and
- (3) capable of being used for legitimate occupation by other persons/groups during holiday periods, when not required for student accommodation purposes.

While these requirements may be subject to a planning application for change of use, in assessing any such application, the overriding consideration must be the need for student accommodation in the area.

Departmental Reports

368. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if his Department subsequently provided a separate submission to him on the Interim Report, the Minority Report and the review of the Minority Report made by the Chair of the Gulls Committee with regard to the briefing notes provided to him by his Department in respect of the 2020-2021 State-wide wild bird declarations (details supplied); and if a separate submission was provided, if he will provide a copy of same. [46601/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): My officials will make arrangements to contact the Deputy directly to furnish the submission on the Interim Report, the Minority Report and the review of the Minority Report made by the Chair of the Gulls Committee to undertake a review of the issues surrounding the impact of gulls in urban areas.

Departmental Reports

369. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the reason the recommendation has not yet been implemented with regard to a report (details supplied) specifically its recommendation at 7.2.13 which states that updated declarations should be published before existing declarations expire; and if he will provide a committed date ahead of the 2022-2023 State-wide derogations declarations by which it will be implemented. [46602/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC) on the conservation

of wild birds is implemented in Ireland, inter alia, under the Wildlife Acts. Under the terms of the Directive all Member States of the EU are bound to take measures to protect all wild birds and their habitats. The Directive prohibits, inter alia, the deliberate killing or capture of wild birds by any method, the removal of nests or the taking of eggs.

Under Article 9(1)(a) Member States may derogate in the interests of: public health and safety; air safety; and to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water; and for the protection of flora and fauna.

There are two general Declarations made annually, to permit the capture or killing of specified species of wild birds or the taking of nests or eggs of certain gulls:

1. One State-wide Declaration in relation to threats to public health and safety, the spread of animal diseases, serious damage to livestock, damage to livestock feedlots, serious damage to arable crops including cereals, legumes and brassicas, contamination of food storage
2. One Declaration for the State in relation to air safety.

The 2021-2022 Declaration was signed on 30 April 2021, before the previous one had expired.

Departmental Reports

370. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 348, 349, 350 and 351 of 13 July 2021, if he will provide a copy of the report that was provided to his Department by the chairperson that appears to have enabled his Department to conclude that the recommendations in the interim report are finally agreed. [46603/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): My officials will make arrangements to contact the Deputy directly to furnish a copy of the report that was provided by the Chairperson in relation to Interim Report on the Consultative Committee to undertake a review of the issues surrounding the impact of gulls in urban areas.

Wildlife Regulations

371. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing; Local Government and Heritage if he is satisfied that the correct legal decision threshold is being applied to relevant evidence and submissions when he is deciding whether any given wild bird species should be included or not included on schedule 1 of the declarations with regard to annual State-wide wild bird derogation declarations (public health and safety); if he will set out the specific decision threshold that is being applied; and the specific legal clauses in the 1979 birds directive EU law that the decision threshold being applied in declarations relies upon. [46604/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC) on the conservation of wild birds is implemented in Ireland, inter alia, under the Wildlife Acts. Under the terms of the Directive all Member States of the EU are bound to take measures to protect all wild birds and their habitats. The Directive prohibits, inter alia, the deliberate killing or capture of wild birds by any method, the removal of nests or the taking of eggs.

The annual declarations are made first and foremost under Article 9 of the Birds Directive.

Under Article 9(1) (a) Member States may derogate in the interests of: public health and safety; air safety; and to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water; and for the protection of flora and fauna.

The annual declarations have traditionally been made only under the European Communities (Wildlife Act, 1976) (Amendment) Regulations 1986 (S.I. No. 254 of 1986), there is also provision under regulation 55 of the European Communities (Birds and Habitats) Directives 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011) in relation to the Article 9 derogations. One key difference between the 1986 Regulations and the 2011 Regulations is that the latter includes a requirement specified in Article 9 of the Birds Directive for there to be “no other satisfactory solution” in the context of derogations.

The 1986 Regulations do not specify that there be “no other satisfactory solution”, however, recent declarations have actually specified this and thus complied with the Article 9 requirement.

My Department, having reviewed the position of the legal basis for the derogations, made the Declarations this year to invoke the powers conferred by both sets of regulations. The use of the 2011 Regulations this year would bring the Declarations more into line with Article 9 of the Birds Directive.

Wildlife Regulations

372. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he is satisfied that the 2021-2022 declarations are legally compliant with the 1979 birds directive with regard to annual State-wide wild bird derogation declarations (public health and safety); and if, in view of expert legal advices acquired by his Department (details supplied), he is satisfied that the legitimate interests of public health and safety in Article 9.1a of the 1979 Birds Directive are being adequately protected by his Department’s processes and its implementation of the governing legislation. [46605/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The annual declarations are made first and foremost under Article 9 of the Birds Directive.

The annual declarations have traditionally been made only under the European Communities (Wildlife Act, 1976) (Amendment) Regulations 1986 (S.I. No. 254 of 1986), there is also provision under regulation 55 of the European Communities (Birds and Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011) in relation to the Article 9 derogations. One key difference between the 1986 Regulations and the 2011 Regulations is that the latter includes a requirement specified in Article 9 of the Birds Directive for there to be “no other satisfactory solution” in the context of derogations.

My Department, having reviewed the position of the legal basis for the derogations, made the Declarations this year to invoke the powers conferred by both sets of regulations.

Rental Sector

373. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Housing; Local Government and Heritage the issues the legislation to strengthen tenancy will cover; and if he plans to adjust the

indexation of rents to harmonised index of consumer prices, HICP, in view of the sharp rise in that indicator. [46665/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

A number of targeted measures and initiatives are being developed to provide better security of tenure and greater rent certainty for tenants, as well as enhancing the supports and services available to both tenants and landlords through the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) particularly, to facilitate the development of a more vibrant and sustainable rental sector.

Inter alia, these initiatives include:

- the recent extension of Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) protections to the end of 2024 and the prohibition on rent increases exceeding any general inflation, as recorded by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), which will be re-examined in the light of prevailing inflation rate;
- the bringing forward of legislation to address long-term security of tenure including by providing for tenancies of indefinite duration, subject to legal advice;
- to enhance tenancy protections for those living in dwellings that are affected by a receivership situation;
- amending the Residential Tenancies Acts to provide for default conciliation as the first step in the RTB's dispute resolution process;
- increasing enforcement of registration of tenancies by RTB;
- the development and publication of a standard tenancy agreement by the RTB; and
- reviewing the recommendations of the Working Group on the Tax and Fiscal Treatment of Landlords, which was chaired by the Department of Finance.

The necessary legislative change will be progressed through the Housing and Residential Tenancies Bill 2021, which I intend to bring forward before the end of this Dáil term.

The Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021 introduced measures in July 2021 to better protect tenants with affordability challenges by extending the operation of RPZs until the end of 2024 and prohibiting any necessary rent increase in a RPZ from exceeding general inflation, as recorded by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). This measure significantly reduced the level of permissible rent increases for the estimated 74% of all tenancies which are in RPZs. The linkage with HICP aims to safeguard continued investment in the sector by existing and new landlords to deliver the much needed supply of high-quality rental accommodation while protecting against a significant increase in rental inflation in the coming years.

When introducing these measures, I was very clear on the need to carefully monitor inflation. At that time, HICP inflation averaged 0.73% p.a. over the previous 3 years but had risen to 1.6% p.a. in the year ending June 2021. I needed to revise the RPZ rent control relatively quickly in July, on a basis that could be independently verified. The Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021 also provides that an index, other than HICP, may be prescribed for the purposes of restricting rent increases in RPZs. Given the continuing rise in HICP inflation, up to 3% p.a. in August, I will consider all the legal options available to me to ensure that effective rent controls are legally in force in RPZs to cap the rate of any rent increase where the general inflation rate is too high. Any necessary provision relating to rent control in RPZs will be considered in the context of the impending Housing and Residential Tenancies Bill 2021.

My Department is currently examining this matter and the advices of the Office of the Attorney General will inform any changes in this area.

Housing Schemes

374. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if the Land Development Agency will be able to apply for either the cost rental equity loan or the affordable housing fund for the provision of affordable housing. [46679/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on an interim basis in September 2018, by way of an Establishment Order made under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971. The Land Development Agency Act was recently signed in law and, on enactment, the LDA will be established as a commercial State agency.

The LDA Commercial Agency will be funded by way of a €1.25 billion equity investment from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) as well as borrowing capacity up to €1.25 billion. As such, it is not intended that the LDA will avail of the Cost Rental Equity Loan Scheme or the Affordable Housing Fund in delivering homes for affordable purchase or cost rental on its own lands. In situations where the LDA is providing services to local authorities to develop housing projects under Section 15 of the LDA Act on local authority land, it is open to the relevant local authority to avail of relevant funds and schemes for these local authority projects.

Housing Schemes

375. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the criteria that will be used to assess whether an organisation can be designated a cost rental provider under the Affordable Housing Act 2021 and related secondary legislation. [46680/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Affordable Housing Act 2021 was enacted by the President on 21 July 2021. On 18 August, I signed the Affordable Housing Act 2021 (Commencement) (Parts 1 and 3) Order 2021, which commenced Parts 1 and 3 of the Act from 19 August, and brought into operation the Cost Rental elements of the Act.

On 19 August 2021, I made the Affordable Housing Act 2021 (Cost Rental Designation) Regulations 2021. These Regulations govern the process by which the owners of dwellings may obtain the designation of their properties as Cost Rental dwellings, provided they commit at the outset to the property remaining in the Cost Rental sector for a certain minimum period.

Applications for designation of a property as Cost Rental will be accepted from any applicant who is the legal owner of the property, provided they have the appropriate consents from any incumbrancers, such as lenders, to apply for this designation and to have the resulting legal burden placed on the property.

It is anticipated that in the initial years of the development of this new sector, Cost Rental homes will be primarily provided directly by Local Authorities, the Land Development Agency (LDA) and the Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), initially funded by State lending from the Housing Agency and Housing Finance Agency.

Housing Schemes

376. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the categories of organisations that will be eligible to apply for the cost rental equity loan and the affordable housing fund (details supplied). [46681/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The implementation of Cost Rental is being supported by the new Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) scheme, under which Government loans to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) on favourable terms will finance up to 30% of the capital costs of new homes for Cost Rental. CREL was allocated €35m under Budget 2021. The Housing Finance Agency also made available €100m to AHBs in very competitive commercial debt funding, to cover the remaining capital costs of CREL-approved projects in the first tranche. At present, CREL funding is exclusively available to AHBs.

The Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) will provide Exchequer funding support to Local Authorities to assist in the delivery of affordable housing for sale or cost rent, under the provisions of the Affordable Housing Act 2021. Whilst eligibility for the Affordable Housing Fund is specific to local authorities, under Section 6 of the Act, a housing authority may make dwellings available for the purposes of sale to eligible applicants under affordable purchase dwelling arrangements. A housing authority may enter into arrangements with the following bodies for this purpose;

- arrangements with an approved housing body;
- arrangements with a community led organisation, a housing co-operative or a community land trust;
- arrangements with the land development agency; and
- public private partnership arrangements.

As such, the provisions allow local authority led partnership arrangements between housing authorities and these bodies for the provision of homes under the affordable purchase dwelling arrangements.

Wildlife Protection

377. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the actions taken by his Department or public bodies under his remit to inspect and regulate the premises and working practices of wildlife rehabilitation organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46738/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The Wildlife Licensing Unit (WLU) of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department issues licences under Section 22 (9) g & h and 23 (6) c & d of the Wildlife Act to retain and possess injured animals/birds.

In order to obtain a licence one must follow a significant and rigorous application process. All rehabilitation organisations are subject to this process.

In order to obtain a licence under these sections of the Wildlife Act, individuals/organisations must first fill in the appropriate application form and forward to the WLU.

All application forms are forwarded to relevant divisional staff for review, including visitation to premises that will house animals/birds during the course of their rehabilitation. Once cleared, the application form is reverted back to WLU, who then issue the licence.

This process includes the WLU sending the application to a local ranger/conservation officer for their observations. Local staff do inspect potential sites as part of the application process to ensure premises are suitable for the rehabilitation of animals and birds. Licences are only issued once this observation is complete and submitted back to the WLU.

Housing Provision

378. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of new houses provided in the past 12 months through direct local authority build, affordable housing or Part 5; the number expected to be built in the coming year in each category by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46754/21]

381. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of housing starts recorded in each of the past 12 months to date in the private sector, whether affordable or otherwise; the projection for the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46758/21]

382. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of local authority housing starts recorded in each of the past 12 months to date; the projection for the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46759/21]

391. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will ensure that each local authority is given a target in respect of the provision of local authority houses, affordable housing and access to local authority sourced loans in order to ensure greater urgency to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46768/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 378, 381, 382 and 391 together.

The recently published Housing for All strategy is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade. The annual targets are for the delivery of a total of 88,400 new build social homes, 53,800 new affordable homes and 170,000 private homes in the period 2022-2030. Housing for All is supported by an investment package of over €4bn per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency (LDA) and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency.

Details on social housing delivery for each local authority, across a range of delivery mechanisms, are included in social housing statistics published by my Department. This data is available to the end of Quarter 2 2021 and is available on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/

A detailed Social Housing Construction Status Report is also published each quarter which provides scheme level detail on new build activity. The most recent publication covers the period up to the end of Quarter 2 2021 and is available on my Department's website at www.gov.ie/en/publication/d7709-social-housing-construction-projects-status-report-q2-2021/. This data

includes information for each local authority and includes a list of the individual projects that make up the new build programme for that local authority.

My Department also publishes data on Commencement Notice statistics. A Commencement Notice is required to give notice to Building Control Authorities of the erection of buildings, or classes of buildings, or the carrying out of works, or classes of works, as may be specified in the regulations. Data on residential unit commencement notices are published on my Department's website at www.gov.ie/en/publication/a5cb1-construction-activity-starts/

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum. In terms of interventions that improve affordability, at a national level this includes 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes. These homes will be provided by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency (LDA), as well as through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks.

Individual targets for the delivery of social housing have been provided to each local authority and under Housing for All, each local authority is required to develop a Housing Delivery Action Plan by December 2021. These plans will set out details on how and when local authorities will deliver their housing targets, including the delivery of affordable homes.

Housing for All strategy contains a multi-pronged approach to improving affordability and increasing the supply of social homes. Some measures such as the Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Other measures such as Cost Rental will deliver approximately 18,000 homes over the period 2021 to 2030.

The Housing for All strategy also provides for the 'Local Authority Home Loan', which will be in place later in 2021. This is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. The Help to Buy scheme also continues to help purchasers to access homes.

Housing Provision

379. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the degree to which it has been possible to monitor the number of affordable houses coming onto the market by county throughout the next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46756/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Under Action 4.12 of Housing for All, in the period to December 2021 local authorities will be preparing Housing Action Delivery Plans to include social and affordable housing where necessary (affordable purchase and cost rental). This will allow each Local Authority to determine the affordability constraint in their area based on the Housing Need and Demand Assessment.

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum.

At a national level, over 300,000 new homes will be built by the end of 2030, including a projected 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental

homes. These homes will be provided by Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency (LDA), as well as through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks.

The Housing for All strategy also provides for the ‘Local Authority Home Loan’, which will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. From 10 September 2021, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate by 0.25% for new borrowers under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL). This lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan. The Help to Buy scheme is also currently available to help purchasers in accessing newly constructed homes.

Departmental Strategies

380. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the degree to which he expects the Housing for All strategy to be implemented fully in the short-term; the number of house buyers who are likely to be facilitated throughout; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46757/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien): Housing for All: A New Housing Plan for Ireland is a whole-of-Government plan that will require a deep level of collaboration throughout its lifetime. The implementation of Housing for All has already begun. There are 213 objectives in this plan, all of which will be delivered according to the dates outlined in the plan itself. The first progress report on Q3 2021 actions is currently being prepared for publication.

Not only will there be oversight and direction at the highest level through the Cabinet Committee on Housing (chaired by the Taoiseach), and the Secretary General Delivery Group (chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach), there will also be dedicated Workstreams, led by the relevant Secretaries General, on i) investment, ii) industry capability, and iii) public service delivery. These Workstreams are tasked with drilling down into the priority actions, to identify any blockages, take appropriate action, and ensure a rigorous monitoring system is in place to ensure delivery.

To keep us on track, the actions in Housing for All will be updated on an annual basis, including timelines, to sustain momentum on delivery during the lifetime of the Plan.

Housing for All is a radical plan that sets out four pathways to a sustainable housing system. Affordability and the chance to own a home is at the heart of this government’s housing policy. It recognises that significant new supports are needed so that those who want to own their own home can do so, and that those who wish to rent are able to do so at an affordable rate. Pathway 1 ‘Supporting homeownership and increasing affordability’ addresses this issue and sets out a number of key actions in this regard.

The objective is to supply 300,000 new homes by 2030, meaning an annual average of at least 33,000 homes per year. This includes an average of 10,000 social homes and 6,000 affordable homes made available each year for purchase or rent up to 2030. This will have a dramatic impact on the provision of housing and will significantly help facilitate house buyers.

Specifically, regarding middle-income families wishing to buy homes, Housing for All contains a multi-pronged approach to supply and improving affordability.

The Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are primarily focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Both of these schemes will be targeted at households constrained by the maximum mortgage and deposit available to them. The gap between the market value and what the household can afford (including with the assistance of the 'Help to Buy' incentive) will be bridged via the provision of equity support. The equity support can subsequently be redeemed at any time at the home-owners discretion, or remain outstanding until the home is sold or passed on.

The Local Authority Home Loan will be expanded, extending its reach and impact, particularly for single people. From 10 September 2021, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate by 0.25% for new borrowers under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL). This lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan. The Help to Buy incentive is also currently available to help purchasers in accessing homes.

In addition, new higher-rate stamp duty measures and planning permission restrictions have been introduced that will minimise the bulk buying of traditional family homes. I also plan to introduce a new form of 'Owner-Occupier Guarantee' which will enable Local Authorities to specify a minimum proportion of the houses in a new development for owner occupiers.

The Croí Cónaithe (Cities) Fund will stimulate the activation of some apartment developments for sale to individual purchasers. The Land Development Agency (LDA), through Project Tosaigh, will intervene in slow or stalled developments with landowners in order to unlock and accelerate the delivery of affordable homes.

Housing for All is backed by historic levels of investment with in excess of €20bn through the Exchequer, the LDA and the Housing Finance Agency over the next 5 years. There is a targeted approach right across the country to supply housing where it is needed most. This is supported by updated planning guidance, additional State land provided for housing, and an increase in funding for Local authorities to acquire new land so that they can deliver social and affordable homes at scale. All of this will help create the environment needed to deliver on the objectives in Housing for All.

I am mindful however that projections for delivery will be heavily influenced by COVID-19 related uncertainties in the earlier years of the Plan. These uncertainties will reduce over time as the impact of the pandemic on the housing backlog is fully established and associated construction related constraints diminish. However, ongoing uncertainties associated with raw material costs and availability, and the sector's capacity to recover, may also impact on delivery but I am confident that Housing for All and the breadth of measures and reforms therein will remove impediments to progress and provide for the much-needed delivery of homes at scale.

Question No. 381 answered with Question No. 378.

Question No. 382 answered with Question No. 378.

House Prices

383. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the degree to which his Department continues to monitor house price inflation; the action that is in-hand or likely to be taken to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46760/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

House price inflation is measured in the Residential Property Index compiled by the CSO which is published monthly, and covers all market purchases of houses and apartments by households. My Department reviews this data monthly, along with other market trends.

Housing supply has been impacted by Covid-19. The periods of lockdown since early 2020 have reduced construction activity and placed limitations on the ability to conduct normal sales activity, and this has impacted on house prices. The considerable growth in household savings, related to the public health restrictions which reduced consumption, also seems likely to be contributing to recent price inflation.

The ongoing removal of Covid restrictions will allow for a full reopening of the housing market. CSO data also shows that new dwellings completions for Quarter 2 are increasing and the effects of the periods of lockdown are alleviating. Data on planning permissions and commencements are also showing a significant increase over this period.

The full opening up of the housing market and construction activity, along with the increases in supply that will be delivered by the Government's Housing for All Plan, will ensure that housing market activity normalises, and supply increases to meet demand as the Plan is implemented.

As a matter of course in the development of housing policy or schemes, account is taken of the intended or potential impacts of the measures under consideration. Furthermore, the governance approach set out in Housing for All, including the Housing for All Delivery Group and my Department will continuously monitor and prioritise delivery of the Plan having regard to relevant market trends including impacts on house prices, where appropriate.

Housing Provision

384. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the total number of local authority housing applicants recorded by each local authority by county; the likely time schedule to meet their accommodation needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46761/21]

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 administrative area are 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.

In relation to the specific question posed by the Deputy regarding the likely time schedule to meet a households accommodation needs, allocation of social housing support is a matter for each individual local authority in accordance with its allocation scheme made under Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, the information sought is not held by my Department.

However, details on the length of time spent on the record of qualified households (waiting

lists) can be found at tables 2.8 and A1.8 of the SSHA report.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists.

SSHA 2020 Report

www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/#:~:text=The%20Summary%20of%20Social%20Housing,is%20not%20currently%20being%20met

Housing Provision

385. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which he expects to respond to the needs of the indigenous rural population, the families of which are in a position to provide a home for themselves in their native place but are being dissuaded thereby throwing a greater burden onto the housing market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46762/21]

386. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which he proposes to address the issue of housing for the indigenous young population of rural Ireland who have access to a building site from a parent or relative and who wish to provide their own housing thereby contributing to the alleviation of the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46763/21]

387. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of indigenous rural applicants for planning permission to provide their own homes who have had their applications refused in the past 12 months; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this places further competition for scarce housing supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46764/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I propose to take Questions Nos. 385 to 387, inclusive, together.

Under the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing 2005, planning authorities are required to frame the planning policies in their development plans in a balanced and measured way that ensures the housing needs of rural communities are met, while avoiding excessive urban-generated housing, particularly in those areas near cities and towns that are under pressure from urban generated development.

The Guidelines identify four rural area types in respect of which planning authorities may formulate policies for ‘urban generated’ and ‘rural generated’ rural housing. Section 3.2.3 of the Guidelines suggests that in areas “under major urban influence”, planning authorities may define “rural generated” housing need for “Persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community” and for “Persons working full-time or part-time in rural areas”.

Since 2018, the National Planning Framework (NPF) is the national planning policy document providing overall strategic policy for the future development of Ireland through specific National Policy Objectives (NPOs) that aim to support the overall rural and small town pattern of development in Ireland and deliver strengthened and diversified rural communities.

NPO 15 of the NPF fully supports the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades, while simultaneously indicating the need to manage the development of certain areas around cities and towns that are under strong urban influence, in order to avoid over-development of those areas.

NPO 15 is supplemented by NPO 19, which aims to ensure that a policy distinction is made between areas experiencing significant overspill development pressure from urban areas, particularly within the commuter catchment of cities, towns and centres of employment, on the one hand, and other remoter and weaker rural areas where population levels may be low and or declining, on the other. NPF Policy NPO19 is aligned with the established approach whereby considerations of social (intrinsic part of the community) or economic (persons working full or part time) need may be applied by planning authorities in rural areas under urban influence.

Updated Rural Housing Planning Guidelines are currently being prepared by my Department to ensure consistency with new requirements and legislation at national and EU level introduced in respect of areas related to rural housing such as environmental protection, the Gael-tacht and climate action. The new guidelines will ensure a more consistent approach between counties and alignment with NPF objectives, and will be published in draft before the end of 2021. In the meantime, the NPF objectives together with the 2005 Guidelines, enable planning authorities to continue to draft and adopt county development plan policies that enable planning applications to be considered and planning permission to be granted for houses in rural areas.

The data requested is not collated by my Department. Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website, at the following link:

www.gov.ie/en/service/9e4ee-get-planning-statistics/

The data collected relates to the total number of applications and decisions for all developments that require planning permission, broken down by year and planning authority.

In addition, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical office, compiles and makes available detailed data on a number of planning related issues including permissions granted and completions by development type and county. Data is available at the following link on the CSO website: www.cso.ie/en/statistics/construction/planningpermissions/

It is noteworthy that there is strong delivery of new homes in rural areas nationally in recent years – with more than 25,000 rural house planning permissions granted in last 5 years. In the same period, more than 90% of that number of rural homes were built, comprising around one in three houses completed in Ireland between 2016 and 2020.

Question No. 386 answered with Question No. 385.

Question No. 387 answered with Question No. 385.

Heritage Sites

388. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which heritage buildings continue to be protected and preserved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46765/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

(Deputy Malcolm Noonan): As advised most recently in my response to Question No. 236 on 24 June 2021 and in many parliamentary replies prior to that, my Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through two grant schemes which are, in the main, administered by the local authorities. These are the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Historic Structures Fund (HSF). This year 562 heritage projects across every county in the country were allocated funding from a combined sum of €6m under these schemes, an increase of nearly 40% on 2020.

My Department also provides financial support through the Community Monuments Fund (CMF) for work relating to monuments. This year funding was allocated to 139 projects across all local authorities to a value of just over €4.2m.

Details of the projects have been published on my Department's website and on local authority websites, and I would again direct the Deputy to those detailed on line resources.

Housing Schemes

389. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if it will be possible to front-load expenditure on housing projects, local authority and affordable, in 2021 in order to make a serious head start on the housing issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46766/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The Government's commitment to increase the supply of public housing was underpinned in Budget 2021, which provided €3.3 billion to deliver housing programmes this year. This funding will support social and affordable housing delivery, along with the continued implementation of a broad range of programmes providing targeted support to meet housing need.

My Department works with local authorities to determine work proposals and related funding requirements. Funding is provided to the local authorities on an ongoing basis as housing projects are progressed and claims fall due for payment. Since 2016 almost €11 billion has been provided to deliver my Department's housing programmes.

The recently published Housing for All strategy is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade, with targets for the delivery of a total of 88,400 new build social homes and 53,800 new affordable homes in the period 2022-2030.

Housing for All is supported by a multi annual investment package of over €4bn per annum, through an overall combination of €12bn in direct Exchequer funding, €3.5bn in funding through the Land Development Agency (LDA) and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency. The specific exchequer allocations for 2022 are currently being determined in the context of the annual estimates process.

Departmental Strategies

390. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which further flexibility can be incorporated in the Housing for All programme with particular reference to applicants who may be marginally excluded from qualification for affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46767/21]

392. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and

Heritage the extent to which he can foresee a broadening of the regulations to facilitate the accommodation of a greater number of applicants seeking affordable housing at an earlier date rather than later when housing costs are likely to be beyond their affordability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46769/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I propose to take Questions Nos. 390 and 392 together.

The Programme for Government – Our Shared Future – sets out the objective that everybody should have access to sustainable, good quality housing to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard, and located close to essential services, offering a high quality of life.

Under Action 4.12 of Housing for All, in the period to December 2021 local authorities will be preparing Housing Action Delivery Plans to include social and affordable housing where necessary (affordable purchase and cost rental). This will allow each Local Authority to determine the affordability constraint in their area based on the Housing Need and Demand Assessment.

The Local Authority Affordable Homes scheme and the First Home scheme are primarily focused on supporting first-time buyers purchasing newly built homes. Both of these schemes will be targeted at households constrained by the maximum mortgage and deposit available to them. The gap between the market value and what the household can afford (including with the assistance of the 'Help to Buy' incentive) will be bridged via the provision of equity support. The equity support can subsequently be redeemed at any time at the home-owners discretion, or remain outstanding until the home is sold or passed on.

The detailed design of the First Home scheme is currently progressing, for the scheme's introduction in early 2022. Price ceilings for eligible homes will be confirmed in advance of the scheme's operation. Regulations regarding income eligibility in respect of the Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme will be put in place by November.

More broadly, the Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. It is the largest State-led building programme in our history, backed up by an unprecedented financial commitment in excess of €4bn per annum.

At a national level, over 300,000 new homes will be built by the end of 2030, including a projected 90,000 social homes, 36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes. These homes will be provided by Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency (LDA), as well as through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks.

The Housing for All strategy also provides for the 'Local Authority Home Loan', which will be in place later in 2021. The Local Authority Home Loan is a successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, and will include an increase in the income ceiling for single applicants, thus increasing the number of people eligible. From 10 September 2021, I have already implemented a reduction of the mortgage interest rate by 0.25% for new borrowers under the existing Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL). This lower rate will also apply to loans issued under the forthcoming Local Authority Home Loan. The Help to Buy scheme is also currently available to help purchasers in accessing newly constructed homes.

Question No. 391 answered with Question No. 378.

Question No. 392 answered with Question No. 390.

Housing Schemes

393. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of Rebuilding Ireland loans approved and drawn down in the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46770/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): 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).

Local Authority drawdowns to Q1 2021 is available at the following link, which will be updated as updated figures are available at: www.gov.ie/en/collection/42d2f-local-authority-loan-activity/#local-authority-loans-approvedpaid.

Housing Schemes

394. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of families who have to date in 2021 applied for local authority or similar housing, affordable housing or special needs housing by county with a view to responding at the earliest possible date to this need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46771/21]

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%. In relation to the question posed by the Deputy regarding the number of families that have in the year to date applied for local authority or special needs housing, information of this specific type is not held by my Department.

The summary report for 2020 includes information in a range of categories, including details on households with a specific accommodation requirement arising from a disability. A breakdown of the categories of disability is available in Figure 2.5 and Table A 1.5 of the report. The report is available at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists.

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. Central to the Plan is a major expansion in the role of the State in providing affordable and social homes. Overall we need to deliver an average of 33,000 new build homes each year out to 2030. This includes an average of 10,000 new social homes each year, 4,000 affordable purchase homes and 2,000 cost rental homes. Over 54,000 new affordable homes will be delivered by the end of 2030, including a projected

36,000 affordable purchase homes and 18,000 cost rental homes.

The provisions of the Affordable Housing Act 2021 were commenced in August of this year. The Act details provisions for the following measures: a new local authority led affordable purchase scheme; a new affordable purchase shared equity 'First Home' scheme for the sale of homes in private development; and establishing Cost Rental as a new form of tenure. To date, the first homes delivered under Cost Rental have been managed by Approved Housing Bodies and data is not retained centrally on applications. In terms of affordable purchase, it is intended that Regulations governing the application procedure for the local authority led scheme will be published by November.

House Prices

395. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will take action to discourage house price increases that currently make it difficult or impossible for first-time house buyers to build or acquire a home of their own; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46772/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Housing supply has been impacted by Covid-19. The periods of lockdown since early 2020 have reduced construction activity and placed limitations on the ability to conduct normal sales activity, and this has impacted on house prices. The considerable growth in household savings, related to the public health restrictions which reduced consumption, also seems likely to be contributing to recent price inflation.

The ongoing removal of Covid restrictions will allow for a full reopening of the housing market. CSO data regarding new dwellings completions for Quarter 2 shows that the rate of completions is increasing and the effects of the periods of lockdown are abating. Data on commencements are also showing a significant increase over this period.

The full opening up of the housing market and construction activity, along with the increases in supply that will be delivered by the Government's Housing for All Plan, will ensure that housing market activity normalises, and supply increases to meet demand as the Plan is implemented. In particular, a range of measures are being implemented which will deliver on the Programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system. These will increase the supply of affordable homes through delivering affordable homes on local authority lands; cost rental; the 'first home' affordable purchase scheme; and expansion of Part V planning requirements to increase the 10% contribution requirement to 20% for social and affordable housing.

These measures are in addition to the previously established Help to Buy and the Rebuilding Ireland Homeloan schemes which also support first time buyers.

Housing Schemes

396. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of households approved for adaptation works by local authority in each of the years 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form; and the funding that will be made available for same in budget 2022. [46812/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):

Details in relation to the number of approved applicants for adaptation works by local authority for the years in question are not collated by my Department. This information may be available directly from the local authorities. However, details of the grants paid for all local authorities up to 2020, are available on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics.

For 2021, a total of 5,213 grants have been paid to date. The detailed administration of the grants including their assessment, approval and prioritisation, is the responsibility of local authorities.

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/.

Local Authorities

397. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of local authority households approved for housing adaptation works but which are yet to be carried out broken down by local authority in tabular form. [46813/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): In respect of the Disabled Persons Grants (DPG) Scheme (LA Tenants), all local authorities were asked to submit details of their work proposals and related funding requirements for 2021 earlier this year. These work proposals were evaluated and the 2021 DPG allocations issued to local authorities in May whereby all works that could be completed in 2021 were approved. Details of which can be found at the link below.

www.gov.ie/en/press-release/20e02-minister-obrien-minister-burke-approve-over-23m-in-funding-for-the-disabled-persons-grant-scheme-improvement-works-in-lieu-of-local-authority-housing-scheme/.

Local authorities were also advised where extra funding was required or in emergency circumstances above their funding allocation a request for additional funding could be made and my Department would make every effort to accede to this request.

The number of properties approved for funding by local authority is available in tabular form below. Local authorities are currently progressing their 2021 work programmes but it will be later this year before significant recoupment claims are lodged with my Department. Full details in relation to the 2021 Programme will be available early in 2022.

Local Authority	Properties Allocated Funding in 2021
Carlow County	27
Cavan County	38
Clare County	35

Local Authority	Properties Allocated Funding in 2021
Cork City	81
Cork County	177
Donegal County	84
Dublin City	162
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	82
Fingal County	70
Galway City	47
Galway County	88
Kerry County	152
Kildare County	24
Kilkenny County	29
Laois County	40
Leitrim County	26
Limerick City & County	49
Longford County	45
Louth County	30
Mayo County	77
Meath County	35
Monaghan County	19
Offaly County	26
Roscommon County	17
Sligo County	68
South Dublin County	79
Tipperary County	78
Waterford City & County	31
Westmeath County	62
Wexford County	147
Wicklow County	86
Total	2,011

Fire Stations

398. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the fire stations currently assessed as needing upgrading works; and when each of these works will be undertaken. [46819/21]

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 supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for equipment and priority infrastructural projects.

In December 2020, I announced a new Fire Services Capital Programme for the period

2021-2025, with a funding allocation of €61m. Following extensive engagement with fire authorities, a number of proposals for station works etc. were received. The proposals were evaluated and prioritised on the basis of the:

- Area Risk Categorisation of the fire station (population, fire risks, etc.);
- established Health and Safety needs;
- state of development of the project (is site acquired, etc.); and
- value for money offered by the proposal.

- This new Programme will see six replacement fire stations built, continued support for the construction of a further 12 new fire stations, nine fire station refurbishments as well as the allocation of 35 new fire engines.

- My Department works closely with the relevant local authority to progress each fire station project through the necessary stages. Project consideration stages include submission of preliminary and detailed appraisals; submission of design brief; selection of site; application for approval in principle; appointment of design consultants; submission of a preliminary design; planning application; submission of preliminary cost plan, detailed design and cost plans; and tender process and construction stage.

- In order to maximise the available Capital Programme funding, my Department re-assesses the status of projects in the Programme on an annual basis, and some flexibility is normally available to advance projects that are ready and that offer best value-for-money, taking account of the state of readiness of projects more generally.

Housing Schemes

399. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the affordable housing in the area of Cherrywood, Dublin as a result of the local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, funding; the number of units, the size of units and whether they will be affordable purchase or affordable rental; the cost or rent in each case; when they are scheduled for delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46831/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The objective of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is to provide public off-site infrastructure to relieve critical infrastructure blockages. This enables the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites in Dublin and in urban areas of high demand. LIHAF is designed to specifically address the issue of housing supply, a crucial factor in terms of moderating house prices. Infrastructure being funded under LIHAF includes access roads, distributor roads, link roads, road improvements, roundabouts, bridges and parks.

LIHAF was not primarily intended as an affordable housing scheme, although it will enable the development of more affordable housing on sites. It is a scheme which funds the building of public infrastructure by local authorities. This infrastructure in turn unlocks associated sites for housing development quicker than would otherwise have occurred. As such, my Department does not routinely retain information on size of dwellings which may be made available by private developers building homes on private lands.

In 2017, grant agreements for 30 approved projects were signed between my Department

and local authorities. One such project was at Cherrywood, Co. Dublin. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council were approved grant funding for the construction of a new N11 junction 'Q' at Druid Glen Road, Druid's Glen Road (road only), Druid's Glen bridge - (short bridge structure traversing valley) and Druid's Glen Road (bridge feature).

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has advised that the total residential units over the entire build out of the Cherrywood SDZ is for c.7,000 homes. The total housing associated to the LIHAF grant agreement is for 2,000 homes, including 200 Part V and 100 affordable homes. These homes are for purchase and will primarily be 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units, therefore rental costs are not applicable. Completion is expected on the total LIHAF related affordable units by end 2023 and price points in relation to LIHAF reductions will be agreed between the local authority and developer in advance of sale.

Housing Policy

400. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the details of all Part Vs delivered over the past five years, by local authority including the cost to the local authority or approved housing body; if these units are being leased or bought; if they are being leased or bought by an approved housing body or local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46832/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): Details on Part V social housing delivery for each local authority are included in social housing statistics published by my Department. This data is available to the end of Quarter 2 2021 and is available on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/collection/fd048-affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics/.

The table below, sets out an indicative average purchase price of Part V delivered units for each local authority in the years 2016 - 2020, based on the information submitted to my Department. It should be noted that average costs vary depending on design and type of units (e.g. bedroom numbers, apartment/house). Average costs are also determined by the number of units delivered in individual local authorities.

[Housing]

Note 1: The information above is calculated using the financial information available to the Department where Local Authorities have submitted a recoupment claim to the Department.

Note 2: The CALF Capital Outlay represents the average amount of CALF funding provided. (A maximum of 30%).

Note 3: Agreement on Part V arrangements are a matter for the local authorities. In some cases the Part V average is affected by delivery of homes that were subject to agreements prior to the current Part V arrangements. Complete details of PART V arrangements are available from the local authorities.

Note 4: The Part V average lease cost is based on the average full year cost of the Part V lease agreements entered into by each local authority in the relevant year and does not represent the amount claimed or paid in respect of that period. In a Part V leased unit, the lease payment can vary depending on how the equivalent net monetary value has been reflected in the agreement. This is usually achieved by either a rent free period up front or a discount on the lease payment over the term of the lease (or part thereof). Where a rent free period is negotiated in

respect of Part V units, no amount will be claimed or paid in respect of the units for that period.

Housing Schemes

401. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the details of the retrofitting programme for local authority housing by number of units to be retrofitted each year to 2030; the cost for each unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46834/21]

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): The newly revised ten year Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme launched in 2021 is designed around the Programme for Government commitment to retrofit 500,000 homes to a B2/Cost Optimal BER standard by 2030, of which approximately 36,500 of those homes are expected to be local authority homes.

A target of 2,400 social homes for upgrade works has been set for 2021, 750 of which relate to the Midlands Retrofit Pilot. The average cost of homes under the 2021 programme is expected to be €30,000. The newly revised programme involves a move from a 'shallow' to a 'deeper' retrofit of local authority homes. Learning from this years programme will inform the programme in future years, including the expected average cost per home and the annual targets.

Citizens' Assembly

402. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the establishment of a citizens' assembly on Ireland's biodiversity crisis. [46208/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): The convening of a Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity is under discussion at a senior level between the Department of the Taoiseach and my Department. The timing and scheduling of the Assembly will depend on the outcome of these discussions and on a number of external factors which need to be considered before the scope and terms of the Assembly are framed.

Passport Services

403. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of a passport application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45968/21]

405. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when passports will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46009/21]

406. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport application will be approved for a person (details supplied). [46069/21]

410. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46344/21]

412. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo in view of the fact that this person submitted their application on 14 July 2021. [46363/21]

415. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of a passport application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46516/21]

422. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when passports will be issued for the children of persons (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46613/21]

423. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46647/21]

424. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo in view of the fact that this person has imminent travel plans. [46663/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 403, 405, 406, 410, 412, 415 and 422 to , inclusive,424 together.

With regard to the specific applications about which the Deputies have enquired, the Passport Service has provided an update on the status of the passport application to the applicant.

The current turnaround times are 10 working days for Simple Adult renewals, 15 working days for Complex renewals, 40 working days for First Time Applications on Passport Online and 8 weeks for Passport Express applications which have been completed correctly.

Passport Services

404. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of a passport application (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45995/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): With regard to the specific passport application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has tried to make contact with the applicant to provide an update on the status of the passport application. The Passport Service currently has a turnaround time of 8 weeks for Passport Express applications which have been completed correctly and we are currently within this turnaround time.

The current turnaround times are 10 working days for Simple Adult renewals, 15 working days for Complex renewals, 40 working days for First Time Applications on Passport Online and 8 weeks for Passport Express applications.

Question No. 405 answered with Question No. 403.

Question No. 406 answered with Question No. 403.

Departmental Expenditure

407. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 348 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were

issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46197/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department did not run a training programme or course and therefore a procurement process was not required. Participation in this programme was requested by a member of staff, in line with their learning and development needs. A business case for the request, setting out the benefits of participation in this course, was submitted and approved. As the total cost of participation was under the €5,000 threshold, under public procurement guidelines, additional quotes were not required.

Equality Issues

408. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if Ireland supports the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action against racism and racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; his views on the Durban+20 agenda of the United Nations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46298/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland delivered a national statement on the 22nd September 2021 at the high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Our participation in the event was an expression of our unequivocal condemnation of racism in all its forms. It also provided the opportunity to categorically reject the anti-semitic statements and other hateful speech associated with past meetings.

Ireland's national statement acknowledged the aim of the Durban Declaration: to reinforce the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and to provide a comprehensive framework for combating racism, racial intolerance, xenophobia and related intolerance.

It further outlined Ireland's efforts to promote a tolerant and inclusive society free from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The statement expressed concern about the alarming proliferation of religious intolerance, and its contribution to the denial of human rights and to fuelling conflict. Ireland welcomed the Political Declaration's explicit condemnation of prejudices based on religion or belief, including hatred or discrimination of an anti-Christian; anti-Muslim; or anti-Semitic nature.

We expressed our belief that all States have the responsibility to condemn racism and to ensure that their legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief to all people without distinction.

Recognising multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and the layered experiences of racism experienced by women and minorities, we also stressed the importance of addressing the impact of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Finally, Ireland's National Statement outlined work underway in Ireland including the development of a national Anti-Racism Plan, the Criminal Justice (Hate Crime) Bill 2021, and ongoing work in the field of education.

Passport Services

409. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport will issue for travel on 28 September 2021 in the case of a person (details supplied); if an individual and specific reply will issue in respect of this Parliamentary Question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46303/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has provided an update on the status of the passport application to the applicant.

The current turnaround times are 10 working days for Simple Adult renewals, 15 working days for Complex renewals, 40 working days for First Time Applications on Passport Online and 8 weeks for Passport Express applications which have been completed correctly.

Question No. 410 answered with Question No. 403.

Equality Issues

411. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the urgent help needed by the Tigrayan people; if he will raise this matter with his EU colleagues and at the United Nations requesting that they set up an international independent body to investigate these atrocities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46362/21]

413. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of the work his Department has done on the crisis of the Tigrayan people in Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46371/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Colm Brophy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 411 and 413 together.

I remain deeply concerned by the human rights and humanitarian situation in Tigray, including the ongoing blockade of the region and attacks on humanitarian workers. As famine-like conditions are reported, there is an urgent need for full humanitarian access, a negotiated ceasefire, and the commencement of political dialogue to find a resolution to the conflict: I wish the former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, who has been appointed AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa, well in his mediation efforts.

I am alarmed by the conflict's impact on civilians, including harrowing reports of widespread and ongoing sexual violence, and other serious human rights violations and abuses. It is vital that perpetrators be held to account. In this regard, Ireland strongly supports the work underway by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), to investigate reported atrocities. The publication of their joint report on 1 November will be a crucial first step towards accountability.

Ireland continues to take the lead at the UN Security Council to ensure a focus on the situation in Tigray. Ireland spearheaded calls for the most recent open Council meeting on 26 August, where UN Secretary General Guterres underscored the severity of the humanitarian situation, and urged all parties to immediately end hostilities, and negotiate a lasting ceasefire. At that meeting, Ireland reiterated its call for an urgent end to the violence, full humanitarian access, accountability for atrocities, and for a political solution to the conflict.

The Government also continues to support a strong and constructive EU response to the crisis. There will be a further discussion on Ethiopia and Tigray at the Foreign Affairs Council

in October, in which Minister Coveney will participate. Minister Coveney also continues to engage on the situation in Tigray with key interlocutors, including leaders in the region and the Africa Union (AU). On 15 September he met with the EU Special Representative on the Horn of Africa, Dr Annette Weber, to discuss options for addressing the conflict.

Ireland's continued priority will remain, as always, supporting the needs of the most vulnerable people in Ethiopia, including those affected by conflict in Tigray. Ireland, through the Irish Aid programme, has so far provided over €3.2 million to support the humanitarian response in Tigray and the refugee response in neighbouring Sudan, through trusted UN and NGO partners on the ground. On 7 July, I announced additional humanitarian funding of €2.75m for Ethiopia, to address hunger and insecurity, including in Tigray.

Question No. 412 answered with Question No. 403.

Question No. 413 answered with Question No. 411.

Citizenship Applications

414. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position regarding and status of an application for Irish citizenship by a person (details supplied). [46386/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The application to which the Deputy refers was received on 11 January 2021, and is currently waiting to be processed. All documentation submitted is being stored in a secure environment.

My Department is responsible for citizenship by descent through the Foreign Births Register under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 ("the 1956 Act"), as amended. We take our legal responsibility in relation to Foreign Birth Registration very seriously and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the processing time for these applications stood at 18 months. This is due to the complex nature of Foreign Birth Registration applications and the very high volume of applications we received due to Brexit.

The Passport Service is very concerned about this backlog situation and are actively planning to resume processing FBR applications as soon as possible. My Department is committed to allocating further resources to this service to assist with the high volume of applications when regular processing resumes with a focus on reducing turnaround times to pre COVID-19 levels by the end of 2021.

In cases of exceptional urgency applicants may continue to contact the Passport Service directly using email address: *travelemergency@dfa.ie*.

Question No. 415 answered with Question No. 403.

Passport Services

416. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of passport applications received by the passport office on a monthly basis from January 2020 to August 2021, in tabular form; if the applications were online, through the post or through an embassy and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46560/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of passport applications received by the passport office on a monthly basis from January 2020 to August 2021, is set out in tabular form below.

2020	Applications from Overseas Mission	Online Applications	Paper Applications	Total Monthly Applications
January	5,229	59,486	25,433	90,148
February	5,155	50,651	25,340	81,146
March	3,622	27,595	15,662	46,879
April	56	11,334	3	11,393
May	538	12,782	119	13,439
June	1,334	32,505	1,682	35,521
July	1,764	29,490	1,227	32,481
August	1,339	21,548	3,843	26,730
September	1,417	21,474	4,420	27,311
October	846	18,537	3,009	22,392
November	134	16,071	38	16,243
December	1,671	20,751	1,473	23,895
2021				
January	40	24,943	25	25,008
February	35	20,577	203	20,815
March	135	30,671	446	31,252
April	257	36,594	489	37,340
May	764	68,227	211	69,202
June	1,786	64,605	304	66,695
July	731	67,117	3,066	70,914
August	419	74,768	6,904	82,091
Total	27,272	709,726	93,897	830,895

Since 2016, there has been an ongoing process of reform within the Passport Service, that has delivered a number of high profile and successful improvements for citizens at home and abroad who rely on this service. This includes the facility for online applications.

In 2019, online applications accounted for 47% of all applications received. The Online Service was enhanced at the end of 2019 to facilitate first time applicants, both children and adults, in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Europe. This has been further expanded this year to facilitate first time applicants in 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.

Passport Services

417. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of completed passports that were physically collected by applicants or by persons on behalf of the applicant at the passport office on a monthly basis from February 2020 to September 2021, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46563/21]

418. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of persons

who were turned away from the public office of the passport office on a weekly basis from March 2020 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46564/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 417 and 418 together.

The Passport Service maintained operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, notwithstanding the fact that the processing of passports requires physical attendance on site to deliver this service. As a result of well implemented safety protocols, our staff were able to assist citizens both at home and abroad who required passports for a range of emergency and urgent personal, business or legal reasons, or who had compelling humanitarian needs to travel.

In the first four months of this year 3,000 urgent passports, were issued to citizens who had either urgent personal or humanitarian needs for a passport. While schedules for urgent situations are not maintained, on a case by case basis, issued passports have been collected by citizens in person when the postal service was not an effective delivery option.

The public offices of the Passport Service in Cork and in Mount Street have been closed in line with COVID-19 public health restrictions and the public have complied fully with those restrictions. While the pandemic has massively disrupted Passport and other public services, I am pleased that so far this year we have managed to have multiple interactions with our citizens by phone and online, provided over 300,000 passports since 4 May while our emergency services have been maintained for those with a medical emergency or death of a family member abroad. There was one security related incident this year which has been reported to An Garda Síochána, where people were removed from our premises to ensure the safety of staff.

I wish to inform the Deputy that, in line with our continued scaling up of services, the Passport Office in Mount Street resumed its Urgent Appointment Service for renewal of Passports on Monday, 27 September 2021. The Urgent Appointment Service for renewal of passports will be available to people who unexpectedly require their passport renewed at short notice and opt for this fee based service to do so.

Applicants are now able to book an appointment to attend the public passport office in Mount Street. Passport applicants who require a same day passport renewal can book appointments 3 days in advance. Applicants who require a four day renewal service can book appointments 3 weeks in advance.

The Passport Service will continue to prioritise its emergency service for those who require a passport for a medical emergency or death of a family member abroad.

Question No. 418 answered with Question No. 417.

Passport Services

419. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of staff reassigned from the passport office FRR section to the HSE for essential contact tracing, to the Department of Social Protection for the processing of essential pandemic unemployment payments and to support the Department of Health with quarantine issues; when those staff members will return to work for his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46566/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): To assist with the response to COVID-19, 166 Passport Service personnel were redeployed into essential public service roles, such as contact tracing for the HSE, assisting the Department of Social Protection to facilitate

the processing of COVID-19 related benefits, providing consular assistance to Irish citizens overseas and assisting the Public Appointments Service.

Two officers from the Passport Service are currently assigned to the Department of Health Mandatory Hotel Quarantine advice line. Officials in my Department are engaging with the Department of Health to return these officers following the recent decision to discontinue the Mandatory Hotel Quarantine advice line. In addition, two officers from the Passport Service remain assigned to the Public Appointments Service to assist with recruitment efforts.

At present, of the 519 staff working in the Passport Service in August 2021, less than one per cent were working from home on a full-time basis, as staff directly involved in customer service and the production of passports are required to work on site.

Passport Services

420. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the exact number of temporary clerical officers assigned by the Public Appointments Service to the passport office in recent weeks; if all of those temporary staff have commenced their employment to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46567/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): From the 23 August to date, 44 Temporary Clerical Officers were assigned through the Public Appointments Service. Nine TCOs who were assigned did not take up employment with my Department.

I can assure the Deputy that staffing needs for the Passport Service, including additional resources to meet the projected demand continues to be an ongoing priority for my Department and an issue which is kept under constant review.

Passport Services

421. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position regarding a passport application by persons (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46589/21]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney): With regard to the specific applications about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has already issued passports to the applicants.

Question No. 422 answered with Question No. 403.

Question No. 423 answered with Question No. 403.

Question No. 424 answered with Question No. 403.

Defence Forces

425. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Defence if he has received a submission from an organisation (details supplied) relating to a funding request for the Asgard programme; and his views on supporting this worthy project. [46515/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm that a pre-budget submis-

sion was received in to my Department on 24 September relating to a sail training ship. Officials in my Department will now review and assess the submission. I also understand that officials have contacted the organisation to arrange a meeting in order to discuss the details of the proposal.

The State operated a national sail training programme for many years, unfortunately this programme ended following the sinking of the Asgard in 2008. I understand that there are a number of organisations engaged in this area now. I am aware of the positive impact sail training has on participants. It is a valuable tool for youth development and not just simply teaching people to sail.

Departmental Expenditure

426. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 371 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46198/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Further to the Deputy's earlier question, I wish to advise that places on this programme were initially facilitated by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department availed of the opportunity to send participants on this programme but was not involved in the original procurement process.

Interest in participating in the programme was sought from employees in appropriate grades and the individual participation fee per employee was met by my Department. Learning of this nature offers a unique opportunity for senior managers to engage in a dynamic programme that focuses on developing key capabilities for personal growth. Learning and development opportunities are kept under review on an ongoing basis to ensure the requirements of the Department are met.

Defence Forces

427. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Defence the number and location of Civil Defence units currently operating from temporary accommodation; his plans to provide permanent accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46818/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Civil Defence operates on a partnership basis between the Department of Defence and the local authorities. Civil Defence policy is set down by the Minister for Defence through the Civil Defence Branch of the Department of Defence and Civil Defence services are delivered at local level by the relevant Local Authority.

The 2015 White Paper on Defence states that it is the responsibility of each Local Authority to provide suitable accommodation for their Civil Defence Unit. Most Local Authorities have provided high quality accommodation for their Units. For example, I recently had the pleasure of opening a new headquarters for Clare Civil Defence in Ennis. I note that both Meath and Monaghan County Councils have recently completed major new building projects for their Civil Defence Units. The Department of Defence provided some funding for each of these projects and, subject to budgetary constraints, is willing to support similar projects in other local authority areas.

I am aware that further improvements in accommodation for Civil Defence units are re-

quired in a small number of Local Authorities. Officials in the Department of Defence are in contact with a number of Local Authorities in this regard. While the Department of Defence is willing to assist, the provision of suitable accommodation for Civil Defence Units is ultimately a matter for each Local Authority.

Defence Forces

428. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Defence the reason behind not meeting with those involved in a documentary (details supplied) until after it had aired given that it has been reported requests were made of him at an earlier stage. [46825/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): There has been considerable interaction between my officials and some of the women who participated in the documentary mentioned before the documentary aired. This took the form of written correspondence, phone calls and a meeting between an individual and officials.

All requests for meetings in person are considered within the circumstances pertaining to individual cases.

Defence Forces

429. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Defence if there has been any contact between his Department and RTÉ following the release of a documentary (details supplied); and if so, the purpose of same. [46826/21]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): I wish to advise the Deputy that following the broadcast of the Documentary a representative from my Department contacted RTÉ for the purpose of providing Departmental contact details to the Women of Honour.

As a result of this contact, an initial meeting subsequently took place between the Secretary General of my Department and the Women of Honour last week and I am scheduled to meet with them today.

Protected Disclosures

430. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education if she will commission an inquiry into the handling of protected disclosures and the failure of relevant authorities to act promptly and protect public finances in view of recent events and disclosures in relation to both CMETB and LMETB and in view of concerns relating to the processes and procedures of both bodies in dealing with these issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46008/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Under section 21(1) of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, all public bodies, including Education and Training Boards (ETBs), are required to establish and maintain procedures for the making of protected disclosures by their employees. Where an ETB receives a protected disclosure, they are required to follow those procedures.

Any follow up actions in relation to a protected disclosure made to an ETB are a matter for the ETB concerned. Depending on the nature of the disclosure, the ETB may need to deal with the matter in accordance with other relevant internal procedures and/or refer the matter to

an external investigative or regulatory authority where appropriate. In handling a disclosure, ETBs must also adhere to their obligations under the Act to maintain the confidentiality of the employee concerned.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has issued guidance to assist public bodies, including in the performance of their functions under the Act. The guidance includes that the procedures should allow for a system for review in respect of the outcome of an assessment/investigation undertaken in respect of the protected disclosure or of any complaint of penalisation.

Both of the ETBs referred to by the Deputy have confirmed that they have a protected disclosure policy in place. All ETBs are also required to report the number of Protected Disclosures received in their annual reports. The ETBs in question have published this information in their annual reports and separately as a standalone document and both are available on their respective websites.

School Transport

431. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Education the number of students by county in tabular form; and the number of children who were unsuccessful in their application for concessionary school transport places. [46821/21]

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 my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2kms at primary and 4.8kms at post-primary and are attending their nearest School/Education Centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who completed the application and payment process on time for the 2021/22 school year will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation. In addition, all post-primary pupils who are otherwise eligible for school transport but are attending their second nearest school and who have applied and paid on time will be accommodated on school transport services. This arrangement is in place for current school year pending completion of the full review of the School Transport Scheme.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and are offered seats where capacity exists after all eligible children have been catered for.

Late applicants and/or families who pay late are not guaranteed a seat and will only be allocated a seat if capacity is available once seats are allocated to those families who applied and paid on time for transport services for the 2021/2022 school year.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that to date some 104,900 pupils have been issued tickets for the School Transport Scheme. This number is continuing to change as tickets continue to be al-

located to pupils where capacity is available. As such the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. School Transport Section of my Department will revert directly to the Deputy with this information when it is available.

Schools Building Projects

432. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the status of a new school building for a school (details supplied). [45973/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design.

In October 2020, in order to expedite the progression of this major building project the Department authorised DDLETB and its Design Team to commence a pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of contractors, in parallel with the Department's review of the stage 2(b) submission for this project.

The Stage 2(b) report has been reviewed and my Department recently received Design Team confirmations from each member of the Design Team that they have carried out a final review of all of its tender documentation to ensure compliance with Department requirements.

Last week, my Department authorised the ETB and its design team to complete the pre-qualification process to shortlist building contractors and then proceed to Tender Stage.

School Funding

433. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education if her Department has received a proposal (details supplied); if her Department is in a position to provide funding for this proposed facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46026/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has not received a proposal relating to the matter to which he refers. My Department is aware that there is engagement among stakeholders locally relating to a potential development.

Programme for Government

434. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education the position regarding updating the national anti-bullying plan as committed to under the programme for Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46036/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Programme for Government reinforces our commitment to improve the learning experience and success of learners and specifically commits to updating the National Anti-Bullying Plan to include gender identity bullying. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth committed in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures to "Develop a National Framework for Anti-Bullying, taking a community-wide approach to tackling bullying from childhood through to adulthood".

As the Deputy is aware, I attended the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science recently to provide an update on a

number of issues including the measures that are being taken to prevent and tackle bullying in schools.

During my appearance at the Joint Committee, I announced that my Department will commence a review of my Department's 2013 Action Plan on Bullying and the 2013 Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools.

This review will take account of developments and relevant research since the action plan and procedures were published in 2013 and will specifically consider areas such as cyber bullying and gender identity bullying.

This work will involve significant consultation and collaboration across my Department, with other Government Departments and Bodies including the Ombudsman for Children, and will also involve consultation with a broad range of education stakeholders, including parents and students.

I also announced that during this school year, my Department's Inspectorate is prioritising monitoring and gathering information about the implementation of anti-bullying measures in schools across all its inspection types.

As part of this work, the Inspectorate will also identify and report on examples of effective practice in relation to preventing and tackling bullying in schools. This will help provide evidence of the type of bullying that is occurring in our schools and examples of approaches that can be successful in dealing with it. An important part of the Inspectorate's work will be a focus on the priority actions of schools in relation to promoting a positive school culture and climate.

Covid-19 Pandemic

435. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education the status of the CO2 monitors supplied to schools; the measures being taken to address defective monitors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46037/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Good ventilation was identified as an important aspect of public health advice on managing Covid-19 risks and this led to the establishment of an Expert Group by the Department of Health. A sub-group of the main Expert Group focussed exclusively on the issue of improving and monitoring ventilation in schools.

This report formed the basis for the most recent updating of the ventilation guidance for schools and included recommendations in relation to strengthening the message about the importance of good ventilation and the use of CO2 monitors.

The use of CO2 monitors can provide a useful general indication that areas/rooms within a building may not be adequately ventilated and can enable occupants to become familiar with the impact that activities, outdoor weather and window openings have on levels of good ventilation within a room. This information can be used to inform strategies for improving ventilation. The portable units can facilitate measurements in a wide range of locations in schools.

My Department procured portable monitors that are currently being distributed to schools – between 2 and 20 at primary school level and between 20 and 35 at post-primary school level depending on school size, at an estimated overall cost of €4 million. The monitors are portable, simple to use, and will give a digital reading.

Deliveries of CO2 monitors to schools commenced in the third week of August. In total,

it involves over 35,000 CO2 monitors being distributed to primary and post-primary schools. 25,000 CO2 monitors have been distributed to schools to date, meaning that CO2 monitors have been delivered to each school in the country.

A fault was detected with the LCD display unit in the CO2 monitor in the last batch of 10,000 CO2 monitors by the manufacturer.

The quality assurance process means that there are no similar concerns with any of the 25,000 CO2 monitors that have already been distributed to schools.

For schools which have received a monitor which is not working as expected, this is unrelated with the above issue. It is most likely in these very small number of cases that the monitor simply got damaged in transit. In the case where a monitor provide to a schools is not operating as expected, the school should contact Lennox Laboratories who will arrange for a replacement monitor to be provided.

96% of primary schools (including all special schools) have received their full allocation of CO2 monitors. 10 CO2 monitors have been provided to schools at post-primary level. The remaining balance of CO2 monitors is expected to be distributed in October.

In the interim, the Department has advised schools that if they wish, they can make arrangements directly for procuring the balance of their CO2 monitors directly themselves, rather than via the current arrangements.

The Department is providing schools with a technical specification for the monitors, and schools may share these specifications with suppliers for guidance. The cost incurred by a school in procuring the shortfall in CO2 monitors locally can be recouped from the Department.

School Accommodation

436. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education the measures being taken to ensure the education system can meet demand in Swords, County Dublin with regard to its growing population; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46038/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, including Child Benefit, school enrolment data and information on residential development activity, to identify where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

The most recent projections for the Swords school planning areas indicate stable enrolments at primary and moderate increases at post primary level. My Department is currently working to examine the capacity of the schools in the area to meet this projected demand.

A number of capital projects have been recently completed or are currently planned or underway in the Swords area, including expansions at Holywell ETNS, St. Colmcille's and Holy Family NS. New school buildings are to be delivered for Rivervalley CNS and Broadmeadow CNS which were established in recent years. Furthermore, at post primary level, additional accommodation plans are being considered for St. Finian's Community College and Loreto College, Swords. A project for Swords Community College is on site and nearing completion.

The additional capacity being provided by all of these projects is being considered in the

context of the projected future requirements in the area.

School place requirements nationally, including Swords, will continue to be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard to the impact of the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

School Funding

437. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education if she will address the reported shortage of books in school libraries; the actions her Department is taking to ensure adequate supply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46039/21]

439. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education if she will take steps to ensure that funding is allocated to schools to ensure they can properly stock and update their school libraries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46051/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 and 439 together.

An arrangement was made through An Chomhairle Leabharlanna in 1971, whereby the local authority librarians would provide services for schools. At that time my Department made a grant available for this purpose based on the number of pupils enrolled in primary schools in the local authority areas.

The amount of the grant payable to each local authority was based on the number of primary pupils in the relevant area and amounted to €4.52 per pupil. The full year estimated cost of reinstating the library grant is circa €2.5m

As Minister for Education and Skills I am very conscious of the importance of library services and the value of these in the context of the supports available to schools.

Schools Building Projects

438. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education if there has been an update in relation to the provision of an Educate Together school in Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46050/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): As the Deputy may be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, utilising data from a range of sources including information on planned and current residential development, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in that area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each local authority to obtain the up-to-date data on significant new residential development in each area. My Department then makes an assessment of the existing capacity within the particular area and its ability to meet increased demand.

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

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

While there are currently no plans to establish an additional school in Waterford, the requirement for additional school places is kept under on-going review.

Where it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required, a patronage identification process takes place. The patronage process is open to all patron bodies, including Educate Together, and prospective patrons. An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been in operation under my Department since 2018 and provides objective information to parents in the relevant school planning areas to assist them in making an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage and language of instruction for the new school. Parental preferences from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of the process.

Question No. 439 answered with Question No. 437.

School Funding

440. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education the investment she will make to a school (details supplied) to ensure that it has the buildings and facilities that it requires; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46052/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design.

In October 2020, in order to expedite the progression of this major building project the Department authorised DDLETB and its Design Team to commence a pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of contractors, in parallel with the Department's review of the stage 2(b) submission for this project.

The Stage 2(b) report has been reviewed and my Department recently received Design Team confirmations from each member of the Design Team that they have carried out a final review of all of its tender documentation to ensure compliance with Department requirements.

My Department last week authorised the ETB and its design team to complete the pre-qualification process to shortlist building contractors and then proceed to Tender Stage.

I would like to inform the Deputy that the DDLETB submitted and were approved funding under my Departments Emergency Works Scheme to repair two prefab roofs at the school in question.

My Department will continue to liaise with the DDLETB to establish any further funding when can be applied for under the Emergency Works Scheme.

School Transport

441. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education if her Department will

sanction the transportation of a disabled child (details supplied) by the school bus service to a respite centre on a Friday evening when the child is due a respite weekend given that the centre is located close to one of the school bus stops; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46064/21]

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 2020/21 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.

Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, children are eligible for school transport where they have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability and are attending the nearest recognised school/class 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.

Under the terms of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, transport is provided from home to school, however the Department does consider request for transport to respite for an eligible child based on a number of conditions, including where there is an existing service in place, there is no change to the existing service (time or route), the arrangement is a consistent arrangement and where there is no inconvenience to any other child on the service (time or change of route).

Requests for transport to/from respite are considered on an individual basis and I can confirm that School Transport Section will revert to the family directly in this regard.

Education Policy

442. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Education the way she plans to increase public investment in the education sector given in the OECD report on Government investment in education, Ireland sits 36 out of 36. [46102/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): There are various expenditure measures presented in the OECD's most recent Education at a Glance, and expenditure as a percentage of GDP is just one of them. Ireland has consistently argued that, given the well-known measurement issues with GDP due to globalisation effects, an alternative measure should be used. This is acknowledged in the methodological notes of the report which notes that in 2016 Ireland produced a modified estimate of the gross national income (GNI*) that was recommended by the Economic Statistics Review Group and which is designed to specifically exclude these effects. My Department's estimate indicates that education expenditure as a percentage of GNI was 5.4% in 2018, which would leave Ireland ranked twelfth out of 36 OECD countries using that indicator.

An alternative measure of government commitment to education spending can be seen in Ireland's measure of public expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure, which in 2018 stood at 12.6%, well above the OECD average which stood at 10.7%. Ireland was ranked tenth for this indicator in the OECD report.

With regard to public investment in education it should be noted that in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future, this Government is committed to building a world class education system.

Over recent budgets, additional resources have been made available to our schools, including through the delivery of thousands of extra teaching and Special Needs Assistant posts, increased capitation in schools, enhanced supports for school leadership and an improved staffing schedule in primary schools. This is in addition to the significant COVID-19 financial resources provided in 2020 and again in 2021 to allow schools to operate in accordance with the latest public health guidance.

In the context of Budget 2022 we will continue to seek movement for Ireland's education system, aim to deliver on the commitments set out in the Programme for Government, to meet demographic and other pressures in the school sector and to support and sustain our schools, their staff and our students in the face of the ongoing significant challenges posed by COVID-19.

Covid-19 Pandemic

443. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education the number of CO2 monitors that have been delivered to schools; the number of monitors required for the total commitment of a monitor in every classroom; and the current projected cost of the project. [46109/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Managing ventilation is just one of a suite of public health measures in place to keep our schools safe. Updated guidance for schools on Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools was provided at the end of May following the work of an expert group that carefully considered the role of ventilation in managing COVID-19.

A copy of the guidance is published on the Gov.ie website.

This report formed the based for the most recent updating of the ventilation guidance for schools and included recommendations in relation to strengthening the message about the importance of good ventilation and the use of CO2 monitors.

The use of CO2 monitors can provide a useful general indication that areas/rooms within a building may not be adequately ventilated and can enable occupants to become familiar with the impact that activities, outdoor weather and window openings have on levels of good ventilation within a room. This information can be used to inform strategies for improving ventilation and in that regard the Department of Education has funded the provision of a number of portable CO2 monitors for schools at an estimated overall cost of circa €4 million. The portable units can facilitate measurements in a wide range of locations in schools.

My Department procured portable monitors that are currently being distributed to schools – between 2 and 20 at primary school level and between 20 and 35 at post-primary school level depending on school size, at an estimated overall cost of €4 million. The monitors are portable, simple to use, and will give a digital reading.

Deliveries of CO2 monitors to schools commenced in the third week of August. In total, it involves over 35,000 CO2 monitors being distributed to primary and post-primary schools. 25,000 CO2 monitors have been distributed to schools to date, meaning that CO2 monitors have been delivered to each school in the country.

96% of primary schools (including all special schools) have received their full allocation of CO2 monitors. 10 CO2 monitors have been provided to schools at post-primary level. The remaining balance of CO2 monitors is expected to be distributed in October.

Departmental Schemes

444. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education if she will establish an ex gratia scheme to compensate the victims of institutional abuse for persons who did not take legal action against the State but who will be taking a judicial review of the matter in October 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46114/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): As the Deputy is aware, a revised ex gratia scheme to implement the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgement relating to childhood sexual abuse in day schools is now open for applications. The Scheme, which was developed in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, provides for ex gratia payments to be made to those who qualify to apply for the Scheme and who satisfy the criteria as set out in the Terms of Scheme.

The ex gratia scheme was originally established in 2015 and was put in place to provide those, who had instituted legal proceedings against the State in respect of day school sexual abuse and subsequently discontinued those proceedings following rulings in the domestic courts, with an opportunity to apply for an ex gratia payment. The Scheme was paused in 2019 following a report from retired High Court Judge Iarfhlaith O’Neill who, as Independent Assessor, reviewed a number of unsuccessful applications to the Scheme and was of the view that the criteria to qualify for a payment were too restrictive for this group of applicants.

Ireland is committed to fulfilling its obligations in implementing the ECtHR ruling. This means that the revised scheme is designed first and foremost to provide a remedy to those who had issued and discontinued their proceedings against the State prior to the ECtHR ruling in *O’Keeffe v Ireland* and who did not receive a payment under the 2015 Scheme. However, the revised scheme goes beyond that group in that all others who issued civil proceedings against the State at a later date and up to 1 July 2021, whether they are still in being, were discontinued at any point, or who had settled with the State, may also apply for an award.

As well as broadening the scope of the Scheme, the type and nature of evidence that will be considered by the State Claims Agency in respect of individual applications (and as set out in the Terms of Scheme) broadens the means through which an applicant can demonstrate that they fall within the terms of the ECtHR judgment. To date the Scheme Administrator has received 44 applications for an award, of which 36 have been approved so far.

I am not aware of any legal challenge in respect of the revised ex gratia scheme and therefore am not in a position to comment in this regard.

Full details of the Terms of Scheme are available on www.gov.ie/en/service/90a42-revised-ex-gratia-scheme. Contact details for my Department for those wishing to apply to the Scheme and who require clarification or further information are also provided.

School Funding

445. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education if her Department has considered restoring library grant funding for primary schools in the context of budget 2022; her views on whether such funding would be a very valuable investment in literacy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46120/21]

455. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education her plans to restore the funding to the school library fund given that there are so many new schools with libraries with no fund-

ing to stock them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46304/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 445 and 455 together.

An arrangement was made through An Chomhairle Leabharlanna in 1971, whereby the local authority librarians would provide services for schools. At that time my Department made a grant available for this purpose based on the number of pupils enrolled in primary schools in the local authority areas.

The amount of the grant payable to each local authority was based on the number of primary pupils in the relevant area and amounted to €4.52 per pupil. The full year estimated cost of reinstating the library grant is circa €2.5m

As Minister for Education, I am very conscious of the importance of library services and the value of these in the context of the supports available to schools.

Disadvantaged Status

446. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Education if she will provide a list of all DEIS schools within the area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46153/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools is the main policy initiative of my Department to address educational disadvantage at school level.

My Department will spend over €150 million on the DEIS Programme in 2021, which includes some €26.07 million for the School Completion Programme.

In the 2021/22 academic year there are 884 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 186,000 pupils - 687 Primary and 197 Post Primary.

Based on Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council area there are 17 primary and post primary DEIS schools which are listed below.

Roll No.	School Name	Local Authority	Education Type
05600C	CLOCHAR SAN DOMINIC	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19438W	SCOIL COLM-CILLE SENIOR	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19497P	SCOIL MHUIRE	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19641T	SCOIL CHOLM-CILLE JUNIORS	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19723V	QUEEN OF ANGELS PRIMARY SCHOOL	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary

Roll No.	School Name	Local Authority	Education Type
19840C	HOLY FAMILY SCHOOL	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19922E	OUR LADYS N S	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19938T	ST JOSEPHS	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19939V	SCOIL NAISIUNTA AN DEAOIRE	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19960M	ST JOHNS N S	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
19979K	ST KEVINS N S	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
20218P	St Columbanus National School	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Primary
60262T	St Laurence College	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Post Primary
91305L	Ballinteer Community School	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Post Primary
91310E	Cabinteely Community School	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Post Primary
91330K	Holy Child Community School	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Post Primary
91343T	St. Tiernan's Community School	Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Post Primary

A list of all DEIS schools, which can be filtered, can be found on the following link;

www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/4018ea-deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/#deis-schools-2021-2022.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

447. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education the efforts she will take to reduce class sizes which remain largely above the EU average; her plans to increase the capital grant funding for schools to pre-recession levels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46183/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Under the Programme for Government there is a commitment to make further progress in reducing the pupil teacher ratios in primary schools.

As part of the Budget 2021 measures, the Government have delivered on this commitment by the announcement of a 1 point change to the primary staffing schedule and the introduction of a three point reduction in the number of pupils needed to retain a teacher. For the 2021/22 school year the staffing schedule is on the basis of 1 teacher for every 25 pupils. This Budget improvement has resulted in the lowest pupil teacher ratio ever at primary school.

The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratio shows an improved ratio of teachers to pupils from 16:1 to 14.5:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2020/21 school year. This compares favourably with the OECD pupil teacher ratio which is 1:15. In the same period the staffing schedule improved from 28:1 to 25:1 for this school year.

Average class sizes improved from 24.9 to 23.3 in the same period. The most recent budget announcement will continue the positive trend of improving class sizes for this school year, and statistics on this will be published later in the year.

The staffing schedule which now stands at a new historical low will also help to ensure better teacher retention in primary schools while also ensuring that less pupils are required to retain or recruit a teacher.

Budget 2020 provided for a further 2.5% increase in standard capitation funding for primary and post 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. It is my intention to seek funding for further capitation increases in future budgets.

The COVID-19 capitation grant will also continue to be the mechanism through which further additional funding will be provided to cater for school costs related to hand hygiene measures, PPE requirements and enhanced cleaning supports.

Departmental Expenditure

448. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education further to Parliamentary Question No. 394 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46199/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The course provider in question was offering programmes which bring emerging and senior leaders together from a variety of sectors in an experiential format and, as such, was meeting training needs identified for staff in my Department. The scale of the expenditure involved meant that it was not necessary to carry out a procurement involving advertisement on etenders for this work.

OneLearning, the body responsible for developing training programmes for the Civil Service, has recently developed and commenced the rollout of a range of leadership training programmes which will be utilised by my Department for future leadership development training.

Covid-19 Pandemic

449. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Education if she will revisit the guidance relating to close contacts of individuals with confirmed cases of Covid-19 in order to minimise disruptions to schooling; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46235/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Covid-19 Response Plans have issued directly to schools for the new school year. These plans are based on the Government's Work Safely Protocol which reflects the most up to date public health advice for the workplace. They set out the range of measures required to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and provide clear and helpful guidance for the safe operation of school through prevention, early detection and control of Covid-19. These plans are living documents and are updated as public health guidance is updated. The infection prevention and control measures in place in schools have worked very effectively to prevent and control Covid-19 in schools and remain in place for this school year.

Policy related to Covid-19 tracing services is a matter for the Department of Health.

In line with recommendations from the National Public Health Emergency Team, which were accepted by the Minister for Health, from Monday 27 September, automatic contact tracing of asymptomatic close contacts in children aged over 3 months and less than 13 years, in schools will no longer take place. Children who are deemed to be close contacts outside of a household setting will not be routinely required to restrict their movements and be tested.

Cases and outbreaks in Special Educational Needs settings, and respite care should have a public health risk assessment (PHRA) which may still require children to be identified as close contacts in these settings, be referred for testing and have their movements restricted. Generally, the advice for those children who are close contacts in these settings will be to have one test (if possible) and if they are advised to restrict movements, it will be for 5 days.

The Department will continue to work with the HSE public health to support schools dealing with Covid-19.

Schools Refurbishment

450. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education if there are plans in place for the development of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46237/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Deputy will be aware that a building project to provide a new school building for the school in question is included in my Department's school building programme and a site is required for this purpose.

Donegal County Council are undertaking a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) on behalf of the Minister for Education of a site for the proposed Buncrana School Campus. This CPO was confirmed by An Bord Pleanála without modification on 6th July 2021. As part of the requirements of the CPO process, a Notice of Confirmation of An Bord Pleanála's decision was published by the Council in the local papers, dated 23rd August 2021. Under the CPO process, an eight-week period is provided from the date of publication of this notice within which a judicial review of the decision of the ABP may be lodged. The provision of the Buncrana School Campus is a priority for my Department. It is the intention of my Department to proceed with this acquisition as soon as permissible and in full compliance with the legal requirements and notice periods as necessitated by the CPO process.

In tandem with the site acquisition, my Department is initiating the preparation of the project brief and is liaising with the school patron in this regard.

Questions - Written Answers
Schools Building Projects

451. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Education the progress to date including planned commencement date and the estimated schedule to complete the construction of a school building (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46249/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under my Department's Design and Build Programme.

The decision to grant planning permission by the Local Authority, which was received in July, was subject to 18 conditions.

The Project Manager with their Design Team have commenced the preparation of tender documentation for the project. Once this stage is complete the project will then proceed to tender stage.

School Funding

452. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Education the status of an application submitted by a school (details supplied) for connection to the natural gas network. [46272/21]

456. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Education the status of an application submitted by a school (details supplied) for connection to the natural gas network; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46313/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 452 and 456 together.

The school to which the Deputy refers to was approved funding under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2018 to enable it to build two classrooms, two small safe spaces, two standard WC, two general storage rooms and one laundry room.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that this project was approved to go to Construction in June 2021. Included within the overall scope of this project was the relocation of the existing gas pipe around the footprint of the new extension and the installation of new radiators in the extension with heating pipes connecting to the existing network.

Departmental Staff

453. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education the number of full-time staff by grade working in the school transport section of her Department; and the number of vacancies by grade currently in this section. [46283/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The School Transport Scheme is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the 2020/2021 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.

Currently there are 13 staff in the School Transport Section of my Department consisting of the following: 1 Principal Officer, 1 Acting Assistant Principal Officer, 1 Acting Higher Executive Officer, 5 Executive Officers, 1 Acting Executive Officer, 2 Clerical Officers, 2 Temporary

Clerical Officers.

There is currently one vacancy at Assistant Principal Officer level which is being covered by temporary acting up contracts and one vacancy at Executive Officer level which is awaiting appointment.

School Accommodation

454. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education the amount spent to date on the renting of prefabs at a school (details supplied). [46302/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I wish to advise the Deputy that rental of €174,355 has been expended to date on temporary accommodation at the school in question.

Question No. 455 answered with Question No. 445.

Question No. 456 answered with Question No. 452.

School Funding

457. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education when a school (details supplied) will be in a position to draw down its physical education equipment grant; and if this will be paid directly to the school and then vouched or whether the school spends and then recoups the funds. [46350/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the application in question has been processed under my Departments Furniture and Equipment Scheme and the funds will shortly be paid directly to the school.

School Staff

458. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education if her Department will put in place more supports for teaching principals and in particular those who teach in schools with special classes as per a proposal to address administrative and staffing issues in schools operating two or more special classes (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46356/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I am keenly aware of the huge contribution made by all Principals in our schools, including principals in schools with special classes.

The allocation of an Administrative Principal position to a school is based on the school's enrolment. A reduced enrolment threshold applies to schools operating 2 Autism special classes so that an Administrative Principal is allocated on the basis of 112 pupils in ordinary schools, rather than the standard 175 pupil requirement. Lower thresholds apply to DEIS Urban Band 1 and 2 schools.

As part of the Covid-19 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 so that each school with a teaching principal has 37 Principal Release Days. 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. The additional four release days allocated to schools with special classes, under Circular 19/2020, remains in place so that teaching principals of schools with a special class receive an allocation of 41 Principal Release Days.

As part of Budget 2022, my Department will be advancing proposals to further support schools.

School Curriculum

459. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Education if she plans to broaden the sex education provided in secondary schools to be more inclusive of those in the LGBTQ+ community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46372/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Programme for Government states that ‘this Government will develop inclusive and age appropriate curricula for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) across primary and post-primary schools, including an inclusive programme on LGBTI+ relationships and make appropriate legislative changes, if necessary’.

In April 2018, the then Minister for Education and Skills asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to undertake a major review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools across all stages of education to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of young people today in modern Ireland.

The Final Report on the Review of RSE in Primary and Post-primary Schools was published by the NCCA in December, 2019.

The NCCA has established two development groups, one for primary and one for post-primary, to oversee the work in this area and support the development of guidance material for schools.

The immediate focus of the work is on creating support materials for teachers for publication online as part of the Interim Guidance Toolkit. The toolkit’s purpose is to support effective teaching and learning of SPHE/RSE linked to the current curriculum. This work is progressing well, with sections of the toolkit linked to the Primary SPHE Curriculum, the SPHE Junior Cycle Short Course and Senior Cycle SPHE Framework.

In tandem with the development of the online Toolkit, preparation for the broader redeveloping and updating of the SPHE curriculum as recommended in the NCCA Report has begun, with an initial focus on Junior Cycle. It is expected that a draft of the updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification will be available for public consultation in early 2022.

These curriculum materials being developed by the NCCA will include updated materials to facilitate the effective coverage of LGBTQ+ matters as part of the curriculum.

Departmental Communications

460. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Education the dedicated email addresses for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas to contact his Department and bodies under his aegis as outlined in circular 25/2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46398/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The details sought by the Deputy, in regard to dedicated email addresses for both my Department and in regard to the bodies under the aegis of my Department, are contained in the attached document.

Contact E-Mail Addresses for the Department of Education and Aegis Bodies under the Remit of the Department

Name of Department		Dedicated Email address for the Members of the Oireachtas
Department of Education		Oireachtasqueries@education.gov.ie
Name of aegis Body under remit of Department	Dedicated Email address for the Members of the Oireachtas	Designated Official Responsible for assisting Oireachtas Members
An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (Note 1)	oireachtas@cogg.ie	muireann@cogg.ie
Educational Research Centre	oireachtas.queries@erc.ie	jude.cosgrove@erc.ie
National Centre for Guidance in Education	oireachtas@ncge.ie	Jennifer.mckenzie@ncge.ie
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Note 2)	oireachtasqueries@ncca.ie	Aine.ArmstrongFarrell@ncca.ie
State Examinations Commission	Oireachtas@examinations.ie	Paddy.Quinn@examinations.ie
The Teaching Council	pqrep@teachingcouncil.ie	Tomás Ó Ruairc
National Council for Special Education	oireachtasqueries@ncse.ie	patrick.martin@ncse.ie and cindyjane.oconnell@ncse.ie
Residential Institutions Statutory Fund – Caranua (Note3)	Hugh_Geoghegan@education.gov.ie	Hugh_Geoghegan@education.gov.ie
Commission of Investigation into Child Abuse	Hugh McClain	hughmcclain@cica.ie

Note 1 – The designated officer responsible within An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta is Muireann Ní Mhóráin.

Note 2 - The spelling of the NCCA e-mail address to which Oireachtas queries may be addressed has been verified with the NCCA as being accurate.

Note 3 – The Executive Office of Caranua (Residential Institutions Statutory Fund) has completed its work, with work underway to address the winding up of the body. At the current time queries in regard to Caranua are being addressed by the Department of Education. Contact details for a Departmental official are provided above.

Special Educational Needs

461. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education if she will support the adoption of a national transition year programme for students who are blind or vision impaired with ring-fenced funding of an additional €150,000 per annum; and if she will make a statement on

the matter. [46487/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The management authority of each school carries responsibility for making decisions regarding the Transition Year Programme in that school.

Each school designs its own Transition Year programme, within set guidelines, to suit the needs and interests of its students. In establishing its own distinctive programme content, the school takes into account the possibilities offered by local community interests.

The NCCA has undertaken an extensive review of senior cycle programmes and vocational pathways, including Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Established which considers the needs of all students including those who are blind or visually impaired.

A key theme of this Review was the future form and reform of the existing senior cycle programmes. This includes the range of learning programmes and pathways available to students at senior cycle, with a desire expressed that Senior Cycle should provide adequate supports for whatever progression pathways are chosen by students.

My Department is currently considering this and other aspects of the NCCA's advisory report, which will be published shortly.

The Deputy may also be aware that I launched the NCBI Transition Year Programme and recently met with NCBI to continue our engagement on progress with the project to date.

My Department has, in advance of the Budget, received pre-budget submissions from a number of stakeholders in the education sector and from organisations involved in other areas of public policy. As in previous years, relevant submissions continue to be reviewed and they will inform the specific budgetary priorities that I will be seeking to achieve in Budget 2022.

Special Educational Needs

462. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education if she will provide continuity funding and access to July provision for children who are blind or have a vision impairment beyond 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46488/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department provides an extensive range of supports to assist pupils who are Blind or who have Visual Impairment.

In line with my Department's policy, which is provided for under Section 2 of the Education of Persons with Special Needs Act 2004, that children with special educational needs access appropriate education intervention in mainstream settings where possible, the majority of pupils who have visual impairment are integrated into mainstream classes at primary and post-primary level.

Additional supports such as special education teaching support and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support are provided.

Some children who have visual impairment may attend a special school or classes, for which lower pupil teacher ratios of 7-1 are provided, along with SNA support.

There is one special school for the education of pupils with visual impairment, which pre-

dominantly caters for pupils at primary school level and two special classes for children with visual impairment at post primary school level.

Pupils who are attending mainstream schools receive additional teaching support from special education teachers. Schools are advised to provide the highest levels of additional teaching support for those pupils which have the highest levels of need, including pupils who may have severe levels of visual impairment.

Pupils who have visual impairment receive additional teaching support from a special education teacher in mainstream settings.

Additional supports provided include funding for specialised equipment for pupils who have visual impairment, special transport arrangements, enhanced levels of capitation in Special schools and Special Classes as well as additional teacher training.

My Department also provides annual funding of €1.28m to the National Braille Production Centre (NBPC) and to the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB) for the provision of its Child Mobility Programme. This grant provides for the services of a Mobility Officer employed by the IGDB who provides mobility training to visually impaired children.

My Department's Summer Programme for 2020 was a significant expansion on the July Provision programme of previous years, and was expanded further for Summer 2021. This was in recognition of the disruptions caused to children with complex needs during the COVID-related school closures in 2020 and 2021

The eligibility criteria for the summer programme was expanded in 2020 to include primary school children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment. This was been widened under the 2021 summer programme to include children with sensory impairments attending post-primary school as well.

The summer programme is an educational programme and therefore has been provided to date by educational staff, such as Teachers and SNAs.

My Department is currently processing claims for payment in respect of this years programme.

When that is complete, planning for next year's programme will commence.

Teacher Training

463. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education if she will ensure that a part of career guidance training, information and understanding of the challenges that face students with sight loss will be included; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46489/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The Indecon Review of Career Guidance Tools and Information, published in April 2019, examined aspects of career guidance in the Irish education and training system in order to improve the existing career guidance tools and information and to enhance engagement with enterprise. Both my Department and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science have been working on sharing responsibility and identifying appropriate actions for the 18 key recommendations. The key recommendations relating to inclusion will involve both Departments.

The Indecon report made eighteen recommendations under four themes: improvement in career guidance tools and career information, better engagement with enterprise, promotion of

inclusion and enhanced governance structures.

Under the promotion of inclusion theme, the four key recommendations were:

Introduce a specific module on career guidance as part of training for teachers in special schools.

Provide access for special education and adult learners to the proposed enhanced central career support services, including information on labour market opportunities.

Provide additional specialised ongoing CPD supports for teachers in special schools and

Prioritise resource allocation, including guidance teachers for learners most in need of assistance.

Preliminary work began last year to progress some of these areas but the public health pandemic caused disruption to the initial work plan. My officials have begun a series of meetings, both internally and with external partners such as the National Disability Authority, to discuss the inclusion recommendations and further explore ways to strengthen Guidance and career supports in the education system. As Guidance is a whole-school activity my Department will be considering ways to improve whole-school Guidance to promote even greater inclusion, which will involve looking at the current level of training for all teachers as well as that of guidance counsellors.

One of the first actions that my Department is undertaking is to explore the level of training, relating to supporting and guiding students with special education needs (SEN), that guidance counsellors and other teachers receive during their post-graduate Guidance and teacher training courses. My officials will be working with the Guidance course leaders to see if the current SEN/inclusion Guidance training modules can be strengthened, which will include, but not be limited to, looking at the challenges that face students with sight loss. Added to this my Department will then be looking at the current SEN/inclusion training all teachers receive during their initial teacher training and post-qualification continuing professional development.

Special Educational Needs

464. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education if she will take steps to introduce access to immediate assistive technology, similar to the proposal by an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46490/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department operates an Assistive Technology scheme, details of which are set out in Circular 0010/2013 published on my Department's website that can be accessed at: education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0010_2013.pdf.

Under the Assistive Technology scheme funding is provided to schools towards the cost of computers and specialist equipment, which are required for educational purposes. Equipment is provided under this scheme for children with more complex disabilities who, in order to access the school curriculum, require essential specialist equipment which they do not already have, or which cannot be provided for them through the school's existing IT provision.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for assistive technology support.

Schools make applications directly to the SENO, providing details of the student's special educational needs or disability, including details of the approach taken by the school in making relevant interventions. Professional reports (from psychologists or occupational therapists, for example) must be submitted by the school along with the application. These reports must have a recent and comprehensive professional assessment of the nature and extent of disability, and outline that the equipment is essential for the pupil to access the curriculum.

Equipment is provided where medical and/or other professional reports outline that the degree of communicative disability is such that this equipment is essential to allow the pupil to access education and set out how the equipment will provide for this.

SENOs will review the application and professional reports, in order to establish whether the criteria of the scheme have been met. They will then make a recommendation to my Department as to whether or not assistive technology is required; and based on this recommendation, my Department's officials will decide on the level of grant, if any, to be provided. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making such recommendations, as set out in Circular 0010/2013.

The type of equipment provided under the assistive technology scheme is varied, and includes audiological supports for students with hearing impairment, braille equipment for children with visual impairment, and computer equipment with associated modified software for students with physical or severe communicative disabilities.

Communication devices or medical or therapy related devices which are not specific educational interventions or equipment specifically required as essential for school educational access, and which have a general application outside of school, are not provided for under the Assistive Technology scheme. Such equipment is normally provided for children with disabilities by the Health Service Executive (HSE) under the Aids and Appliances Scheme.

School Curriculum

465. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education her role or that of school inspectors with regard to the procurement of a certificate of exemption from studying Irish; if such certificates can be procured retrospectively in circumstances in which the de facto situation for a number of years has been that the student involved has been informally exempt from studying Irish in their primary school and in cases in which this has in fact been documented in annual school reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46513/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): As set out in Department Circulars 0052/2019 (primary) and 0053/2019 (post primary), an application for an exemption from the study of Irish must be made to school management. School management are required to consider applications in accordance with the procedures and processes set out in the Circulars. Additional guidance is provided to accompany the circulars together with guidance on test selection and Frequently Asked Questions: www.gov.ie/en/service/irish-exemption/.

The only exceptional circumstances in which a school can grant a Certificate of Exemption are those set out in Section 2.2 of the circulars.

If school management are satisfied that a pupil/ student meets the criteria for granting an exemption from the study of Irish then they are required under the circulars (and under previous circulars) to issue a Certificate of Exemption, signed by the Principal, to the parent/ guardian and to retain a copy of the Certificate on file.

The authority to grant exemptions from the study of Irish has been devolved to school management and the process of considering applications does not involve Department Officials.

All applications for Certificates of Exemption since the start of the 2019/20 academic year, must be made under the terms of Circular 0052/2019 (primary) and Circular 0053/2019 (post primary).

As provided for in the Circulars, where the application for an exemption is refused, a parent/guardian can appeal the school's decision to the Irish Exemptions Appeal Committee (IEAC). The deliberations of the IEAC will focus solely on the process the school engaged in reaching its decision. The IEAC will consider how the school followed the process as prescribed in this Circular and the accompanying Guidelines for Primary Schools. The IEAC comprises a Principal, an Inspector and an Educational Psychologist from the NEPS service.

School Curriculum

466. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education if she will clarify the process for securing a certificate of exemption from studying Irish at primary school level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46514/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Detailed information, guidance and Frequently Asked Questions on exemptions from the study of Irish are available on the website gov.ie/en/service/irish-exemption/.

The procedures are set out in Section 2.3 of the relevant circular: 0052/2019 primary and 0053/2019 post primary as follows:

A parent/guardian must make an application in writing to the principal of the school for a Certificate of Exemption from the study of Irish on behalf of a pupil.

Considering an application for exemption:

The principal will:

Ensure that the date of receipt of the application by the school is recorded on the form.

Acknowledge receipt of the application for exemption from the study of Irish in writing.

Discuss the written application with the parent(s)/guardian(s) and confirm the sub-paragraph on which the application is based (2.2a, 2.2b, 2.2c or 2.2d) as soon as practicable following receipt of a written application

Advise the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the next steps in processing the application.

Inform the parent(s)/guardian(s)/pupil regarding any implication of an exemption from the study of Irish for the student while in post-primary education and into the future.

Inform the parent(s)/guardian(s) that the application will be processed and the outcome confirmed in writing within 21 school days of receipt of the application.

Explain to the parent(s)/guardian(s) that a signed Certificate of Exemption will issue where a decision is reached that an exemption from the study of Irish may be granted.

Inform the parent(s)/guardian(s) that, where an application is refused, the school's decision may be appealed to the Irish Exemptions Appeal Committee within 30 calendar days from the

date the decision of the school was notified to the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Explain to the parent(s)/guardian(s) the arrangements for the pupil's learning in the case of an exemption being granted.

Recording the decision

The outcome of the application process will be conveyed by the school principal in writing to the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Where an exemption is granted, a Certificate of Exemption, signed and dated by the school principal will be issued. The Certificate of Exemption will also state the name and address of the school, the school roll number, the pupil's name, date of birth and the sub-paragraph under which the exemption is being granted.

Parents/guardians and pupils should be informed of the option not to exercise the exemption granted, without any loss of the right to exercise it at a future time.

School Transport

467. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education the reason a person (details supplied) had to pay for school transport given that Bus Éireann informed them that it did not have a bus for three days. [46545/21]

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 2020/21 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.

Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, children are eligible for school transport where they have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability and are attending the nearest recognised school/class 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.

Bus Éireann has advised that the pupil in question is currently availing of transport under the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs. This pupil commenced on transport from 06/09/2021 in the 2021/22 school year. Transport was not available to this pupil for 3 days on 01/09/2021, 02/09/2021 & 03/09/2021 due to no contractor being available to operate this service.

A Special Transport Grant (STG) towards the cost of private transport arrangements may be provided in

certain situations such as where Bus Éireann is not in a position to provide a transport service. The grant payable is based on the distance that a family reside from their child's school of attendance. The calculation is based on four trips per day (home to school and school to home, morning and afternoon) multiplied by the number of days a child attends school in the relevant school year. The current rate of grant is 39.12 cent per kilometre for the first 6,437 kilometres travelled and 21.22 per kilometre for each kilometre travelled thereafter.

School Transport Section of my Department will contact the family in regard to the Special

Transport Grant for the days the service was not available.

School Accommodation

468. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education if her Department is in receipt of an application for prefab replacement for a primary school (details supplied) in County Mayo; if she will expedite the decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46555/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I can confirm to the Deputy, that my Department has not received an application for prefab replacement, from the school in question.

It is open to the school authorities to submit an application under my Department's Additional School Accommodation (ASA) Scheme. The purpose of the ASA scheme is to ensure that essential mainstream classroom and Special Education Needs (SEN) accommodation is available to cater for pupils enrolled each year, where the need cannot be met by the school's existing accommodation. Such applications are assessed by my officials and the decision conveyed to the school authorities.

School Transport

469. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education the reason a school (details supplied) is not included on the school transport scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46557/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The School Transport Scheme is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the 2020/2021 school year over 114,100 children, including over 14,700 children with special educational needs, were 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 my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

There are two Educate Together schools in Limerick City - Limerick East ETNS (Roll number 20175A) and Limerick ETSS (Roll number 68309N). Bus Éireann has confirmed that details for the schools are available on the Bus Éireann family portal for school transport applications and families can select these schools when they are applying for school transport.

School Transport

470. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education if two post-primary students (details supplied) who did not receive school bus tickets will be accommodated given they should meet the criteria for temporary alleviation measures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46558/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The School Transport Scheme is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the 2020/2021 school year over 114,100 children, including over 14,700 children with special educational needs,

were transported on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country at a cost of over €224.7m in 2020.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who completed the application and payment process on time for the 2021/22 school year will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation. In addition all post-primary pupils who are otherwise eligible for school transport but are attending their second nearest school and who have applied and paid on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation. This arrangement is in place for current school year pending completion of the full review of the School Transport Scheme.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and are offered seats where capacity exists after all eligible children have been catered for.

Bus Éireann has advised that the pupils to whom the Deputy refers are not eligible under the terms of the scheme and have also advised that they are not attending either their nearest or second nearest post-primary school.

Concessionary transport was not an option as there is currently no service operating from where the family reside to their school of attendance.

Schools Building Projects

471. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education the number of primary and secondary schools that are awaiting construction across the country following tenders for construction having been awarded by location and by county as of 1 September 2021, in tabular form. [46569/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department has a large-scale and ambitious roll-out of school building projects under the National Development Plan and as part of Project Ireland 2040. The continuation of construction work on school building projects during lockdown period in early 2021 was an important enabler to facilitating the delivery of our school building programme.

There are currently over 250 school building projects at construction stage, with a continuous stream of other projects at or near the tendering stage.

The current status of these projects being delivered is listed on a county by county basis on gov.ie and is updated on a monthly basis to reflect their progress through the various stages.

My Department is aware of the challenges of Covid and the challenging market conditions for tender processes that are currently underway and is working proactively to ensure that all school building contracts are awarded as expeditiously as possible, while working within the parameters set by the Office of Government Procurement and principles of public procurement set out at both national and EU level.

My Department works closely with design teams on school projects to permit reasonable additional time for tenderers to submit tenders, allowing them ample time to price appropriately given the current market.

As of 1 of September 2021 my Department is not aware of any project where, following the completion of the tender process, the contract has been awarded but the contractor has not

started on site.

Road Network

472. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education the person or body responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of a road (details supplied) that is still under the remit of her Department; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the road is in very poor condition with debris, refuse and large weeds visible as there has been no maintenance carried out on this particular road in recent months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46581/21]

473. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education if her Department plans to implement traffic calming along a road (details supplied) that is currently under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46582/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 472 and 473 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the road to which he refers forms part of a project delivered under the Schools Bundle 5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme. The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) holds the role of agent for my Department on this PPP project, which consists of the construction and operation of six new schools, two of which are the schools referred to by the Deputy.

As part of the PPP arrangement, responsibility for this road lies with the PPP Company, until such time as it is taken in charge by the relevant local authorities. In the interim, the NDFA is engaging with the PPP Company to prioritise the maintenance issues raised by the Deputy.

I can confirm that my Department, together with the NDFA, continues to engage with the relevant parties with a view to having these roads taken in charge by the relevant local authorities. In that context, at this time it is not a matter for my Department to implement measures, including traffic calming, on this road.

Question No. 473 answered with Question No. 472.

Teaching Council of Ireland

474. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education, further to Parliamentary Question No. 368 of 22 June 2021, if a reply in respect of changing status can be furnished by the Teaching Council given that the person is yet to receive confirmation in reply to previous correspondence on the matter and has renewed his or her registration for 2021-2022; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46584/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 the Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority and responsibility for the regulation of the teaching profession in Ireland including the registration of teachers in the State.

The Teaching Council registers teachers in line with the requirements set out in the Teaching Council Act 2001-2015 and the Teaching Council (Registration) Regulations 2016.

As set out in the Schedule of the Regulations, the Teaching Council registers teachers under four routes of registration: Primary, Post-primary, Further Education and Other. To be entered on the Register of Teachers under the Post-primary route, registrants are required to hold an

accredited post-primary initial teacher education qualification in addition to holding a relevant qualification that meets the requirements for at least one post-primary curricular subject.

The Teaching Council inform me that they have been in contact with the teacher in question in relation to gaining registration under Route 2 Post-primary with the most recent engagement in June 2021.

As previously advised, the Teaching Council inform me that where an applicant for registration does not hold an accredited post-primary initial teacher education qualification, Further Education is the only route of registration that can be offered. The applicant referred to is correctly registered with the Council in accordance with their qualifications.

In order to be eligible for registration as a post-primary teacher, applicants need to complete an accredited initial teacher education qualification suitable for post-primary teaching and hold a qualification that meets the post-primary curricular subject requirements.

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

National Broadband Plan

475. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Education if a school (details supplied) will be connected under the national broadband plan given that it is unable to access the school's broadband programme due to location.; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46592/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department operates the Schools Broadband Programme at an annual cost of some €13m, providing connectivity to schools through a range of technologies at the best level of connectivity available based on local infrastructure. The school referred to by the Deputy was provided with a DSL connection, which unfortunately is a low speed connection and it is appreciated this is less than optimal. There has been engagement between the school and the Schools Broadband Service Desk, with the school requesting an improved service, however it has not previously been possible to provide anything other than the DSL connection. The school did not avail of this connection, however, if the school is interested in re-joining the programme the school should record their request with the Schools Broadband Service Desk. As required under procurement regulations the school can then be included in the next available tender for broadband services to schools, at which stage the best level of connectivity available will be determined in order to award a contract for services. The Broadband service desk is the Department's dedicated broadband service desk which is managed by the Professional Development Service for Teachers - Technology in Education (PDST-TiE). They can be contacted by phoning 1800334466 or by emailing broadband-servicedesk@pdst.ie.

The school referred to is in the National Broadband Plan Intervention Area, with implementation underway. My Department is engaging with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications on this implementation to prioritise school connectivity, with all schools in the NBP to be provided with high speed broadband infrastructure by the end of 2022. When the infrastructure becomes available, the school will be upgraded to that service through the Schools Broadband Programme. My officials have confirmed with colleagues in the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications that this school in question is on the list for NBI infrastructure connectivity by end 2022.

School Admissions

476. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education if a new school place will be facilitated for a child (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46595/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): It is the responsibility of my Department to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. Parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to draft, publish and implement a school admission policy in accordance with the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018. In schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in their school of first choice.

The admission policy, including the selection criterion to be used where the school is over-subscribed, must comply with the Education Acts 1998 to 2018, be non-discriminatory and be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

Where a board of management receive an application for admission and they make a decision to refuse admission, a parent/guardian can appeal that decision under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998, and an independent appeals committee will be appointed to consider the appeal. My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a student, except in circumstances where an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 has been allowed and the appeals committee directs that the school admit the child concerned.

Where a parent has been refused admission to a school and wishes to appeal that decision under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 the appeal must be made no later than 63 calendar days from the date of the school's decision to refuse admission.

It is important to note that if admission has been refused due to the school being oversubscribed, and a parent wishes to appeal this decision she or he must firstly make a written request to the school seeking a review of the board of management's decision. This request for a review to the board of management is time bound and must be made within 21 calendar days from the date of the decision by the school to refuse admission.

If the parent has been refused admission for a reason other than the school being oversubscribed, she or he may, but is not required to, request a review by the board of management within 21 calendar days from the date of the decision by the school to refuse admission. Where admission has been refused for a reason other than the school being oversubscribed and the parent does not wish to seek a review by the board of management she or he may make an appeal to an independent appeals committee no later than 63 calendar days from the date of the school's decision to refuse admission.

Full details on the section 29 appeals processes are available on my Department's website at the link below:

www.gov.ie/en/publication/8248c-appeals-in-relation-to-refusal-to-admit-a-student-due-to-a-school-being-oversubscribed/

www.gov.ie/en/publication/31c4f-appeals-in-relation-to-refusal-to-admit-a-student-for-a-reason-other-than-the-school-being-oversubscribed/

In addition, Tusla Education Support Services (TESS), the Educational Welfare Service of

the Child and Family Agency, is the legal body which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school placement for their child. Contact details for TESS are available at the following link www.tusla.ie/tess/get-in-touch/ or by email at tessinfo@tusla.ie. I would advise the parents of the child for whom the deputy has provided details, to make contact with Tusla Education Support Services to seek their support in securing a school place.

School Transport

477. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education if a full school transport service is being provided to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46599/21]

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 2020/21 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 my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Under the terms of the Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest post primary school/education centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

All children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time for the 2021/2022 school year will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation.

Children who are not eligible, but who apply for school transport, will be considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children have been facilitated; such seats are referred to as concessionary seats.

There is a school transport service available to this pupil. An application for transport was first received for this pupil on 30/04/2021 for the 2021/22 school year. Medical card details were submitted for this pupil on 23/07/2021 and a ticket was sent to this pupil on 30/08/2021.

Bus Éireann have advised that this pupil was deemed eligible in error at the time of initial application and a letter in this regard will issue from Bus Éireann to the family in question.

As the pupil in question is not eligible for transport the medical card waiver does not apply and payment is required to secure the pupils ticket for the 2021/22 school year.

Education Policy

478. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education if there are plans to reduce class sizes in primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46614/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Under the Programme for Government there is a commitment to make further progress in reducing the pupil teacher ratios in primary

schools.

As part of the Budget 2021 measures, the Government have delivered on this commitment by the announcement of a 1 point change to the primary staffing schedule and the introduction of a three point reduction in the number of pupils needed to retain a teacher. For the 2021/22 school year the staffing schedule is on the basis of 1 teacher for every 25 pupils. This Budget improvement has resulted in the lowest pupil teacher ratio ever at primary school.

The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratio shows an improved ratio of teachers to pupils from 16:1 to 14.5:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2020/21 school year. This compares favourably with the OECD pupil teacher ratio which is 1:15. In the same period the staffing schedule improved from 28:1 to 25:1 for this school year.

Average class sizes improved from 24.9 to 23.3 in the same period. The most recent budget announcement will continue the positive trend of improving class sizes for this school year, and statistics on this will be published later in the year.

The staffing schedule which now stands at a new historical low will also help to ensure better teacher retention in primary schools while also ensuring that less pupils are required to retain or recruit a teacher.

School Staff

479. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education if her Department will facilitate additional flexibility with regard to the staffing schedule for schools that are dealing with particular fluctuations in the school-going population outside of the normal variations arising from circumstances (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46621/21]

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. Primary schools are currently provided with class teachers on the basis of one teacher for every 25 pupils which is at its historically lowest level. In addition, there has been a three point reduction in the retention schedule, which will assist schools that would otherwise be at risk of losing teaching posts.

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 staffing arrangements at primary level also include a provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolments for the following September.

At post-primary level, teachers are allocated at a ratio of 19:1 in the Free Education System and 23:1 to schools in the fee-charging sector and the staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for post primary schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Post Primary Appeals Board. Additionally, schools that project an increase in enrolment may apply for an additional teacher allocation and provisional approval is sanctioned in May pending official confirmation of enrolments in September.

The Special Education Teaching allocation, as outlined in Circular 0007/2019, (primary schools) and 0008/2019 (post primary schools) provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile and also encompasses the Language Support (EAL) allocation that schools were allocated in

previous years. Further temporary Language Support is also provided, as necessary, to schools that have high concentrations of pupils that require language (EAL) support.

The staffing arrangements for primary and post primary schools for the 2021/22 school year, as set out in Circular 0019/2021 (primary) and Circulars 0005/2021, 0006/2021 and 0007/2021 (post primary), which are available on the Department website, provides details on the staffing appeal process.

School Facilities

480. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education the status of the provision of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46628/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The site to which the Deputy refers is a zoned site to meet a potential future school requirement in the settlement in order to serve newly establishing neighbourhood(s). At this point, given the early stage of development, there is not yet a requirement to establish an additional school in order to meet a demographic need but this site is positioned to meet to meet a future anticipated need. The matter will be kept under review as development proceeds.

School Facilities

481. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education her plans to open an Educate Together primary school in Dungarvan, County Waterford; if the location is part of an envisaged reconfiguration process; the potential timescale for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46648/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The patronage divesting process arises from the recommendations of the 2012 report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, following which my Department undertook surveys of parental preferences in 43 areas of stable population in 2012 and 2013 to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas. Analysis of the parental preferences expressed in each area surveyed indicated that there was sufficient parental demand to support changes in school patronage in 28 areas, including in Dungarvan.

Under the patronage divesting process, a school can be opened where a school building became, or was due to become available as a result of an amalgamation/closure of an existing school. In some areas, including in the case of Dungarvan, in responding to demand for diversity where existing patrons were unable make school properties available, my Department also included an examination of properties held in public ownership.

To date, it has not been possible to secure a school property to facilitate a new school under the divesting process being established in Dungarvan. However, my Department is continuing its efforts in relation to identifying a suitable solution under the patronage divesting process.

In parallel with the Divesting process, my Department is continuing to work with stakeholders to progress delivery of the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process which

has been developed in order to accelerate the delivery of multi-denominational schools across the country. This Reconfiguration process involves the transfer of existing live schools as opposed to the amalgamation and/or closure model of the patronage divesting process.

The initial identification phase of the process involved each of the 16 Education and Training Boards identifying an initial pilot area within their functional area where they considered there may be unmet oncoming demand for a multi-/non-denominational school and arranging for surveys of parents of pre-school children in these areas. The Department has been engaging with representatives of the Irish Episcopal Conference (Catholic Bishops) with a view to developing an agreed approach to the next Phase of the process. The identification phase work provides useful learning and is informing the development of the process.

The “Early Movers” provision of the Schools Reconfiguration process enables school communities which have already decided to seek a transfer of patronage (independent of the survey process envisaged as part of the Reconfiguration process) to engage with their school patron on the matter. A patron may transfer patronage under section 8 of the Education Act 1998. A number of patronage changes have taken place in recent years in this context, resulting in the provision of an additional 11 multi-denominational Community National Schools. In addition, an Irish-medium gaelscoil has recently changed patronage from its Catholic patron to An Foras Pátrúnachta. From September 2021, this school offers parents of junior infants the choice of undertaking an Ethics and Morality Program and, for parents who so chose, a Catholic programme is provided.

School Accommodation

482. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education the progress regarding a permanent site for a school (details supplied). [46673/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): My Department is currently in discussions with another public body regarding the acquisition of a permanent site for Killester/Raheny/Clontarf ETNS. This site option for the new school is within the school planning area.

The nature of these negotiations is complex but good progress is being made. However due to the confidential nature of these negotiations it is not possible to provide any further information at this time.

My Department undertakes to keep the patron and school informed of any key developments.

My Department is committed to delivering a permanent site for Killester/Raheny/Clontarf ETNS and is treating this as a priority.

School Funding

483. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education her views on a matter regarding a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46675/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I wish to advise the Deputy that a COVID Learning and Support Scheme (CLASS) has been put in place to help schools mitigate the adverse impacts of Covid-19 on pupil/student learning loss and wellbeing arising from the periods of school closures in 2020 and 2021.

Under the programme, a block of additional teaching hours is being provided to each recognised school, from which schools can provide additional teaching support for the pupils/students who have experienced difficulties in settling back into school and engaging with learning.

The extra teaching hours which are being provided are additional to 13,600 special education teachers who support the additional learning needs of pupils in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

They are also additional to:

Under the Covid Learning and Support programme, provision is being made for up to €52 Million in extra teaching hours for schools.

This is in addition to the €40 Million already allocated for this year's enhanced summer education programme. €10 Million has also been spent this year on the Supplementary Education scheme, which provided extra teaching support for pupils with complex special educational needs.

When combined with the additional provision now being made for the COVID Learning and Support Scheme (CLASS), this will bring the total package of support for enhanced educational programmes this year to €102.6 Million.

Enhanced allocations are also being provided for special schools and schools which are in the disadvantaged (DEIS) scheme.

Under the scheme, every school will receive an allocation of additional teaching hours, which they may use in accordance with the needs of their students. This will enable schools to identify students most at risk of learning loss arising from the recent disrupted school experience and put in place specific targeted teaching supports to meet these students' needs.

The additional hours can be utilized by schools from October of this year, to the end of the 2021/22 school year.

Guidance has also been provided for schools in relation to how the additional teaching hours should be best used as well as details of appropriate control and oversight measures required in schools.

The CLASS programme will also provide for shared learning opportunities between schools to ensure that good practice in meeting students' needs and mitigating learning loss is shared and replicated.

The Department will also ensure that research is undertaken both into the impacts of the disruption to learning and the student experience of Covid-19 across a range of areas, and on the impact of the mitigation measures undertaken under this programme.

The allocations which are being made for schools under CLASS are additional allocations of teaching hours, for each school, are provided on a graduated and proportionate basis, based on school size, as set out in DES Circular 45/2021

The additional teaching allocations for schools are based on school enrolment bands, with enhanced allocations being provided for special schools and schools which are in the Department's Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School (DEIS) scheme.

The Deputy should also be aware that, in addition to the CLASS programme and in the context of the SET allocation to schools, that schools can seek a review of their SET allocation through the National Council for Special Education. It is open to this school to seek such a review if they so wish.

484. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Education the number of additional special needs classes introduced in the Dún Laoghaire area in the past 18 months; the number in train to be introduced over the next 18 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46730/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Enabling children with special educational needs to receive an education is a priority for this Government.

The level of investment in special education, at almost €2 billion, is at an all-time high.

An additional 269 special classes are being opened this school-year. This will bring the total number of special classes nationally to 2,118. The new classes provide 1,600 additional places, spread right throughout the country.

Two new special schools are also opening this year, one in Dublin and one in Cork.

Despite this unprecedented increase, I am very aware of the need for further specialist education places in a small number of areas, mainly concentrated in Dublin.

Currently, there are forty three special classes for students with autism attached to mainstream primary and post-primary schools in Dún Laoghaire. Eleven of these classes have opened in the past eighteen months, providing placements for 258 students in the area. This also includes three Early Intervention classes.

I acknowledge that any delay in securing a suitable school placement can cause much anguish for parents and families involved.

Delays can happen for a variety of reasons including, for example, assessment reports for children becoming available over the summer period while schools were closed. In other cases, parents may change their preference for a class placement and request that their child move from a mainstream class to a special class.

My Department and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) have therefore put in place new planning structures and procedures to ensure sufficient places become available to meet local need. As new need emerges, there is a cohesive response available to ensure places become available in a timely and targeted way.

The willingness of school communities to open special classes is central to ensuring that every child can obtain a suitable placement. My Department and the NCSE can provide the necessary funding, teaching and SNA resources, professional supports and training so that the required special class places can be provided as soon as possible.

The NCSE is currently in communication with all schools in the Dún Laoghaire/South Dublin area regarding additional special class provision.

My Department will support their work in any way necessary to ensure the required number of school places become available as quickly as possible.

Education Policy

485. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education the provision that is being made for the growing demand for Irish medium education for learners in the Fingal area; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is not a sufficient number of places at primary or

secondary level to meet demand; the plans she has in place to address the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46748/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): A number of new Irish-medium gael scoileanna and a gaelcholáiste have been established in the Fingal area in the last decade.

As the Deputy may be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, including Child Benefit and school enrolment data, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise and where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

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

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. Parental preferences in relation to patronage and language of instruction (Irish or English) from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity of provision in these areas (including Irish-medium provision), are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

In the short-term, the most recent projections for the Fingal area indicate decreasing requirements at primary level and increasing requirements at post-primary level. My Department is currently working to examine the capacity of the schools in the area to meet this projected demand.

Where capacity issues arise it may not be as a result of lack of accommodation but may be driven by the following factors:

Similar to the process adopted in advance of the current academic year, my Department is engaging with patron bodies, including patrons of schools in the Fingal area, to identify particular capacity requirements for the forthcoming year(s) which may necessitate action including, where required, the provision of modular accommodation solutions. The true extent of any capacity issue will only become known following discussion with the relevant school authorities.

School Accommodation

486. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the status of the new school building for a school (details supplied) which is yet to break ground; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46788/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents.

Planning permission was secured for this project in May 2020 on the basis of a proposed amended Right of Way in favour of a neighbouring property owner.

Discussions have been ongoing with the neighbouring property owner with a view to finalising an agreement in respect of the amended Right of Way and matters arising from the abuttal

of the two buildings.

One matter remains outstanding which relates to the relocation of an air vent on the side of the neighbouring property. A meeting between both technical teams is currently being scheduled with a view to reaching agreement in relation to a workable solution regarding this outstanding matter.

The Design Team is currently working on the completion of the Stage 2(b) report which upon completion will be submitted to my Department for review.

In order to expedite the progression of this project the Department, in January 2021, authorised the Design Team to commence the pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of contractors for this project in parallel with the completion of the Stage 2(b) report. The Pre-qualification process is now complete.

Upon final agreement relating to the outstanding issues and receipt, review and approval of the Stage 2(b) report my Department will be in contact with the Design Team regarding the progression of this project to tender and construction stages.

My Department and the design team will continue to keep the school fully informed regarding the further progression of this project.

Special Educational Needs

487. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education if autism spectrum disorder, ASD, classrooms are included in the total number of classrooms for primary schools when determining the allocation of CO2 monitors. [46793/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): Managing ventilation is just one of a suite of public health measures in place to keep our schools safe. Updated guidance for schools on Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools was provided at the end of May following the work of an expert group that carefully considered the role of ventilation in managing COVID-19.

A copy of the guidance is published on the Gov.ie website.

The over-arching approach in the guidance is for schools to have windows open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use and partially open when classrooms are in use.

The guidance outlines that Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) monitors can play a part in providing a useful general indication that areas/rooms may not be adequately ventilated. They can enable occupants to become familiar with the impacts of activities, outdoor weather and window openings on levels of good ventilation.

Deliveries of CO₂ monitors to schools commenced in the third week of August. In total, it involves over 35,000 CO₂ monitors being distributed to primary and post-primary schools. 25,000 CO₂ monitors have been distributed to schools to date, meaning that CO₂ monitors have been delivered to each school in the country. The monitors are portable, simple to use, and will give a digital reading.

96% of primary schools (including all special schools) have received their full allocation of CO₂ monitors. Ten CO₂ monitors have been provided to schools at post-primary level with the balance of their allocation expected to be distributed in October

My Department arranged for the provision of a number of portable CO2 monitors based on the size of each school. The provision of portable CO2 monitors provides schools with the flexibility to focus their use to those rooms where most beneficial to inform strategies for optimising ventilation in the school.

Special Educational Needs

488. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Education when her Department will review the current criteria set out for a child with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, ASD, to qualify for an exemption from Irish language studies in school (details supplied). [46827/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): As provided for in the circulars on exemptions from the study of Irish, the Department is planning to commence an initial review of the operation of the circulars following two years of implementation (September 2019).

The circulars have moved away from a categorical, diagnostic model to a needs based model in line with Department policy. Therefore a report from a psychologist or other medical professional is no longer required.

The circular requires the school to demonstrate evidence of intervention and differentiated support for those students who struggle with literacy, as well as the current level of in-school testing on discrete tests of word reading, reading comprehension or spelling. This includes using evidence of needs over time. As part of this process, the school will administer discrete tests to identify the needs of the student. It is these test results which inform intervention and need for any additional support.

For pupils with significant literacy needs, such as those where there are concerns that literacy attainments remain, despite intervention, at/below the 10th percentile, the school will most likely be providing support through the Special Education Teacher. These teachers undertake assessment and identification of need as part of their problem solving approach and development of Student Support Plans detailed in the Continuum of Support model. The granting of an Irish exemption emerges from this process. Therefore the school will have evidence on an individual's Student Support file to support the application for an exemption from the study of Irish. The granting of an exemption from the study of Irish should not be a key factor in planning for the provision of special education teaching for a pupil.

The circulars were developed following a review of the previous circulars (Report) and an extensive public consultation process.

School Enrolments

489. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education the number of first-year students a school (details supplied) will be permitted to enrol in the 2022-2023 school year; if her Department will increase the capacity of the school in view of the demand for enrolment; when a decision will be made on enrolment numbers; when it will be communicated to the school management; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46828/21]

Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley): The school to which the Deputy refers is currently in interim accommodation on its proposed permanent site at Colpe, Mill Road, Drogheda pending delivery of its permanent accommodation project.

The planning application required for the additional interim accommodation which the

school will require for the 2022/23 academic year needed to take cognisance of the overall Shannon Homes Masterplan for the area. That Masterplan has recently been received by my Department. A planning application for additional interim accommodation is currently being prepared and it is anticipated that it will be submitted to the relevant local authority by mid-October.

Enrolment numbers for the school for the 2022/23 academic year including consideration of increase in first year intake levels are currently being considered and the Patron Body and school management will be advised of this number as soon as possible.

Departmental Data

490. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total social insurance collected for the year ending 31 December 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46295/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): €10.6 billion was received in respect of social insurance contributions in 2020.

Social insurance contribution receipts for any given year can include receipts in respect of earlier contribution years as well as the current year.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

491. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection if consideration has been given to extending the total contributions approach for calculating the State pension (contributory) to those who have not accumulated 520 PRSI contributions (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45942/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In April 2012, the number of paid contributions required to qualify for a State Pension (Contributory) increased from 260 to 520. While this change only took effect in 2012, it had been signalled well in advance. In 1993, “Developing the National Pension System - Final Report of the National Pensions Board” was published, which recommended that the number of paid contributions required to qualify for a contributory pension should be increased to 520 contributions, in recognition of the expansion of PRSI coverage over the decades. The necessary legislation to effect this recommendation was contained in Section 12 of the Social Welfare Act 1997, which provided for the implementation of the change in two stages, with the paid contribution requirement being standardised at 260 from 2002 (5 years after its introduction into law), and rising to 520 from April 2012 (15 years after its introduction in law).

The Pensions Commission was established in November 2020 to examine sustainability and eligibility issues with the State Pension and the Social Insurance Fund, in fulfilment of a Programme for Government commitment. Its terms of reference included consideration of how long-term carers could be accommodated in the pension system.

The Commission has now concluded its work and has submitted its final report to me. The report itself is extremely detailed, running to several hundred pages, and covers a range of complex matters in relation to the Pensions system which will require very careful consideration.

It should be noted that if a person does not satisfy the conditionality to qualify for State Pension (Contributory), s/he may qualify for the means-tested State Pension (Non-Contributory), the maximum rate of which is over 95% that of the maximum rate of the State Pension (Contributory). Alternatively, if his/her spouse is a State pensioner and has significant household means, his/her most beneficial payment may be an Increase for a Qualified Adult, based on his/her personal means, and amounting to up to 90% of a full contributory pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Schemes

492. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection the consideration that has been given to extending the purchasing of voluntary contributions to those who are no longer in the workforce to ensure that persons can reach the required number of PRSI contributions to qualify for the State pension (contributory); if she will advise any review of the process behind voluntary contributions overall; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45943/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The purpose of the voluntary contribution scheme is to provide persons who were but are no longer compulsorily insured under the social insurance system with the opportunity to pay contributions directly to my Department. Voluntary contributions ensure continuity of social insurance for pension purposes during periods where former contributors are no longer insured as employed or self-employed persons or are not in receipt of credited employment contributions.

The scheme's entry criteria require applicants to have at least 520 social insurance contributions paid from either employment or self-employment. The Scheme was changed relatively recently in February 2017 when the period of time in which an application to become a voluntary contributor must be made was extended from 12 months to 60 months (5 years) from the end of the contribution year during which the applicant last paid a compulsory social insurance contribution or was last awarded a credited employment contribution. This change has already substantially widened the opportunity for individuals to participate on the scheme.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

493. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is planning to make changes to the community employment programme; if so, the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45967/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien): On clarification with the Deputy's office, the question relates to plans to change the eligibility criteria for CE by reducing the period a person must be in receipt of a qualifying payment and potentially increasing the lifetime limits.

The aim of the Community Employment (CE) programme is to enhance the employability of disadvantaged and long-term unemployed people by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their local communities. The programme aims to improve a person's opportunities to return to the labour market.

CE placements are intended to be temporary and subject to time limits. This is to ensure the continued availability of places on CE schemes for a broad range of long-term unemployed

candidates. Those who are unemployed and in receipt of an eligible payment for 12 months or more may be eligible to participate on CE.

In general, all CE placements for new entrants aged between 21 and 55 years are for one year. However, CE participants, working towards a major educational award, can seek to extend participation by up to two years to enable them to reach the required qualification standards.

Those over 55 years of age can remain on CE for up to three years, while CE participants who are aged over 55 and commenced on CE prior to the introduction of the changes in 2017 continue to be eligible to stay on CE for six consecutive years.

CE participants over the age of 62 can participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age on the CE Service Support Stream (SSS), subject to certain criteria. In total, 10% of CE placements are available under the service support stream and Department officials continue to encourage CE schemes to promote this facility.

There are no plans at present to amend the eligibility criteria as suggested by the Deputy; any reduction in the eligibility period would reduce the number of employment support places available for persons who are facing the greatest difficulty in returning to employment, namely the long-term unemployed.

I will continue to support and improve the programme for the benefit of the CE participants and the valuable contribution being made to local communities through the provision of services while ensuring that places continue to be made available to those who are long term unemployed.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

494. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of plans for local employment schemes (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45972/21]

495. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a local service (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45975/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 494 and 495 together.

My Department is now at an advanced stage in its first phase of procuring new employment services. This phase involves the procurement of regional employment services for seven counties in the Midlands and North-West across four lots. These counties do not have an existing local employment service and represent the first phase of an expansion of employment services.

The funding approach for the new service awards approximately ninety percent of fees to providers when clients commence their engagement and agree their personal progression plan. The latter requires a tailored approach for each client and can contain progression towards employment, which may involve participation on relevant education, training or other programmes.

Phase two will take on board the learnings of the first phase and apply these to subsequent Requests for Tenders that will expand this model throughout the rest of the State, including County Kerry. This is a significant expansion of employment services and will result in State-

wide coverage of employment services for those furthest from the labour market for the first time.

The Department is in receipt of legal advice from the Attorney General's office that it must procure its employment services in an open and competitive manner in order to meet its legal obligations arising from EU and national procurement rules.

I understand and appreciate the concerns in the sector at the changes to the Local Employment Service model. However, existing service providers with a strong track record and a willingness to cooperate with others in the sector, will be well-placed to submit high-quality tenders for the new services. The new model and its associated procurement process is accessible to the community and voluntary sectors, including through lower financial requirements and a significant emphasis on service quality. Phase two will take on board the learnings from the phase one procurement.

Question No. 495 answered with Question No. 494.

Community Employment Schemes

496. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the provision of a pension scheme for community employment supervisors. [45978/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien): As the Deputy will be aware, CE supervisors and CE assistant supervisors have been seeking for several years, through their union representatives, the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a 2008 Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme for CE supervisors and assistant supervisors who are employed by CE scheme sponsors.

This claim creates some difficulties because the State is not the employer of the supervisors.

Within this context, officials from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform held discussions on proposals to progress and resolve this complex issue, while having regard to the wider budgetary framework. Department officials also held discussions with unions representing CE supervisors and CE assistant supervisors.

At the start of April, agreement was reached with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on proposals to resolve the long-standing issue. These proposals include a financial package.

I am confident these proposals are a solid basis for progressing and resolving this complex issue. Discussions on these proposals are ongoing between my Department and the unions representing CE supervisors and CE assistant supervisors. The unions have made a number of observations, and these are currently being examined by my officials in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other relevant Government Departments.

My officials are continuing to progress this matter as a priority, and I would hope that these discussions can reach a conclusion in the near future.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

State Pensions

497. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there has been a review of the method of calculating PRSI contributions for the State pension (contributory) particularly with regard to averaging over years of work in which an individual may have had several years of varying classes of PRSI contributions which then results in a lower yearly average and lower rate of weekly State pension payment; the processes for granting full State pensions to those who have accumulated less than 1,200 contributions over 20 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45987/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The State Pension (Contributory) is paid to people from the age of 66 (State Pension Age) who have enough Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) Contributions. It is not means tested.

One of the basic principles underpinning the Irish social insurance system is the contributory principle. Under this principle there is a direct link between the PRSI contributions that a person has paid and entitlement to a varying range of benefits and pensions.

At present the State Pension (Contributory) can be calculated under two different methods known as the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) and the Yearly Average (YA) approach. The elements which make up each method are set out in legislation. Since April 2019 all new State Pension (Contributory) applications are assessed under all possible rate calculation methods with the most beneficial rate paid to the pensioner.

The Total Contributions Approach to calculation, introduced for pensioners reaching State Pension Age from September 2012, included provision for the HomeCaring Periods Scheme. It acknowledged, for the first time, home caring periods prior to 1994. TCA provides for up to 20 years of home caring periods to be considered. Those with a 40 year record of paid and credited social insurance contributions, subject to a maximum of 20 years of credits / homecaring periods, qualify for a maximum contributory pension where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme.

The Yearly Average method, in place since the introduction of the state pension in 1961, is a calculation where the number of reckonable weekly PRSI contributions are divided by the number of years between entering social insurance and state pension age. Entitlement is then banded, with a YA of 48 or more required for a full rate pension. The YA system measures the frequency rather than the number of contributions. Since 6 April 1994, the Homemaker's Scheme has allowed up to 20 years spent as a homemaker to be disregarded when calculating the YA.

There are a number of anomalies associated with the YA system. Entitlement to a full pension can in some cases be achieved from as little as 10 years of social insurance contributions. This can happen where there is a shorter timespan between first and last social insurance contributions, i.e., someone who enters insurable employment at age 55 and works until they are pension age has time to gain the requisite 520 contributions to qualify for pension, and will have a higher yearly average than someone who has gaps in their record although they may have started work at 16.

A key concept in the YA calculation is that the number of contributions are calculated from the date of entry into social insurance to the end of the last complete tax year prior to the person's 66th birthday - covering the full period of their time contributing to the social insurance system, regardless of the classes of PRSI paid over that period.

Modified rate contributions are not reckonable for a full standard State Pension (Contributory). However, they are used when calculating entitlement to a mixed insurance pro-rata State Pension (Contributory).

A mixed insurance pro rata state pension is a pro-rata pension, introduced in November 1991, which is based on a combination of full and modified rate contributions. Prior to this, many persons who paid a mixture of full and modified rate social insurance contributions did not qualify for pension despite the fact that they paid full-rate contributions for part of their working lives. These persons may now qualify for a pension based on the number of full-rate contributions as a proportion of their total contributions i.e. full and modified rate.

There are also EU and Bilateral pro-rata State Pension Contributory pensions. The pension is a pro-rata payment based on the proportion of Irish social insurance contributions to the total number of contributions paid and/or credited, that is, Irish and other insurance combined.

Those who have not built up state pension contributory entitlements in other countries, which are not covered by these agreements, will have gaps in their PRSI record and, whatever the system in place, this could be expected to impact upon their ability to qualify for a maximum rate contributory pension.

The Pensions Commission was established in November 2020 to examine sustainability and eligibility issues with the State Pension and the Social Insurance Fund, in fulfilment of a Programme for Government commitment.

The Commission has now concluded its work and has submitted its final report to me. The report itself is extremely detailed, running to several hundred pages, and covers a range of complex matters in relation to the Pensions system which will require very careful consideration. I intend to bring the report to Government in the near future, after which it will be published. The Government has committed to taking action having regards to the Commission's recommendations within 6 months.

If a person does not satisfy the conditionality to qualify for State Pension (Contributory), s/he may qualify for the means-tested State Pension (Non-Contributory), the maximum rate of which is over 95% that of the maximum rate of the State Pension (Contributory). Alternatively, if his/her spouse is a State pensioner and has significant household means, his/her most beneficial payment may be an Increase for a Qualified Adult, based on his/her personal means, and amounting to up to 90% of a full contributory pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

498. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46071/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The person concerned, a State pension (contributory) recipient, applied for an Increase for qualified adult (IQA) in respect of his spouse, who is currently in receipt of the maximum rate of State pension (non-contributory) in her own right.

While State pension (contributory) is an insurance-based scheme, the IQA is a means-tested payment, payable to State pension (contributory) claimants whose spouse, civil partner or co-habitant is being wholly or mainly maintained by them, and where that qualified adult's personal means from any source does not exceed a means test income limit. Where property or assets are held jointly, they are assessed as half of the total amount.

If a qualified adult has weekly means of less than €100, the maximum rate of IQA is payable. Where their weekly means are between €100 and €310, a tapering reduced rate of IQA is payable. If the qualified adult has means of more than €310 per week, this exceeds the means limit and there is no entitlement to an IQA payment.

The State pension (non-contributory) is also a means-tested payment to residents in the State, but the means of both members of the couple are taken into account in the means test. The State pension (non-contributory) claim has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector for review. On receipt of the Social Welfare report, a decision will be made on both the State pension (non-contributory) and the IQA entitlements.

Both the person concerned and his spouse will be notified in writing of the decisions on their respective claims.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Employment Schemes

499. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the JobPath programme; and if it will be continued after October 2021. [46146/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In October 2020, I announced an extension of referrals for a further twelve months to the end of 2021 for all contracted service partners including JobPath, the Local Employment Services, Job Clubs and EmployAbility. These measures were taken in order to ensure the Public Employment Service had sufficient capacity to support those impacted by the pandemic with access to employment services during 2021.

While new referrals to the JobPath service are due to cease at the end of December, there will be a run out period enabling existing clients to complete their engagement with the service. In the interim, my Department is continuing to examine procurement options for the provision of all contracted employment services to ensure that the Public Employment Service has sufficient capacity in 2022 to support all those who need our assistance and help in securing new employment.

Departmental Expenditure

500. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 461 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46200/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department of Social Protection is committed to the development of all its staff in order to deliver the best possible service delivery to our customers. Staff from my Department attended a number of Common Purpose Ireland programmes between 2015 and 2018, as part of my Department's focus on leadership development. As there were a number of different programmes attended by various levels of staff over these years, this did not require a formal tender process.

Common Purpose offered a unique peer-to-peer experiential learning approach through their programmes which aimed to broaden leadership perspectives with participants from across the public, private and NGO sector.

Social Welfare Schemes

501. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting so long on illness benefit enhancements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46268/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The person concerned made an online application for Enhanced Illness Benefit on the 13th September 2021.

In order to support her application for Enhanced Illness Benefit, medical evidence for Covid-19 was needed to support her claim. The person concerned emailed a copy of her HSE texts stating her positive diagnosis of Covid-19 to the Department on the 16th September 2021.

Subsequently, the claim from the person concerned was awarded on the 22nd September 2021. She has been awarded Enhanced Illness Benefit for 10 days and payments totalling €525.00 have issued to her.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Social Insurance

502. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated yield that would be generated if the entry threshold for persons to access social insurance coverage increased for €38 per week to €95 per week. [46276/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Any increase in the entry threshold for persons to access social insurance coverage from the current employee earnings level of €38 per week would lead to a reduction in the social insurance contribution yield. It is estimated that there would be a loss of approximately €7 million to the Social Insurance Fund if the entry threshold for persons to access social insurance coverage increased from €38 per week to €95 per week.

This initial reduction in income would, in time, be offset by reduced expenditure on short-term social insurance benefit schemes as those earning below the new threshold would not establish entitlement to these benefits.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Data

503. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost in 2022 if the fuel allowance increased to €31.50 per week. [46277/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Fuel Allowance is a payment of €28.00 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €784 each year) from October to April, to over 370,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €300 million in 2021. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the household benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €195 million in 2021.

The full year additional cost of the measure proposed by the Deputy is estimated at over €36 million, assuming no change in the number of recipient households or in the duration of the fuel season.

While I fully understand that these are difficult times for many people, especially for the vulnerable and the elderly, any further economic measures, such as increasing the fuel allowance payment, can only be considered while taking account of the overall budgetary context and the availability of financial resources.

In Budget 2021, the Government targeted one third of carbon tax revenues to boosting the incomes of the poorest in our society. Based on ESRI research, three key DSP payments were targeted for increases in the budget as a result - the Fuel Allowance, the Qualified Child Allowance and the Living Alone Allowance. Accordingly, with effect from January 2021, I increased the Fuel Allowance by €3.50 per week to €28 for a period of 28 weeks.

Finally, under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, Exceptional Needs Payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources, and this may include exceptional heating costs. Decisions on such payments are made on a case-by-case basis.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments

504. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide €68.5 million to increase weekly carer payments by €8, the carer's support grant to €2,000 and the carer's allowance income disregards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46290/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Deputy will be aware that I will be considering a range of options for Budget 2022 over the coming weeks, taking account of available resources.

My Department provides a range of income supports to carers through the Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Support Grant and Domiciliary Care Allowance schemes. In total, it is estimated that my Department will spend almost €1.5 billion on these supports in 2021.

A series of evidence-based targeted measures were introduced in the last two Budgets to ensure the most vulnerable, including carers, are protected. For example, the qualified child rates were increased by €4 for children aged under 12, and €8 for those aged 12 and over. This benefits many of those on a carer's payment. The Carer's Support Grant was also increased by €150, from €1,700 to €1,850 per year.

The means test for Carer's Allowance is unique within the social welfare system, in that a single person can have a weekly income of up to €332.50 (€665 in the case of a couple) and still qualify for the full rate of payment.

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 and policy context.

Departmental Policies

505. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide €3 million in annual funding towards a dedicated carer's pension for long-term family carers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46291/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Pensions Commission was established in November 2020 to examine sustainability and eligibility issues with the State Pension and the Social Insurance Fund, in fulfilment of a Programme for Government commitment. Its terms of reference included consideration of how long-term carers could be accommodated in the pension system. The Commission has now completed its report and submitted it to me for consideration. In accordance with its commitment in the Programme for Government, the Government will consider the recommendations of the Pensions Commission in the coming months.

Any decisions made by the Government arising from the report will be made within the overall budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Policies

506. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will increase the basic social welfare rate for the blind pension and disability allowance by €20 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46491/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Deputy will be aware that I will be considering a range of options for Budget 2022 over the coming weeks, taking account of available resources.

A series of evidence-based, targeted measures were introduced in the last two Budgets, to ensure the most vulnerable were protected. Many recipients of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension will have benefitted from these measures, which included an increase in the Living Alone Allowance of €10 per week, the Fuel Allowance bring increased by €5.50 per week, and increases to the weekly qualified child rates of €4 for children aged under 12, and €8 for those aged 12 and over.

In addition, the earnings disregard for both payments was increased by €20 per week, from €120 to €140, allowing recipients to earn more from employment or self-employment without their payment being affected.

To increase the weekly rate of Disability Allowance and the Blind Pension by €20 would cost an estimated €177 million in a full year. Any changes to the rate of payment for Disability Allowance or Blind Pension will be considered in an overall budgetary and policy context.

Departmental Reports

507. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the cost of disability report will be published as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46492/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Programme for Government commits the Government to use the research into the cost of disability to individuals and families to properly inform the direction of future policy. My Department commissioned

Indecon International Consultants to carry out research into the cost of disability in Ireland.

The report has been received and my Department is considering it in detail. As part of this consideration, the Department has been briefing and seeking the views of relevant Government departments which have a role to play in the delivery of disability services and supports. This matter is significantly wider than the income support system which is why a whole-of-Government perspective is being taken. Once this process is complete, I intend to submit the report to Government for consideration. A decision regarding the appropriate date of publication will be made once Government has had an opportunity to consider the report fully.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

EU Directives

508. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will facilitate online application methods for the blind for social protection services through welfare.ie in accordance with the EU Web Accessibility Directive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46494/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department of Social Protection is committed to making the information on all its websites and online portals accessible to all. In order to achieve this, the Department has designed its websites to follow guidelines set out by the W3C (the World Wide Web Consortium). The W3C WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative) produces accessibility guidelines that are an internationally recognised benchmark of accessibility. The Department's sites currently comply with Level Double-A of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.

The Department is committed to inclusive design, enabling websites which can be used by all users including those who may have cognitive or physical impairments, such as blindness. This means that our sites, including MyWelfare.ie, can be used with assistive technologies such as screen readers or by using a keyboard for navigation, but also that the design of the Department's sites supports cognitive and visual impairments such as dyslexia, colour blindness or those short of sight, to ensure for all users that there is a smooth journey and experience through our website.

In designing new services for MyWelfare.ie the Department continues to engage with customers and stakeholder groups to assist in the design and testing of prototypes to help shape online services in a customer centric manner.

The Department is also aware of the new requirement for Public Body websites to meet the new WCAG 2.1 standard. Following the completion of audits of the Department's sites, the websites' accessibility statements will include a statement of commitment and a compliance status statement as required under the European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020.

Employment Support Services

509. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of complaints that have been received from participants on the work placement experience programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46518/21]

513. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of employ-

ers who have been removed or banned from the work placement experience programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46522/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 509 and 513 together.

The Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP) is a key policy initiative under the Government's new national employment services strategy; Pathways to Work 2021-2025. WPEP is a funded work placement scheme to provide work experience for jobseekers who have been unemployed for more than six months, including time spent on the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP). Participation on WPEP is entirely voluntary. All participants are paid €306 per week plus any social welfare increases for qualified adults and children. The intention is to provide quality and valuable work experience to unemployed persons.

To date there have been no complaints received from participants in relation to the WPEP programme. While placements can be closed for a number of reasons and placements must satisfy certain criteria prior to being advertised, to date no employer has been banned from WPEP or removed for any other reason other than where a placement was closed. Placements are closed when the placement is filled, after the placement has been advertised for 28 days, or where requested by the host organisation.

Any complaints received relating to participation on the WPEP will be investigated in full by the Department's case officer as part of the ongoing monitoring of the programme and the individual placement.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

510. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of participants who have started on the work placement experience programme; the number who are currently on the programme; the number who have finished placements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46519/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP) is a key policy initiative under the Government's new national employment services strategy; Pathways to Work 2021-2025. This sets out the national framework for activation and employment supports to assist persons, whose employment has been adversely affected by COVID, back to work while continuing to support those who were unemployed pre-pandemic find jobs.

WPEP is a funded work placement scheme to provide work experience for jobseekers who have been unemployed for more than six months, including time spent on the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP). Participation on WPEP is entirely voluntary. All participants are paid €306 per week plus any social welfare increases for qualified adults and children. The intention is to provide quality and valuable work experience to unemployed persons.

As of 23rd September, 83 WPEP placements have been approved and of these 50 participants started their placements. There have been four instances where the participant has finished the placement early and, in one case, the participant involved did not start the placement.

There are therefore currently 45 active participants on the scheme. In addition, a further 33 participants have been issued a WPEP start date and will take up placements in this coming

weeks.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

511. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of employers who have requested a position they submitted to the work placement experience programme to be removed from the website; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46520/21]

512. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of positions on the work placement experience programme that have been refused due to the fact that the position did not meet the standards of the scheme or that were removed for the same reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46521/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 511 and 512 together.

The Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP) is a key policy initiative under the Government's new national employment services strategy; Pathways to Work 2021-2025. WPEP is a funded work placement scheme to provide work experience for 10,000 jobseekers who have been unemployed for more than six months, including time spent on the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP). Participation on WPEP is entirely voluntary. All participants are paid €306 per week plus any social welfare increases for qualified adults and children.

All WPEP placements are advertised on the Department's online recruitment service website; jobsireland.ie. All host organisations and individual placements are vetted for compliance and quality assurance purposes prior to being listed on *jobsireland.ie* to ensure that each placement provides quality work experience and training opportunities for jobseekers.

Placements are not removed from jobsireland.ie but may be closed from jobsireland.ie for one of a number of reasons. The primary reason a placement is closed is where a jobseeker has taken up a placement or where a jobseeker has been selected for a placement with a future start date.

Placements can also be closed by or at the request of a host organisation or where the placement has been advertised for 28 days. In many such cases, the organisations may choose re-advertise the placements.

As of 23rd September 2021, 169 WPEP placements that were advertised on jobsireland.ie have closed for one of the reasons cited above.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Question No. 512 answered with Question No. 511.

Question No. 513 answered with Question No. 509.

Employment Support Services

514. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if employers who were

banned from the JobBridge scheme for abusing the scheme have been prevented from advertising positions on the work placement experience programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46523/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP) is a key policy initiative under the Government's new national employment services strategy; Pathways to Work 2021-2025. WPEP is a funded work placement scheme to provide work experience for jobseekers who have been unemployed for more than six months, including time spent on the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP). Participation on WPEP is entirely voluntary. All participants are paid €306 per week plus any social welfare increases for qualified adults and children. The intention is to provide quality and valuable work experience to unemployed persons and the scheme has been designed on this basis.

All WPEP placements are advertised on the Department's online recruitment service website; jobsIreland.ie. All host organisations and individual placements are vetted for compliance and quality assurance purposes prior to being published on jobsireland.ie to ensure that each placement provides quality work experience and training opportunities for jobseekers.

In advance of advertising any placement opportunity, host organisations' tax compliance is verified by the Department. Host organisation must confirm appropriate insurance and health and safety measures in place and accept the terms and conditions of the programme.

Each work placement published on JobsIreland is reviewed in advance to ensure that it provides sufficient information on the nature of the work experience and training being offered by the host. The provision of training to participants, is a pre-condition for host organisations to participate on the scheme. Options include a new accredited QQI work placement module available to all WPEP participants and delivered by the Education and Training Boards at QQI levels 3, 4 and 5. Host organisations must also demonstrate that they can provide supervision and mentoring to participants. Where the above requirements are not satisfied the placement will not be approved or advertised on jobsireland.ie.

Host organisations and individual placements are approved in accordance with these stringent WPEP eligibility criteria and not for any other reason.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Social Insurance

515. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Social Protection if social insurance credits will be awarded to self-employed persons who have been in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment in 2020 and to date in 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46526/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The attribution of contributions measure is intended to ensure that persons entitled to and in receipt of certain Covid-19 income supports, including the pandemic unemployment payment, will not be disadvantaged in accessing social insurance benefits in the future.

The legislation underpinning the measure makes provision for the Minister for Social Protection, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and having considered certain matters set out in the legislation, to prescribe the number of self-employment contributions to be attributed to a self-employed contributor.

A self-employed contributor has a period of time following the end of the contribution year to remit and pay his or her social insurance liability for that contribution year. For example, self-employed contributors have until the end of October 2021 to file their self-assessment tax returns for 2020, including the payment of social insurance contributions where they are liable to do so for that year.

Once data on the social insurance returns made by self-employed workers in respect of 2020 are available towards the end of this year or early in 2022, I and my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will be in a position to prescribe, as appropriate, the number of self-employment contributions required to protect the social insurance entitlements of self-employed workers who were in receipt of the pandemic unemployment payment in 2020 and who were not in a position to discharge their social insurance liability for that year. The matter of the attribution of contributions in respect of self-employed workers for the 2021 contribution year will be considered towards the end of 2022.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

516. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection if persons transitioning from illness benefit to partial capacity benefit will continue to be eligible for the fuel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46579/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Illness Benefit (IB) is a payment made to people who are unable to work due to illness and who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions. Illness Benefit is a short term scheme and is not a qualifying payment for fuel allowance.

Persons in receipt of Invalidity Pension (IP) or Illness Benefit (IB), the latter for a minimum of 26 weeks, who wish to enter or re-enter employment or self-employment can apply for the Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) scheme.

PCB is a scheme which extends the IP and IB schemes to recognise and respond to the reality that some people with an illness or disability have a capacity to engage in open market employment while continuing to need to receive some income support from the State. The duration a person can be in receipt of PCB is linked directly to the payment they moved from, subject to a maximum of 156 weeks.

The personal rate of payment of PCB is based on a medical assessment of a person's restriction regarding their capacity for work and the payment they are moving from, i.e., IP or IB. After the medical assessment, if a person's restriction regarding their capacity for work is rated as moderate, severe or profound their payment continues at 50%, 75% or 100% of their previous rate, respectively. If assessed as 'mild' they will not qualify for PCB.

PCB allows people to continue to receive a percentage of their previous payment while in employment. In addition, the scheme has been designed so there are no restrictions on the number of hours a person in receipt of the payment can work and there are no restrictions on earnings. PCB is not a qualifying payment for the purposes of the fuel allowance.

The Department also provides supports under its Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, including a heat supplement, which may be awarded in cases where a person has exceptional essential heating costs due to ill health or infirmity and who cannot provide for such costs from within his or her own resources. Where a person wishes to apply for a heat supplement, s/he

should contact their local Intreo Centre.

The Department continues to keep the range of supports available under review. Any proposed change would need to be considered in an overall policy and budgetary context.

Community Employment Schemes

517. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a community employment scheme placement will be extended in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46616/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Joe O'Brien): The aim of the Community Employment (CE) programme is to enhance the employability of disadvantaged and unemployed people by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities. Participation limits on these schemes are necessary to allow for the maximum utilisation of places amongst qualifying persons. It is important to note that participation is intended to be for a temporary fixed term and the positions offered are not full-time sustainable jobs. Instead, the placements are designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the open labour market.

In general, placements for new entrants aged between 21 and 55 years are for one year. Those participants who are working towards a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) major award can seek to extend their participation on CE by up to two years to enable them to reach the required standard of qualification. Participants aged 55 years or older can remain on CE for three years and do not have to work towards a QQI major award.

In both instances, a maximum of three consecutive year's participation is permissible. A person may re-qualify for CE after a 12 month break once they satisfy the qualifying conditions. An overall lifetime limit of six years applies to all CE participants (seven years for those on a disability payment).

The lifetime participation limit for the person concerned (312 weeks / 6 years) has been exceeded, their time having been extended due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. The person concerned is scheduled to leave the scheme on the 19th November 2021 under a phased exit programme. The Departments' Employment Support Service will work with former CE participants to ensure the benefits and experience they received during their time on CE are maximised.

Social Welfare Schemes

518. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection if persons who are in receipt of a disability allowance who post-leaving certificate take up college offers outside of this jurisdiction are entitled to continue to receive their disability allowance during their studies abroad; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46669/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Disability Allowance (DA) is a means-tested payment for people with an injury, disease or disability that has continued, or may be expected to continue, for at least one year and, as a result of this disability, the person is 'substantially restricted' in undertaking work that would otherwise be suitable.

Legislation provides that the DA means test takes account of the income and capital/assets of the person (and spouse/partner, if applicable) applying for the scheme.

The scheme is also subject to a habitual residency requirement. Persons who are studying abroad are not eligible for the scheme.

School Meals Programme

519. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of providing hot school meals for every DEIS school in Ireland; and the number of DEIS schools already part of the hot school meal programme. [46789/21]

520. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of providing hot school meals for every primary school in Ireland; and the number of primary schools already part of the hot school meal programme. [46790/21]

521. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of providing hot school meals for every post-primary school in Ireland; and the number of post-primary schools already part of the hot school meal programme. [46791/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 519 to 521, inclusive, together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,506 schools and organisations benefiting 230,000 children. The objective of the programme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them. The programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement.

A budget of €65.1 million has been provided for the scheme in 2021.

The programme provides funding towards food services for disadvantaged school children through two schemes: the urban school meals scheme and the school meals (local projects) scheme. The Urban School Meals Scheme for primary schools is operated and administered by local authorities and is part-financed by my Department.

As part of Budget 2019, funding was provided for a pilot scheme from September 2019, providing hot school meals in primary schools at a cost of €1m for 2019 and €2.5m in 2020. The pilot involved 37 schools benefitting 6,744 students for the 2019/2020 academic year and was aimed at primary schools with no onsite cooking facilities.

In Budget 2021, I announced that an additional €5.5m would be provided to extend the provision of hot school meals to an additional 35,000 primary school children, currently receiving the cold lunch option.

There are currently 186,205 pupils in 887 DEIS schools in Ireland. To provide a hot meal, at a cost of €2.90 per child, per day, to all students in these schools would cost €93.8m for a full school year. There were 25 DEIS schools in the hot school meals pilot and an additional 171 DEIS schools have been included in the extension this year.

There are 561,411 students in 3,241 primary schools in Ireland and 379,184 students in 730 secondary schools. The total cost of providing a hot meal to every student in every primary and secondary school at a rate of €2.90 per child, per day, would cost €474.5m in a full school year. (€293.1m for primary schools; €181.4 for secondary schools)

There are currently 226 primary schools and 42,744 children participating in the Hot Meals Scheme. In addition, 24,614 students in 118 secondary schools receive funding for a dinner

clubs at the rate of €1.90, per child, per day. Dinner clubs provide a hot meal, but are different from the Hot Meals clubs, in that they tend to be provided by schools with onsite cooking facilities, whereas food for Hot Meals clubs is cooked offsite and either delivered hot or reheated in the school.

I am committed to continuing to grow the hot school meals element of the school meals programme and building further on the significant extension announced as part of Budget 2021.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 520 answered with Question No. 519.

Question No. 521 answered with Question No. 519.

Social Welfare Inspections

522. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of complaints received by her Department against social welfare inspectors; and the breakdown of complainants by gender in each of the years 2017 to 2020 and to date in 2021. [46792/21]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The information that the Deputy has requested will take time to collate. Once the information has been collated the Department will provide this information directly to the Deputy without delay. When an individual registers a complaint with the Department of Social Protection, the Department does not collect the gender of the complainant.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy at this time.

Departmental Expenditure

523. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the amount that has been allocated to organisations that provide services that combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in each of the years 2016 to 2020, in tabular form. [46498/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The response to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) is a cross Departmental and multi-agency issue with overall policy coordinated by the Department of Justice. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of DSGBV. My Department provided the following funding to Tusla for the provision of DSGBV services:

Year	Funding (million)
2016	€20.6
2017	€22.1
2018	€23.8
2019	€25.3
2020	€25.3

In addition, further supports of up to €2m were made available by Tusla to DSGBV service providers for once-off costs mainly that have arisen as a result of Covid-19.

The Department of Justice provides funding to promote and assist the development of specific support services to victims of crime, including domestic and sexual crime, within the criminal justice system. This year, funding of more than €3.2 million has been secured for raising awareness of DSGBV of which over €1.4m is to organisations whose primary focus is on combatting DSGBV. Furthermore, over €4.2 million is allocated to support victims of crime. This includes funding allocated to organisations whose remit is supporting victims of crime in general. Within this amount, over €2.8 million is granted to organisations whose primary focus is supporting victims of DSGBV.

I do not currently have the tabular information sought by the Deputy in respect of the funding by Department of Justice that it allocated to DSGBV services in previous years. I am informed that the Department of Justice will write directly to the Deputy with this information.

After-School Support Services

524. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the reason a family (details supplied) in County Kildare are not being offered free after-school tuition given it was previously received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46609/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I am strongly committed to supporting all children to develop to their full potential, especially those who are most disadvantaged. The National Childcare Scheme provides financial support to help parents to meet the cost of childcare and to support better outcomes for children. The schemes objectives are to promote (i) a reduction in child poverty, (ii) positive child development outcomes, (iii) labour market activation and (iv) improved quality.

The National Childcare Scheme represents the first statutory entitlement to financial support for early learning and childcare. By making this fundamental shift away from the legacy schemes where subsidies are grounded in medical card and social protection entitlements, and by tangibly reducing the cost of quality childcare for thousands of families.

I have followed up with Pobal the scheme administrator for the NCS they have informed in relation the child in question, it would seem was awarded a NCS subsidy of 20 hours, this is the subsidy awarded where parents are not engaged in work or study. This award can be used in term time only.

The definition of work or study is broad, covering all forms of work or study arrangements: full-time, part-time, week-on/ week-off and zero hour contracts. This makes the scheme as flexible as possible. The minimum hours required to engage in work or study to qualify for enhanced hours is very low – at just two hours per week.

I am committed to keeping the scheme under review and to assess whether it is meeting its objectives. I have contracted Frontier Economics to undertake a review of the National Childcare Scheme in line with Section 26 of the Childcare Support Act.

Variations on the concept of a work/study test is widely used around the world and I have also requested that Frontier review the usage and evidence of efficacy of this approach in other countries.

This work is due to be finalised in the final quarter of this year and will inform in an evidence based manner the future development of the scheme.

Health Services

525. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth when the proposed introduction of baby boxes for all new parents will begin. [46735/21]

526. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if the proposed introduction of baby boxes for new parents will include all parents regardless of immigration status.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46736/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I propose to take Questions Nos. 525 and 526 together.

Baby Boxes for newborns are to be piloted under First 5 A Whole-of -Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028. Piloting Baby Boxes is just one initiative which is part of a wide ranging strategy addressing various aspects of the lives of children from birth to age five including supports for parents to balance working and caring, developments in early learning and care and health initiatives.

The gift of the Baby Box is intended as a welcome from the State for a new arrival to a family and an acknowledgement of this very significant moment for parents. The universal distribution of Baby Boxes also reflects an important equality principle that each child is given something of equal value at the start of their life. The concept of Baby Boxes has been implemented in a number of countries whereby parents receive a package of items to assist with the transition to parenthood. The pilot will undertake research and consultation to determine items for inclusion in the pack, informed by the commitments in the First 5 strategy, and these may include safety items, toys to support early development and books.

Key objectives with the Baby Box and linked communications will include support for parent-infant bonding, information on baby development and early learning, advice and support for breastfeeding and promotion of infant health and safety.

Owing to Covid-19, work on the pilot project was delayed. However, a First 5 Project Specialist has now been recruited in my Department and will lead on this project. A working group will be established for this project and terms of reference will be developed to guide its development. Key tasks for the working group include agreeing the full scope of the project and developing a detailed project plan. Considerations will include the scale and focus of the pilot, optimal timing and channel of distribution for the baby box and the possible contents. That stage of the project will consider how parents from will be informed about the project and how they can register their interest. There will be a clear emphasis in the project for it to be as inclusive as possible of all parents. Research and engagement with parents will also be undertaken to inform the pilot.

Following an initial scoping phase, the working group will oversee a process to appoint suitable partners to develop and distribute the baby boxes and undertake a full evaluation of the pilot.

Question No. 526 answered with Question No. 525.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

527. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if his Department as a data controller will grant access to the medical

records for those survivors of mother and baby homes who did not nominate a medical practitioner when requesting their records as he is obligated to do under Article 15 of the General Data Protection Regulation. [46117/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Currently, under Data Protection Regulations, a data controller who is not a health practitioner is required to consult with an appropriate health practitioner before supplying any health data to the data subject concerned. My Department, as a data controller, must apply the Regulations when records contain health data. The Regulations do not enable the exercise of any discretion by the data controller and require consultation with an appropriate health practitioner in all cases.

What this means in practice, for the moment, is that where health data is included in the data due to be provided to a data subject, my Department is releasing all other non-health related information in the first instance, but, to give effect to the Regulations, is asking the requestor for the details of their health practitioner in order to consult him/her, before releasing the health data. Once the requestor’s health practitioner has reviewed the health data and has determined that it can be released, my Department will release the personal data in question to the requestor. My Department has already done this for a number of requestors.

I am not satisfied with this requirement and am working in conjunction with the Minister for Health, to amend the regulations.

In the interim, and in order to facilitate the timely release of information, my Department is also making requestors aware that Freedom of Information legislation, which is separate to the General Data Protection Regulation, provides an alternative route or additional route by which they may also access the health data concerned. Under that legislation, the involvement of a health professional in relation to releasing health records is discretionary rather than mandatory.

My Department is seeking to ensure that individuals are aware that it is open to them to make a request under both GDPR and FOI if that is their wish and my Department provides health data to individuals in accordance with each legislative framework.

Youth Services

528. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the way the new UBU Your Place Your Space contract will allow detached youth work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46130/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The UBU Your Place Your Space scheme provides funding to youth organisations supporting disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable young people between the age 10 and 24. The scheme focuses on improving the personal and social development outcomes of those engaged.

Funding for the provision of targeted youth services is administered on behalf of my Department by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Funding is allocated following applications to the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme. This operates generally on a 3-year cycle with an annual renewal process. This is the first full year of the scheme.

The UBU Policy and Operating Rules allows for a number of different intervention types, including outreach and detached youth work. This provides for UBU funded youth services to engage young people in their own space, with a view to bringing them into youth services.

Detached youth work is therefore an existing allowable intervention type under UBU.

In addition to UBU Your Place Your Space, my Department funds the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme. This is operated by ETBs across the country and qualifying clubs or groups may apply for up to €3,000 in a given year.

Local ETBs will be able to provide more information to youth services. Their contact details are available at the following link: www.ubu.gov.ie/etb-information.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

529. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if St. Kyran's in Rathcoole, County Wicklow was included in investigations regarding mother and baby homes; if the files from this institution were handed over to the State; if so, if they are with his Department or Tusla; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46181/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): The institution to which the Deputy refers is not one of the institutions examined by the Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters).

I understand that St. Kyran's was an Industrial School for Junior Boys, located in Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow and was included in the Schedule of eligible institutions for the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002. The Deputy may wish to direct her query to my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science, as I am advised that her Department holds some records in relation to this institution.

Departmental Expenditure

530. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth further to Parliamentary Question No. 497 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46201/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): I wish to inform the Deputy with regard to PQ 46201, which seeks further information subsequent to PQ 43233/21, staff identify their learning and development needs as part of the annual process relating to their performance management development system (PMDS). This approach is in line with civil service practice and would have been followed with regard to the selection of the courses referenced in PQ 43233/21.

The annual PMDS process includes the identification of suitable training and development opportunities and this is informed by considering an individual's skills and experience and identifying any gaps they may have with regard to their role.

The identification of training for individuals to address specific gaps is not subject to tendering processes however, it would be normal practice that a range of options would be considered during the selection of suitable training.

Departmental Budgets

531. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the estimated cost in 2022 if the budget for better start early years specialist within his Department increased by 10%. [46288/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Better Start, which is located within Pobal, was established in 2014 by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) in association with the Department of Education to co-ordinate the work of existing State-funded supports for quality in early learning and care settings.

The Better Start team of specialists work across three areas: the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), the Quality Development Service (QDS), and a Learning and Development Unit.

Under AIM, Better Start Early Years Specialists work collaboratively with parents, pre-school providers, and with other professionals to support the development of inclusive learning environments in pre-school services. Better Start provides early learning and care practitioners across the country with timely access to advice and support from experts in early learning and care (and disability in particular) to assist them meet each child’s needs. Better Start also provides coaching and mentoring to the pre-school staff on supporting children with disabilities to participate in the ECCE pre-school programme.

Specialists in the Quality Development Service (QDS) work with early learning and care settings in a mentoring capacity to promote and develop the quality of practice, as set out in Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

The Better Start Learning and Development Unit co-ordinates the roll-out of a range of training options for early learning and care practitioners, to support them to deliver quality early learning and care experiences for all children.

The overall budget for Better Start in 2021 (across the QDS, AIM and the Learning Development Unit) was €14.2 million. If this budget were increased by 10% in 2022, the additional allocation would amount to €1.42 million, given a total budget allocation of €15.62 million.

Child and Family Agency

532. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of staff members Tusla has referred to CORU over concerns over standards, practice or misconduct in each of the past five years. [46336/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I wish to inform that Deputy that my officials have asked Tusla to respond to you directly on this matter.

Child and Family Agency

533. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of staff dismissed by Tusla over misconduct in each of the past five years. [46337/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I wish to inform the Deputy that my officials have asked Tusla to respond to you

directly on this matter.

Departmental Schemes

534. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he will facilitate a meeting with a service (details supplied) and with Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas from County Donegal to discuss serious concerns in relation to the ongoing failure of the Government and State agencies to adequately resource the vital service which has been provided for many years. [46531/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Tusla has responsibility for the care and protection of victims of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV). Tusla provides funding to some 60 services throughout Ireland that work with and support survivors of DSGBV. I understand that the service in question is in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for the provision of counselling services for children.

I have no direct role in relation to how Tusla undertakes its day to day operations. Tusla’s approach to the commissioning services is undertaken to ensure that the total resources available to services are applied to improving outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way. In this case I might suggest that the Deputy should in the first instance assist the organisation in seeking a meeting with Tusla representatives.

Tusla has acknowledged that accessibility is an issue for many service users in rural areas, and supports organisations to develop and enhance outreach services in order to improve service access. Significant funding has been provided to services in recent years for this purpose. In Donegal, core funding is provided to two domestic violence services, Donegal Women’s Domestic Violence Service (DWDVS) and Donegal Women’s Centre. DWDVS is the primary organisation delivering domestic violence support services across Donegal, including Inishowen.

International Protection

535. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth when persons seeking international protection will be sent to a direct provision centre (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the critical importance of schools in the integration of these children in local communities; if his attention has been further drawn to the 30 September 2021 deadline for schools which determines staff enrolment for the subsequent academic year and the difficulty which a significant influx of additional students after this deadline can cause; the arrangements which he can secure with the Department of Education to facilitate greater flexibility around the 30 September 2021 deadline in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46576/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): I recognise that schools form an integral part of integration into the community for school-aged children residing in accommodation provided by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) within my Department. However, the location of IPAS accommodation provided to newly arrived families seeking international protection is both demanded and subject to the availability of suitable accommodation across the entire IPAS accommodation network.

Newly arrived International Protection applicants have to be accommodated by IPAS

throughout the school year. IPAS has a full-time official seconded Tusla Education Support Services whose role is to work with local educational welfare officers and residents to ensure that all school-aged children receive a suitable school place.

With regard to staffing levels in schools, I understand that the Department of Education has an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Primary Staffing Appeals Board. I'm further advised that the staffing arrangements for primary and post primary schools for the 2021/22 school year, as set out in Circular 0019/2021 (primary) and Circulars 0005/2021, 0006/2021 and 0007/2021 (post primary) - available on the Department of Education's website - provide details on the staffing appeal process.

Finally, I should also add that the centre specifically mentioned by the Deputy is in fact an emergency accommodation centre opened at a time when capacity had been exhausted across the IPAS network of accommodation centres. I am committed to ending the use of emergency accommodation as soon as possible.

Child and Family Agency

536. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of front-line social workers employed by Tusla in areas (details supplied) during each of the years 2016 to 2020 and in June 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46707/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): I wish to inform the Deputy that my officials have asked Tusla to respond to you directly on this matter.

Child and Family Agency

537. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of Tusla front-line social worker vaccines in areas (details supplied) in June 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46708/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): I wish to inform the Deputy that my officials have asked Tusla to respond to you directly on this matter.

Departmental Communications

538. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the engagement he has had with the Minister for Finance with regard to extending the EWSS exemption beyond Q3 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46719/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman): The exemption to the turnover rule for the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme for Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare employers has been in place since the scheme began in 2020 and has allowed access to important financial supports in a context of increased operating costs due to public health guidance and reduced demand due to Covid-19.

Within the sector, EWSS is estimated to cover, on average, 80% of wage costs or 50% of operating costs for providers and has been a very valuable measure. At the current enhanced EWSS rates, it amounts to approximately €34 million per month for the sector.

It has been confirmed that EWSS will be in place until 31 December 2021 and that the exemption from the 30% reduction in turnover requirement for ELC and SAC providers is in place until 30 September 2021. A decision on the continuation of the exemption after 30 September is anticipated imminently.

Officials in my Department are undertaking ongoing analysis of the impact of public health measures and levels of demand on the sector and the case for the exemption to the turnover rule for EWSS. Since the introduction of EWSS in August 2020 there has been regular and, where necessary, detailed engagement between my Department and the Department of Finance on this issue.

Early Childhood Care and Education

539. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he has any plans to change the number of entry dates into the ECCE system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46731/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme is a universal free two-year preschool programme available to all children within the eligible age range.

There are currently no plans to change the number of entry dates into the ECCE programme. The minimum eligibility age of 2 years and 8 months for the ECCE programme was chosen based on national experience and a review of international practice. It also had regard to the regulatory environment for early years education and care in this country and issues such as child development readiness and adult-child ratios. The number of entry points reverted to one at the beginning of September 2018.

This measure addressed the previous situation with regard to three entry points whereby there was a broad fluctuation in the number of free preschool weeks a child could avail of and ensures a programme that is equitable for all children.

One enrolment period at the start of the preschool year has streamlined the administration process and makes it easier for childcare providers to operate and budget for the programme year. It also makes it easier for parents to secure places on the ECCE programme for their children.

Childcare Services

540. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the supports that are available for childcare facilities continuing to employ high staff levels to facilitate the pod system, to provide sick leave cover due to Covid-19 or for when staff must isolate when their children are unwell; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46775/21]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman): Significant additional financial supports have been made available to early learning and childcare services throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that they can remain

sustainable and to assist in defraying the additional costs of operating under new public health requirements, including the operation of ‘play pods’.

In particular, the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) has been made available to early learning and childcare providers without having to demonstrate a 30% drop in turnover required by other sectors.

The estimated value of EWSS at enhanced rates is approximately €34m per week and this is estimated to cover on average 80% of staffing costs, or 50% of total operating costs of early learning and childcare services.

On 28 September, it was agreed by Government that the existing arrangements for the EWSS will continue for the month of October – with enhanced rates and the exemption to the turnover rule for the early learning and childcare sector maintained for this period

Information about plans for the EWSS after October will be announced in the context of Budget 2022 on 12 October. Officials in my Department have engaged in this planning in respect of the early learning and childcare sector.

Additionally, Government has provided for entitlement to illness benefit for persons who have been diagnosed with Covid-19 or who are a probable source of infection with Covid-19.

The rate of payment of the enhanced Illness Benefit payment in respect of Covid-19 is higher than the normal maximum personal rate for a limited period. The enhanced rate of Illness Benefit was brought in as a short-term public health measure and is not a long-term income support payment. It is payable for 2 weeks where a person is isolating as a probable source of infection of Covid-19 and up to 10 weeks where a person has been diagnosed with Covid-19. The purpose of the enhanced Illness Benefit payment in respect of Covid-19 is to encourage people to not go to work due to financial constraint when they should be in isolation.

In a case where a person continues to be ill beyond 10 weeks, standard Illness Benefit may be paid for an extended period, based on the person’s continued eligibility.

Apprenticeship Programmes

541. **Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the steps he will take to reduce down the time period for SOLAS craft apprenticeship training given that there is currently a waiting list of up to three years for students to commence their first college phase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46677/21]

544. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of apprentices waiting to access off-the-job training in an apprenticeship programme in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45961/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): I propose to take Questions Nos. 541 and 544 together.

Craft apprenticeships account for 25 of the 62 existing available apprenticeship programmes. They comprise of a standard seven phase programme of alternating on-the-job and off-the-job phases. The off-the-job training for these programmes is delivered in Training Centres, Insti-

tutes of Technology and Technological Universities. Given the practical nature of off-the-job training for craft apprentices, the shutdown of on-site learning activity in 2020 and 2021 had a significant impact on the ability of craft apprentices to progress through their course.

9,743 craft apprentices are currently waiting for access to off-the-job training. A breakdown by apprenticeship and phase is attached.

In addition to the general activity surrounding a return to on-site learning across the further and higher education sector a number of specific actions were put in place to support craft apprentices to progress in their training in a timely manner:

- Craft apprentice off-the-job training was prioritised for a return to on-site learning across further and higher education institutions as COVID restrictions allowed.

- Delivery of off-the-job phases continued over the summer, subject to public health advice and with restricted numbers. This approach assisted institutions and providers in preparing and organising the safe return of larger numbers in the autumn.

- €20m in capital funding has been provided to increase training capacity in the system with SOLAS and HEA allocating this to ETBs and HEIs. This will facilitate an additional 4,000 craft apprenticeship places, assisting significantly with the immediate backlog issues but also more broadly increase training capacity in the apprenticeship system as the sector caters for higher demand.

- An additional €12 million was allocated for 2021 to support additional classes and teaching capacity to ameliorate COVID-19 measures at higher education level (Phases 4 and 6).

- A three-step plan to tackle the backlog in craft apprenticeship off-the-job training over the coming period by SOLAS and further and higher education providers is in delivery. Step 1 of the plan includes an increase in the number of training workshops available across further and higher education from September 2021 onwards. Steps 2 and 3 involve tailored emergency approaches to accelerate the throughput of apprentices at Phases 2 and 6 for a designated period of time.

- Phase 2 apprentice commence off-the-job training throughout the year. SOLAS are engaging with the ETBs to maximise and expand provision to clear the waiting lists for phase 2 training. An update issued to ETBs on 20 September, with a number of information sessions for staff due to take place over the coming weeks.

- Phase 4 and 6 intakes are currently scheduled three time per year – September, January and April. Additional capacity coming on stream at phase 4 and 6 from September has resulted with in the region of 2,500 phase 4 and 6 apprentices scheduled to commence off-the-job training in September, up from 2,100 per intake immediately pre-COVID.

- In the event that Phase 4 and 6 are prevented from returning at full capacity, a number of alternatives remain available to ensure that craft apprentices are not precluded from qualifying in a timely manner, including the potential for competency assessments to allow apprentices to qualify. Any such measure would need to safeguard the integrity of the Craft Certificate qualification.

The additional investment in supports, as well as training providers re-commencing in September at full capacity will mean that by the end of December 2021, the respective proportion of apprentices returned to training will be:

- 35 per cent of Phase 2;

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- 40 per cent of Phase 4; and
- 60 per cent of Phase 6 apprentices.

Subject to continued access to workshops and training facilities in addition to the rollout of additional places, it is expected that the majority of craft apprentices waiting for off-the-job training at Phases 4 and 6 will be called in the early months of 2022. The waiting list for Phase 2 apprentices is expected to be completely cleared by the end of 2022.

A public update issued on www.apprenticeship.ie on 23 September which outlined the comprehensive programme of work underway and to ensure that information is available to apprentices, employers and prospective apprentices.

Trade Family	Trade	Waiting for Phase 2 (Apprentices at 1C)			Waiting for Phase 4 (Apprentices at 4W)			Waiting for Phase 6 (Apprentices at 6W)			Grand Total
		0-11 mths	1 year +	Phase 2 Total	0-11 mths	1 year +	Phase 4 Total	0-11 mths	1 year +	Phase 6 Total	
	Brick and Stonelaying	55	1	56	15	1	16	0		0	72
	Carpentry and Joinery	613	98	711	148	10	158	83	14	97	966
	Painting and Decorating	26	13	39	0	3	3	7	2	9	51
	Plastering	3		3	0	7	7	5		5	15
	Plumbing	586	372	958	153	104	257	81	4	85	1300
	Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	2	1	3	0		0	0		0	3
	Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	108	9	117	25	34	59	15	3	18	194
Construction	Total	1393	494	1887	341	159	500	191	23	214	2601
	Aircraft Mechanics	0		0	30	5	35	22		22	57
	Electrical	1864	1323	3187	516	201	717	337	24	361	4265
	Electrical Instrumentation	78	74	152	28	22	50	8		8	210
	Electronic Security Systems	32	2	34	7	20	27	6	2	8	69
	Instrumentation	9	8	17	6	13	19	0	4	4	40
	Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	82	82	164	23	13	36	28	1	29	229
Electrical	Total	2065	1489	3554	610	274	884	401	31	432	4870
	Fariery	2	1	3	0		0	2	1	3	6

	Apprentices waiting for Phase 2,4 & 6 at end of August 2021	Waiting for Phase 2 (Apprentices at 1C)			Waiting for Phase 4 (Apprentices at 4W)			Waiting for Phase 6 (Apprentices at 6W)			
	Industrial Insulation	17	2	19	0	4	4	8		8	31
	M.A.M.F.	143	43	186	61	56	117	34		34	337
	Metal Fabrication	223	94	317	61	78	139	47	12	59	515
	Pipefitting	54	59	113	6	17	23	0		0	136
	Sheet Metalworking	47	2	49	10	1	11	0		0	60
	Toolmaking	46	4	50	8		8	16		16	74
Engineering	Total	532	205	737	146	156	302	107	13	120	1159
	Agricultural Mechanics	36		36	0	2	2	1		1	39
	Construction Plant Fitting	54	1	55	25	5	30	5		5	90
	Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	149	28	177	47	34	81	15	2	17	275
	Motor Mechanics	353	47	400	97	7	104	131	6	137	641
	Vehicle Body Repairs	22	1	23	16	24	40	2	3	5	68
Motor	Total	614	77	691	185	72	257	154	11	165	1113
Grand Total		4604	2265	6869	1282	661	1943	853	78	931	9743

Student Accommodation

542. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the action he plans to take to address the issue of the acute shortage of student accommodation with particular reference to the immediacy of the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46755/21]

549. **Deputy Richard O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will address the lack of accommodation for students and the knock-on effect it has on their education (details supplied). [45917/21]

556. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the steps he will take to resolve the acute crisis in student accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46554/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): I propose to take Questions Nos. 542, 549 and 556 together.

I am acutely aware of the challenges facing students with regard to securing accommodation.

The National Student Accommodation Strategy is designed to ensure that there is an increased level of supply of purpose built student accommodation. Several of the actions in this strategy centre around ensuring that HEIs have access to low-cost financing in order to support their building of student accommodation. One of these actions involved the introduction of legislation to empower the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) to lend directly to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the development of student accommodation. This legislation was commenced in 2017, and so far three universities - TCD, UCC and UCD have had a total of €157 million in loans approved by the HFA, which will provide more than 1,400 new student bed spaces.

In June I, along with my colleagues the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, announced that €75 million of financing had been successfully sourced for the Council of Europe Bank for the building of student accommodation in universities.

In the context of significant unmet demand for student accommodation, I was extremely disappointed to see the recent granting by Local Authorities of “Change of Use” permissions to allow privately-owned purpose built student accommodation be used for other purposes. This runs contrary to the Student Accommodation Strategy. I welcome the issuing of a circular to Local Authorities underscoring the critical need for purpose-built student accommodation to be available to meet the needs of students in third level education.

Housing For All, the Government’s recently announce plan for housing, contains a commitment to support technological universities to develop purpose-built student accommodation where such a requirement exists, through access to appropriate financing, and a specific action in relation to legislating to allow for Technological Universities to borrow from the Housing Finance Agency.

My officials and I will continue to work with colleagues in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the universities, and the Union of Students in Ireland on these issues.

Apprenticeship Programmes

543. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the drop-out rate from apprenticeship for each trade per year since 2015, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45960/21]

546. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of new registrations for each apprenticeship course since 2015; the number of new registrations to date in 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45963/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): I propose to take Questions Nos. 543 and 546 together.

A total of 33,481 apprentices were registered from 1 Jan 2015 to 31 August 2021. 3,801 apprentices withdrew from apprenticeships between 2015 and 2020. Apprentices end their registration for a variety of reasons including failed assessments, pursuing another career or edu-

ational programme or personal reasons such as serious illness etc.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of new registrations for each apprenticeship between 2015 and August 2021 and the withdrawal rate from apprenticeship for each trade per year since 2015 are attached as follows in tabular form.

Apprenticeship	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (Aug)
Arboriculture	0	0	0	0	0	3	26
Accounting Technician	0	0	71	88	124	96	81
Agricultural Mechanics	59	43	45	41	44	52	47
Aircraft Mechanics	34	39	53	74	72	50	0
Auctioneering and Property Services	0	0	0	53	92	75	85
Brick and Stonelaying	26	52	60	81	80	56	77
Butcher	0	0	0	7	37	10	36
Carpentry and Joinery	291	399	443	591	597	563	446
CGI technical Artist	0	0	0	0	7	0	0
Chef de Partie	0	0	0	31	40	5	22
Commis Chef	0	0	25	112	62	16	23
Construction Plant Fitting	77	59	86	71	73	63	39
Cybersecurity	0	0	0	0	13	30	3
Electrical	956	1343	1705	1841	1949	1740	1469
Electrical Instrumentation	83	106	120	108	125	62	47

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Apprenticeship	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (Aug)
Electronic Security Systems	28	28	72	65	76	45	25
Engineering Services Management	0	0	0	0	10	17	9
Equipment Systems Engineer	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Farriery	7	5	6	9	5	0	3
GEO Driller	0	0	0	0	2	18	0
Hair-dressing	0	0	0	0	14	84	9
Health Care Assistant	0	0	0	0	0	0	46
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	154	136	143	176	174	135	90
ICT - Network Engineer Associate	0	0	0	22	44	22	9
Industrial Electrical Engineer	0	12	19	25	28	30	2
Industrial Insulation	13	10	21	19	20	23	16
Instrumentation	8	10	20	17	16	11	6
Insurance Practitioner	0	67	86	80	70	49	31
International Financial Services Associate	0	0	15	11	9	17	5

Apprenticeship	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (Aug)
International Financial Services Specialist	0	0	18	10	12	18	8
Laboratory Analyst	0	0	0	2	21	18	3
Laboratory Technician	0	0	0	14	10	12	1
Lean Sigma Manager	0	0	0	0	0	39	36
Logistics Associate	0	0	0	27	34	53	24
Manufacturing Engineer (Level 7)	0	0	36	20	27	20	47
Manufacturing Technology (Level 6)	0	0	40	34	29	30	30
Mechanical Automation & Maintenance Fitting	153	163	183	180	199	142	110
Metal Fabrication	198	186	224	234	266	198	187
Motor Mechanics	423	420	353	380	408	310	275
OEM Engineer	0	0	0	0	11	16	4
Painting and Decorating	19	27	44	30	31	24	21
Pipefitting	37	33	25	49	76	52	45
Plastering	7	18	34	29	36	20	21

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Apprenticeship	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (Aug)
Plumbing	289	345	532	653	628	560	477
Polymer Processing Technology	0	0	25	15	13	11	13
Principal Engineer	0	0	0	0	0	5	8
Print Media (** Trades Amalgamated into Print Media 2006)	8	4	2	0	0	0	0
Recruitment	0	0	0	0	0	27	11
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	75	79	106	119	122	73	84
Retail Supervision	0	0	0	0	76	101	102
Sales	0	0	0	0	0	30	36
Sheet Metalworking	38	40	53	70	57	41	8
Software Developer Associate	0	0	0	39	66	42	32
Sous Chef	0	0	0	0	5	3	31
Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	13	2	8	7	3	3	5
Supply Chain Associate	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Supply Chain Manager	0	0	0	0	0	11	8

Apprenticeship	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (Aug)
Supply Chain Specialist	0	0	0	0	0	10	23
Telecommunications and Data Net. Tech.	0	0	0	0	50	31	14
Toolmaking	62	66	65	79	61	48	32
Vehicle Body Repairs	47	58	46	40	51	31	33
Wood Machining	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	48	71	59	95	102	75	94
Grand Total	3153	3821	4843	5648	6177	5326	4513

Apprentices who have withdrawn registration between 2016 and 2020.	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016 - 2020
Trade	Withdraw	Withdraw	Withdraw	Withdraw	Withdraw	Withdraw	Withdraw
Accounting Technician	0		11	20	12	3	46
Agricultural Mechanics	8	8	10	10	5	4	45
Aircraft Mechanics	9	11	10	3	15	2	50
Arboriculture						2	2

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Apprentices who have withdrawn registration between 2016 and 2020.	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016 - 2020
Auctioneering and Property Services				2	8	3	13
Brick and Stonelaying	10	20	18	19	20	10	97
Butcher					8	2	10
Carpentry and Joinery	59	85	75	94	64	45	422
Chef de Partie				16	13		29
Commis Chef			11	44	12	2	69
Construction Plant Fitting	8	10	13	15	9	4	59
Cybersecurity					1	3	4
Electrical	123	163	194	157	106	69	812
Electrical Instrumentation	25	21	19	17	11	5	98
Electronic Security Systems	8	9	16	15	19	8	75
Engineering Services Management					3	2	5
Farriery	1	1	1	3	3		9
Geo Driller							0
Hairdressing					5	7	12

Apprentices who have withdrawn registration between 2016 and 2020.	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016 - 2020
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	22	20	15	27	36	9	129
Industrial Electrical Engineer			2	3	3	1	9
Industrial Insulation	4	3	4	4	2	6	23
Instrumentation	3	2	1	5	2	1	14
Insurance Practitioner		15	17	10	9	6	57
International Financial Services Associate			3		2	2	7
International Financial Services Specialist			4			1	5
Laboratory Analyst				1			1
Laboratory Technician				9	7		16
Lean Sigma Manager						3	3
Logistics Associate				2	3	7	12
M.A.M.F.	23	18	28	22	21	13	125
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)			4	1		2	7

Questions - Written Answers

Apprentices who have withdrawn registration between 2016 and 2020.	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016 - 2020
Manufacturing Technology (Level 6)			7	10		4	21
Metal Fabrication	43	42	55	34	40	18	232
Motor Mechanics	76	85	57	67	70	29	384
Network Engineer Associate				1	10	1	12
OEM Engineer					1	1	2
Painting and Decorating	3	8	7	6	7	3	34
Pipefitting	7	6	4	2	6	5	30
Plastering		3	10	7	10	4	34
Plumbing	43	47	74	58	60	24	306
Polymer Processing Technology			7	4	2	1	14
Print Media	3	1					4
Recruitment Executive						3	3
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	14	12	29	11	16	3	85
Retail Supervision					24	17	41
Sales						7	7

Apprentices who have withdrawn registration between 2016 and 2020.	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016 - 2020
Sheet Metal-working	14	12	17	29	14	5	91
Software Developer Associate				8	12	2	22
Sous Chef					1		1
Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	4		1		1	3	9
Supply Chain Manager						3	3
Telecommunications and Data Network Technician					4	4	8
Toolmaking	15	6	12	11	12	7	63
Vehicle Body Repairs	7	13	4	8	13	5	50
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	9	15	12	17	18	9	80
Grand Total	541	636	752	772	720	380	3801

Question No. 544 answered with Question No. 541.

Third Level Costs

545. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the amount of overpayment paid out by SUSI since 2018; the details of the cause of these overpayments in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45962/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The complex nature of the student grant scheme means that there is a risk that some students receive grant payments for which they are not eligible, including for reasons beyond the direct control of SUSI.

To mitigate the risk of overpayments, SUSI implements procedural and system-based controls within its application assessment and grant payment operations. A highly developed quality assurance programme is implemented within the assessment process and a focussed programme of independent post-assessment reviews are also performed across targeted risk areas.

The critical objective for SUSI is to identify and rectify errors on a timely basis before a grant is awarded and thus before any overpayment can arise. Issues identified from quality and post-assessment reviews are fed back into the assessment process through feedback and training on a current basis.

SUSI has a formal overpayments policy and implements repayment approaches that are sensitive to students' means and circumstances

SUSI is obliged to attempt to recoup any grants issued to applicants who are not eligible for funding, as per section 24 of the SUSI Support Act 2011:

The following tables give the amount of overpayments and the details of the cause of the overpayments.

Academic Year	No. of Overpayments Identified	Total € Amount of Overpayments Identified
2017 / 18	916	€932,460.18
2018 / 19	779	€1,005,495.03
2019 / 20	966	€844,696.49
2020 / 21	1,516	€827,621.96

Reason	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Student in receipt of BTEA	85	73	102	84
Information omitted from application form	15	20	81	912
Change of Rate	88	100	74	29
College Fee Refund	139	102	73	54
Course Not Approved	18	13	20	10
Deferred	114	115	68	26
Incomplete Attendance	6	6	30	7
Ineligible	42	83	64	133
Nationality		2	1	
Repeating	51	37	76	35
Withdrawn	358	228	377	226
Grand Total	916	779	966	1,516

Question No. 546 answered with Question No. 543.

Departmental Expenditure

547. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 507 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46202/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The course provider in question was offering programmes which bring emerging leaders together from a variety of sectors in an experiential format and, as such, was meeting training needs identified for staff in my Department. The scale of the expenditure involved meant that it was not necessary to carry out a procurement involving advertisement on etenders for this work.

OneLearning, the body responsible for developing training programmes for the Civil Service, has recently developed and commenced the rollout of a range of leadership training programmes which will be utilised by my Department for future leadership development training.

Departmental Expenditure

548. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if the previous commitments given by the Department of Education pertaining to further education building projects previously included in the Department of Education building plan and notified to colleges will be honoured; when these projects will receive approval from his Department to appoint a design team; the measures being taken to ensure that such projects do not suffer adversely or be delayed due to the change in departmental structure; if appropriate capital funds are available to his Department to ensure no delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46308/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): Prior to the current National Development Plan (NDP), there was no dedicated capital investment envelope for the further education and training (FET) sector. The most urgent issues were addressed as part of the Department of Education's school building programme (plus a small equipment allocation) but there was little opportunity to take a strategic or long-term approach to investment.

Under the current NDP, a dedicated capital envelope was established for the FET sector for the first time. At this time, funding is being largely directed to address the most immediate health and safety issues, and to support the expansion of apprenticeship provision. Also, a Devolved Capital Grant of just over €8m has been extended to the FET sector for 2021. This grant can be used by ETBs for a range of capital priorities, including preparatory work for larger investments, such as the commissioning of building condition surveys.

My Department is working with SOLAS and the ETB sector to build up the governance, strategic framework and delivery capability required for the implementation of a FET capital programme over the coming years. The outcome of the review of the NDP, expected in the near future, will inform the level of resources available for the programme, including large-scale FET capital projects.

We continue to work closely with SOLAS and the ETB sector on all such matters.

Question No. 549 answered with Question No. 542.

Third Level Education

550. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 363 of 13 May 2021, the cost of extending to those studying for a professional doctorate in counselling psychology the conditions that apply to those in clinical psychology in terms of salary during training and a 60% fee reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46353/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): In relation to clinical psychology, I understand that the sponsor pays 60% of the course fee, with the student paying the balance of 40%. I also understand that the salary payable to the student by the HSE over the three years of the course ranges from approx. €32,000 to approx. €39,000.

In relation to Counselling courses in the higher education sector, the position is that in the 2019/20 academic year there were some 41 students enrolled on the PhD in Counselling Psychology course in Trinity College Dublin. There is also a Masters course in Bereavement Counselling in the RCSI with 9 students enrolled.

The TCD course fee is €14,924 for this academic year. Applying the clinical psychology sponsor level, and say the second point of the HSE salary level to the numbers of students on the TCD course would cost some €367,000 in fee supports and some €1.4m in salary supports per annum.

Third Level Costs

551. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the percentage of SUSI recipients with farm income included within the assessed household; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46366/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The main support to students attending higher education is the Student Grant Scheme. Under the Student Grant Scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding, provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution and meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those which relate to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment (progression) and means

The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for SUSI to determine. All applications are assessed nationally with reference to the terms and conditions of the relevant student grant scheme, which are applied impartially to all applicants.

Income from all types of self-employment including farming are all assessed by SUSI under the heading of Self-Employment/Farming Income and are not broken down into different categories of self-employment income.

Therefore it is not possible for SUSI to determine the number of applications where farm income was included when determining the total reckonable income.

Third Level Education

552. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of first-year enrolments and the number of graduations, respectively in dentistry in each of the years 2006 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46367/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The information requested by the Deputy is available in the table below. The numbers provided are those recorded on the HEA's Student Records System (SRS) and include enrolments in and graduates from graduate-entry dentistry as well as undergraduate dentistry.

Year	1st Year Enrolments	Graduates
2006/2007		65
2007/2008	83	75
2008/2009	93	72
2009/2010	88	68
2010/2011	91	70
2011/2012	92	74
2012/2013	85	85
2013/2014	90	75
2014/2015	100	85
2015/2016	97	76
2016/2017	97	79
2017/2018	96	78
2018/2019	106	95
2019/2020	113	89
2020/2021	114	

Third Level Admissions

553. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the dedicated email addresses for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas to contact the CAO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46399/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The CAO process applications for undergraduate, and some postgraduate, courses on behalf of the Higher Education Institutions. Decisions on admissions are made by the HEIs who then instruct the CAO to make offers to successful candidates. Neither I nor my Department have a role in the operation of the CAO.

I understand that the current process for queries to the CAO is via the general enquiry function on the CAO website. If the Deputy sees the need for a further process, I would be happy to engage on the matter.

Departmental Projects

554. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will report on his ongoing work with the Department of Health on workforce planning for the health service and the way the numbers studying in the healthcare

area can continue to be increased in 2021 and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46434/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): My Department is strongly committed to supporting the health of the population through the provision of graduates with the key competencies and skills to be effective in the health workforce, and support a range of clinical teams in our health services.

In both 2020 and 2021, in response to the extraordinary circumstances faced by Leaving Certificate students, and in order to offset the particular pressures faced by these students, I ensured that additional places on a wide range of higher education courses were made available in the higher education system. This ensured that more students than ever before could be offered a place in a third level course. These included additional places in nursing, medicine, pharmacy and a number of other health-related courses.

The Programme for Government commits the Department of Health to working with the education sectors, regulators, and professional bodies to improve the availability of health professionals and reform their training to support integrated care across the entire health service. My Department and I will continue to engage to ensure that we can continue to deliver graduates with the skills necessary to support our healthcare system and support the strategic workforce planning by the health sector.

Student Accommodation

555. **Deputy Richard O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the supports that are being given to higher institutes of education to support students during the housing crises; if his Department will commence nine month modular-type homes on or off-campus in cities such as Limerick in which there is huge demand for accommodation; and if any capital infrastructure is planned to erect modular homes for students. [46497/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The National Student Accommodation Strategy is designed to ensure that there is an increased level of supply of purpose built student accommodation to reduce the demand for accommodation in the private rental sector by both domestic and international students attending our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Several of the actions in this strategy centre around ensuring that HEIs have access to low-cost financing in order to support their building of student accommodation.

One of these actions involved the introduction of legislation to empower the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) to lend directly to HEIs for the development of student accommodation. This legislation was commenced in 2017, and so far three universities - TCD, UCC and UCD have had a total of €157 million in loans approved by the HFA, which will provide more than 1,400 new student bed spaces.

In June I, along with my colleagues the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, announced that €75 million of financing had been successfully sourced for the Council of Europe Bank for the building of student accommodation in universities.

Housing For All, the Government's recently announce plan for housing, contains a commitment to support technological universities to develop purpose-built student accommodation

where such a requirement exists, through access to appropriate financing, and a specific action in relation to legislating to allow for Technological Universities to borrow from the Housing Finance Agency. My officials and I will continue to work with colleagues in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to advance this.

My Department, together with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, is also engaging with all the universities, including the technological universities, to explore further options which may be available to increase the availability of student accommodation.

Question No. 556 answered with Question No. 542.

Covid-19 Pandemic

557. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the support that will be given to third-level educational institutions to reconvene in-person classes safely for the upcoming academic year. [46587/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): Following Government approval, I published A Safe Return: Plan for a safe return to on-site Further and Higher Education and Research in 2021/22 on June 15th. The Safe Return Plan can be accessed at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/publication/bcd91-a-safe-return-to-on-site-further-and-higher-education-and-research/.

The plan, which emerged following extensive and productive discussions between university representatives, public health and other relevant stakeholders, provided a framework for higher education institutions to proceed with planning for a return to onsite campus learning that would be in line with public health guidance. In that context, institutions and providers progressed with their own detailed planning and work for a comprehensive return to on-site activity.

To support the further and higher education student and sector, €105 million in additional COVID support funding was allocated to assist third level sector to safely reopen in September 2021. The package includes financial support for further and higher education to return on-site safely and in line with public health advice, and additional student supports for students in further and higher education. €21 million of this funding will be allocated to provide specific extra supports for students including an extra €3m for student mental health, an extra €10m for the Student Assistance Fund which provides financial supports to students experiencing financial difficulties while in college, and €8m for the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund which supports and engages disadvantaged learners. This builds on significant supports for the sector and students throughout 2020.

The sector has now moved into the implementation phase with all students having resumed onsite activity. Launching on the 27th September, the Department has worked with the HSE to establish a number of pop-up vaccination centres across 15 different institutions. The clinics will provide first or second doses and will be provided to students and staff as walk-in clinics during Vaccination Week. The aim is to maximise vaccine uptake in those who have not yet availed of vaccination, including international students.

In addition, following engagement between my Department and the HSE, free face masks will be available to staff and students

The safety, sustainability and continuity of the return to campus are of paramount importance and my Department will continue to work with the Chief Medical Officer and the Health

Service Executive to that end.

Departmental Reports

558. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will publish the findings of the independent consultants appointed by the European Commission to assess the Cassells report in advance of Budget 2022 next month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46600/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): My Department's Statement of Strategy, which I published on 8 March last, contains a commitment to put in place a sustainable funding model for the higher education. This is essential in ensuring that our higher education institutions can effectively meet high standards of quality and performance, and achieve critical outcomes for our economy and society.

The report referred to in the Deputy's question was commissioned under the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme in November 2019. The final report deliverable was agreed between the Commission (DG Reform) and its consultants at the end of May 2021.

Following its completion my Department has commenced its examination of the report's analysis, findings, conclusions and recommendations in order to develop proposals for Government to seek to meet the commitment contained in its Statement of Strategy. Once this examination is concluded the report will be submitted to Government for consideration in advance of its publication (pending agreement with the European Commission as the contracting authority).

Budgetary discussions in relation to higher education provision for 2022 are ongoing and I will continue to work towards increased investment in Higher Education for 2022 and beyond.

Covid-19 Pandemic

559. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will put in place measures that would see colleges refund students who are being forced to take lectures online given that vaccination rates amongst persons over 18 years of age are high; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46618/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): Following Government approval, I published A Safe Return: Plan for a safe return to on-site Further and Higher Education and Research in 2021/22 on June 15th. The Safe Return Plan can be accessed at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/publication/bcd91-a-safe-return-to-on-site-further-and-higher-education-and-research/.

The plan, which emerged following extensive and productive discussions between university representatives, public health and other relevant stakeholders, provided a framework for higher education institutions to proceed with planning for a return to onsite campus learning that would be in line with public health guidance. In that context, institutions and providers are currently progressing with their own detailed planning and work for a comprehensive return to on-site activity.

I am very much aware of the difficulties facing students and in July I secured Government

approval for €105 million for the third level sector to safely reopen in September 2021. The package will include financial support for further and higher education to return on-site safely and in line with public health advice, and additional student supports for students in further and higher education.

€21 million of this funding will be allocated to provide specific extra supports for students including an extra €3m for student mental health, an extra €10m for the Student Assistance Fund which provides financial supports to students experiencing financial difficulties while in college, and €8m for the Mitigating Educational Disadvantage Fund which supports and engages disadvantaged learners.

In considering fees, it is important to note that the State currently provides very substantial financial support to undergraduate students in higher education towards the cost of their studies. Under the Department's Free Fees Initiative (FFI), the Exchequer provides funding toward the tuition fee costs of eligible undergraduate higher education students. All students eligible for the scheme receive state support whereby the Exchequer pays the cost of tuition fees exclusive of the student contribution.

Third level institutions are autonomous entities responsible for their own day-to-day operations, management and administration. Any determination as to the level of fees to be charged is a matter for them in light of their own particular conditions and circumstances, and there are no current plans for the Department to provide advice in such matters.

Notwithstanding the above there is a real requirement in these exceptional times to have a responsive approach to student needs wherever possible and it is important to acknowledge that HEIs have to date shown enormous willingness to be responsive in numerous ways. I would encourage all institutions to engage with students in relation to any issues, including course delivery and fees.

Third Level Admissions

560. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if the case of a student (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46623/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The CAO process applications for undergraduate courses on behalf of the Higher Education Institutions. Decisions on admissions are made by the HEIs who then instruct the CAO to make offers to successful candidates. Neither I nor my Department have a role in the operation of the CAO, and it is not within our remit to determine CAO points levels, which are determined by the grades received by students, the number of applicants for a course and the number of places available.

I know how difficult a time it has been for students and parents, and we appreciate how disappointing it can be not to receive an offer for your course of choice, but we would like to stress the range of options available both in further education and training and apprenticeships, but also in pathways in higher education. For those whose route into higher education may not be what they originally planned, there are many pathways available in the further and higher education system.

Covid-19 Pandemic

561. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he has any plans to standardise university Covid-19 restrictions to national public health measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46727/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins): The Safe Return Plan for further and higher education, which was agreed following extensive discussions between sectoral representatives, institutions, public health, students, staff and other stakeholders was published on the 15th June. The Safe Return Plan can be accessed at the following link: www.gov.ie/en/publication/bcd91a-safe-return-to-on-site-further-and-higher-education-and-research/.

The plan, which emerged following extensive and productive discussions between university representatives, public health and other relevant stakeholders, provided a comprehensive framework for higher education institutions to proceed with planning to safely return to significant on-campus learning, teaching, research and a broader student experience fully supported by public health authorities through the implementation of a comprehensive and extensive suite of precautionary measures.

The sector is committed to ensuring that onsite operations are conducted in such a manner as to manage any risk to individual and public health through adherence to the prevailing regulations, guidance, and advice. The approach that the sector has taken is supported by the Chief Medical Officer. In addition, public health recently provided clarification to the sector on public health advice to support the sector in the implementation of its plans for a safe return and to assist its engagement with staff and students in that regard.

The Plan and the approach taken fully recognises the autonomy and diversity of the higher and further education sector, and recognises that institutions will develop and implement their own plans for returning on-site, in line with their local context and physical infrastructure.

The implementation of these plans are being realised with all returning students having resumed onsite activity and first year students commencing this week. The safety, sustainability and continuity of the return to campus are of paramount importance and my Department will continue to work with the Chief Medical Officer and the Health Service Executive to that end.

Legislative Measures

562. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice her position on offences related to non-fatal strangulation; if her attention has been drawn to reforms in Northern Ireland in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45940/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): My Department is aware of the work in Northern Ireland and of the public consultation the Justice Ministry in Northern Ireland has conducted. Officials of my Department are in contact with their counterparts in Northern Ireland in relation to this ongoing work.

It is important to note that there is modern legislation in this jurisdiction that covers non-fatal strangulation, while Northern Ireland still relies solely on section 21 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

Under section 2 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 (Assault), a person who, without lawful excuse, intentionally or recklessly directly or indirectly applies force to or causes an impact on the body of another, without the consent of the other, is guilty of the offence

of assault. A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding €2,500 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or to both.

Under section 3 (Assault causing harm) of that Act, a person who assaults another causing him or her harm is guilty of an offence. A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to a fine not exceeding €2,500 or to both, or

(b) on conviction on indictment to a fine or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or to both.

“Harm” is defined as harm to body or mind and includes pain and unconsciousness.

The question of the introduction of a standalone offence of non-fatal strangulation in this jurisdiction is currently being examined by my Department. Amongst the issues to be considered is whether there is a possibility that the creation of a standalone offence could cast doubt on the applicability of the 1997 general provision to other specific acts. Any legislative intervention in this area must, as the Deputy will understand, avoid any unintended consequences.

Citizenship Applications

563. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Justice if she has considered fast-tracking citizenship applications of those applicants who worked on the front lines during the Covid-19 crisis as has been done in France; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46011/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): I recognise and acknowledge the crucial role frontline workers are continuing to play in responding to the threat of COVID-19. They work in a challenging environment and deal with vulnerable people on a daily basis. Their exceptional commitment has been particularly clear throughout the pandemic, during which they have been playing a key role in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

However, all applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the legislation. There are no provisions to apply different criteria depending on the category of employment of the applicant. All applicants are required to meet minimum periods of reckonable residence and standard checks are carried out as part of the overall process to maintain its integrity.

I am deeply conscious of how important the granting of naturalisation is to those who apply for it and my Department has continued to accept and process citizenship applications throughout the pandemic and at all levels of public health restrictions. However, processing rates have been negatively impacted by the necessary health and safety related restrictions imposed and it has not been possible to hold in-person citizenship ceremonies since March 2020.

Regrettably, there are just over 22,200 applications currently on hand. These applications are at various stages of processing, ranging from those just received to those where a decision has been made and are “ceremony ready”.

For applicants that were in the final stages of processing, in January, my Department opened a temporary system to enable these applicants to complete their naturalisation process by signing a statutory declaration of loyalty. Since then, my Department has delivered on its commitment to communicate with 6,500 applicants by the end of June, inviting them to complete the

final steps required prior to the granting of a certificate of naturalisation.

As of 15 September 2021, 6,167 certificates of naturalisation have been issued so far this year and a significant number of healthcare and other frontline workers have and benefitted from these new arrangements. A further 1,000 people have paid the statutory fee and will receive their certificates in the coming weeks.

Since 13 September, the staff of the Citizenship Division of my Department have returned to the office on a new attendance pattern that will see a gain of approximately 500 production hours per week due to increased footfall on-site. To further address the volume of applications on hand, additional staff are being assigned to the citizenship team; and a number of digitisation measures have been introduced to increase efficiency in the process, including eTax clearance, eVetting and online payments.

The end result of the digitisation process will be to free up more staff to focus on processing applications in a timely and efficient manner, to improve service to our customers and reduce waiting times. Based on this, my objective is to achieve an improved decision making time-frame of 6-9 months for a majority of applications during 2022.

Immigration Status

564. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice when a stamp 1G visa will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46017/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): I can confirm that an application for a Stamp 1G permission from the person referred to by the Deputy has been approved. They can expect to receive their new Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card within the next 10 working days.

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.

Family Law Cases

565. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice the status of a maintenance enforcement application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46049/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): My Department acts as the Central Authority in Ireland for the recovery of maintenance from abroad.

My officials are dealing with the case referred to by the Deputy. However, I hope you will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me, as Minister, to comment on any individual case.

Traffic Fines

566. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Justice the number of fixed charge notices which have been issued by An Garda Síochána using the new statutory instrument for dangerous overtaking of cyclists since the law was introduced in November 2019 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46066/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána, including the enforcement of road traffic legislation. As Minister for Justice, I have no direct role in these matters.

Fixed Charge Notices can be issued for offences related to overtaking or attempting to overtake in a manner which endangers or causes inconvenience to a cyclist. I am informed by the Garda authorities that 47 Fixed Charge Notices have been issued for these offences since the law was introduced in November 2019.

I am advised that these figures are based on incidents which occurred from 12 November 2019 to 23 September 2021, inclusive. I am further informed that these figures are based upon operational data from the Fixed Charge Processing System as was available on 24 September 2021, and are liable to change.

Immigration Policy

567. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Justice if she will consider issuing flexible visa entry arrangements for persons (details supplied) in view of a significant investment in a tourism and history project by them. [46079/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): The persons referred to by the Deputy are US nationals and therefore are visa exempt. They do not require a visa to enter the State for periods of up to 90 days.

However, in order to work in Ireland, a non-EEA national, unless they are exempted, must hold an Atypical Working Scheme (AWS) permission granted by my Department or a valid employment permit issued by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE).

Any non EU/EEA nationals who wish to remain in the State for longer than 90 days must register with their local immigration office and apply for permission to remain before their initial permission to remain expires. Full details of the registration process can be found at: www.irishimmigration.ie/registering-your-immigration-permission/how-to-register-your-immigration-permission-for-the-first-time/requirements-and-documents-needed/.

If their application for a new immigration permission is granted and they are successfully registered they will receive an Irish Residence Permit card by post, which is proof that they are legally in the State. The IRP card will indicate the stamp/permission granted, the conditions attaching to that permission and the expiry date of the permission. Once the IRP card is in date it will allow the holder to travel freely from and return to the State.

Depending on the type of permission granted, some applicants will have to pay a registration fee of €300. They will be advised of any fee at the time of registration and will be required to pay by credit or debit card at their registration appointment.

In Dublin, the registration office is at 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2. If they are residing outside Dublin, the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) operates a network of registration offices throughout the country. They must register at the registration office nearest to where

they live. They can find their nearest Garda station here: www.garda.ie/en/contact-us/station-directory/.

Freedom of Information

568. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice if all freedom of information requests received by her Department for the duration of this Government have been dealt with comprehensively and accurately; and if she or any Departmental officials have expressed any concerns regarding the way in which freedom of information requests have been handled during the same period. [46084/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to fulfilling all obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and I am satisfied that my Department strives at all times to respond accurately and fully to all requests received.

In the period from June 2020 to end August 2021, my Department has received 1,059 requests and 1,000 decisions have been made.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the restrictions on office attendance during COVID-19 have had some impact on response times, particularly in accessing physical files and hard copy records. The Freedom of Information team followed the guidance of the FOI Central Policy Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in how to provide continuity of services to the greatest extent possible and engaged proactively with requesters where appropriate in an attempt to meet their needs and provide them with the information sought.

Arising from my Department's commitment to respond effectively to all Freedom of Information requests, an overall examination of processes and procedures in early 2020 included a review of the current model in place for dealing with requests and the updating and publication of the disclosure logs. Additional methods of monitoring our performance include monthly reports to the Management Board of the numbers of requests on hand and decisions made.

In addition, similar to a number of other Departments, a Freedom of Information Review Committee has been established within my Department. The Committee's role includes determining whether individual Freedom of Information requests and internal reviews have followed all the proper processes and procedures. I am satisfied that this extra level of review has contributed further to ensuring that my Department maintains high and consistent standards in processing and managing FOI requests.

The Freedom of Information team routinely receives and indeed welcomes suggestions and comments from staff and stakeholders. Any feedback from staff and from our external customers regarding Freedom of Information procedures is taken into consideration and informs the continuous review of our FOI processes.

Prison Service

569. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice if an appointment will be made to a facility (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46133/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Everyone in custody is provided with healthcare services based on an equivalence of care to that which is provided under the General Medical Scheme in the community.

Those services are based on a primary care model which includes general practitioner services made available to all those in custody.

In respect of the specific case referenced by the Deputy, I understand that the Irish Prison Service recently held a national competition to recruit Prison Doctors to fill positions across the entire prison estate. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful in recruiting a General Practitioner posting for Castlerea Prison.

I am advised that the Prison Service will shortly return to the market to recruit additional Prison Doctors and consideration is being given to advertise specifically for a General Practitioner to work at Castlerea Prison.

The Deputy will wish to be aware that the Prison Service is currently meeting its requirement for the provision of GP services at Castlerea Prison by employing locum GP's who are engaged by way of a contract agreement with a provider of those services.

This arrangement has been challenging on occasion and the locum providers have not been able to supply a locum GP placement to Castlerea at all times, however I understand that this situation is reflective of the difficulties which are being experienced nationally in other clinical settings in terms of securing locum GP cover.

Citizenship Applications

570. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice the current average processing time for applications for citizenship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46189/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): As the Deputy will appreciate, a number of unforeseen issues have negatively impacted the processing of citizenship applications in recent years. A High Court case, which was subsequently successfully appealed to the Court of Appeal, resulted in significant delays in 2019, and the loss of over six months processing time. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on staff attendance in the office over the last 18 months and a significant backlog has built up regarding the granting of citizenships due to the inability to hold in person ceremonies during this time.

As a result, regrettably, the current average processing time for applications is 23 months and there are just over 22,200 applications currently on hand. These applications are at various stages of processing, ranging from those just received to those where a decision has been made and are "ceremony ready".

I am deeply conscious of how important the granting of naturalisation is to those who apply for it and my Department has continued to accept and process citizenship applications throughout the pandemic and at all levels of public health restrictions. However, the combined impact of the 2019 Jones judgment and the necessary health and safety related restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 disruption has resulted in the processing timeline for standard applications increasing.

Aside from these specific issues, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. Processing timescales can be impacted by incomplete applications having to be returned; further documentation being required from the applicant; where the payment of the required certificate fee is awaited; or if the applicant has not been engaging with my Department.

In some instances, the input of several government agencies, both within and outside the jurisdiction is needed and the request and receipt of information from these sources can result in delays in processing some applications. Issues can also arise at the final stage of the naturalisation process, for example, where additional information comes to light which is required to be considered before a final decision is taken.

For applicants that were in the final stages of processing, in January, my Department opened a temporary system to enable these applicants to complete their naturalisation process by signing a statutory declaration of loyalty. Since then, my Department has delivered on its commitment to communicate with 6,500 applicants by the end of June, inviting them to complete the final steps required prior to the granting of a certificate of naturalisation.

As of 15 September 2021, 6,167 certificates of naturalisation have been issued so far this year and a further 1,000 people have paid the statutory fee and will receive their certificates in the coming weeks.

The Citizenship Division of my Department has prioritised bringing the oldest applications on hand to conclusion and a significant number of these applicants have received their certificates of naturalisation since the introduction of the temporary process.

Since 13 September, the staff of the Citizenship Division of my Department have returned to the office on a new attendance pattern that will see a gain of approximately 500 production hours per week due to increased footfall on-site. To further address the volume of applications on hand, additional staff are being assigned to the citizenship team; and a number of digitisation measures have been introduced to increase efficiency in the process, including eTax clearance, eVetting and online payments.

The end result of the digitisation process will be to free up more staff to focus on processing applications in a timely and efficient manner, to improve service to our customers and reduce waiting times. Based on this, my objective is to achieve an improved decision making time-frame of 6-9 months for a majority of applications during 2022.

Departmental Expenditure

571. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice further to Parliamentary Question No. 533 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46205/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is committed to supporting the development of all its staff in line with our HR Strategy and the wider People Strategy for the civil service, and looks for opportunities to support and invest in its people. The provision of training and development programmes has been identified as a key strategic action to enable the civil service to meet its strategic people priorities, namely: be an employer of choice, build the workforce of the future, and build support and value people developers.

It is important to note that the Department does not go to the market to procure development supports in all cases. Specific individual development needs are identified on an ongoing basis through performance management. Small scale individual needs can be met by a range of providers on a one-off basis. The Common Purpose Meridian Programme was identified as an offering in this regard, in providing an environment for senior leaders to engage with other learners from across the public, private and NGO sectors to develop key change management and leadership development skillsets.

Citizenship Applications

572. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Justice if consideration will be given to allowing persons who have residency in Northern Ireland to apply for Irish citizenship based on their years living there. [46247/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

Section 15 of the Act sets out the statutory conditions that must be fulfilled for a certificate of naturalisation to be granted. Section 15A provides that, where the application is based on being the spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen, the requirements include that the couple are married or civil partners to each other for a period of at least 3 years and are living together and, immediately before the date of application, have a period of one year's continuous residence in the island of Ireland and, during the preceding four years, have a further period amounting to 2 years (i.e. 3 years in total).

Following the 2004 referendum, a person born after 2004 on the island of Ireland (including Northern Ireland) is automatically a citizen if one parent was an Irish citizen, a British citizen, a resident of either Ireland or Northern Ireland entitled to reside in either without time limit, or a legal resident of Ireland or Northern Ireland for three of the four years preceding the child's birth (excluding time spent as a student or an asylum seeker).

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory conditions as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

Coroners Service

573. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice if a coroner will be reappointed to cover south County Tipperary following the retirement of the coroner; the number of cases waiting to be heard by the Coroner's Court in County Tipperary; the average waiting time for a case to be heard in County Tipperary; the reason County Tipperary with a larger population and average annual case load has only one coroner while other counties with a smaller population and case load have three, for example, County Waterford; the efforts she is making to reduce the waiting times for the Coroner's Court in County Tipperary; if she will urgently move to reappoint a coroner to south County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46271/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy Hildegard Naughton): Prior to the retirement of the coroner for Tipperary South, Mr. Paul Morris on 25 June 2021, it had been agreed by the relevant local authority, Tipperary County Council to amalgamate, by way of Section 7 of the Coroners Acts 1962–2019, the two coronial districts of Tipperary North and Tipperary South with effect from that date.

On 25 June 2021, Mr Joseph P Kelly, the then coroner for North Tipperary, was appointed

as the coroner for the newly amalgamated coronial district of Tipperary. Prior to this, Mr. Kelly had acted as Deputy Coroner for the Tipperary south district. There are no plans to reappoint a coroner for the former Tipperary south district.

I understand that Mr. Kelly will continue to provide inquests in venues previously utilised to accommodate families and I am informed that he has ensured a seamless transition.

As the Deputy will be aware, Coroners are independent in the conduct of their functions and neither I nor my Department have any role in the scheduling of inquests by a coroner.

All coroners are continuing to work to schedule inquests in a safe manner. Most coroners hold inquests in local court houses, and as a result of Covid-19, given public health considerations, inquests have unfortunately been severely curtailed.

The Courts Service is working closely with coroners across the country to facilitate inquests and continue to do so while ensuring adherence to public health guidelines.

Immigration Status

574. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice if the visa applications that were accepted for Afghans included applications prior to May 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46273/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): In response to the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, my Department is currently focused on processing applications for Afghan family members of Irish citizens and Afghan nationals living in Ireland. We are prioritising all such applications and processing them speedily and sympathetically.

A total of 295 visa applications, including both short and long term visas, have been received to date in 2021 from Afghan nationals. For the period 1 January 2021 to 30 April 2021, my Department received 64 applications from Afghan nationals and of these, 47 were granted a visa to enter the State.

For the period 1 May 2021 to 15 September 2021, my Department received 231 applications for Visas from Afghan nationals, and of these, 170 have been granted a visa to date.

The Deputy can be assured that my Department will continue to prioritise the processing of visa applications from Afghan nationals seeking to join family in the State.

Legislative Programme

575. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice her reason for omitting amendments to the Succession Act 1965 from the heads of the courts and civil law (miscellaneous provisions) Bill that would provide that a convicted killer is not entitled to the full value of a property for which they share joint ownership with the victim as committed to in the summer legislative programme. [46275/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): At the outset, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to all families who have been affected in such devastating circumstances.

I can inform the Deputy that work is progressing in amending Section 120 of the Succession Act in order to ensure that perpetrators of domestic homicides could not benefit through inheritance.

My Department is working with the Office of the Attorney General and, as the Deputy will appreciate, there are a number of complex legal issues to be addressed in this area which require thorough examination by experts in this field of law. We are currently considering the most appropriate legislative vehicle to progress this issue. This is a complex area of the law and I want to ensure that we avoid any unintended or unforeseen consequences.

In addition, the independent study on Familicide and Domestic Homicide Review is expected to be published soon. While its terms of reference do not cover this issue specifically I would like to consider the next steps on this important area following on from the publication of that important review.

An Garda Síochána

576. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice the number of drug searches that have taken place in County Tipperary since 1 September 2020; and the number of arrests and convictions for possession and supply of illegal drugs in County Tipperary since September 2020. [46285/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána. As Minister, I have no responsibility for these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the continued disruption of the supply of all illicit drugs remains a priority for An Garda Síochána and the other state agencies tasked with responsibilities in this regard. An Garda Síochána have also stated that drugs searches are enforcement activity and as such do not generally provide this information. Drugs can also be found in unrelated searches. For this reason the Garda authorities have provided information on incidents and arrests only.

The below table, furnished to me by the Garda authorities, sets out the number of incidents and arrests recorded by An Garda Síochána for ‘Possession of Drugs for Sale or Supply’ in County Tipperary between 01/09/2020 to 23 September 2021.

Tipperary Garda Division	01 Sept 2020 - 23 Sept 2021
Incidents of Possession of Drugs for Sale or Supply	151
Arrests for Possession of Drugs for Sale or Supply	152

It is important to note that these figures are operational and subject to change.

In relation to the information requested by the Deputy on the number of persons convicted of relevant offences in Tipperary, the following table, furnished to me by the Courts Service, outlines the number of convictions in the District Courts in Tipperary.

	01 Sept – 31 Dec 2020	01 Jan – 31 Aug 2021

Court Area	Number of Offences where convictions were recorded	Number of Persons convicted	Number of Offences where convictions were recorded	Number of Persons convicted
Cashel	4	4	26	25
Clonmel	15	13	58	51
Carrick on Suir	4	4	5	5
Nenagh	27	17	31	21
Thurles	8	7	29	27
Tipperary	3	2	9	6
Total	61	47	158	135

The Courts Service can only provide data in relation to where offence codes provided on the system were used by prosecutors. Prosecutors may have used uncoded free text offences and any such offences would not be included in the data provided.

At this time, the system in use by the Courts Service in the Circuit Courts is the Integrated Criminal Management System (ICMS). ICMS cannot produce reports for specific offences.

An Garda Síochána

577. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice further to Parliamentary Question No. 497 of 22 June 2021, if she has received the necessary information from the Garda authorities. [46286/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Parliamentary Question 497 of 22 June 2021 refers to the estimated cost of installing a minimum of two defibrillators in each Garda station that is open on a 24/7 basis.

I can confirm that a substantive response to Parliamentary Question 497 of 22 June 2021 was issued to the Deputy on 6 July 2021.

Civil Service

578. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice the efforts she and her officials have made to engage and consult with the 4,000+ civil servant Garda staff who are fearing a change in their status as a result of the proposals contained in the Policing, Security and Community Safety Bill; the steps that have been and will be taken to engage with the relevant staff; and the expected effect the proposed changes will have on Garda recruitment given that Garda numbers are so low per capita in counties such as County Meath. [46300/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, in April of this year the Government approved the drafting of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Bill, a commitment in the Programme for Government and Justice Plan 2021. This general scheme was developed to deliver on the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (CoFPI) following publication of its fundamental in-depth review in 2018.

A central tenet of the CoFPI report is that An Garda Síochána should be a single organisation with a single workforce. To support this, CoFPI recommended that non-sworn members (i.e.

Garda staff) should be recruited directly to An Garda Síochána, not to the general civil service, and should be treated as valued members of a single Garda workforce with a shared mission.

The general scheme gives effect to this recommendation by providing for the Garda Commissioner to recruit and appoint Garda staff in accordance with the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004. Under the provisions of the general scheme, the Minister may also designate by order that existing civil servants within An Garda Síochána will change status, but only after engagement with trade unions and staff associations.

It is important to emphasise that no changes to the status of existing Garda staff will take place solely as a result of the enactment of the proposed legislation. A Ministerial order will be required before any designation to change the civil servant status of existing Garda staff may be made. The Minister must engage with any trade union or staff association concerned and consider any representations made by them. The general scheme provides for further reassurances on the terms and conditions of existing Garda staff prior to any agreement being reached with relevant unions or associations. I should emphasise that this does not pose any risk to their current terms and conditions.

Officials from my Department have been in contact with the relevant representative associations to brief them on the legislation, and are available to consult further as required.

The proposed changes will have no effect whatsoever on recruitment of Garda members, or on the allocation of policing resources by the Garda Commissioner. In that regard, the Deputy will be aware that an unprecedented budget of €1.952 billion was allocated to An Garda Síochána in 2021 which is enabling an ongoing programme of recruitment of Garda members and staff, albeit the pace of this has been impacted over the last 18 months by the pandemic. Subject to Budget 2022, I hope that it will be possible for recruitment to reach normal levels next year.

Immigration Policy

579. Deputy Marian Harkin asked the Minister for Justice if there are circumstances in which the fees for an application for naturalisation can be waived. [46347/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): The fees in relation to applications for a certificate of naturalisation are governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011.

The current application fee is €175, payable when an application for naturalisation is lodged. A certification fee is payable only when the application is successful and a certificate of naturalisation issues.

The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of recognised refugees and stateless persons, there is no certification fee.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation which, given the benefits involved, is quite a detailed process.

All of the fees payable under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, are kept under ongoing review by the Department. However, there are currently no plans to amend the fees.

Immigration Status

580. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice the status of an asylum case (details supplied). [46572/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): For reasons of maintaining full confidentiality, it is not my Department's practice to comment on whether an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State. An applicant for such protection status, or their legal representative, should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted: by email to *info@ipo.gov.ie*; by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

The IPAT may be contacted either: by email to *info@protectionappeals.ie*; by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

I can assure the Deputy that, under the International Protection Act 2015, each international protection application is assessed individually on its merits. All applicants for international protection are carefully interviewed and their cases are individually assessed by experienced case-workers. The circumstances of each individual case is assessed having regard to both the subjective elements (the applicant's own account or personal history) and objective elements (up-to-date information on the applicant's country or place of origin).

Any decision in relation to reviewing decisions made on appeals is a matter for the Chairperson of the Tribunal, who is independent in their functions under the 2015 Act.

The principle of non-refoulement applies to all decisions made on international protection applications. Under international human rights law, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm.

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*) 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.

An Garda Síochána

581. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice the number of community Gardaí attached to Finglas and Ballymun stations, Dublin 9 and 11 in each of the past ten years by rank in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46617/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána, including the stationing of Gardaí and their allocation to Garda units. As Minister for Justice, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am assured by An Garda Síochána that local and senior Garda management are consulted during the allocation of Garda personnel, and are responsible for the specific deployment and assignment of duties being undertaken at divisional level to ensure the continued delivery of policing services within Garda Divisions.

To date, the official categorisation as a Community Garda refers to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society, including by giving talks to schools, community groups and others. However, community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána, and all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in the course of carrying out their duties. This has perhaps never been clearer than in the response which has been provided to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The below table, provided to me by the Garda authorities, outlines the number of Garda members categorised as Community Gardaí that are assigned to Ballymun and Finglas Garda Stations, broken down by rank, during the period 31 December 2012 to 31 August 2021.

Ballymun	Sergeants	Garda	Finglas	Sergeants	Garda
31/12/2012	2	10	31/12/2012	1	14
31/12/2013	2	8	31/12/2013	1	10
31/12/2014	1	8	31/12/2014	1	11
31/12/2015	1	5	31/12/2015	1	11
31/12/2016	1	5	31/12/2016	0	10
31/12/2017	1	7	31/12/2017	1	11
31/12/2018	1	7	31/12/2018	1	10
31/12/2019	1	4	31/12/2019	1	14
31/12/2020	1	5	31/12/2020	0	15
31/08/2021	1	7	31/08/2021	0	11

An Garda Síochána

582. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Justice if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Operation Tombola; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46664/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that on the 26 August, 2021, “Operation Tombola” was initiated in the DMR in all Divisions and will remain in place in the lead up to and over the Halloween period.

The Deputy will wish to be aware that proactive policing initiatives within the DMR under ‘Operation Tombola’ include but are not limited to the following actions:

- Increased patrolling (overt and covert) of areas of interest, including but not limited to usual locations where young people congregate as well as areas where bonfire materials are likely to be stockpiled.
- High visibility patrols of public transport on Dublin Bus, LUAS and Dart services in the lead up to and on Halloween to prevent and detect incidents of anti-social behaviour.
- Engagement with schools and youth services throughout the region with talks designed and focused on engaging with those who may participate in sale/supply and use of fireworks.
- Proactive monitoring of open source media to identify the location where individuals are

operating the sale and supply of fireworks.

- Identifying the scene(s) of unsupervised and unplanned bonfire locations and liaising with local authorities to have bonfire material removed in advance of Halloween
- Allocation of designated Garda personnel to monitor overt CCTV to ensure anti-social issues are effectively dealt with in a timely manner.
- Proactive engagement by liquor licensing inspectors with managers and business owners, reminding the business community of their responsibilities under Liquor Licensing Legislation.
- Utilisation and deployment of Crime Prevention Officers (CPO) in the DMR to impart, educate and inform business owners / building site managers, etc. on how best secure combustible material (tyres, pallets etc.) in their possession in the lead up to Halloween.
- Policing the public consumption of alcohol and underage minors drinking.

Residency Permits

583. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice if she will expedite an application by a person (details supplied) in County Sligo for a permanent residence card for their daughter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46702/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): The processing of this application is ongoing at present. The EU Treaty Rights Division of the Immigration Service of my Department will contact the applicant by the end of this week with an update on their case.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility (*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.

An Garda Síochána

584. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Justice the Garda strength in the DMR by division in each of the years the years 2016 to 2020 and in June 2021, in tabular form. [46706/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is by law responsible for the general management and administration of the Garda organisation under the Garda Síochána Act 2005. This includes the deployment of members of An Garda Síochána throughout the State. As Minister, I have no role in these independent functions.

I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of policing priorities and crime trends, to ensure their optimum use. I am further advised that it is a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her, having regard to the profile of each area within the Division and its specific needs.

For the Deputy's information, the tables appended to this answer contain the breakdown of Garda members attached to the DMR from 2016 to August 2021, the latest date for which figures are available.

Detailed information in relation to the Garda strength of each Garda Division by District, Station and Rank is available on my Department's website. This information is updated every month with the latest data provided by An Garda Síochána. The information can be found at the following link:

www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-09-28_pq584-28-9-21_en.xlsx.

Asylum Applications

585. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if her attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will request her Department to reconsider the rejection letter issued. [46774/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne): For reasons of maintaining full confidentiality, it is not my Department's practice to comment on whether an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State.

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

The IPO may be contacted: by email to info@ipo.gov.ie; by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

The IPAT may be contacted either: by email to info@protectionappeals.ie; by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

I can assure the Deputy that, under the International Protection Act 2015, each international protection application is assessed individually on its merits. All applicants for international protection are carefully interviewed and their cases are individually assessed by experienced case-workers. The circumstances of each individual case is assessed having regard to both the subjective elements (the applicant's own account or personal history) and objective elements (up-to-date information on the applicant's country or place of origin).

Any decision in relation to reviewing decisions made on appeals is a matter for the Chairperson of the Tribunal, who is independent in their functions under the 2015 Act.

The principle of non-refoulement applies to all decisions made on international protection applications. Under international human rights law, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm.

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) 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.

Departmental Functions

586. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Justice the persons or bodies that have the legal authority to authorise surveillance including phone tapping; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46824/21]

Minister for Justice (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I understand the Deputy to be referring to authorisations made under the provisions of the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act 1993 and the Criminal Justice (Surveillance) Act 2009.

I can inform the Deputy that it is the Minister for Justice who may, in accordance with the provisions of the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act 1993, authorise bodies designated under the Act to intercept communications for the purposes of investigating serious crime or safeguarding the security of the State.

Surveillance is governed by the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Surveillance) Act 2009. Under Section 5 of the Act, a district court judge may authorise bodies designated under that Act to carry out surveillance for the purposes of investigation and prevention of arrestable offences and maintaining the security of the State. Section 7 of the 2009 Act provides that a member or officer of a body designated under the Act may carry out surveillance without an authorisation in cases of urgency and subject to strict conditions. Section 8 of the 2009 Act provides for the use of a tracking device where approved by a superior officer of a designated body, and subject to strict conditions.

As the Deputy may be aware, the operation of both Acts is overseen independently by serving Judges of the High Court who are designated by the Government for this purpose and report to the Taoiseach. In carrying out their functions, the Designated Judges have, by law, full access to all persons and records they consider relevant and all relevant persons have, by law, a duty to co-operate.

In addition, both Acts provide for a serving judge of the Circuit Court to act as the Complaints Referee. The Complaints Referee is empowered to receive and investigate complaints from persons who believe that their communications have been intercepted or that they might be the subject of surveillance. In carrying out her functions, the Referee has, by law, full access to all persons and records she considers relevant to her investigations and all relevant persons have, by law, a duty to co-operate with her.

Home Help Service

587. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that an adequate number of healthcare assistants can be sourced here or within the EEA; if he is satisfied that pay, conditions and training here for home care staff are sufficient in order to ensure that an adequate number of healthcare assistants can be sourced here or within the EEA to meet the growing demand for home care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46048/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Programme for Government (2020)

commits to the introduction of a statutory scheme to support people to live in their own homes, which will provide equitable access to high-quality, regulated home care. In this regard, the Department is in the process of developing a statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home-support. It is intended that the new scheme will provide equitable and transparent access to high-quality services based on a person's assessed care-needs.

The HSE has operational responsibility for planning, managing, and delivering home support services for older people and people with a disability at national, regional and local levels. Services are delivered either directly by HSE employed staff, or on its behalf by a combination of private and 'Section 39' organisations (i.e. voluntary/not-for-profit) providers who operate under service level agreements with the HSE. There are also many home support users who self-fund entirely or self-fund additional support above the support provided via the HSE. There has been sustained investment in home-support services in recent years, with approximately €630 million allocated in the National Service Plan 2021 to provide 24 million hours of home support.

In the public sector any amendments to pay are carried out in line with the current public service agreement for those working in relevant agencies. It would not be appropriate for the Minister to comment directly on the terms and conditions of those working in Section 39 or other privately operated services. Privately operated services are responsible for recruiting, setting and managing the terms and conditions of employment of their staff, having regard to employment legislation.

Departmental Communications

588. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if he or any person in his Department have had any communications with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and or the HSE regarding the future of the Dean Maxwell home in Roscrea, County Tipperary; if so, the way in which he communicated with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and or the HSE; the dates he communicated with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and or the HSE; and the persons with whom he communicated with in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and or the HSE on this matter (details supplied). [46082/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): Unfortunately, it has not been possible to provide the information requested in the timeframe available, as there may be a considerable body of work required. In order to properly answer the questions posed, my officials in the Department of Health may engage with you directly in due course on a number of matters related to your queries, including the scope and timeframe involved in the request. I can assure the Deputy that the information requested will be provided at the earliest possible opportunity.

Disability Services

589. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the process that a young person with an intellectual disability follows when they exit formal schooling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46184/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs

and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly with regard to those who transition from schooling into HSE services, as soon as possible. Processes in relation to transitions into further education or employment are led by DFHERIS and DSP respectively.

Disability Services

590. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the criteria as to the way in which the money is spent by each service provider in regard to each person with an intellectual disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46186/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Disability Services

591. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the amount that has been spent on personal assistance services by CHO area in each of the years 2016 to 2020, in tabular form. [46501/21]

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

Assisted Human Reproduction

592. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health the processes in place to ensure that parents of children born via assisted human reproduction such as IVF and surrogacy are able to secure legal guardianship of these children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46615/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (the Act of 2015), reforms and updates family law to address the needs of children living in diverse family types. The Minister for Health is responsible for Parts 2 and 3 of the Act of 2015 and these Parts commenced on 4 May 2020. Parts 2 and 3 deal with the issue of donor-assisted human reproduction.

Subject to certain conditions, the provisions of Parts 2 and 3 of the Act of 2015 provide for the parentage of donor-conceived children born after the commencement of Parts 2 and 3 and retrospective declarations of parentage for donor-conceived children born prior to the commencement of Parts 2 and 3.

On a broad level, issues related to legal guardianship – including responsibility for the provisions of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 – come under the remit of the Minister for Justice. Specifically, section 6B of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, as inserted by the Act of 2015, provides for the guardianship of donor-conceived children to whom Parts 2 and 3 of the Act of 2015 apply.

The Act of 2015 does not make provisions in relation to the regulation of surrogacy. Provisions relating to domestic altruistic surrogacy are included in the forthcoming AHR legislation. The surrogacy provisions outline a court-based mechanism through which the parentage of a child born through surrogacy may be transferred from the surrogate (and her husband, if applicable) to the intending parent(s).

Hospital Waiting Lists

593. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and young persons in the CHO Dublin north city and county who are currently awaiting an appointment for child psychology services at CHI Temple Street. [45936/21]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

594. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the current average waiting time to access child psychology services at CHI Temple Street. [45937/21]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

595. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently awaiting an appointment for child psychology services at CHI Temple Street; the number of persons that have been waiting for six, 12, 18 and over 18 months, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45938/21]

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

Hospital Services

596. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if child psychology services at CHI Temple Street are currently accepting new referrals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45939/21]

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

State Properties

597. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on his visit to the site of the former nursing home at Crooksling, County Dublin; if he has made a decision in respect of the future of the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45946/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): On Monday, 20 September, I had a productive visit to the site at Crooksling and met with officials from the HSE and a group of local representatives. No formal decision has been reached on the future of the site of the former nursing home. However, my department will continue to engage in discussions to progress plans for the site.

Dental Services

598. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of dental practitioners currently providing dental care to persons holding a medical card under the dental treatment services scheme in CHO Dublin north city and county in tabular form. [45947/21]

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

Dental Services

599. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of dental practitioners contracted to provide dental care to persons holding a medical card under the dental treatment service scheme in CHO Dublin north city and county in each of the years 2016 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [45948/21]

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

Dental Services

600. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting access to the dental treatment services scheme in CHO Dublin north city and county; the number of these persons that have been waiting for six, 12 and 18 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45949/21]

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

Dental Services

601. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of dental practitioners that have withdrawn from the dental treatment services scheme in CHO Dublin north city and county in each of the years 2019 and 2020 and to date in 2021. [45950/21]

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

Dental Services

602. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the status of the roll-out of the national oral health policy and the proposed review of the dental treatment services scheme contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45951/21]

603. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the engagement that has taken place with dental practitioners and their representatives relating to the provision of services under the dental treatment services scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45952/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 602 and 603 together.

The National Oral Health Policy, *Smile agus Sláinte* (2019), provides a framework to transform oral health services and will broaden the care provided to the public from birth to old age. Progress is being made on the priority actions identified in the Policy in the areas within my Department's remit, including liaising with other agencies such as the Dental Council.

The roll-out of the Policy has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the proposed review of the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) contract has been deferred. I am committed to the sustainability of the DTSS which provides dental care, free of charge, to medical card holders aged 16 and over and which will need to be aligned with the new policy. Officials in my Department and from the HSE are currently engaging with the Irish Dental Association on matters relating to the provision of services under the DTSS.

Question No. 603 answered with Question No. 602.

Budget 2022

604. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered a pre-budget submission (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45953/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I recently received Mental Health Reform's Pre-Budget 2022 submission. I value their input - they play an important role in raising awareness and advocating for improvements to mental health service delivery.

I am giving detailed consideration to the submission, in consultation as appropriate with other relevant areas within the Department and with the HSE. More broadly, the Department is engaging in dialogue with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the HSE in relation to the 2022 Estimates. Until these discussions are concluded it would not be appropriate for me to comment on this matter. However, I am committed to ensuring the continued enhancement of mental health services through the allocation of additional development funding in mental health in 2022.

I would note for the Deputy that 2021 saw a record budget for mental health of over €1.1 billion, including €23 million to commence implementation of many of the short-term recommendations of *Sharing the Vision* in 2021 and the HSE National Service Plan. €15 million is to address the additional challenges posed by Covid-19, including increased step-down beds, private surge capacity, extra resources for community mental health teams and reconfiguration of residential facilities to meet Mental Health Commission recommendations. An additional €2.2 million was allocated in 2020 to develop telehealth and psychosocial responses to Covid-19 for

healthcare workers and the public.

While we do not yet fully understand Covid-19's impact on mental health, the extent of supports that may be required and how this will affect longer term service demand the Department and HSE continue to plan for any potential surge in demand as it arises and as services return to normal provision and capacity. The HSE has a range of proactive responses for any rise in service need.

Throughout the pandemic, with adaptations, enhancements and improvements, mental health services continued to operate to approximately 85-90% capacity. In particular, expanded and enhanced digital services were crucial in responding to both existing and new and emerging need.

Vaccination Programme

605. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Health when Covid-19 booster vaccines will be available for those who are immunocompromised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45956/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): On 1 September, I announced an update to the Covid-19 vaccination programme following updated recommendations from the NIAC. The recommendations involved extending the primary vaccination course with an mRNA dose for immunocompromised individuals aged 12 years and older irrespective of whether the initial doses were an mRNA or adenoviral vector vaccine.

The third dose of an mRNA vaccine should be given a minimum of two months after the second dose of the extended vaccination schedule.

It is currently anticipated that the administration of the third dose extension programme for immunocompromised will commence the week of 27 September and will take approximately 5-6 weeks to complete.

It is important to note that the NIAC has made a distinction between an additional vaccine for those who have mounted a sub-optimal immune response to the primary vaccination course and booster vaccine doses which may be required by some, or all, of the population as a result of waning immunity and vaccine effectiveness over time.

On 8 September, I announced a further update to the Covid-19 vaccination programme following additional advice from the NIAC. The Committee has recommended a booster dose of an mRNA vaccine (irrespective of whether the primary vaccination course was of an mRNA or adenoviral vector) for residents aged 65 years and older living in Long Term Residential Care Facilities and for those aged 80 years and older living in the community.

I have accepted this advice and the HSE has been requested to make the necessary arrangements to operationalise the recommendations. The NIAC continues to examine emerging evidence regarding booster vaccines for those with waning immunity and reduced effectiveness in other groups.

Vaccination Programme

606. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Health if payment to pharmacies for the administration of vaccines (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [45969/21]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

607. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has put forward proposals to compensate front-line healthcare workers for their outstanding efforts to date in dealing with Covid-19 (details supplied). [45970/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to health sector workers in relation to their continuing efforts in the delivery of health services during this very challenging pandemic period.

I note that this important matter was recently before the Labour Court, and the resulting recommendation issued last Wednesday, 22 September is being given careful consideration by Health Service Management. In the meantime, I wish to reassure the Deputy that the Department and the HSE acknowledge frontline healthcare workers' critical and significant response to this pandemic, and are working to appropriately recognise those efforts.

Dental Services

608. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his plans in relation to the provision to dental services (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45971/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental care, free of charge to medical card holders aged 16 and over. As the Deputy is aware, officials in my Department and from the HSE are currently engaging with the Irish Dental Association on matters relating to the provision of services under the DTSS. The intention is to review the DTSS contract and to explore ways of mitigating the difficulties some patients are currently experiencing in accessing services. In the meantime, I am assured by the HSE that they will assist anyone experiencing problems accessing a service in their locality.

Hospital Procedures

609. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health if Irish hospitals perform surgery on unborn children for any conditions; and if so, if a list of the conditions and the location in which they are carried out will be provided. [45983/21]

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

Hospital Procedures

610. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health if Irish hospitals perform surgery on unborn children with spina bifida; if so, the amount that has been allocated to in utero care for babies with spina bifida in Ireland. [45984/21]

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

Assisted Human Reproduction

611. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the status of the assisted human reproduction Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45986/21]

747. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health his plans to progress the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017; his planned timeline in relation to the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46384/21]

748. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if an update will be provided on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46385/21]

750. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if advice will be provided on a matter (details supplied) in relation to assisted human reproduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46436/21]

803. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce legislation for assisted human reproduction specifically the surrogacy section; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46667/21]

804. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address issues regarding surrogacy (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46668/21]

806. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the current status of the assisted human reproduction Bill which was listed under priority legislation for publication in the summer session 2021; when the Bill is likely to be published and brought before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46671/21]

808. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on assisted human reproduction Bill; the steps he is taking to create a legislative framework to govern surrogacy in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46688/21]

816. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Health the status of the assisted human reproduction Bill; the timeline for the publishing of this Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46728/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 611, 747, 748, 750, 803, 804, 806, 808 and 816 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, drafting of a bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research is ongoing by officials in my Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. I can assure the Deputy that publication of this legislation is a priority for my Department and the Government, and a commitment to enact this legislation is included in the Programme for Government, "Our Shared Future". My Department and the Office of the Attorney General continue to prioritise the drafting of this complex legislation and will engage intensively over the next few months to finalise the Bill.

The AHR legislation encompasses the regulation, for the first time in Ireland, of a wide range of practices, including domestic altruistic surrogacy, as well as: gamete (sperm or egg) and embryo donation for AHR and research; pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of embryos; posthumous assisted reproduction; and embryo and stem cell research. The legislation

also provides for the establishment of an independent regulatory authority for AHR.

The surrogacy provisions of the Bill outline the specific conditions under which surrogacy in Ireland will be permitted, including a requirement for all surrogacy agreements to be pre-authorised by the new AHR Regulatory Authority. The legislation also sets out a court-based mechanism through which the parentage of a child born through surrogacy may be transferred from the surrogate (and her husband, if applicable) to the intending parent(s).

Overall, the provisions outlined within the Bill will ensure that AHR practices and related areas of research are conducted in a more consistent and standardised way and with the necessary oversight.

Covid-19 Pandemic

612. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can obtain a Covid-19 vaccination certificate in Ireland after being vaccinated in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45997/21]

676. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if cross-Border workers vaccinated in Northern Ireland will receive an EU Digital COVID Certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46173/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 612 and 676 together.

Following the successful rollout of the initial implementation phase of the EU Digital COVID Certificate in Ireland the Government is adding a further service to enable Irish citizens vaccinated outside of the EU to obtain a Digital COVID certificate valid in Ireland and across the EU.

This service will be released in a two phased approach. During Phase 1 the portal will accept applications from Irish citizens vaccinated in Northern Ireland who hold a Northern Irish COVID vaccination certificate with a QR code.

It is expected that an announcement on the launch of the portal will be made shortly.

Disability Services

613. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding available for new residential care places for children with complex needs; the number of places which will be created as a result of funding assigned; when such places will be made available for service provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46019/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

614. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine and address the wait time for a very urgent procedure for a child (details supplied); and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [46023/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Assisted Human Reproduction

615. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health his plans to assist women with infertility issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46025/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy may be aware, a commitment to introduce the model of care for infertility, which was developed by officials in my Department in conjunction with the HSE's National Women & Infants Health Programme, is included in the Programme for Government, "Our Shared Future". This model of care will ensure that infertility issues will be addressed through the public health system at the lowest level of clinical intervention necessary as part of the full range of services available in obstetrics and gynaecology.

The model of care comprises three stages, starting in primary care (i.e., GPs) and extending into secondary care (i.e., Regional Fertility Hubs) and then, where necessary, tertiary care (i.e., IVF and other advanced assisted human reproduction (AHR) treatments).

Structured referral pathways are being put in place and patients referred onwards for further investigations or treatment as required and as clinically appropriate.

Phase One of the roll-out of the model of care has involved the establishment, at secondary care level, of Regional Fertility Hubs in maternity networks, in order to facilitate the management of a significant proportion of patients, both male and female, presenting with infertility issues without the need to undergo IVF, or other advanced AHR, treatments.

Funding of €2m was provided to the HSE to commence Phase One of the roll-out in 2020 and this was utilised specifically in respect of the development of the first four Regional Fertility Hubs – namely, Cork University Maternity Hospital, the Rotunda Hospital, the National Maternity Hospital and the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital.

Additional funding was made available in Budget 2021 to enable the continuation of Phase One this year, through the setting-up of the final two Regional Fertility Hubs, one located within the Saolta Hospital Group, at University Hospital Galway, and one within the University of Limerick Hospital Group, at Nenagh General Hospital. Work is well underway in relation to the recruitment, refurbishment and equipping of these two Hubs.

Therefore, the completion of Phase One of the roll-out of the model of care will result in fully operational Regional Fertility Hubs in each of the six Hospital Groups across the country.

Phase Two of the roll-out will see the introduction of tertiary infertility services, including IVF, in the public health system, but will not commence until such time as infertility services at secondary level have been developed across the country, required resources have been allocated

and the AHR legislation commenced.

Publication of the Bill to regulate the area of assisted human reproduction is a priority for the Government, and officials in my Department and the Office of the Attorney General will continue to engage intensively over the next few months to finalise this complex piece of legislation.

The underlying aim of the policy to provide a model of funding for AHR, within the broader AHR regulatory framework, is to improve accessibility to AHR treatments, while at the same time embedding safe and appropriate clinical practice and ensuring the cost-effective use of public resources.

Primary Care Services

616. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot get an appointment for a primary care certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46027/21]

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

Home Help Service

617. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to extending the home help hours for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46030/21]

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

Home Help Service

618. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a respite care application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46033/21]

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

Disability Services

619. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the level of engagement that has taken place to date with children’s service providers in the CHO Dublin north city and county area and in the wider CHO 9 area regarding the progressing disability services programme of reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46034/21]

620. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of continued dedicated supports, services and clinicians that are currently on site at special schools in the CHO Dublin north city and county area and in the wider CHO9 area further to the commitment given that these services would not be impacted by the progressing disability services programme of reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46035/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 619 and 620 together.

As these are service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Question No. 620 answered with Question No. 619.

Health Strategies

621. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the status of Sláintecare and the process to fill vacancies on the Sláintecare Implementation Advisory Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46041/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): A new three-year Sláintecare Implementation Strategy & Action Plan was approved by Government in May 2021. €1.235 billion was allocated to “pure” Sláintecare initiatives in the first year of the new Strategy. This funding has been used to increase acute and community bed capacity, providing enhanced care in the community, including access to diagnostics, additional home supports, including funding for up to 5 million additional home support hours, streamlining care pathways and tackling waiting lists.

On 10 September, my Department published a report on progress in the first six months of the new Strategy & Action Plan. The report shows that significant progress has been made. Of 112 deliverables for the first six months, 84 were on track and 25 were being progress with minor challenges and 3 are experiencing major challenges. The vast majority of Sláintecare projects are progressing as scheduled in spite of the difficulties presented by the cyberattack four months ago and the ongoing COVID pandemic response.

Progress is continuing in this quarter. Discussions continue with the representative groups on implementation of the public-only consultant contract, a draft preliminary business case for the elective hospitals is now complete and is undergoing internal evaluation in the Department of Health.

A new waiting list initiative will be published shortly and a proposal for the implementation of Regional Health Areas will be finalised before the end of the year.

The Sláintecare Integration Fund has been very successful; 41 projects have already transitioned to recurrent HSE funding, primarily through the Enhanced Community Care Fund while funding for many others is currently being explored as part of the Estimates process. These projects are making a significant contribution to reducing hospital admissions, presentations to emergency departments and helping people stay healthy in their communities for longer.

The question of filling vacancies on the Sláintecare Implementation Advisory Council is currently under consideration.

Primary Care Centres

622. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of Swords primary care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46042/21]

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

Alcohol Sales

623. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the status of his Department's efforts to curb binge drinking of alcohol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46043/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The primary policy response to the health harms of alcohol consumption is the Public Health (Alcohol) Act. The Act contains measures recommended by the Steering Group Report on a Substance Misuse Strategy to address both the volume of alcohol consumed in Ireland and harmful patterns of alcohol consumption such as binge drinking. Harmful drinking patterns have particular impacts on young people with evidence showing that binge drinking impacts on the developing brain.

Pricing is one of the most effective interventions to address harmful patterns of drinking especially among young people.

The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (Sale and Supply of Alcohol Products) Regulations 2020 came into operation in January this year. These regulations have restricted price promotions in relation to alcohol products. Measures in the regulations include the prohibition of the sale of an alcohol product at a reduced price for a limited period and the prohibition of the sale of an alcohol product at a reduced price because that product is sold with another product or service.

In May of this year, I commenced section 11 of the Act on Minimum Unit Pricing. It will come into operation from 4 January 2022 and sets a minimum price of 10c per gram of alcohol. Minimum pricing is effective at addressing the harms associated with alcohol as international evidence shows that heavier drinkers tend to purchase cheaper alcohol than lighter drinkers. In addition, the introduction of a 10c minimum price will ensure that strong alcohol products are not cheaply available for children and young people.

Finally in November this year, two sections of the Act relating to alcohol advertising and alcohol sponsorship will become operational. The purpose of these provisions is to reduce the visibility of alcohol in daily life, particularly for children. Those provisions are:

- A prohibition on alcohol advertising on a sports area during a sporting event, at events aimed at children or at events in which the majority of participants or competitors are children.

- A prohibition on alcohol sponsorship of events aimed at children, events which the majority of participants or competitors are children and events involving driving or racing motor vehicles.

Tobacco Control Measures

624. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to tackle youth smoking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46044/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study 2018 found that 5 percent of children aged 10 to 17 smoke, a decline of 3 percent on the 2014 figure. While this decline is welcome we want to drive the number of children who smoke down to zero and there are a number of initiatives taking place at national and at local level that are working towards that outcome.

The Public Health (Tobacco & Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill will ban the sale of tobacco products at places or events intended for children, from mobile units or containers, and from self-service vending machines, all of which will reduce the availability of tobacco products to children. It will also prohibit the sale of tobacco products by people under the age of 18 and prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products to those under 18. Finally, it will create a licensing system for the retail sale of tobacco and nicotine inhaling products, with increased enforcement options available to the HSE in dealing with non-compliant retailers.

In addition to legislation, community initiatives such as the ‘Not Around Us’ campaigns in Limerick, Galway and Clare are contributing to the denormalisation of smoking for children and young people while the HSE Tobacco Free Ireland programme has worked with educators to develop content on the dangers of tobacco use as part of the Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum. This multi-faceted approach is, and will continue to be, crucial in ensuring that young people do not take up smoking.

Hospital Charges

625. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that in the very rare occasion of a person receiving a Covid-19 vaccination having an adverse reaction that results in a stay in hospital that their inpatient charge and any other fees are waived; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46053/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Currently, the Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are eligible, subject to the statutory in-patient charge, to public in-patient hospital services. The current public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €80 per night, subject to a maximum of €800 in any period of twelve consecutive months. All persons accessing public in-patient services in a public hospital are liable for the statutory public in-patient charge, subject to a number of limited exemptions which include;

- medical card holders;
- people receiving treatment for prescribed infectious diseases - including Coronavirus (Covid-19);
- people who are subject to ‘long-stay’ charges;
- children referred for treatment from child health clinics and school board examinations;
- people who are eligible for hospital services because of EU Regulations;
- women receiving maternity services;
- children up to 6 weeks of age;
- people with hepatitis C who have a Health Amendment Card;
- people who are part of the Redress Scheme for Women Resident in Certain Institutions.

The question of waiving statutory in-patient charges and other fees for persons who experience an adverse reaction to Covid-19 vaccination, will require further consideration in the context of broader health policy, legal and financial implications which may arise.

Abortion Services

626. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the high level of general practitioners and maternity hospitals that are not providing abortion services; the steps he will take to improve access; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46054/21]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

627. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will advise on a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46056/21]

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

Health Services Staff

628. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Health if he will make funding available to appoint a clinical psychologist to each acute hospital diabetes multidisciplinary team; his views on whether psychosocial support in diabetes care is not formally embedded as part of diabetes management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46058/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Diabetes is a complex condition that can have a profound impact on the quality of life of people living with the condition, the management of emotional and psychological well-being is an important part of diabetes care and self-management. Self-management education programmes such as DAFNE (for people living with type 1 diabetes) and DESMOND and Discover Diabetes (for people living with type 2 diabetes) help provide psychosocial support for many people living with diabetes.

The Model of Integrated Care for Patients with Type 2 Diabetes sets out that diabetes is to be managed within the acute system by the diabetes multidisciplinary team including access to psychology support where available. However, I acknowledge there is a deficit in the number of hospital staff providing psychological services dedicated to diabetes care.

The 2021 National Service Plan recognised the need for an unprecedented expansion of the permanent health workforce through permanent appointments. Funding has been provided for an increase to approximately 135,655 WTE across the health service by December 2021, which is an increase of 15,838 WTE over funded 2020 levels. There is significant workforce recruitment underway. The HSE Pay and Numbers Strategy identifies the specific roles and grades to be hired.

Health Services

629. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Health if he will make funding available to provide a diabetes psychology resource to each community diabetes specialist team hub under the Integrated Model of Care for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease Implementation Guide; his views on whether access to psychosocial support in these teams should be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46059/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In 2021, significant funding of €150 million was allocated to deliver a programme of Enhanced Community Care, a key component of which is the provision of 30 Community Specialist Teams (CSTs) for the management of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart failure, COPD, and asthma in the community. Each CST will provide support across three Community Healthcare Networks, serving a population of approximately 150,000 patients per team.

These multidisciplinary teams will support individuals with chronic disease in the community setting by providing specialist care closer to home. The CSTs for chronic diseases will also ensure integration between preventative supports, primary and community care, and acute ambulatory care services.

The Integrated Care Programme for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease (ICPCD) focuses on improving the standard of care for four major chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes. The ICPCD leads out in the development and implementation of a model of care for the Integrated Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease in Ireland.

This model includes the provision of chronic disease CSTs and provides a suite of job descriptions for various team roles, which for diabetes includes a diabetes clinical nurse specialist (CNS). The diabetes CNS role includes the undertaking of comprehensive patient assessments to include physical, psychological, social and spiritual elements of care; this assessment is used to develop and implement holistic plans for care management.

Diabetes is a complex condition that can have a profound impact on the quality of life of people living with the condition, the management of emotional and psychological well-being is an important part of diabetes care and self-management. Community specialist care provides supports to the GP to care for patients in the community including diabetes structured patient education services. Self-management education programmes such as Discover Diabetes for people living with type 2 diabetes help provide psychosocial support for people living with diabetes.

Hospital Staff

630. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Health if he will make funding available to appoint a 0.5 whole-time equivalent clinical psychologist to each acute hospital diabetes paediatric diabetes team; his views on whether psychosocial support in paediatric diabetes care should be available in each team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46060/21]

793. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding to appoint a 0.5 whole-time equivalent clinical psychologist to each acute hospital diabetes paediatric diabetes team; his views on whether psychosocial support in paediatric diabetes care should be available in each team; the reason there is no access to this support outside of Dublin paediatric diabetes services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46636/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 630 and 793 together.

The information necessary to answer the Deputy's question is not available at this time. However I have asked the Health Service Executive to provide me with the information and I will respond to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Hospital Staff

631. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Health if he will make funding available to appoint a clinical psychologist to the diabetes multidisciplinary team in Navan Hospital or Navan primary care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46061/21]

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

Health Services

632. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health if his Department is currently engaged in retaining any of the existing services other than residential care in the Owenacurra Mental Health Facility in Midleton, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46070/21]

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

Special Educational Needs

633. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason for removal of school based clinical supports for students attending a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46072/21]

634. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the engagement the HSE undertook with a school (details supplied) in County Dublin in advance of the decision to remove school based clinical supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46073/21]

635. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he will urgently address the need for provision of school based clinical supports for students attending a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46074/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 633 to 635, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Question No. 634 answered with Question No. 633.

Question No. 635 answered with Question No. 633.

Special Educational Needs

636. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health his views on the removal of school based clinical supports for students who have complex disabilities attending a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46075/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): As I said in the Topical Issue debate on this matter on September 21st in the House, that having made enquiries with the HSE, I have been informed that the pre-covid allocation Whole Time Equivalent levels based on the information given by St. John of Gods in April 2021 is as follows:

- Occupational Therapist - 0.4, which is equivalent to 2 days a week.
- Senior Physiotherapist - 0.38, which is equivalent to approximately 2 days a week.
- Speech and Language Therapist - 0.2, which is equivalent to approximately 1 day a week.

I'm informed by the HSE that the level of support as indicated by St. John of Gods is now being provided by the Children's Disability Network Team assigned to the school and that there has been no removal of school based clinical supports for students.

Disability Services

637. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the engagement that took place with a school (details supplied) in County Dublin regarding the implementation of the progressing disability services for children and young persons programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46076/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): As the implementation of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young Persons Programme is an operational matter, the Deputy's question has been referred to the HSE, for direct reply as soon as possible.

Special Educational Needs

638. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he will urgently liaise with his Ministerial colleagues regarding the provision of school based clinical supports for students who have complex disabilities attending a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46077/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): As the provision of school based clinical supports for students who have complex disabilities is an operational matter, the deputy's question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply, as soon as possible.

Health Services

639. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made with regard to supports for an association (details supplied) with regard to a lifelong pathway of care for those with Prader-Willi syndrome including access to appropriate respite service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46080/21]

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

Dental Services

640. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists that have withdrawn from the medical card scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [46091/21]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

641. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his Department and the National Immunisation Advisory Committee have undertaken a scientific analysis on the possibility of the ivermectin drug being used as a Covid-19 therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46092/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Deputy is advised that, previously at the request of the NPHT, HIQA conducted a rapid evidence review to identify studies on the effectiveness of (i) pharmaceutical and (ii) non-pharmaceutical interventions, in the ambulatory setting, aimed at reducing progression to severe disease in individuals with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. This evidence review included a review of relevant studies in relation to Ivermectin.

As confirmed by HIQA's COVID-19 Expert Advisory Group (www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2021-02/Interventions-to-prevent-progression_Advice.pdf), evidence regarding the effectiveness of pharmaceutical treatments intended for systemic use, must be subject to the highest standards of rigour. Where a pharmaceutical intervention is recommended in the absence of appropriate supportive evidence, there is a significant potential for harm to the patient. Whereas this risk of harm may be justified in certain circumstances (e.g. the intervention poses minimal risk, or the setting involves patients with high potential to gain due to almost certain risk of severe adverse consequences in absence of any intervention) this is less likely to be the case in the setting of mild disease, where a great number of otherwise well patients would potentially receive the intervention.

HIQA has also advised my Department that several international health technology assessment or guideline development organisations have specifically reviewed the evidence to date on Ivermectin in COVID-19 and have cautioned or advised against the use of Ivermectin outside the setting of clinical trials on the basis of the current evidence. HIQA has also advised that the pharmaceutical company MSD (Merck, USA), which holds a license in the USA for the use of Ivermectin as an antiparasitic agent, on 4 February 2021 published a statement including the following:

“It is important to note that, to-date, our analysis has identified:

- No scientific basis for a potential therapeutic effect against COVID-19 from pre-clinical studies;

- No meaningful evidence for clinical activity or clinical efficacy in patients with COV-

ID-19 disease, and;

- A concerning lack of safety data in the majority of studies.

We do not believe that the data available support the safety and efficacy of Ivermectin beyond the doses and populations indicated in the regulatory agency-approved prescribing information.”

Further research was undertaken by HIQA and updated advice was provided to the NPHEP on 12 May: COVID-19 - Interventions and health related factors that prevent infection or minimise progression to severe disease. This document was subsequently published by HIQA on the 23 June 2021:

www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2021-06/Advice-to-NPHEP_Interventions-to-prevent-COVID-19.pdf

One of the key findings of the review was that Ivermectin is not currently licensed for the treatment of COVID-19. From this evidence summary, there is currently insufficient information on whether it can be safely used to prevent or reduce the severity of COVID-19. Ivermectin should therefore not be used as prophylaxis outside well-designed, regulated clinical trials as the benefits and harms are not yet clear when taken in the context of COVID-19 treatment.

Low certainty or very low certainty evidence was identified in relation to a small number of interventions. However, HIQA noted the low quality of the evidence available including the high risk of bias, small sample sizes and short durations of follow-up, different trials and advised that results from these studies should not be used to inform decision-making with respect to effectiveness.

HIQA's overall finding was that there is currently insufficient evidence of either effectiveness or safety to support the use of any pharmaceutical intervention outside of well conducted, well-regulated clinical trials. Furthermore, no evidence was identified for the effectiveness or safety of any non-pharmaceutical interventions.

Health Service Executive

642. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has returned to full ICT functionality; and if not, the estimated date for achieving this. [46110/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have been advised by the HSE that while the vast majority of ICT systems have recovered to full functionality, some remedial work is required on a small number of older legacy ICT systems and this work is actively being addressed.

As the timeframe for achieving full functionality is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly.

Health Services

643. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made to date on the roll-out of community hubs for cardiology services in Cork city and county as part of Sláintecare; the status of same and of the plans going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46119/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this matter falls within the operational responsibility of the HSE, it has been referred there for direct reply.

Budget 2022

644. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year health and well-being budget for 2022, including for a child and well-being service. [46121/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The funding allocation for Health and Wellbeing for 2022 will be outlined in the October budget announcement.

Health Services

645. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost in 2022 of adding 1,000 beds to the acute hospital network. [46122/21]

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

Gender Recognition

646. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost in 2022 of clearing waiting lists for gender reassignment. [46123/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It is recognised that waiting times for scheduled appointments and procedures have been impacted in the last eighteen months as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently as a result of the ransomware attack. While significant progress was made in reducing waiting times from June 2020 onwards, the surge in Covid-19 cases in the first quarter of 2021 and the associated curtailment of acute hospital services, coupled with the ransomware attack of May 2021, has impacted waiting times. However, the HSE advise that acute services are now almost all fully restored to pre cyber-attack levels, and are operating in line with relevant Covid protocols.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) are focusing on improving access to elective care in order to reduce waiting times for patients. These plans include increased use of private hospitals, funding weekend and evening work in public hospitals, funding “see and treat” services where minor procedures are provided at the same time as outpatient consultations, providing virtual clinics and increasing capacity in the public hospital system.

An additional €240 million has been provided in Budget 2021 for an access to care fund, €210m of which has been allocated to the HSE and a further €30m to the NTPF. This is to be used to fund additional capacity to address the shortfall arising as a result of infection control measures taken in the context of COVID-19, as well as addressing backlogs in waiting lists.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund are currently working on a Multiannual Waiting List Plan to address waiting lists and bring them in line with Sláintecare targets over the coming years.

As the issues raised by the Deputy relate to operational matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Disabilities Assessments

647. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost in 2022 of clearing waiting lists for autism assessment. [46124/21]

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

Nursing Homes

648. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when the changes to the fair deal scheme as legislated for in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Amendment) Act 2021 will become operational; the current position for family farms and businesses; if those who are applying for the scheme presently are subject to the conditions set out in the Act; if the new proposed terms will be available to current applicants retrospectively; if the HSE nursing home support scheme office and staff have been briefed on the new measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46127/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): The NHSS, commonly referred to as 'Fair Deal', is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. The primary legislation underpinning the NHSS is the Nursing Home Support Scheme Act 2009. Participants in the NHSS contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

It is recognised that the Act, in its current form, did not place caps on the financial assessment of family owned and operated farms or businesses when calculating the means to pay for nursing home care. This places a potentially onerous burden on family successors and could challenge the future viability of these productive assets.

Therefore, the Department of Health proposed a policy change to the Scheme, to cap contributions based on farm and business assets at three years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset. The stated policy objective of the legislation is to introduce additional safeguards in the Scheme to further protect the viability and sustainability of family farms and businesses that will be passed down to the next generation of the family. These changes were made through the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Amendment) Bill, which was signed into law by the President 22 July 2021 and will come into effect 90 days later, on the 20 October 2021.

The principal amendment introduced under the Act extended the three-year cap on contributions based on farm and business assets at three years where an appointed family successor commits to working the productive asset for a period of 6 years. To be considered for the 3-year cap, the legislation requires that an asset owned by an applicant for the Scheme or recently transferred to a family member is a productive family asset that has been actively worked by a family member for a significant period of time in advance of the person entering care.

For the purposes of calculating the three-year period after which contributions will be capped under the amendment, time already spent in care when the amendment comes into force will be taken into account. This means that a person who entered nursing home care three or more years ago should be able to benefit from the relief under the amendment when it comes into force, provided they can meet the other conditions.

However, the amendment does not provide for any retrospective relief or refunds on contributions to care made before the amendment comes into operation. Retrospective application of the proposed legislative changes would create a challenging precedent, involving high legal and administrative costs and risks, in attempting to apply retrospectively a complex set of conditions. It would also introduce a degree of inequity where conditions would be imposed in the past, with only some people in a position to satisfy those – as then unknown – conditions.

The HSE Nursing Home Support Scheme Office has been involved throughout the development of the legislation as the responsible operational body. Appropriate training and updated guidance is being provided to staff involved in administering the scheme, and necessary changes to IT systems are being implemented.

Eating Disorders

649. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently awaiting residential services and treatment with respect to the national clinical programme for eating disorders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46134/21]

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

Disability Services

650. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if the progressing disability services programme has been stopped in respect of its application to special schools and that special schools that heretofore had school based clinicians prior to the programme will continue to have clinicians based on site in accordance with the advice given to the HSE in the December 2009 Report of the National Reference Group on Multidisciplinary Disability Services for children aged 5 to 18; if this has been confirmed with special schools throughout Dublin city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46135/21]

651. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if all special schools previously being brought under the progressing disability services programme will receive the same number of clinicians of the same grade and same skill set specialisation based on-site for the same number of clinical hours, not allocated hours, as they had pre-Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46136/21]

652. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) was initially told that it would not lose services, after the pausing then stopping of the progressing disability services policy applying to special schools has had a reduction in their service provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46137/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 650 to 652, inclusive, together.

As these are operational matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Question No. 651 answered with Question No. 650.

Question No. 652 answered with Question No. 650.

Hospital Waiting Lists

653. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address the outpatient eye care waiting list. [46143/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): It is recognised that waiting times for scheduled appointments and procedures have been impacted in the last eighteen months as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently as a result of the ransomware attack. While significant progress was made in reducing waiting times from June 2020 onwards, the surge in Covid-19 cases in the first quarter of 2021 and the associated curtailment of acute hospital services, coupled with the ransomware attack of May 2021, has impacted waiting times. However, the HSE advise that acute services are now almost all fully restored to pre-cyber-attack levels, and are operating in line with relevant Covid protocols.

My Department, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) are focusing on improving access to elective care in order to reduce waiting times for patients. These plans include increased use of private hospitals, funding weekend and evening work in public hospitals, funding “see and treat” services where minor procedures are provided at the same time as outpatient consultations, providing virtual clinics and increasing capacity in the public hospital system.

The NTPF have advised my department that they have approved 7 Outpatient ophthalmology initiatives and 1 See & Treat initiative for funding so far in 2021, which will facilitate treatment for 11,749 patients on ophthalmology waiting lists.

An additional €240 million has been provided in Budget 2021 for an access to care fund, €210m of which has been allocated to the HSE and a further €30m to the NTPF. This is to be used to fund additional capacity to address the shortfall arising as a result of infection control measures taken in the context of COVID-19, as well as addressing backlogs in waiting lists.

In order to address waiting lists in the immediate-short term the Department of Health, HSE, and National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) are finalising a waiting list Action Plan which will be in operation until the end of 2021. The Action plan will focus on addressing the backlog arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the HSE cyber-attack. A longer term Multi-Annual Waiting List Plan, which is an essential part of the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan approved by Government in May the year, is also currently being finalised.

Health Services

654. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will resume in-person breastfeeding support groups. [46144/21]

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

Hospital Services

655. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that elective surgeries have been cancelled at University Hospital Kerry since 9 September 2021 with no plan to resume them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46147/21]

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

Hospital Overcrowding

656. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the plan to address overcrowding at University Hospital Kerry, which has led to the cancellation of elective surgeries for an extended period of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46148/21]

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

Hospital Procedures

657. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the details of the plan to ensure that elective surgeries can resume at University Hospital Kerry, even if at a limited capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46149/21]

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

Hospital Staff

658. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the details of the plan to address the shortage of consultants and nursing staff at University Hospital Kerry given these staff shortages have been publicly cited as the reason that elective surgeries have been cancelled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46150/21]

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

Hospital Staff

659. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health the timeline by which his Department and the HSE will deliver a plan to address staff shortages, cancelled surgeries and staff retention issues at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46151/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked

the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Services

660. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the decision has been made to downgrade University Hospital Kerry from a model 3 hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46152/21]

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

Health Services

661. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health the estimated prevalence of type 1 diabetes here; the number of continuous glucose monitoring systems and insulin pumps, respectively, in use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46154/21]

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

Budget 2022

662. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health if the pre-budget submission for an organisation (details supplied) has been brought to his attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46155/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I received a pre-budget submission from Alzheimer's Society of Ireland on September 9th 2021 which my Department and I have considered ahead of Budget 2022.

As Minister of State with Responsibility for Mental Health and Older People I am committed to the implementation of the Irish National Dementia Strategy, which aims to improve how we provide care for people living with dementia. The National Dementia Office, established within the HSE, oversees implementation of the Strategy.

As the Deputy will be aware in Budget 2021, the Government allocated €12.9 million for a number of dementia specific measures. This allocation comprised of €7m for an additional 250,000 hours of home support for people living with dementia, €0.9m to expand the dementia advisor service operated by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and €5m for implementation of the National Dementia Strategy.

With regards to allocation of funding for 2022, as the Deputy will appreciate, I cannot comment at this stage on the outcome of the estimates process, or matters which will be the subject of national service planning in 2022.

Home Care Packages

663. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made for a home support application for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [46159/21]

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

Vaccination Programme

664. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if second-dose Covid-19 vaccines can be accessed at local vaccination centres if first dose Covid-19 vaccines were received in a hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46160/21]

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

Vaccination Programme

665. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if it is planned that Covid-19 booster vaccines will be available at local vaccination centres for those who received Covid-19 vaccines in hospital settings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46161/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): More than seven million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have now been administered since the programme began in December last year. As the current phase of vaccination is nearing completion, the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) has been examining evidence regarding booster vaccines.

On 8 September, I announced a further update to the Covid-19 vaccination programme following additional advice from the NIAC. The NIAC has now recommended that a booster dose of an mRNA vaccine (irrespective of whether the primary vaccination course was of an mRNA or adenoviral vector) for residents aged 65 years and older living in Long Term Residential Care Facilities and for those aged 80 years and older living in the community.

The booster dose can be given after a minimal interval of six months following completion of the primary vaccination schedule. I have accepted this advice and the HSE has been requested to make the necessary arrangements to operationalise the recommendations.

The NIAC continues to examine emerging evidence regarding booster vaccines for those with waning immunity and reduced effectiveness in other groups.

Community Care

666. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to reopen the respite services at Drumboe House, County Donegal for children and young adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46162/21]

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

Health Services

667. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if respite care will be made available for a child (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46163/21]

Awaiting reply from Department.

Hospital Appointments Status

668. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for an eye operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46165/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Disability Services

669. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Donegal who has been diagnosed with autism will have a speech and language and an occupational therapy appointment for the purposes of assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46166/21]

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

Medicinal Products

670. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of the reimbursement process for the drug Zolgensma for the treatment of spinal muscular atrophy; the progress made to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46167/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In line with the 2013 Health Act and the national framework agreed with industry, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE, the company must submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

Reimbursement is for licensed indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency or the Health Products Regulatory Authority.

In making a relevant reimbursement decision, the HSE is required under the Act to have regard to a number of criteria, including efficacy, the health needs of the public, cost effectiveness

and potential or actual budget impact.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

I am advised by the HSE that, in April 2020, the NCPE received a reimbursement application dossier for Onasemnogene abeparvovec (Zolgensma) for the treatment of patients with 5q spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) with a bi-allelic mutation in the SMN1 gene and a clinical diagnosis of SMA type 1, or patients with 5q SMA with a bi-allelic mutation in the SMN1 gene and up to 3 copies of the SMN2 gene.

On 13 May 2020, the NCPE completed a rapid review with respect to this application and recommended a full Health Technology Assessment (HTA) to assess the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of Zolgensma compared with the current standard of care.

The HTA was undertaken as a part of the Beneluxa collaboration between Ireland, the Netherlands and Belgium, with Austria acting as a reviewer in the Belgian procedure.

The HTA was completed in May 2021. The NCPE recommended that Zolgensma not be considered for reimbursement unless cost-effectiveness could be improved relative to existing treatments.

Pricing/reimbursement negotiations are currently underway, having commenced in July 2021.

A final decision on the pricing/reimbursement application for Zolgensma will be made in accordance with the 2013 Health Act.

Hospital Appointments Status

671. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for ophthalmic surgery in Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46168/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services

672. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason physiotherapy appointment frequency have changed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46169/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as

soon as possible.

Community Care

673. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding was sought in 2020 from estimates to provide seven day per week respite at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46170/21]

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

Social Workers Register

674. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if his attention was drawn to processing times to have qualifications recognised and register with CORU for social workers who qualified in Northern Ireland that want to apply for vacant positions here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46171/21]

675. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the processing timeframes for recognition of qualifications and registering with CORU for social workers in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46172/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 674 and 675 together.

CORU has provided data in tabular form on the processing times for the recognition and registration of social work qualifications.

These data include applications for the recognition of social work qualifications generally and applicants who qualified in Northern Ireland., CORU does not track the data on applicants based on geographical location and cannot provide a figure specifically for applicants who provide an address for correspondence in Northern Ireland.

Recognition data for 2021 is not yet available, however, the current registration average processing time for 2021 is provided below.

Table 1: Average Recognition Processing Time in Days for Social Worker Applications

Year	Social Workers (All)	Social Workers (NI only)
2018	97	99
2019	82	82
2020	75	76

Table 2: Average Registration Processing Time in Days for All Social Worker Applications

Year	Days
2018	73
2019	67

2020	81
2021	56

Measures to Improve Timelines

CORU has advised that until recently an applicant with an international qualification was required to wait until their recognition application was completed before they could apply for registration. CORU has introduced a new process whereby an applicant who has submitted their application for recognition can now begin the registration process at the same time, this means internationally qualified applicants can be placed on the register in a shorter timeframe. CORU advises that as this is a recent change, outcomes cannot yet be measured.

CORU has also scheduled additional board meetings for the Social Workers Registration Board for Quarter 4 in 2021 and into 2022 to support faster decision making.

In addition to the above measures, CORU has informed the Department that in October the Health and Social Care Professionals Council will consider a proposal to pilot an alternate mechanism for the recognition of qualifications, this pilot will include Social Work qualifications from Northern Ireland and is expected to significantly reduce timeframes.

Question No. 675 answered with Question No. 674.

Question No. 676 answered with Question No. 612.

Covid-19 Pandemic

677. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a person who was vaccinated using their English name will be able to have their EU Digital COVID Certificate amended to match the Gaeilge version of their name which corresponds with their passport; if so, the process for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46174/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Digital COVID Certificates are being issued automatically for persons who have completed a full course of vaccination in Ireland.

A person who wishes to amend details on a Digital COVID Certificate which has been issued, including altering the name to match their passport, can do so by contacting the helpline directly or requesting the changes on the appropriate online portal available on gov.ie

Updates to certain types of identifying information will require documentary evidence to be provided to support the change.

Disability Services

678. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the intellectual disability service received a multidisciplinary team proposal for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46175/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services

679. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies for positions within the mental health services in County Donegal; the corresponding length of the vacancies in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46176/21]

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

Mental Health Services

680. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocation for mental health services in County Donegal by organisation in for the period from 2011 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46177/21]

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

Mental Health Services

681. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently on the waiting list for mental health services in County Donegal by the stage of assessment and or treatment; the corresponding length of time that they have been waiting for assessment and or treatment in three-month intervals, that is, zero to three, three to six months and so on in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46178/21]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

682. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for procedures in Letterkenny University Hospital; if the referral is general or urgent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46179/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health

Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

683. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46180/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Disability Services

684. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the allocation to each service provider in respect of each person with an intellectual disability; the scale of payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46185/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Disability Services

685. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if an evaluation of the pilot scheme on personalised budgets for those with an intellectual disability will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46187/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The report of the Task Force on Personalised Budgets (Towards Personalised Budgets for People with a Disability in Ireland) was published in 2018. The Task Force Report recommended that Personalised Budgets would be piloted and evaluated in an Irish context over a two year period. The HSE established the Personalised Budget Demonstration Projects in 2019. The Department of Health requested the National Disability Authority (NDA) to manage the evaluation of the Demonstration Project.

Given the number of factors that the Task Force Report suggested should be tested in the Demonstration Project, the Department of Health, HSE and NDA recommended that a sample size of 180 Personalised Budget participants would be required to allow for a robust evaluation.

There are currently 92 participants in the various stages on the Pilot Personalised Budget Demonstration Project. This means that the Demonstration Projects are running behind schedule. This is due primarily to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also due to other factors such as challenges in recruiting HSE staff and the cyber-attack on the HSE.

The NDA has tendered for and selected an evaluation team to conduct the evaluation. The NDA has secured research ethics approval from some of the service providers supporting people who have engaged with the Personalised Budget Demonstration Project process and is actively engaged in seeking ethical approval from other service providers.

The evaluation is designed to capture the experiences and outcomes of all the participants (who have consented to be part of the evaluation) regardless of what their primary disability might be. However, the evaluation team have taken the needs of participants with intellectual disabilities into consideration and have developed Plain English and Easy to Read evaluation materials. Those conducting the evaluation fieldwork have extensive experience of working directly with people with disabilities, including people with intellectual disabilities.

A key output of the evaluation process will be a report capturing learning about the experiences and outcomes for persons with disabilities participating in the Demonstration Project, as well as consideration of the costs of administering the system. This will inform Department of Health considerations with regard to any future programme of Personalised Budgets.

Primary Medical Certificates

686. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications waiting for a primary medical certificate by county; the current application processing time for a primary medical certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46188/21]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

687. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with diabetes aged 18 years and over who are waiting on a first appointment to the outpatients diabetes clinic in any of the University Limerick Hospitals Group facilities; and the number who are waiting six to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 months, two to four and more than five years in tabular form. [46214/21]

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

Health Services

688. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if University Hospital Limerick is included in the remaining six diabetes centres to become dose adjusting for normal eating licensed in 2022 (details supplied); and if a centre in the mid-west such as Limerick is included in the remaining six centres to become licensed in 2022. [46215/21]

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

Health Services Staff

689. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding in budget 2022 to provide a minimum of one whole-time equivalent diabetes specialist pump nurse for the adult diabetes clinic in University Limerick Hospitals Group to enable insulin pump therapy initiation for persons who are clinically suited to this treatment. [46216/21]

694. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the funding in budget 2022 to provide a minimum of one whole-time diabetes specialist pump nurse in all 18 does adjustment for normal eating, DAFNE, certified diabetes centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46221/21]

801. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the funding in budget 2022 to provide a minimum of one whole-time equivalent diabetes specialist pump nurse in all 18 does adjustment for normal eating, DAFNE, certified diabetes centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46644/21]

802. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if the extra funding required to provide the appropriate diabetes staffing resources to provide access to the dose adjustment for normal eating programme for all persons with type 1 diabetes will be made available in the upcoming budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46645/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 689, 694, 801 and 802 together.

As the Department is currently engaging in dialogue with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the HSE in relation to the Estimates process for 2022 / Budget 2022, it would not be appropriate for at this time to provide the type of information requested.

Medical Aids and Appliances

690. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with diabetes over the age of 18 years attending University of Limerick hospital's group adult diabetes service who are using insulin pump therapy to manage their condition. [46217/21]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances

691. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of funding applications received for persons with diabetes over 21 years of age by the long-term illness scheme and primary care reimbursement service for the Dexcom continuous glucose monitoring system; the number of those applications for persons with diabetes over 21 years of age that were approved; and the number that were rejected in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [46218/21]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances

692. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of funding applications for persons with diabetes over 21 years of age that were rejected by the long-term illness scheme and the primary care reimbursement service, PCRS, for the FreeStyle Libre glucose monitoring system; and the number of those rejections that are now being funded for either Dexcom or Medtronic continuous glucose monitoring sensors through the PCRS, in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form. [46219/21]

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

Health Services

693. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health when the current application process for the HSE insulin pumps tendering contract will be completed; when the new list of insulin pumps will be sent to the community drug schemes; the locations in which patients will have access to same; the estimated timeline of the process from product review to inclusion on the PCRS; the persons in the expert group who review the insulin pumps; and the point in the process patient representatives are involved in this process. [46220/21]

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

Question No. 694 answered with Question No. 689.

Health Services Staff

695. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if the extra funding required to provide the appropriate diabetes staffing resources to provide access to the dose adjusting for normal eating programme for all persons with type 1 diabetes will be made available in Budget 2022 [46222/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Department is currently engaging in dialogue with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the HSE in relation to the Estimates process for 2022 / Budget 2022, it would not be appropriate for at this time to provide the type of information requested.

Healthcare Policy

696. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health his views on the need for a national diabetes register given 10% of the health service annual budget is spent on diabetes care; the reason there is no current register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46224/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In September 2019 Sláintecare Integration funding was allocated to the HSE to design and procure a National Diabetes Registry

demonstrator product and develop a full specification plan for a National Diabetes Registry.

The development of a National Diabetes Registry will have a long-term benefit on

- Patient care by facilitating benchmarking of individual care against guideline recommendations and QI feedback to practitioners

- Provision of appropriate health services by providing reliable information to healthcare planners and policymakers.

This project was paused as it was dependent on the input and expertise of key HSE staff who were redeployed onto urgent on-going COVID-19 work. This project remains a priority and, subject to COVID-19, will be revisited in the future.

Hospital Facilities

697. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health the status of progress with regard to the installation of x-ray facilities and diagnostic facilities in the primary care centre in Tuam, County Galway; when he expects them to be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46225/21]

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

Hospital Staff

698. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the lack of administration staff at the department of oncology at Tallaght University Hospital; if funding will be provided for the recruitment of additional administration staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46226/21]

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

Abortion Services

699. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to research published (details supplied) that drew attention to the fact that there is uncertainty among abortion performing doctors in Ireland regarding the measures to take in the event that an unborn baby survives the abortion procedure; if protocols and guidelines have been put in place to address this humanitarian issue; if so, the precise wording of such protocols and guidelines; if no protocols and guidelines have been put in place, his plans to take measures to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46227/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I am aware of the article to which the Deputy refers in his question, on ‘Fetal medicine specialist experience of providing a new service of termination of pregnancy for fatal fetal anomaly: a qualitative study’.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 sets out the parameters in which termination of pregnancy may be lawfully carried out in this country. Section 11 of the Act permits a termination of pregnancy to be carried out in cases

where there is a condition present affecting the foetus that is likely to lead to the death of the foetus before or within 28 days of birth.

Clinical guidelines for the provision of termination of pregnancy services, within the legal framework set out in the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, have been developed by the relevant professional medical bodies. Medical practitioners are bound through professional regulatory mechanisms to operate in accordance with best medical practice.

There is regular ongoing engagement between the Department of Health and the HSE to facilitate the operation of the service and to resolve any issues that may arise.

Abortion Services

700. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that doctors are receiving training in the way in which to perform dilation and evacuation abortions as mentioned in UCD research published in April 2021 in relation to the experiences of abortion providers since the law has changed; if dilation and evacuation abortions are currently taking place in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46232/21]

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

Health Services Staff

701. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health the strategy in place to enable occupational therapists across all clinical areas to pursue upgrades (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46234/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the TD.

Health Promotion

702. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the plans he is putting in place as a matter of urgency to deal with the backlog in the CervicalCheck screening; his further plans with regard to the number of women who are required to have retests due to the time delay in testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46236/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services

703. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 3083 of 27 July 2021, if the daily transport charge being charged to service users in CHO1 is also being levied throughout all other CHO areas. [46239/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will

empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Covid-19 Pandemic

704. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of all extra capital expenditure under Covid-19 funding measures since March 2020; and the capital expenditure by project and location. [46240/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Medical Inquiries

705. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the expected timeframe for the establishment of the inquiry into the historical licensing and prescribing of sodium valproate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46241/21]

707. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the expected timeframe for the establishment of the stakeholder group into the historical licensing and prescribing of sodium valproate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46243/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 705 and 707 together.

Details of the proposed inquiry into the historical licensing and use of sodium valproate in Ireland, and of the stakeholder group referred to by the Deputy, are currently being considered by officials within the Department of Health.

Health Services Staff

706. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the expected timeframe for the appointment of the four epilepsy nurse specialist posts to manage the patient safety requirements for women who are prescribed sodium valproate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46242/21]

708. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health when the services currently in place to support families who have been affected by the use of sodium valproate will be fully operational; the details of his plans to expand support services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46244/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 706 and 708 together.

As these questions relate to operational matters for the Health Service Executive (HSE), I have asked that the HSE responds to the Deputy directly.

Question No. 707 answered with Question No. 705.

Question No. 708 answered with Question No. 706.

Medical Aids and Appliances

709. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the eligibility criteria of the HSE aids and appliances scheme; the items available through the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46245/21]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances

710. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health the way the HSE aids and appliances scheme is administered; the amount of funding allocated to the scheme for 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46246/21]

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

Health Services

711. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Health the reason funding has been withheld from an organisation (details supplied); if he will reconsider the provision of such funding to keep the service in operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46248/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The Department is aware of the many challenges facing families and communities in Drogheda and the north east region arising from drug-related crime, as documented in the Department of Justice report.

In line with the report's recommendations, the Department is committed to improving the availability of drug and alcohol services in Drogheda and surrounding counties. As well as the allocation of €150,000 announced by Minister McEntee for drug and alcohol services in Drogheda, the Department of Health and the HSE is providing a further €150,000 to support family support services and to improve access to community-based drug and alcohol services across the region.

The important role of families affected by drug use in contributing to the planning, design, and delivery of effective addiction services is outlined in the National Drug Strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery. Accordingly, in Budget 2021, €280,000 was allocated to support family services through the HSE National Service Plan for 2021. This funding will be used to develop and broaden the range of peer-led, mutual aid and family support programmes in accordance with best practice. The HSE will use this additional funding to develop coordinated family support programmes in Louth and Meath and three other areas in 2021, with each area being allocated €70,000.

The drawdown of the funding for these services has been approved by the Department and

the funding is now available to the HSE for allocation to local services.

I would encourage eligible organisations, including the one referenced by the Deputy, to engage with the HSE on securing additional funding for their services in the Louth/Meath region.

Hospital Services

712. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the rationale for locating the major trauma centre at the Mater Hospital contrary to best international practice of co-locating major trauma centres with neurological centres. [46251/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The National Trauma Strategy, A Trauma System for Ireland, published in February 2018, recommended the introduction of an inclusive trauma system, that will be delivered by two regional networks, each with a Major Trauma Centre that is linked to a number of Trauma Units. Services will be networked and co-ordinated along standardised pathways to ensure that the right care is delivered in the right place at the right time.

Before recommending the designation of the Mater Hospital as the Major Trauma Centre for the Central Trauma Network, the Health Service Executive (HSE) undertook a clear and objective process to inform the recommendation for the designation. This included the appointment of an Independent Assessment Panel, containing members expert in the retrieval and acute management of trauma patients, including those patients with head injuries. The panel used a designation framework, which included service specifications and criteria to assess submissions from Hospital Groups. This Framework had been subject to a public consultation, which allowed the HSE to meet with key stakeholders and gave interested parties an opportunity to seek further clarity on the service specifications and the designation criteria. The recommendation to designate the Mater Hospital as the Major Trauma Centre for the Central Trauma Network was approved by Government in April 2021.

The clear objective of the National Trauma Strategy is for all trauma patients to access the treatments they need in a timely manner. This will be possible through the establishment of two Major Trauma Centres that have all trauma specialties, including neurosurgery. The availability of all trauma specialties in one hospital will create very significant benefits for patients, including a reduced need for a secondary transfer, as well as reduced waiting times between sequential surgeries. As such, the National Trauma Office in the HSE is engaging closely with neurosurgeons with a view to them assisting in the planning of neurosurgical services in the Major Trauma Centre.

Health Services

713. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the suspension of BreastCheck screening services over the pandemic; and if a breakdown will be provided of cancelled appointments by CHO area in tabular form. [46252/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Dental Services

714. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists that were registered for the dental treatment support scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46253/21]

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

Dental Services

715. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the number of registered complaints and or cases taken against dentists by medical card holders and non-medical card holders, respectively in each of the years 2016 to 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46254/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The information sought by the Deputy is not held by my Department. The Dental Council, established under the Dentists Act 1985 is the regulatory body for the dental profession. The Dental Council deals with complaints concerning breaches of its Codes of Practice. The Dental Council publishes the results of Fitness to Practise Inquiries where allegations of professional misconduct against a dentist have been proven together with the sanctions imposed.

Home Help Service

716. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the number of hours of the additional €5 million allocated for home support hours as committed to in the National Service Plan 2021 delivered to date. [46255/21]

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

Health Services

717. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for the National Rehabilitation Centre by county of residence in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46256/21]

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

Vaccination Programme

718. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the reason that persons who received their first vaccine dose in another country and their second dose in Ireland may apply for an EU Digital COVID Certificate in Ireland, while for those who received their first dose in Ireland and their second dose in another country there is no option to apply for the certificate in Ireland; his plans to amend this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46258/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The EU Digital COVID Certificate Regulation concerns the issuing and verification of certificates for medical events including vaccination, recovery, and testing related to COVID-19 to support freedom of movement across the EU.

EU Digital COVID Certificates for persons who have received their full or second dose of a vaccine in Ireland are issued automatically to the holder. EU Digital COVID Certificates can be issued as proof of a single dose of vaccine administered in Ireland upon request.

Persons who have been fully vaccinated or received their second dose of a vaccine in another EU country must request a Digital COVID Certificate from the issuing authorities in that specific EU country.

Covid-19 Pandemic

719. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1184 of 9 September 2021, when new guidelines for addiction recovery group meetings will be published; if these guidelines will take account of the current restrictions imposed in an office environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46261/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The current public health advice for organised indoor group activities is as follows:

Organised indoor group activities (sports, arts, culture, dance classes) can take place with capacity limits of 100 people (with appropriate protective measures) where all patrons are immune (fully vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19 within previous 6 months), or accompanied minors (under 18). Where patrons have mixed immunity status, pods of up to 6 participants will be permitted (excluding adult leaders/teachers). Multiple pods will be permissible subject to protective measures. Number of pods will have regard to the size of venue and substantial social distance between individual pods.

In the light of the above, the Department guidance for drug and alcohol support groups and treatment programmes, where participants have mixed immunity status, is unchanged. The Department advise that the maximum number of participants is 20, to include organisers. This higher limit is subject to 2 metre social distancing in the venue.

From 22 October onwards, the majority of the remaining restrictions will be lifted and replaced by guidance and advice to enable us to work together to protect ourselves and to live our lives to the fullest extent possible. We will need to continue to monitor the ongoing risk from the disease and take steps individually and collectively in our everyday lives to keep this risk under control.

The following public health restrictions will be lifted:

- requirements for physical distancing
- requirements for mask wearing outdoors and in indoor private settings
- limits on numbers at indoor and outdoor events and activities
- restrictions on religious or civil ceremonies
- limits on numbers that can meet in private homes/gardens

- certification of vaccination, immunity or testing as a prerequisite for access to, or engagement in, any activities or events (with the exception of international travel)
- restrictions on high-risk activities (for example: nightclubs)

Measures that will remain in place include:

- self-isolation when we have symptoms
- mask wearing in healthcare settings, indoor retail and on public transport

I appreciate the positive engagement by drug and alcohol support groups with the Department on this matter. I look forward to the full resumption of their activities from 22nd October.

Health Services Staff

720. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the status of the appointment of a national lead in genomics by the HSE; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46262/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As recruitment is a service issue I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services Staff

721. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the status of Recommendation 17 of the National Cancer Strategy, appointment of a National Lead for Cancer Molecular Diagnostics; if progress can be made in this prior to the appointment of the national lead in genomics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46263/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme advises that the recruitment of the National Lead in Genomics is expected to be finalised shortly through the office of the HSE's Chief Clinical Officer.

It is considered important that the National Lead in Genomics be in place before the NCCP advance the recruitment of a National Lead for Cancer Molecular Diagnostics. Once the National Lead in Genomics is in place, the NCCP will be in a position to better define the role of a National Lead for Cancer Molecular Diagnostics for solid and liquid malignancies, and then to pursue the appointment.

Health Promotion

722. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if he is considering the option of providing resources in Budget 2022 to enable the reduction in the age of those women who can avail of a free breast check; and if he is considering introducing a general practitioner service to breast check all young women of the age of 18 upwards as part of standard general practitioner visits. [46269/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I am fully committed to supporting our population screening programmes which are a valuable part of our health service. In that regard and in line with commitments in the Programme for Government, BreastCheck is currently

implementing an age-extension project that will see all women aged between 50 to 69 years being invited for routine breast screening.

In relation to consideration of any further age changes, such as reducing the age to people under the age of 50, it is vital we remember that breast screening is a population health screening measure. It is not an individual diagnostic test. The balance between the benefits of screening and the potential harms or risks to the population as a whole require careful, evidence-based consideration and balancing.

As with all our national screening programmes, BreastCheck delivers its services in line with international criteria for population-based screening programmes, which are kept under constant review. The balance between the benefits of screening and the potential harms or risks to the population as a whole require careful, evidence-based consideration and balancing.

Decisions about changes to our national screening programmes will be made on the advice of our National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC). This independent expert group considers the evidence for changes in a robust and transparent manner. The Committee's role is to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly. This ensures policy decisions are informed by the best available evidence and advice.

The NSAC is currently finalising plans for its first 'annual call' which will be announced later this year. Applications for proposals for new population based screening programmes and modifications to existing programmes, such as a reduction in the age of those eligible for screening, will be welcomed from the public as well as the HSE, health professionals and other professional bodies. Further information on the 'annual call' will be published on the NSAC website.

There are no plans at present to introduce a general practitioner service to breast check all young women of the age of 18 upwards as part of general practitioner visits under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme.

It is important that every woman is breast aware. This means knowing what is normal for them so that if any unusual change occurs, they will recognise it. The HSE have useful information in relation to self-checking their breasts on its website.

If a woman becomes aware of symptoms, or if they have concerns or worries, they should contact their GP, who will arrange appropriate follow-up care.

Primary Care Centres

723. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the completion date and timeline for opening for the Ballyboden primary care centre; the services to be provided on opening and over time; the anticipated geographical reach of the centre; the way in which staff will be recruited on the administrative side for the centre; the hours of opening; the overall cost of the project both anticipated and real time; the details of the contractors and the contractual arrangements and costs for the lease of the centre going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46270/21]

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

Hospital Staff

724. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time staff by job title working in the medical assessment unit at Nenagh General Hospital; and the number of vacancies by job title in tabular form. [46278/21]

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

Hospital Equipment

725. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of fractional CO2 laser machines that are in use in CHI Temple Street and CHI Crumlin; and if there are sufficient trained staff available in both hospitals to use these machines. [46279/21]

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

Hospital Staff

726. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time vacant nursing posts in South Tipperary General Hospital; and if a recruitment campaign will be launched to fill these vacancies. [46280/21]

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

Third Level Education

727. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost in 2022 of providing 65 additional general practitioner training places. [46281/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The annual cost of one doctor on the GP Training Scheme is approximately €100,000. On that basis, the estimated full year cost in 2022 of an additional 65 GP training places would be €6.5 million.

Eating Disorders

728. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which HSE has spent and will spend the €3.94 million allocated on specialist eating disorder services in 2021. [46282/21]

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

Care Services

729. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide €5 million in

annual funding to deliver the carer's guarantee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46289/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will appreciate, I cannot comment at this stage on the outcome of the estimates process, or matters which will be the subject of national service planning in 2022.

In Budget 2021, €2m was allocated as a first step towards implementing a Carers' Guarantee. The 'Carers Guarantee' will provide a core basket of services to carers across the country, regardless of where they live. My Department has been in consultation with representative groups and the HSE to ensure measures introduced will work towards addressing geographical inequity of access to supports.

Departmental Funding

730. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide €5 million to publish a refreshed National Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2021-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46292/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will appreciate, I cannot comment at this stage on the outcome of the estimates process, or matters which will be the subject of national service planning in 2022.

As Minister for Health, I am committed to improving supports for family carers. Under the National Carer's Strategy a range of measures have been introduced or extended by my Department to support family carers in recent years. Most recently, €2m was allocated in Budget 2021 as a first step towards implementing a Carers' Guarantee. My Department has been in consultation with representative groups and the HSE to ensure the funding addresses geographical inequity of access to carer supports.

Carer's Leave

731. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce the statutory home care scheme including an annual entitlement to 20 days respite and a carer needs assessment for full-time carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46293/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): Enabling people with care-needs to continue to live independently at home for as long as possible is a priority for the Government. To advance this, the Government is committed to establishing a new, statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home-support services, which the Department of Health is currently developing.

It is intended that the new scheme will provide equitable and transparent access to high-quality services based on a person's assessed care-needs. It will build on the HSE's continual enhancement of existing service-provision and on emerging good practice across the current system of health and social care delivery as well as supporting family and unpaid carers.

Work is on-going within the Department to progress the development of the new scheme within the broader context of the Sláintecare reforms. This work encompasses the development of the regulatory framework for the new scheme; the examination of the options for the financing model for the scheme; and the development of a reformed model of service-delivery for home support services.

The national roll-out of interRAI as the single assessment tool (incorporating the assessment of carers' needs) will be integral to the new scheme, underpinning the provision of one streamlined process for responding to the evolving care-needs of the individual, from entry-level home-support through to intensive care in a residential setting. In this regard, funding was allocated for approximately 130 posts to support the national rollout of the InterRAI Ireland system as the standard assessment tool for care needs in the community. The system of regulation will ensure public confidence in the services provided as well as safeguarding service-users.

The Programme for Government commits to delivering a 'Carers Guarantee' proposal that will provide a core basket of services to carers across the country, regardless of where they live. This commitment is consistent with the National Carers' Strategy, which seeks to support family carers to care with confidence through the provision of adequate information, training, services and supports.

In line with this commitment, and as a first step towards implementing the Carers' Guarantee, €2 million was allocated in Budget 2021 to provide a more standard package of supports to family carers in every region, in tandem with the community and voluntary sector. Discussions are underway between my Department and the HSE to determine how this funding will be allocated and to ensure measures introduced will work towards addressing geographical inequity of access to supports.

Care Services

732. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will work to establish a commission on care to include an examination on the role, reliance and recognition of family carers in long-term care provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46294/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): In June 2020, the Programme for Government, mindful of the particular impact of COVID-19 on older people, especially those who live on their own and people living in nursing homes, set out a commitment to establish a commission to examine care and supports for older people.

Under the National Carer's Strategy a range of measures have been introduced or extended by my Department to support family carers in recent years. Most recently, €2m was allocated in Budget 2021 as a first step towards implementing a Carers' Guarantee. My Department has been in consultation with representative groups and the HSE to ensure the funding allocated to address geographical inequity of access to carer supports. In addition, the interRAI Carers Needs Assessment pilot - which will look at the needs of carers in the context of access to home supports - is starting in November 2021.

In relation to a Commission on Care, progress has been made in relation to older persons care over the last 12 months. In particular good progress has been made on the implementation of recommendations arising from the COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel which ultimately will improve standards of care in nursing homes; and also in the establishment of a statutory Home Support Scheme which will significantly increase support for people in their own homes.

In light of these developments we are assessing the focus and remit of a Commission on Care for older people.

General Practitioner Services

733. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1429 of 9 September 2021, if the required permission cited in the question for general practitioners taking annual leave was given in the case of a general practitioner (details supplied) for 2021; if an application for reimbursement for a locum was received by the HSE to date in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46299/21]

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

Hospital Staff

734. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital (details supplied) will be allocated additional resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46338/21]

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

Hospital Staff

735. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a hospital (details supplied) has the busiest orthopaedic trauma unit nationally but is only being funded in 15th place nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46339/21]

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

Hospital Staff

736. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to increase staffing levels in the orthopaedic unit in a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46340/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Staff

737. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of CAAC-approved consultant posts across each specialty; the basis on which they are filled as per DIME; and the number of each type of contract, that is, A, B and C across specialties filled and or allocated for all 3,613 posts. [46348/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to revert to the Deputy with the details sought as soon as possible.

Covid-19 Pandemic

738. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the reason a student (details supplied) is currently being denied access to their clinical placement on the grounds that they declined to disclose their Covid-19 vaccination status by a person, despite the fact that they were previously placed in the Mater Hospital for the month of May 2021 and the HSE guidelines do not preclude unvaccinated students from going on placement; if advice can be provided to this student detailing the measures they may take to ensure that their placement hours are met this year, as they have now missed four weeks of placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46351/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Staff

739. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of CAAC-approved consultant posts across each discipline and specialty; the basis on which they are filled, that is, permanent, temporary and agency, as per DIME; and the number of each type of contract, that is, A, B and C across disciplines filled and or allocated for all approved posts including the number on post-2012 pay rates. [46354/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to revert to the Deputy with the details sought as soon as possible.

Home Care Packages

740. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications for the home support grant which were approved in counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo and Mayo in the period 2011 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46355/21]

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

Health Services

741. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the circumstances surrounding the relocation of the adult audiology service from St. Fintan's, Portlaoise to Tullamore; when this service will resume in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46361/21]

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

Mental Health Services

742. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for an appointment in each Jigsaw for video and phone support appointments and face-to-face appointments in tabular form. [46368/21]

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

Mental Health Services

743. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for an appointment in Jigsaw Dublin south west for video and phone support appointments and face-to-face appointments. [46369/21]

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

Vaccination Programme

744. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Health if young persons who did not partake in the HPV vaccine programme during their first year of secondary school may still avail of the programme at a later date; the procedure to avail of the HPV vaccine for young persons under such circumstances, for example, after first year of secondary school; if a charge will be incurred for persons who are seeking to avail of the HPV vaccine programme beyond their first year of secondary school; and if his attention has been drawn to the matter. [46373/21]

766. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Health if students who missed or refused the HPV vaccine while in first year are able to access the vaccine through their school if they are still in secondary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46530/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 744 and 766 together.

The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). The committee's recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. It makes recommendations on vaccination policy to my Department. The NIAC continues to revise recommendations to allow for the introduction of new vaccines in Ireland and to keep abreast of changes in the patterns of disease. Therefore, the immunisation schedule will continue to be amended over time.

In 2009, the NIAC recommended HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination for all 12 to 13 year old girls to reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer when they are adults. In September 2010, the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of secondary school.

In June 2017, on foot of the NIAC's recommendation that the HPV vaccine should also be given to boys, my Department asked the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a health technology assessment (HTA) to establish the clinical and cost-effectiveness of extending the immunisation programme to include boys in the first year of secondary school.

The HIQA completed the HTA in December 2018, recommending that the HPV immunisation programme be extended to include boys. A policy decision was made to extend the HPV immunisation programme to include boys, starting in September 2019, with the introduction of a 9-valent HPV vaccine.

The ages at which vaccines are recommended in the immunisation schedule are chosen by the NIAC in order to give each child the best possible protection against vaccine preventable diseases. As the HPV vaccine is preventative it is intended to be administered, if possible, before a person becomes sexually active, that is, before a person is first exposed to HPV infection.

Therefore, the gender-neutral HPV vaccination programme targets all girls and boys in first year of secondary school to provide maximum coverage. All vaccines administered through the School Immunisation Programme are provided free of charge.

My Department will continue to be guided by NIAC's recommendations on any emerging evidence on this issue in the future.

Anyone not in 1st year of secondary school or age equivalent in special schools or home schooled during the 2020/2021 school year who wishes to get the HPV vaccine, must go to their GP or sexual health clinic and pay privately for the vaccine and its administration. This applies to everyone whether or not they have a medical card/GP visit card, as it is outside of the HPV immunisation programme.

At the request of my Department, the HIQA are conducting a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) on a school based HPV mop-up vaccination programme (for those that were previously eligible and missed or turned down the vaccine). The HIQA has confirmed that this HTA has been added to its work programme for 2021/2022 and I have requested that my officials give consideration to the outcome of this work in the context of the immunisation programme.

Care Services

745. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be allocated a full-time residential place. [46379/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Care Services

746. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the status of support networks for a person (details supplied). [46380/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

28 September 2021

Question No. 747 answered with Question No. 611.

Question No. 748 answered with Question No. 611.

Legislative Measures

749. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when the terms of reference for the three-year review of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 will be published; if a company or organisation has or will be commissioned to deal with the service user and service provider strands of the review; if a company has been appointed or chosen, the name of the organisation; the terms of reference it has been given; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46430/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The review of the operation of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 is being progressed this year, in line with statutory and Government commitments. Under section 7 of the Act, the review must be initiated by January 2022. It will comprise a three-part approach to appraise the operation of the Act, with strands focusing on service users, service providers and a public consultation.

An independent expert will be appointed to lead the review. Independent research commissioned to inform the service user and service provider strands will form key elements of the review. An invitation will also be extended to all interested groups, organisations and members of the public to provide their views to inform the review of the operation of the legislation.

The service provider strand of the review will be commissioned in due course. The service user strand of the review will draw on a research study commissioned by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme. The research is a large-scale qualitative on women's experiences of abortion and unplanned pregnancy support services since the implementation of the Act on 1 January 2019.

A full report collating all three strands of the review, and including any necessary recommendations, will be submitted to me, as Minister for Health, for consideration once complete.

Question No. 750 answered with Question No. 611.

Primary Medical Certificates

751. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the processing of applications for primary medical certificates; if processing has resumed since it was stalled due to Covid-19; if there is a substantial backlog of applications to be processed; the number of applications that are currently waiting to be processed; and the breakdown of pending applications in each CHO in tabular form. [46437/21]

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

Health Services Staff

752. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional

therapeutic staff under the newly established children's disability network model that have been resourced to date in 2021 as per the National Service Plan. [46438/21]

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

Mental Health Services

753. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the proposed closure of the HSE building Prague House, Ennistymon as it has been deemed condemned; if his attention has been further drawn to the report condemning the building; if so, if he will relay this information; and if a copy of this report will be made available to the staff. [46439/21]

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

Mental Health Services

754. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health if the decision to close Prague House followed protocol of notice given the staff were notified on 20 July 2021 that they would be relocated effective immediately; the recommended notice for a closure and relocation of a HSE building or service normally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46440/21]

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

Mental Health Services

755. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the reason Prague House was shut down with no consultation with the community, the relevant trade union and the elected representatives in County Clare; and if there is a contingency plan to replace this service in view of the under-resourced mental health service in the county. [46441/21]

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

Dental Services

756. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists in the dental treatment services scheme in Ballina and Belmullet, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46444/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As this is a service matter, I have asked

the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff

757. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ring-fence funding for the eye clinic liaison officer programme until 2026; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46479/21]

763. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he plans to expand the eye clinic liaison officer service countrywide with seven posts in total at an estimated cost of €490,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46496/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 757 and 763 together.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services

758. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the point of care for appropriate conditions such as wet AMD, out of acute hospitals into primary care settings in the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46480/21]

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

Health Services Staff

759. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will support the recruitment of 50 additional ophthalmologists at a cost of €10.3 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46481/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE Primary Care Eye Services Review Group (PCESRG) Report was launched in June 2017. The Report sets out current levels of service, models of service provision and the consultation process undertaken with patients, advocates, ophthalmic staff and representative bodies.

It also highlights the limitations of the current model of service delivery and sets out the way forward for a significant amount of eye services to be delivered in a primary care setting.

The Report estimates that 60% of existing outpatient activity could be moved to primary care thus enabling hospital services to focus on patients who require more specialist diagnostics or treatments.

The National Clinical Programme for Ophthalmology has developed a model of care which details how the realignment of eye services from the acute hospitals to the community will be undertaken. The recommendations from the PCESRG Report also complement the Model of Care.

The PCESRG Report remains current and the HSE is implementing a number of measures.

Included in current priorities is transferring the care of children aged 8+ years to the care of local private optometrists, creating a new role of Consultant Medical Ophthalmologist, and recruiting additional Consultant Medical Ophthalmologists to other CHOs.

Specific proposed recruitment campaigns linked to primary eye services will be considered in the context of the PCESRG Report, subject to existing recruitment processes.

The 2021 National Service Plan recognised the need for an unprecedented expansion of the permanent health workforce through permanent appointments. There is significant workforce recruitment underway to support this.

Medical Aids and Appliances

760. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will commit to the standardisation of the technical aids grant scheme run by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46482/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The HSE provides a wide range of medical and surgical aids and appliances free of charge to medical card holders and people on the Long Term Illness (LTI) scheme following assessment by a relevant health professional. These appliances and aids that are provided by the HSE through community services known as Community Funded Schemes (CFS) and play a key role in assisting and supporting service users to maintain everyday functioning, and to remain living in their homes and local community.

Each Community Health Organisations (CHO) operates processes for the allocation of funding for medical and surgical aids and appliances. Each application within a CHO is assessed, both for medical card and LTI card patients, by the local Resource Allocation Group. A determination is made regarding approval based on priority and funding availability within local budgets. At times, due to the demand for resources exceeding the available capacity, waiting lists may apply for some categories of items provided through the medical and surgical aids and appliances budget in a particular CHO. CHOs undertake a range of initiatives to ensure optimum use of resources.

A HSE Primary Care led National Service Improvement Programme has the aim of improving the quality and sustainability of the CFS through the establishment of national standards. These standards will be based on evidence-based rationale and will include a list of approved items, national prescribing guidelines, and clinical criteria for each. This should improve equity of access, value for money, and functional processes. As the situation involving the Covid-19 pandemic continues to improve, this Programme will gather pace.

Departmental Data

761. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to produce CHO segregated annual figures related to adults and children with a diagnosis of vision impairment and in relation to their engagement with health and or disability services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46483/21]

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

Social Welfare Benefits

762. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with HSE offices to offer the blind welfare allowance payment electronically to recipients going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46495/21]

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

Question No. 763 answered with Question No. 757.

Health Services

764. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of the HSE overall budget that has been allocated to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence supports between 2016 and 2020. [46499/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): Government policy in relation to addressing Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) is set out in the National Strategy on DSGBV, which outlines a whole of Government approach to delivering on the actions in the Strategy. The Department of Justice coordinates the implementation of the strategy.

The Department of Health and the HSE are committed to providing the appropriate supports to address the health needs of victims of DSGBV. I have secured, as part of Budget 2021, an additional €2.1m for the HSE to enhance access to health services for socially excluded groups. Of this funding €175,000 is allocated for initiatives for victims of DSGBV and the LGBTI+ community.

As the detail in relation to the amount of funding allocated by the HSE relates to operational and service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Disability Services

765. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the cost to the State to accommodate a disabled person in a residential setting or nursing home per annum. [46500/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 766 answered with Question No. 744.

Disability Services

767. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the definitive timeframe and plan for the full reopening of adult day services in an area (details supplied). [46533/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Govern-

ment is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

768. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot get an operation; the reason for the long delay to be called for same; the reason the allocated hospital has no record of their appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46534/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services

769. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused funding by the HSE to go to England to undergo mesh removal surgery on the basis that it is available in some Irish hospitals given that they were informed by their consultant that this is not the case and would need to travel for the operation. [46535/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I understand that complications from a mesh implant are very distressing and painful for those women involved. Women's health is a priority for this Government, as outlined in the Programme for Government and since the emergence of this matter, the ongoing priority focus for the Department and the HSE has been to meet the care needs of women experiencing mesh complications. Women affected by mesh continue to be strongly encouraged to engage with the relevant HSE contact points and the associated care pathways, to ensure that their service needs can be identified and provided for.

Considerable work has been done and continues to progress in Ireland in relation to the safe use of mesh implants and ensuring that all women who develop mesh-related complications receive high quality, multi-disciplinary and patient-centred care is a priority.

As this Parliamentary Question also relates to a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

770. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46548/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services

771. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health when the Sláintecare project on the development of a national diabetes register will recommence; his views on the need for a national diabetes register; the reason there is no current register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46550/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In September 2019 Sláintecare Integration funding was allocated to the HSE to design and procure a National Diabetes Registry demonstrator product and develop a full specification plan for a National Diabetes Registry.

The development of a National Diabetes Registry will have a long-term benefit on

- Patient care by facilitating benchmarking of individual care against guideline recommendations and QI feedback to practitioners

- Provision of appropriate health services by providing reliable information to healthcare planners and policymakers.

This project was paused as it was dependent on the input and expertise of key HSE staff who were redeployed onto urgent on-going COVID-19 work. This project remains a priority and, subject to COVID-19, will be revisited in the future.

Mental Health Services

772. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who requested mental health services in University Hospital Kerry accident and emergency department in each of the years 2017 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46552/21]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances

773. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if there are plans for a review of the current availability for the reimbursement support for FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring sensors to be extended to all GMS medical card holders and not just the category of children and young adults in the four to 21 years of age cohort (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46556/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has now commissioned a full Health Technology Assessment of the FreeStyle Libre Flash

Glucose Monitoring System to be conducted by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics in collaboration with the Medicines Management Programme. If a positive recommendation arises on completion of the Health Technology Assessment, the Primary Care Reimbursement Service will progress the funding of the device as part of the preparations for the National Service Plan 2022.

Consultant Endocrinologists / Diabetes Nurse Specialists may apply to the HSE, on behalf of specific patients, for reimbursement support of FreeStyle Libre Flash Glucose Monitoring sensors. The application process is undertaken by means of a dedicated online portal, which has been operational since 3rd April 2018. In line with the recommendations outlined by the Health Technology Assessment Group, access to this product was made available to children and young adults (4 -21 years). However, the application process does cater for applications in very exceptional circumstances for a type 1 diabetic patient outside of this group.

Vaccination Programme

774. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health if there are plans to provide a Covid-19 booster vaccine for those over 60 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46562/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): More than seven million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have now been administered since the programme began in December last year. As the current phase of vaccination is nearing completion, the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) has been examining evidence regarding booster vaccines.

On 8 September, I announced a further update to the COVID-19 vaccination programme following additional advice from the NIAC. The NIAC has now recommended that a booster dose of an mRNA vaccine (irrespective of whether the primary vaccination course was of an mRNA or adenoviral vector) for residents aged 65 years and older living in Long Term Residential Care Facilities and for those aged 80 years and older living in the community.

The booster dose can be given after a minimal interval of six months following completion of the primary vaccination schedule. I have accepted this advice and the HSE has been requested to make the necessary arrangements to operationalise the recommendations.

The NIAC continues to examine emerging evidence regarding booster vaccines for those with waning immunity and reduced effectiveness in other groups.

General Practitioner Services

775. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the actions he is taking to help with the provision of a replacement general practitioner service in Templemore, County Tipperary, following the retirement of the local general practitioner there. [46568/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Two recruitment campaigns have been undertaken in an effort to find a replacement GP for this single-handed practice in Templemore. The panel was advertised locally, nationally and in the British Medical Journal. In addition, the advertisement was shared with all GMS practices across the Mid-West and with the Mid West Training Scheme in an attempt to attract newly qualified GPs. Unfortunately, the HSE has not been successful in recruiting a GP to this practice.

It is therefore planned that the group practice in the town of Templemore, will take on the

panel of patients on an interim basis. An additional GP has been recruited by the practice which means there will be three Doctors providing the additional capacity to provide a safe, accessible and consistent service to the patients in Templemore and the surrounding area. Additional nursing and administrative staff have also been recruited for this practice.

GMS patients have been advised of the new arrangements and how to access the new practice. Whilst the HSE has no responsibility for private patients, private patients have been advised by practice staff of the need to source a new GP. Private patients can contact the Group practice or any other practice of their choice and request to be taken on as a private patient. Should any private patient find it difficult to source a new GP, they can contact the local HSE Primary Care Unit who can support them in accessing a GP in so far as is possible.

Covid-19 Pandemic

776. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the up-to-date position in regard to the full reopening of day centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46570/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): It is a key priority for the Government to allow more people to engage in services that allow them to remain independent and live in their own homes with dignity and independence for as long as possible.

Assisted Human Reproduction

777. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health when legislation and availability of supports regarding assisted human reproduction such as IVF and surrogacy will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46575/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Deputy will be aware, drafting of a bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research is ongoing by officials in my Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. This comprehensive piece of legislation will encompass the regulation, for the first time in Ireland, of a very wide range of practices, including domestic altruistic surrogacy. I can assure the Deputy that publication of this legislation is a priority for my Department and the Government, and a commitment to enact this legislation is included in the Programme for Government, “Our Shared Future”. Officials in my Department and the Office of the Attorney General continue to prioritise the drafting of this complex legislation and will engage intensively over the next few months to finalise the Bill.

Another Programme for Government commitment is the introduction of the model of care for infertility, which was developed by officials in my Department in conjunction with the HSE’s National Women & Infants Health Programme. This model of care will ensure that infertility issues will be addressed through the public health system at the lowest level of clinical intervention necessary.

The model of care comprises three stages, starting in primary care (i.e., GPs) and extending into secondary care (i.e., Regional Fertility Hubs) and then, where necessary, tertiary care (i.e., IVF and other advanced assisted human reproduction (AHR) treatments). Structured referral pathways are being put in place and patients referred onwards for further investigations or treatment as required and as clinically appropriate.

Phase One of the roll-out of the model of care has involved the establishment, at secondary

care level, of Regional Fertility Hubs within maternity networks in the six Hospital Groups across the country, in order to facilitate the management of a significant proportion of patients presenting with infertility issues.

Phase Two of the roll-out will see the introduction of tertiary infertility services, including IVF, in the public health system, but will not commence until such time as infertility services at secondary level have been developed across the country, required resources have been allocated and the AHR legislation commenced.

The underlying aim of the policy to provide a model of funding for AHR, within the broader AHR regulatory framework, is to improve accessibility to AHR treatments, while at the same time embedding safe and appropriate clinical practice and ensuring the cost-effective use of public resources.

Covid-19 Pandemic

778. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to remove the necessity to undertake a hotel quarantine upon arrival in Ireland for Irish citizens living in Argentina that have been fully vaccinated with an approved vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46578/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): Persons arriving in Ireland who are fully vaccinated with an approved vaccine are not required to undergo Quarantine in a Designated Facility, however may be subject to a home quarantine and other testing requirements depending on where they are arriving from.

To be fully vaccinated, a person must have waited the correct length of time after the final dose of an EMA-approved vaccine.

The table below sets out what fully vaccinated means.

A full course of any one of the following vaccines:	Regarded as fully vaccinated after:
2 doses of Pfizer-BioNtech Vaccine: BNT162b2 (Comirnaty®)	7 days
2 doses of Moderna Vaccine: CX-024414 (Moderna®)	14 days
2 doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine: ChAdOx1-SARS-COV-2 (Vaxzevria® or Covishield)	15 days
1 dose of Johnson & Johnson/Janssen Vaccine: Ad26.COVS-2-S [recombinant] (Janssen®)	14 days

Travellers coming from a designated state who have not been vaccinated as outlined in the table above do not meet Ireland's meaning of fully vaccinated and must pre-book and enter mandatory hotel quarantine.

Mental Health Services

779. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of psy-

chology services in the Headford and Lackagh primary care service, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46580/21]

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

Mental Health Services

780. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when appropriate primary care psychology service will be provided to a person (details supplied); the efforts currently underway to secure a primary care psychologist for this area; the progress in relation to same; if the child will be referred to a neighbouring service in the absence of an ability to be seen in their own catchment area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46588/21]

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

Mental Health Services

781. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health when day care centres for service users with mental health illnesses will reopen; the number that have opened to date; the expected timeline for a full reopening in line with the reopening of society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46593/21]

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

Covid-19 Pandemic

782. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if advice will be provided regarding a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46598/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The obligations placed on international passengers under SI No. 135/2021 apply equally to passengers who have travelled from the USA or Canada.

Those arriving with an accepted proof of vaccination or recovery are not required to undergo any further testing or quarantine requirements upon arrival. Passengers who have travelled without valid proof of vaccination or recovery are required to observe a 14-day home quarantine at the address given on their Passenger Locator Form. The quarantine period can be shortened if the person obtains a negative result from a PCR test taken no sooner than day 5 after arrival.

Travel policy is kept under review based on the epidemiological situation and public health advice.

Assisted Human Reproduction

783. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce legislation for assisted human reproduction with particular reference to surrogacy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46608/21]

805. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if his proposed legislation for assisted human reproduction will deal with the issues of legal guardianship, single fathers, recognition of domestic and international surrogacy, retrospective parentage and social welfare entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46670/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 783 and 805 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, drafting of a bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research is ongoing by officials in my Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. This comprehensive and far-reaching piece of legislation encompasses the regulation, for the first time in Ireland, of a wide range of practices, including domestic altruistic surrogacy, as well as: gamete (sperm or egg) and embryo donation for AHR and research; pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of embryos; posthumous assisted reproduction; and embryo and stem cell research. The legislation also provides for the establishment of an independent regulatory authority for AHR.

The surrogacy provisions outline the specific conditions under which surrogacy in Ireland will be permitted, including a requirement for all surrogacy agreements to be pre-authorised by the new AHR Regulatory Authority. The legislation also sets out a court-based mechanism through which the parentage of a child born through surrogacy may be transferred from the surrogate (and her husband, if applicable) to the intending parent(s).

The draft Bill does not contain provisions to regulate surrogacy arrangements undertaken in other jurisdictions. As issues relating to international surrogacy concern areas of law that intersect across the remits of several Government Departments, my Department is engaging with the Department of Justice and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in respect of this policy area.

I can assure the Deputy that publication of this legislation is a priority for my Department and the Government, and a commitment to enact this legislation is included in the Programme for Government, “Our Shared Future”. Officials in my Department and the Office of the Attorney General continue to prioritise the drafting of this complex legislation and will engage intensively over the next few months to finalise the Bill. Subject to certain criteria being met, AHR treatment will be available to people irrespective of gender, marital status or sexual orientation. Overall, the provisions outlined within the Bill will ensure that AHR practices and related areas of research are conducted in a more consistent and standardised way and with the necessary oversight.

The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (the Act of 2015) reforms and updates family law to address the needs of children living in diverse family types. The Minister for Health is responsible for Parts 2 & 3 of the Act of 2015 and these Parts commenced on 4 May 2020. Parts 2 & 3 deal with the issue of donor-assisted human reproduction.

Subject to certain conditions, the provisions of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act of 2015 provide for the parentage of donor-conceived children born after the commencement of Parts 2 & 3 and retrospective declarations of parentage for donor-conceived children born prior to the commencement of Parts 2 & 3.

On a broad level, issues related to legal guardianship – including responsibility for the

provisions of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 – come under the remit of the Minister for Justice. Specifically, section 6B of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, as inserted by the Act of 2015, provides for the guardianship of donor-conceived children to whom Parts 2 & 3 of the Act of 2015 apply.

Finally, matters concerning social welfare payments are the responsibility of the Minister of Social Protection.

Official Engagements

784. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will facilitate a meeting with a family (details supplied) in County Kildare given the ongoing issues for the family and the previous correspondence between the HSE and officials in his office. [46610/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

785. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when appointments will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46612/21]

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

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Staff

786. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding to appoint a clinical psychologist to each acute hospital diabetes multidisciplinary team; his views on the fact that psychosocial support in diabetes care is not formally embedded as part of diabetes management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46622/21]

791. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding to appoint a clinical psychologist to each acute hospital diabetes multidisciplinary team; his views on the fact that psychosocial support in diabetes care is not formally embedded as part of diabetes management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46634/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 786 and 791 together.

Diabetes is a complex condition that can have a profound impact on the quality of life of people living with the condition, the management of emotional and psychological well-being is an important part of diabetes care and self-management. Self-management education programmes such as DAFNE (for people living with type 1 diabetes) and DESMOND and Discover Diabetes (for people living with type 2 diabetes) help provide psychosocial support for many people living with diabetes.

The Model of Integrated Care for Patients with Type 2 Diabetes sets out that diabetes is to be managed within the acute system by the diabetes multidisciplinary team including access to psychology support where available. However, I acknowledge there is a deficit in the number of hospital staff providing psychological services dedicated to diabetes care.

The 2021 National Service Plan recognised the need for an unprecedented expansion of the permanent health workforce through permanent appointments. Funding has been provided for an increase to approximately 135,655 WTE across the health service by December 2021, which is an increase of 15,838 WTE over funded 2020 levels. There is significant workforce recruitment underway. The HSE Pay and Numbers Strategy identifies the specific roles and grades to be hired.

Health Services Staff

787. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if a diabetes psychology resource will be provided to each community diabetes specialist team hub under the Integrated Model of Care for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease Implementation Guide; his views on whether access to psycho-social support in these teams should be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46624/21]

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

Hospital Staff

788. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding to appoint a 0.5 whole-time equivalent clinical psychologist to each acute hospital diabetes paediatric diabetes team; his views on whether psychosocial support in paediatric diabetes care should be available in each team; the reason there is no access to this support outside of Dublin-based paediatric diabetes services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46625/21]

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

Hospital Staff

789. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to appoint a clinical psychologist to the diabetes multidisciplinary team in Wexford Hospital and St. Vincent's Hospital in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46626/21]

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

Health Services Staff

790. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health when the specialist community diabetes teams under the enhanced community care programme be appointed; if it will be available to all persons with diabetes free of charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46633/21]

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

Question No. 791 answered with Question No. 786.

Health Services Staff

792. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a diabetes psychology resource to each community diabetes specialist team hub under the Integrated Model of Care for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease Implementation Guide; his views on whether access to psychosocial support in these teams should be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46635/21]

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

Question No. 793 answered with Question No. 630.

Healthcare Policy

794. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he will extend eligibility to the long-term illness scheme for reimbursement of blood glucose test strips to all women who develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy; his views on the decision to remove them from the scheme; if he will now reverse the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46637/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The Long Term Illness Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the scheme are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide.

Under the Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

Gestational diabetes is not a permanent or long-term illness and is, therefore, not covered by the Scheme. There are currently no plans to make specific provision for gestational diabetes under any new or existing health scheme.

However, there are other supports for access to medical approved items such as the Drug Payment Scheme (DPS) and the General Medical Services Scheme (GMS) that would assist patients with gestational diabetes.

Under the DPS, no individual or family pays more than €114 a month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines.

People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be eligible for a medical card. In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. In certain circumstances the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds the income guidelines, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from illness.

The HSE afford applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting documentation to determine whether undue hardship exists and to fully take account of all relevant circumstances that may benefit them in assessment, including medical evidence of costs and certain expenses.

In circumstances where an applicant is still over the income limit for a medical card, they are then assessed for a GP visit card, which entitles the applicant to GP visits without charge.

Patients may also be entitled to claim tax relief on the cost of their medical expenses. This includes medicines prescribed by a doctor, dentist, or consultant. Relief is at the standard tax rate of 20%.

Health Services

795. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the number of women who developed gestational diabetes during pregnancy in each of the years 2018 to 2020 and to date in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46638/21]

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

Health Services

796. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the cost of the type 2 diabetes cycle of care programme since its inception; the number of persons who avail of the programme; the number of general practitioners who provide the programme; if the programme has been evaluated; if an audit of the programme has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46639/21]

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

Health Services

797. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he will extend the type 2 diabetes cycle of care programme to all persons with type 2 diabetes; his views on whether it

is equitable that persons with type 2 diabetes without a GMS or general practitioner visit card but otherwise meet the HSE criteria for uncomplicated type 2 diabetes, to be managed in primary care, are excluded from the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46640/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In October 2015, the Diabetes cycle of care programme was introduced nationally by the HSE. Under this programme, adult GMS patients, those who hold a medical card or GP visit card, with a diagnosis of Type 2 Diabetes are eligible to be managed as part of the programme by their GP.

The 2019 GP Agreement introduced the chronic disease management programme for GMS patients who have one or more specific chronic diseases, of which Type 2 Diabetes is one. The structured programme commenced in 2020 and is being rolled out to all adult GMS patients over four years (2020 to 2023). This year the programme has been rolled out to those aged 65 years and over. The chronic disease management programme will replace the Diabetes cycle of care programme as it is rolled out.

People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependents may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. People who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card.

There is currently no plan to extend type 2 diabetes care under the chronic disease management programme to patients who do not hold a medical or GP visit card.

While Type 2 diabetic patients who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card are not eligible under the Diabetes cycle of care or chronic disease management programmes, diabetes is one of the conditions covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme. Under this scheme, patients with diabetes can receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness free of charge, regardless of whether they hold a medical card.

Medical Aids and Appliances

798. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he will ring-fence some of the anticipated 2021 cost savings from the recent HSE medicines management programme preferred blood glucose strips for adults with type 1 and type 2 diabetes evaluation to fund the provision of the FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system to persons with diabetes, who are over 21 years of age, based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46641/21]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances

799. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health if he has plans to provide funding in the upcoming budget to fund the provision of the FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system to persons with diabetes over 21 years of age based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46642/21]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances

800. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications for the FreeStyle Libre device that were submitted by individual hospitals for persons with diabetes who are over 21 years of age; the number that were approved; the number that were refused in each of the years 2017 to 2020 and to date in 2021, in tabular form; his plans to remove the age restriction on the FreeStyle Libre device; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46643/21]

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

Question No. 801 answered with Question No. 689.

Question No. 802 answered with Question No. 689.

Question No. 803 answered with Question No. 611.

Question No. 804 answered with Question No. 611.

Question No. 805 answered with Question No. 783.

Question No. 806 answered with Question No. 611.

Covid-19 Pandemic

807. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the costs involved for the use of a hotel (details supplied) by the HSE since the Covid-19 pandemic to date; the services that were provided for those costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46672/21]

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

Question No. 808 answered with Question No. 611.

Health Services

809. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider extending the eligibility for breast screening and genetic testing to all women aged 25 and over considering the cost savings involved in the early detection of cancer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46714/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I am fully committed to supporting our population screening programmes which are a valuable part of our health service. In this regard and in line with commitments in the Programme for Government, BreastCheck is currently implementing an age-extension project that will see all women aged between 50 to 69 years being invited for routine breast screening.

In relation to consideration of any further age changes, it is vital we remember that breast screening is a population health screening measure. It is not an individual diagnostic test. The balance between the benefits of screening and the potential harms or risks to the population as a whole require careful, evidence-based consideration and balancing.

As with all our national screening programmes, BreastCheck delivers its services in line with international criteria for population-based screening programmes, which are kept under constant review. The balance between the benefits of screening and the potential harms or risks to the population as a whole require careful, evidence-based consideration and balancing.

Decisions about changes to our national screening programmes will be made on the advice of our National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC). This independent expert group considers the evidence for changes in a robust and transparent manner. The Committee's role is to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly. This ensures policy decisions are informed by the best available evidence and advice.

The NSAC is currently finalising plans for its first 'annual call' which will be announced later this year. Applications for proposals for new population based screening programmes and modifications to existing programmes, such as a reduction in the age of those eligible for screening, will be welcomed from the public as well as the HSE, health professionals and other professional bodies. Further information on the 'annual call' will be published on the NSAC website.

Covid-19 Pandemic

810. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the total amount that the State spent on personal protective equipment, which either never arrived or was not fit for use when it arrived; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46720/21]

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

National Children's Hospital

811. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the estimated total cost of the construction of the new national children's hospital to date; and the estimated final cost of construction for the hospital when it is completed. [46721/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The new children's hospital (NCH) project, comprises the main hospital on a shared campus at St James's, and two paediatric Outpatient and Urgent Care Centres at Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, and Tallaght University Hospital.

In 2018, the Government approved a capital budget of €1.433bn for the NCH project. This included the capital costs for the main hospital at St James's Hospital campus, the two Outpatient Department and urgent care centres at Connolly and Tallaght campuses, equipment for the three sites, and the construction of the carpark and retail spaces.

There are a number of items not included in this investment figure as there was no price certainly for them and nor can there be, for the duration of the project. These include construction inflation, the impact of Covid-19, statutory changes, any change in scope resulting in healthcare policy changes and the Employment Order. In addition, there remain risks beyond the control of the Development Board and the contractor, arising from Brexit, the global pandemic, global supply chain difficulties and shortages of construction raw materials. However, the contractor is working hard to mitigate those risks where possible.

Since the commencement of the NCH project construction, just under €805m has been drawn down for works on the project across the three sites.

Definitive updates on outturn costs cannot be provided due to the fact that there is a live contract in place and speculation on any costs would be detrimental to the Development Board's commercial engagements.

Despite delays, the new children's hospital building at St James's is taking shape. The concrete frame was completed at the end of March which reaches the highest point in the building. This 'topping out' is an important milestone in any construction project. The façade to the building will be practically complete and weathertight by the end of 2021 and the internal fit-out of a range of clinical areas is progressing well.

The second paediatric Outpatient and Urgent Care Centre at Tallaght Hospital was substantially completed in early September 2021, in line with the contractor's programme schedule, and then handed over to Children's Health Ireland on 15 September 2021.

The new facility is expected to open in mid-November after a period of operational commissioning and equipping. This will further drive the shift towards ambulatory care provision. Together with the Urgent Care Centre, CHI at Connolly, these new facilities will improve access to urgent care for a significant number of paediatric patients. The opening of the second of the three new campuses, will mark another important milestone in the NCH programme and in the delivery of children's services.

National Children's Hospital

812. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to reports of anti-social behaviour, fires or pipe bombs on the site of the new national children's hospital; and if antisocial behaviour is having an impact on the construction of the hospital. [46722/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has advised my Department of a number of incidents that have arisen on the site of the new children's hospital. Gardaí are investigating those incidents with the support of the primary contractor BAM, who is responsible for the site, and the NPHDB.

Since criminal investigations are ongoing no further comment can be made at this time.

Departmental Expenditure

813. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his views on the overpayment of rent to the landlords for the building from which his Department operates on Baggot Street; the amount of overpayment that was made; when the overpayment was made; when the attention of his Department was drawn to the overpayment; his views on whether it will be possible for the State to recoup the overpayment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46723/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In respect of the rental costs for my Department's premises, I can confirm that the rent payments come from the Office of Public Works' budget. I have no role in relation to the lease or rent arrangements for Miesian Plaza. The OPW, as the tenant, manage these functions on behalf of all Departments in the building.

The terms of the lease were agreed between OPW and the landlord. As my Department

was not involved in the process, I cannot comment on rental costs, how they were arrived at, or subsequently agreed.

Departmental Expenditure

814. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the amount of rent that has been paid by the State for the use of the building from which his Department operates on Baggot Street in each of the past five years. [46724/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): In respect of the rental costs for my Department's premises, I can confirm that the rent payments come from the Office of Public Works' budget. The terms of the lease were agreed between OPW and the landlord.

I have no role in relation to the lease or rent arrangements for Miesian Plaza. The OPW, as the tenant, manage these functions on behalf of all Departments in the building.

Covid-19 Pandemic

815. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the hotels or premises with which the State entered into contracts for use as self-isolation facilities and emergency hospital beds throughout the pandemic; the capacity of each hotel and premises in question; the length of each contract; the costs associated with each contract; and the number of persons who availed of the facilities during the pandemic. [46725/21]

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

Question No. 816 answered with Question No. 611.

Mental Health Services

817. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Health when he expects a national psychology led postnatal depression and mental support network to be introduced in each primary care team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46729/21]

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

Mental Health Services

818. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Owenacurra Centre, Middleton, County Cork. [46734/21]

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

Health Services

819. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons over 69 years of age are not eligible for breast cancer screening. [46737/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I am fully committed to supporting our population screening programmes which are a valuable part of our health service. In this regard and in line with commitments in the Programme for Government, BreastCheck is currently implementing an age-extension project that will see all women aged between 50 to 69 years being invited for routine breast screening.

In relation to consideration of any further age changes, such as extending the age to people over the age of 69, it is vital we remember that breast screening is a population health screening measure. It is not an individual diagnostic test. The balance between the benefits of screening and the potential harms or risks to the population as a whole require careful, evidence-based consideration and balancing.

As with all our national screening programmes, BreastCheck delivers its services in line with international criteria for population-based screening programmes, which are kept under constant review. The balance between the benefits of screening and the potential harms or risks to the population as a whole require careful, evidence-based consideration and balancing.

Decisions about changes to our national screening programmes will be made on the advice of our National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC). This independent expert group considers the evidence for changes in a robust and transparent manner. The Committee's role is to undertake an independent assessment of the evidence for screening for a particular condition against internationally accepted criteria and make recommendations accordingly. This ensures policy decisions are informed by the best available evidence and advice.

The NSAC is currently finalising plans for its first 'annual call' which will be announced later this year. Applications for proposals for new population based screening programmes and modifications to existing programmes, such changes in the age of those eligible for screening, will be welcomed from the public as well as the HSE, health professionals and other professional bodies. Further information on the 'annual call' will be published on the NSAC website.

Health Services

820. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the BreastCheck website and the advice that was made available through that platform for women in view of the suspension of the BreastCheck service; and the information provided in relation to alternative measures that women could undertake during the Covid-19 restrictions. [46741/21]

821. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the reason the BreastCheck website has now changed and appears to have been replaced by the HSE. [46742/21]

822. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the number of women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer in 2021 after their BreastCheck was cancelled in 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46743/21]

823. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health if the reason BreastCheck appointments were cancelled in 2020 was due to the redeployment of staff for Covid-19 related assistance who would have normally conducted the BreastCheck service; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [46744/21]

824. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health if all BreastCheck appointments were cancelled in 2020; if BreastCheck appointments are now 12 months or more behind schedule; and the contingency plans that are in place to address the backlog in BreastCheck appointments. [46745/21]

825. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of those awaiting BreastCheck appointments by CHO area in tabular form. [46746/21]

826. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Health the communication that was given to the women on the BreastCheck database in relation to the suspension of the service; the way they were communicated with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46747/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 820 to 826, inclusive, together.

As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 821 answered with Question No. 820.

Question No. 822 answered with Question No. 820.

Question No. 823 answered with Question No. 820.

Question No. 824 answered with Question No. 820.

Question No. 825 answered with Question No. 820.

Question No. 826 answered with Question No. 820.

Health Services

827. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1175 of 9 September 2021, if he can provide details of the four units not providing phase III cardiac rehabilitation services; the reason these services are not being provided; when the services will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46750/21]

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

Health Services

828. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of cardiac rehabilitation services in each hospital that is supposed to offer the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46751/21]

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

Dental Services

829. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of dentists participating in the dental medical card scheme in County Tipperary in 2019 and 2020. [46752/21]

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

Care Services

830. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he has received a submission from an organisation (details supplied) in relation to Budget 2022; and if he will prioritise family carers and carers in his discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. [46776/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I received a pre-budget submission from Family Carers Ireland on August 24th 2021 which my Department and I have considered ahead of Budget 2022.

However, as the Deputy will appreciate, I cannot comment at this stage on the outcome of the estimates process, or matters which will be the subject of national service planning in 2022.

As Minister for Health, I am committed to improving supports for family carers. Under the National Carer's Strategy a range of measures have been introduced or extended by my Department to support family carers in recent years. Most recently, €2m was allocated in Budget 2021 as a first step towards implementing a Carers' Guarantee. My Department has been in consultation with representative groups and the HSE to ensure the funding address geographical inequity of access to carer supports.

Budget 2022

831. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health his priorities for cancer service funding during Budget 2022 discussions; if is in receipt of proposals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46777/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): The implementation of the National Cancer Strategy is a Programme for Government commitment, and is part of the implementation of Sláintecare. We have seen significant progress on the implementation of the Strategy over the past four years, with clear evidence-based policy direction from my Department and strong implementation by the HSE's National Cancer Control Programme.

As part of Budget 2021, an extra €20m was allocated for the continued implementation of the National Cancer Strategy this year. Additional funding of €12m was also allocated this year for the restoration of cancer services to 95% of 2019 (pre-Covid) levels. This funding is being used to support hospitals in addressing backlogs, extending clinic times, providing additional clinics, increasing diagnostic capacity and providing locum/temporary support.

It is important that our focus remains on the implementation of the National Cancer Strategy across the areas of prevention, diagnosis, treatment and patient supports, as well as on supporting cancer services to progress against the background of Covid-19, and the impact of the ransomware attack on the health service in May 2021.

Decisions on the funding of cancer services next year will be made in the context of Budget 2022. The Irish Cancer Society has presented a pre-budget submission and I can assure you that their views will be taken into account in the Service Planning process for next year.

Budget 2022

832. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he has engaged with an organisation (details supplied) in relation to its Budget 2022 proposals; if he will ensure a continued expansion of funding for Alzheimer's services similar to Budget 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46778/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): I received a pre-budget submission from the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland on September 9th 2021 which my Department, Minister Butler and I have considered ahead of Budget 2022. Unfortunately, due to diary commitments, I was unable to attend Alzheimer's Society of Ireland's pre-budget launch.

As Minister for Health I am committed to the implementation of the Irish National Dementia Strategy, which aims to improve how we provide care for people living with dementia. The National Dementia Office, established within the HSE, oversees implementation of the Strategy.

As the Deputy will be aware in Budget 2021, the Government allocated €12.9 million for a number of dementia specific measures. This allocation comprised of €7m for an additional 250,000 hours of home support for people living with dementia, €0.9m to expand the dementia advisor service operated by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and €5m for implementation of the National Dementia Strategy.

With regards to allocation of funding for 2022, as the Deputy will appreciate, I cannot comment at this stage on the outcome of the estimates process, or matters which will be the subject of national service planning in 2022.

Healthcare Policy

833. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has plans to add folic acid to flour and bread products in the interest of public health in view of emerging evidence from the United Kingdom (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46779/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): The Department of Health has received a Folic Acid Supplementation Report prepared by the Department's Folic Acid Policy Committee which was established to help the Department's policy considerations on the matter.

While the Committee's report found that there is considerable evidence in support of the introduction of mandatory fortification of foodstuffs with folic acid, it also recognised that this would be a significant undertaking in terms of resources and timing. In addition, there was an acknowledgement that the implications of Brexit would need to be worked through before further consideration could be given to mandatory food fortification.

Health Service Executive

834. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of unused or under-used HSE-owned buildings by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46814/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Health Service Executive

835. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health his views on the long-term leasing of suitable premises by the HSE to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46815/21]

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

Hospital Staff

836. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the areas in which the unfilled consultant positions in Mullingar Regional Hospital exist; and the action that has been taken to fill these roles. [46822/21]

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

Health and Safety

837. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the hospitals or centres of care per county which have been assessed as having asbestos in the buildings; and the actions that have been taken to ensure the health and safety of employees and former employees to assess the health impact that asbestos had. [46823/21]

Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the public healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Fishing Industry

838. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the Department responsible in relation to a matter (details supplied); and the steps he will take to ensure the matter is brought to a suitable solution. [46257/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I am aware of the very unfortunate situation to which the Deputy refers. Having spoken with the individual concerned, I understand that this arose from his purchase of an unstable fishing vessel in the Netherlands in 2007, essentially a private commercial transaction between two contracting parties to purchase a vessel. The responsibility for ensuring the authenticity of the details, specifications and stability of the vessel being purchased rested with the purchaser.

The core issue here relates to the safety and safety certification of the vessel purchased. The safety of fishing vessels and safety certification, including matters relating to stability, is the responsibility of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has no function in relation to the safety certification of Fishing vessels or matters arising in relation to their stability.

My Department's European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Programme is the principal source of development funding for our seafood sector. The Programme is implemented under the provisions of the EMFF Regulation (508/2014) which specifies to what purposes funds can be granted. There is no particular provision of the EMFF Regulation that would facilitate an ex-gratia payment to assist in the case raised by the Deputy. Furthermore, it is not possible to provide a grant for the decommissioning of the vessel concerned, as under the terms of the EMFF Regulation, decommissioning is not permitted after 31 December 2018. A new European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) Regulation (2021/1139) for the 2021-27 period was enacted in July 2021 and my Department is preparing a new corresponding Seafood Development Programme, which should be in operation next year. However, similar to the EMFF Regulation, the new EMFAF only permits decommissioning of fishing vessels for very specific purposes concerned with addressing an identified imbalance in a particular fleet segment and only allows decommissioning of active fishing vessels and so is unlikely to be relevant to the case identified by the Deputy.

Agriculture Schemes

839. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45959/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The person named applied for the 2021 Basic Payment and Areas of Natural Constraints scheme on 1st May 2021.

All necessary up-dates to the area claimed by the person named under these scheme have been completed by the Department and the advance payment under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme has now been processed. Payment will be lodged to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Advance payments under the Basic Payment Scheme are due to commence issuing from 18th October.

Harbours and Piers

840. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will provide the €3 million urgently required by Donegal County Council to upgrade the pier at Rathmullan, County Donegal. [46001/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Rathmullan Pier is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for its maintenance and development rests with that Local Authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage thereafter.

The Department provides funding to assist the coastal Local Authorities, including Donegal

County Council, in carrying out small scale projects for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

Between the years 2010-2020, Donegal County Council has received funding of €3.8m under this programme, with €31,000 received for projects at Rathmullan Pier that included projects relating to visitor moorings, safety measures and repairs from storm damage.

In May, I was pleased to announce a 35% increase in the funding being made available to Local Authorities from the 2021 Programme, with Donegal County Council securing funding of €637,500 to undertake 12 projects in total (nine Harbour Development and three Marine Leisure & Tourism). Further information on this year's Programme is available online at www.gov.ie/en/press-release/db402-minister-mcconologue-announces-383-million-in-funding-for-capital-projects-at-irelands-six-fishery-harbour-centres-including-an-enhanced-scheme-for-79-local-authority-harbours-the-2021-programme-sees-a-35-increase-in-funding-for-local-authority-harbours/

No application for funding in relation to Rathmullan Pier was received under this year's programme. Should any application be submitted by Donegal County Council in relation to Rathmullan Pier under any future programme, it will be given due consideration, taking into account the terms and conditions of the scheme, the priority attached by the Council and available Exchequer funding.

Maritime Safety

841. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the new sea survival centre at the National Fisheries School, Greencastle, County Donegal; and when this will be delivered. [46002/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConologue): I confirm that I approved proceeding with BIM's proposal for commencement of the new sea survival centre project at BIM National Fisheries College, Greencastle, County Donegal and funding has been provided in 2021.

In relation to the delivery of the project, BIM has advised as follows;

The new sea survival infrastructure at the BIM National Fisheries School, Greencastle, County Donegal project is currently in the procurement stage for design services for the building of the facility. As part of this design brief, research has been undertaken looking at other, similar international sea survival facilities pools. BIM is consulting with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) to ensure that the facility will be built in line with energy efficient design principals, to ensure a modern, sustainable and environmentally friendly facility and SEAI will continue to work with BIM throughout the process. Procurement is underway for the navigation simulator and marine radio training suite which are due to be installed in December 2021. It is planned that the pool installation will commence in February 2022 and that the facility will be in service by June 2022.

Agriculture Industry

842. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the con-

sideration his Department has given to encouraging the integration of the beef and dairy sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46040/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): It is important that livestock farmers have as many options as possible to improve their viability, with this in mind, I am very conscious of the importance of developing closer integration of the beef and dairy systems and my Department have engaged in a number of initiatives to support this. In Budget 2021, provision was made for the introduction of a dairy beef pilot programme. The objective of the pilot programme which was launched in April 2021, is to both build on the gains of previous BEEP schemes in terms of weight/performance recording, and to facilitate further integration of the dairy and beef systems, by providing support for farmers who are rearing progeny from the dairy herd.

Another initiative aimed at creating greater integration between the beef and dairy systems is the development of the Dairy Beef Index (DBI). This was developed by ICBF to promote high quality beef cattle bred from the dairy herd, while maintaining optimal dairy traits. As the data set underpinning this index increases, so does the reliability and usefulness of the index to farmers as a decision making tool and as a mechanism to provide greater integration between dairy and beef systems. With the development of the ICBF's Dairy Beef Index, data from ICBF show that genetic trends for beef traits have improved for beef sires, reassuring farmers that these beef-dairy calves have improved beef potential.

A support for a dairy beef calf welfare has been proposed as part of the development of Ireland's CAP strategic plan (CSP). A public consultation on the draft interventions proposed for the CSP has recently ended and the submissions received are being reviewed. I will continue to consult on the content of the plan with the key stakeholders, through the CAP Consultative Committee and through additional public consultation later in the year.

I can assure the deputy that my Department and I are committed to supporting the enhanced integration of the dairy and beef sectors.

This approach is reflected in 'Food Vision 2030', the stakeholder-led strategy for the sustainable development of the sector over the next decade. Food Vision includes the following action under a Goal aimed at improving the competitiveness and productivity of primary producers:

Mission 2, Goal 1, Action 1:

'promote greater integration of the dairy and beef sectors, especially in relation to the production of beef coming from the dairy sector'.

Agriculture Schemes

843. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will be compensated for confiscated livestock. [46057/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): On animal welfare grounds, seizure notices issued to the person in question by the Department's veterinary inspectorate pursuant to Article 37 of SI 311 European Communities (Welfare of farmed animals) Regulations 2010.

In accordance with Article 36 of the Regulation, the animals were seized with the intention of selling, disposing of, destroying or arranging for the sale, disposal or destruction of the animals. This has been undertaken.

The balance due to the person in question, minus the costs of same has been finalised and payment issued to the person in question last week.

Forestry Sector

844. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider amending the Forestry Act 2014 in order that the definition of forestry is changed from 0.10ha to 0.50ha to allow landowners to plant small parcels of land without administrative restrictions and without having to seek Ministerial approval via the licensing application process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46095/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Department is currently examining options to increase the level of small scale planting of individual and groups of trees in the proposed agri-environment measures under the new CAP Strategic Plan. This may require a legislative change to the Forestry Act 2014 which currently provides that a licence is required for all tree planting above the 0.1 ha. threshold.

Any changes considered will have to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place and will be targeted specifically at the planting of native trees for biodiversity reasons.

On the basis of recommendations from the Project Woodland Working Groups, the Department has also commissioned a review of the forestry licensing process which may provide for areas where the existing legislation can be revised and streamlined. This work will take place over the next few months and will influence the future of the licensing process also.

Agriculture Schemes

845. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason farmers (details supplied) are being penalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46111/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): In order to qualify for payment under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), farmers must have an eligible hectare of land in respect of each entitlement held.

Where land has been burned between the period of 1st March and 31st August of any given year, it is not eligible for payment under the BPS. This is clearly stated in the terms and conditions of the scheme.

Where such land is claimed under a BPS application it is considered an overclaim and, as such, a penalty/reduction may apply. In each case where a penalty/reduction applies, the applicant has a right of review and appeal.

The applicant is advised of this right of appeal and the relevant steps to take to seek a review. Each case is examined on its merits and any information supplied by the applicant will be taken into consideration during this review.

Agriculture Schemes

846. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a new

entrant farmer who has been approved for TAMS for a milking parlour can extend the expiry date on the drawdown given that they have not yet secured a contract with any dairy supplier; if they can draw down without such a contract being put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46115/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The granting of extensions under TAMS is provided for in the terms and conditions of the scheme which is published on the Department's website.

Applicants with a 12-month approval have the option of applying for a six months extension. The extension will only be granted for structures and fixed investments where work has commenced. The application for an extension must be lodged together with documentary evidence to the online system between the start of the eighth month and before the end of the eleventh month following the original date of approval to join the scheme.

Payments cannot issue until the approved works have been completed and a payment claim is submitted by or on behalf of the approved applicant to the online system.

The suite of seven measures available under TAMS II have been open for applications on a rolling tranche-by-tranche basis. The closing date for Tranche 23 is 5th November 2021 with Tranche 24 opening on 6th November.

It is open to every farmer who has an expired approval to make another application.

Agriculture Industry

847. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of inspections carried out by inspectors from his Department on horticultural businesses by functional area in each of the past five years in tabular form. [46116/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Department is involved in a range of inspections on horticultural businesses required by specific legislation, to facilitate trade and for verification of compliance with Schemes.

These include:

1. Food Safety Inspections necessitated by Regulation (EU) 2017/625 (Official Controls Regulation and carried out under S.I. 22 of 2020 (Food & Feed Hygiene regulations 2020).

2. Inspections to facilitate growers' payments under Article 25 of Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/891 DAFM verify Producer Organisations' Operational Programmes in part through on the spot checks of PO members' farms.

3. Inspections to verify investments under the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector.

4. Inspections of Horticulture producers of regulated plants and plants products are required under the provisions of the EU Plant health Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 and the Official Controls Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

5. Finally, inspection of Horticulture Business are required to facilitate the export certification process and ensure compliance with the Phytosanitary requirements of the Third Country.

Numbers of inspections in each of the past five years are set out in the following table.

Year	Food Safety Horticulture Primary producers	Horticulture Grant Aid & Producer Organisations	Plant Health Official controls	Export Certification Inspections	Total
2020	157	159	474	78	868
2019	154	155	289	73	671
2018	109	154	280	98	641
2017	178	157	353	101	789
2016	107	141	330	115	693

Forestry Sector

848. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a forestry application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46118/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): A decision has not been made on an application for an afforestation licence and the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme for the person named. In the absence of the necessary environmental documentation submitted by the forester, such as a pre-screening report, etc. it will not be possible for the Department to process the file.

Departmental Reviews

849. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will make available the terms of reference of the review by his Department of the review of the 2011 and 2017 EIA Regulations (Agriculture); the timescale of this review; and if it is being conducted internally or by an external entity. [46141/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The terms of reference for the review of the EIA (Agriculture) regulations have yet to be decided, but it is anticipated to be a comprehensive evaluation of these regulations.

The review will be conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with an expected public consultation phase being carried out at a later stage. The timeline involved will be determined once the terms of reference have been established.

Departmental Expenditure

850. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 761 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider was ultimately chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46203/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): No tenders were issued for these particular training courses which provided a specific development opportunity for senior staff in the Department, as the courses in question facilitated a blend of senior managers from both the private and public sectors.

The Department was not required to publish a public advertisement for purchases of this

value under the National Public Procurement guidelines.

The Department's Learning and Development function would have reviewed the market at the time to ensure that the training sought was relevant and provided value for money for the taxpayer.

Forestry Sector

851. **Deputy Francis Noel Duffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of and position regarding the forestry licensing log-jam; the number of licences which have been granted; the number which are left to process; the length of time it is estimated it will take to clear the queue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46320/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Deputy will be aware that certain High Court decisions have changed the processing of forestry licence applications, resulting in approx. 80% of applications being screened in for a comprehensive ecological assessment, a situation for which the Department was not prepared.

In addition, the number of appeals increased from 21 in 2017 to a peak of 582 in 2020. This combination of events led to a backlog of licence applications. I am very aware of the obligations my Department has towards applicants, but also to ensure that systems and processes are compliant with legal framework.

In respect of licensing, resources have been significantly increased; ecologists have gone from one in 2018 to 27 currently and 21 additional forestry inspectors have been deployed. The number of licences issued had increased through May and into early July. However, there was a significant fall off in licences issued in July and August, due to a new legal requirement for an additional 30-day public consultation.

Applications in the system, received before 11th January this year when the Forestry Licence Viewer (FLV) was introduced, had to be manually examined and redacted of personal information before the documents were published in the FLV for the second public consultation.

As the introduction of this SI resulted in a reduction in the number of licences issued in June and July, it is unlikely that our target of 4,500 will be met this year and it will be closer to 4,000.

I must note, however that licensing outputs have increased over the past three weeks, with 110 licences issued weekending 3rd September, 136 the following week and 146 weekending 17th.

The Department is currently examining every afforestation application in the system and has deployed 10 ecologists to deal specifically with afforestation. I would encourage those with a valid afforestation licence to proceed with planting and I am advised there is 5,700ha with approval to plant.

The Department will shortly announce the successful bidder for the recent tendering process to engage external expertise to carry out an end-to-end regulatory and process review, which has been sought by the Project Woodland working groups.

This is in addition to the systems analyst already in place. In the meantime, the Department is working with forestry companies to improve the quality of information provided with licence applications. This has already yielded results for felling licences.

The same exercise has been completed for forest roads and will shortly be carried out on

afforestation licence applications. I expect that licensing output will continue apace for the remainder of the year.

Forestry Sector

852. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of licences that have been issued for non-commercial, amenity tree planting under section 22 of the Forestry Act 2014. [46357/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Department has two schemes to support the planting of non-commercial trees – the NeighbourWood and the Creation of Woodland on Public Lands Schemes (CWPL).

The CWPL was introduced earlier this year and aims to encourage public bodies to establish new native woodlands on suitable bare land. Bodies eligible for the Scheme are government departments and State sponsored organisations, Higher Education Authorities, and local authorities. The Scheme has four grant elements, two for planting and two for recreational facilities such as trails and signage and forest playgrounds. There is also a small grant for derelict site clearance. Since the Scheme opened this year, nine applications have been received, which are currently being processed.

NeighbourWood is a long-standing scheme that provides financial assistance to create woodland amenities for local people. Funding is available to help establish woodland on green-field sites and to support the development of existing sites. NeighbourWoods can be used by the community for strolling, family visits and picnics, exercising and a host of other outdoor activities.

The scheme is available to both public and private landowners who work in partnership with local communities. Since 2016, 12 sites have received grant funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme.

Forestry Sector

853. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of landowners that have been prosecuted for planting without a licence under summary conviction or conviction on indictment. [46358/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Since the commencement of the Forestry Act, 2014 on 24th May, 2017, no landowners have been prosecuted for planting without a licence under summary conviction or conviction on indictment.

Any forestry activities such as planting or, more usually, tree felling that takes place without a valid licence are taken very seriously by the Department.

Any complaints made are always investigated.

Agriculture Industry

854. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if

urgent consideration will be given to the issues outlined in correspondence (details supplied) in relation to the poultry sector; if he will ensure that this matter is given urgent attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46376/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Compliance with environmental regulations is a prerequisite for Irish farmers and food producers, not only to meet legislative requirements, but also to ensure that our quality produce can command a premium in both domestic and export markets.

This approach is at the heart of the new stakeholder-led strategy for the sustainable development of the sector over the next decade: ‘Food Vision 2030 - a world leader in sustainable food systems’.

I am pleased to see local authorities and industry representatives taking an active and collaborative role in seeking to address the necessary balance between economic and environmental sustainability related to poultry sector in their region.

While I would not see a role for the Department in permanent membership of the Task Force/Working Group envisaged, my officials will be happy to address any specific queries relevant to the remit of the Department which may arise in the course of the group’s deliberations.

Nitrates Usage

855. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of penalties relating to fencing to prevent access from grazing bovines to watercourses for drinking purposes issued under the Nitrates Action Programme for non-compliance with the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, SI No. 605 of 2017 in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46381/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The requirement to fence watercourses on certain agricultural holding types is set out under Article 17(18) European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, SI No. 605 of 2017 (as amended). This measure came into effect on 1st January 2021. Information on non-compliances and associated penalties relating to this requirement is not available to date as the inspection cycle for 2021 is not yet completed.

Nitrates Usage

856. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of penalties issued under the Nitrates Action Programme for non-compliance with the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, SI No. 605 of 2017 in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46382/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Department of Housing Planning and Local Government are the competent authority for the implementation of the Good Agricultural Practice regulations. The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine is the paying agency for EU Common Agricultural Policy funds.

In accordance with the CAP regulations DAFM undertake the required number of farm inspections and compliance with SI 605 2017 is one of the areas checked. In addition an administrative check is undertaken to ensure all bovine and ovine livestock farmers comply with the stocking rate limits in the regulations.

Penalties for non compliance are provided for in EU Regulations 1306/2013, 640/2014 and 809/2014 and are applied under the Terms & Conditions of the Direct Payments Schemes and Rural Development Programme measures.

The table attached details the number of farmers penalised in recent years, both from administrative checks and those identified during farm inspection. The administrative checks are currently under way to identify those who exceeded the limits in 2020.

[Nitrates Penalties Issued]

State Bodies

857. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of full-time equivalent staff currently assigned to the Unfair Trading Practices Enforcement Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46508/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): As the Deputy will be aware, one of the key principles of the Directive on Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain is to protect farmers, farmers' organisations and other weaker suppliers of agricultural and food products against stronger buyers and to improve their position in the supply chain.

I signed Statutory Instrument No. 198 of 2021 transposing the UTP Directive into Regulations applicable to Irish law on 28th April 2021, ahead of the EU deadline of 1st May 2021. These Regulations are an important tool in strengthening the position of primary producers, who are key to the success of our sector.

The Regulations provides for the establishment of an Enforcement Authority to deal with complaints against unfair trading practices and, as an interim measure, I established the Enforcement Authority in the Department pending the finalisation of primary legislation to establish a new Office of National Food Ombudsman or Regulator.

The Enforcement Authority has the power to investigate complaints made by agricultural and food product suppliers. The Authority may also initiate and conduct investigations on its own initiative and initiate legal proceedings for breaches of the UTPs.

The Authority currently has two full-time staff members and further staff resources will be allocated to it shortly.

I am fully committed to bringing forward legislation at an early date to establish a National Food Ombudsman or Regulator office that will bring greater levels of transparency to the sector.

Proposed Legislation

858. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the intended timeline to bring forward legislation to establish a new office of national food ombudsman, regulator or equivalent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46509/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): As the Deputy will be aware, the establishment of an Office of National Food Ombudsman, or equivalent, is a key commitment in the Programme for Government, which states that the new Office

will enforce the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) Directive and will also have a role in analysing and reporting on price and market data in Ireland.

The Deputy will also be aware that, in April 2021, I signed Statutory Instrument No. 198 of 2021 to transpose the UTP Directive into Irish law directly as it stands, with effect from 1st July 2021. As an interim measure, I have established the UTP Enforcement Authority in the Department. That Enforcement Authority has the powers to investigate complaints from suppliers including primary producers, carry out investigations on its own initiative and initiate legal proceedings for breaches of the UTPs.

In regard to the primary legislation required to establish the new Office, following the public consultation inviting views on what functions the new Office should deliver, and the information seminar that I hosted in June for stakeholders, which included a presentation by the former UK Groceries Code Adjudicator, the submissions received have been examined and the legislation is now being drafted.

I am fully committed to ensuring the Programme for Government commitment is implemented as quickly as possible to ensure we bring much-needed transparency to the sector. The Department is giving this matter priority. However, until the legislation is finalised, I am not in a position to say exactly when the new Office will be established.

Animal Welfare

859. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to any increased prevalence of liver abscesses in cattle in factory-controlled feedlots and any associated increased usage of veterinary medicinal products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46510/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Department does not have such information.

The Animal Health Ireland Beef Health Check programme does capture information on the apparent prevalence of liver abscesses in cattle slaughtered in Ireland over recent years. This data is set out in the attached file.

The data does not provide any breakdown as to the herd type or farm system associated with the herd of supply of the identified cases. The trend line however suggests a reducing prevalence of liver abscess over recent years, rather than an increase.

[IHA Data]

Agriculture Schemes

860. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the €1.5 billion ring-fenced from the carbon tax is intended exclusively for the agri-environmental scheme or for broader agri-environmental measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46511/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The funding allocation for future agri-environment measures arising out of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), including the use of Carbon Tax funds, will be determined in consul-

tation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. However, the Programme for Government committed to using €1.5bn in carbon tax receipts between 2020 and 2030 for use in the agri-sector and that is a commitment I will honour.

Work is ongoing on the development of a new agri-environmental climate measure under the new CAP with due regard to the proposed new Green Architecture. A hybrid model is being considered which means it would offer a combination of prescription based actions with a fixed rate of payment and results based actions where the level of payment will be dependent on result achieved.

The lessons learned from the Results-based Environment-Agri Pilot (REAP) will assist in the design of the latter. It is proposed that the new measure will include a range of actions encompassing agri-environment, climate, water quality and biodiversity, and will include targeting of priority habitats.

Work on the preparation of the overall draft CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP) has intensified in the Department. Development of the plan involves a number of stages, including SWOT analysis, needs assessment, intervention design, financial allocations, target setting (including monitoring) and governance systems. The draft CSP is also subject to an ex-ante evaluation, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment including a public consultation on the draft CSP and draft Environmental Report.

The Department has recently completed a five-week public consultation on the proposed draft interventions for the CSP 2023-2027 with over 1,000 responses received. Department officials are currently considering these proposals as the CSP is developed. I am currently consulting with farmers and other stakeholders on the content of the CSP at a series of mart meetings. I will continue to engage with farmers and all stakeholders as we develop our CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

Greyhound Industry

861. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of greyhound injuries and deaths at a location (details supplied) to date in 2021, by date; the names of the dogs; and the nature of the injuries and causes of death. [46649/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Rásaíocht Con Éireann (RCÉ) is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. RCÉ is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for RCÉ and, therefore, the question has been referred to the body for direct reply.

Live Exports

862. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will halt plans to export live Irish pigs to China given the cruelty involved in live export (details supplied). [46650/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I wish to assure the Deputy that the Department deploys considerable resources to protecting animal

welfare during transport. In regard of the recent agreement signed with China to export breeding pigs to that country, animal welfare requirements during transport must be in accordance with EU rules, which are set out primarily in Council Regulation (EC) no 1/2005 on the Protection of Animals during Transport and Related Operations and associated national legislation.

The Regulation sets out legal measures to ensure animal welfare during transport, and has specific provisions on air transport of pigs to safeguard their welfare throughout the journey. It also refers to the need for conditions during transport to comply with International Air Transport Association (IATA) live animals Regulations.

- Pigs are transported in specially designed pens or containers appropriate to their species and size which comply with IATA Regulations.

- They are transported only in conditions where air quality, temperature and pressure can be maintained within an appropriate range during the entire journey, having regard to the animals' specific needs.

- Maximum loading densities for pigs are set which must not be exceeded, in order to protect their welfare.

Officials veterinarians of my Department assess journey plans and monitor loading to ensure that welfare legislation is complied with. The high genetic merit breeding pigs that will be transported to China will be transported with every possible measure to minimise any risk of injury and suffering.

The Department takes its responsibilities in the matters of regulating this trade, and of protecting animal welfare, very seriously - it exercises close oversight, and deploys considerable resources to the area of animal welfare in general, including in respect of animals being transported.

Forestry Sector

863. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of felling licences issued during each of the years 2016 to 2020, in tabular form; if he will provide an update on efforts to streamline the licensing system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46705/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Deputy will be aware that certain High Court decisions have changed the processing of forestry licence applications, resulting in approx. 80% of applications being screened in for a comprehensive ecological assessment, a situation for which the Department was not prepared.

In addition, the number of appeals increased from 21 in 2017 to a peak of 582 in 2020. This combination of events led to a backlog of licence applications. I am very aware of the obligations my Department has towards applicants, but also to ensure that systems and processes are compliant with legal framework.

In respect of licensing, resources have been significantly increased; ecologists have gone from one in 2018 to 27 currently and 21 additional forestry inspectors have been deployed. The number of licences issued had increased through May and into early July. However, there was a significant fall off in licences issued in July and August, due to a new legal requirement for an additional 30-day public consultation.

Applications in the system, received before 11th January this year when the Forestry Licence Viewer (FLV) was introduced, had to be manually examined and redacted of personal information before the documents were published in the FLV for the second public consultation.

As the introduction of this SI resulted in a reduction in the number of licences issued in June and July, it is unlikely that our target of 4,500 will be met this year and it will be closer to 4,000.

I must note, however that licensing outputs have increased over the past three weeks, with 110 licences issued the week ending 3rd September, 136 the following week and 146 the week ending the 17th.

The Department will shortly announce the successful bidder for the recent tendering process to engage external expertise to carry out an end-to-end regulatory and process review, which has been sought by the Project Woodland working groups.

This is in addition to the systems analyst already in place. In the meantime, my Department is working with forestry companies to improve the quality of information provided with licence applications. This has already yielded results for felling licences. The same exercise has been completed for forest roads and will shortly be carried out on afforestation licence applications. I expect that licensing output will continue apace for the remainder of the year.

The number of tree felling licences issued from 2016 to 2020 is in the following table. It should be noted that the figure for 2016 and 2020 is skewed by a large volume of Coillte thinning licences. I expect the final figure for 2021 to be 30% higher than 2020.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Felling Licences Issued	6,731	3,003	3,603	4,180	1,717

EU Regulations

864. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he plans to meet the requirements of EU Regulation 2019/6 through primary or secondary legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46709/21]

867. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the manner and timeframe in which he intends to legislate to give effect to EU Regulation 2019/6; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46712/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 864 and 867 together.

EU Regulation 2019/6 on veterinary medicinal products comes into effect in January 2022. This Regulation is binding in full and has direct effect on all Member States.

The Department is currently drafting secondary legislation to give effect to this Regulation which is expected to be in place in advance of 28th January 2022.

Animal Slaughtering

865. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 818 of 15 September 2021, the actions he has taken in response to a factory in Northern Ireland ceasing to slaughter pigs from Ireland; if he has concerns re-

garding the effect this will have on farmers' income and animal welfare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46710/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I am concerned at reports that labour and CO2 shortages are impacting on pig processing capacity in Northern Ireland. Of course commercial capacity issues in that jurisdiction are not a matter that can be resolved by authorities in this jurisdiction.

In relation to processing capacity in Ireland, the Department has regular engagement with industry on this issue and has facilitated further engagement with the Department of Social Protection in seeking to recruit labour from within the Irish and European Union markets.

The Department has also engaged with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to explore the possibility of further employment permits for certain occupations in meat processing where it is not possible to recruit sufficient labour from within the domestic and European labour pools. These discussions remain ongoing.

I and my officials have also highlighted to the meat processing sector the need to have appropriate labour attraction and retention policies in place, especially as competition for labour grows with the re-opening of the economy in line with the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

The Department is closely monitoring the current situation in the pig sector from both an economic and animal welfare perspective. In terms of the current market situation, I am acutely aware of the challenges faced by Irish pig producers albeit having come off historically high prices. The Department continues to closely monitor the situation both in Ireland and across the EU.

Animal Slaughtering

866. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of pigs processed in meat factories within the State for the years 2016 to 2020 and 2021 to date; the number of pigs originating within the State that were and are processed in Northern Ireland for the years 2016 to 2020 and 2021 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46711/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Pig meat is the fourth most valuable sector of the Irish agri-food industry in terms of exports after dairy, beef and beverages. Exports increased by 0.21% in value terms in 2020 compared to 2019, totalling just over €893 million according to Central Statistics Office figures. This equates to 6.3% of overall food, drink and horticulture exports.

Irish pig meat production in 2020 was up on 2019, with 3.5 million head processed by DAFM approved meat plants. Production for 2021 year to date (as of week ending 19th September 2021) has seen a 5.9% increase over the same period of 2020.

Pig Slaughter Figures for Ireland:

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 YTD(19 Sept)
3,253,759	3,292,233	3,400,130	3,384,285	3,511,610	2,574,254

Figures taken from the EU's Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES) system show that

Ireland has exported a total of 335,000 live pigs in 2021 to date (23rd September), with 331,556 of these to Northern Ireland. The vast majority of these pigs are exported for the purposes of slaughter as detailed below, with smaller numbers designated as being for the purposes of production or breeding.

Pigs exported to Northern Ireland for slaughter:

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 YTD(23 Sept)
374,789	404,806	424,252	398,198	449,892	318,380

Question No. 867 answered with Question No. 864.

Animal Welfare

868. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions that are taken by his Department or public bodies under his remit to inspect animal welfare organisations before such organisations can be given charitable status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46733/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): All charitable organisations operating in Ireland are required to be registered with the Charities Regulator who deal with applications and requirements for charitable status. The Department has no involvement in animal welfare organisations being granted charitable status.

Animal Welfare

869. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cases involving animal welfare concerns that have come under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46808/21]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides a modern framework for applying standards in the area of animal health and welfare and replaced a number of enactments dating back over a century. The Act was passed, after a lengthy and constructive debate in both Houses of the Oireachtas and came into operation on 6th March 2014.

The Department is committed to ongoing promotion and enforcement of animal welfare standards and all animal welfare reports are followed up by Veterinary Staff in the Regional Veterinary Offices or in some cases are referred to the ISPCA or DSPCA for attention by their authorised officers. In many of these cases sanction or prosecution is not the most proportionate or effective course of action in achieving a positive outcome.

Often the provision of guidance, advice and education can alleviate welfare concerns for both the animal and the owner.

Offences under the Act may be prosecuted in the District Court by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, local authorities and member of An Garda Síochána. Matters tried on indictment are the remit of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The data below relate to cases prosecuted at the suit of the Minister for Agriculture, Food

and the Marine.

Since March 2014, 95 individuals have been successfully prosecuted. Fines in excess of €65,000 have been imposed. 11 persons have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment which were suspended in 9 cases. The Probation Act was applied in 8 instances.

Twenty persons have been disqualified from keeping animals under section 58 of the Act.

In 46 cases, summonses have issued or files have been sent to the DPP with a view to initiating prosecution. A further 7 are currently being examined by my Department with a view to pursuing a prosecution if the evidence so warrants.

Library Services

870. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when she will be providing updated guidelines to public libraries in relation to restrictions on computer usage due to Covid-19 in view of schools and colleges returning and students needing to use such facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46010/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 31 August, the Government published ‘COVID-19: Reframing the Challenge, Continuing Our Recovery and Reconnecting’, which is Ireland’s plan for the next and final phase of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. From 20 September, indoor and outdoor group activities, including those in libraries are permitted and this includes access to study spaces and PCs, where this is in line with the updated Health and Safety guidance.

While my Department has policy responsibility for public libraries, the provision of public library services is a matter for each local authority in their capacity as library authorities under the Local Government Act 2001. I understand that the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) issued updated guidelines for public libraries to each local authority on 24 September 2021 following a meeting of its Health & Safety Operational Committee which reviewed the LGMA’s current COVID-19 documentation. The documentation was updated to ensure that it is in line with the revised Work Safely Protocol and Government’s document ‘COVID-19: Reframing the Challenge, Continuing Our Recovery and Reconnecting’.

Dormant Accounts Fund

871. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of and position regarding the dormant account funds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46093/21]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O’Brien): The main purpose of the Dormant Accounts Acts 2001-2012 is to reunite account or policy holders with their dormant funds in credit institutions or insurance undertakings. These bodies are required to take steps to identify and contact the owners, with any unclaimed funds transferred by the holding institution, each year, to the Dormant Accounts Fund which is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency. The transfer of moneys takes place on the basis that the beneficial owner has a guaranteed right of reclaim at any time in the future.

The legislation also introduced a scheme for the disbursement of funds that are unlikely to be reclaimed. These funds can be used for the purposes of measures to assist the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged; the educational

development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged or; persons with a disability. The Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2012 provides for the Minister to put in place Disbursement Schemes which cover a three year period. These schemes set out the principles and priority areas for disbursements over the period. Subsequent Annual Action Plans, which are also prepared by the Minister in consultation with other Ministers, detail the approved measures for funding each year. These Disbursement Schemes and Action Plans, including the current ones in place, are available on the Departments website. www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c376c9-dormant-accounts-fund/

The current 2021 Dormant Accounts Action Plan details funding of €51 million for 46 measures across 10 Government Departments. The 2022 Dormant Accounts Action Plan is currently in preparation and will be published shortly after Budget 2022. It is expected that this Action Plan will provide for a similar level of support in 2022.

Annual reports are also published on the website, with the most recent report for 2020 detailing funding measures totalling €93.5m, which included once off funding of €45 million to support the Covid-19 Stability Fund which provided grants to charities, community and voluntary organisations and social enterprises who were supporting the most vulnerable in society throughout the pandemic.

Finally, the most recent information from the NTMA with regard to the value of the Dormant Accounts Fund shows an overall balance of €283.7 million in the fund at the end of August 2021, with €108 million of this set aside for possible future refunds to beneficial owners of the funds.

Departmental Expenditure

872. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to Parliamentary Question No. 825 of 15 September 2021, if tenders for the courses and training provided were issued; if so, the persons who responded; the criteria by which the course provider; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46204/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department was established on 19 July 2017. It has utilised the services of Common Purpose Ireland for limited individual staff training purposes. In common with other staff training the courses were selected to meet identified training needs of particular staff. The details and expenditure costs were provided in the answer to Parliamentary Question No. 825 of 15 September 2021.

The Department's People Strategy document was launched in 2019. One of the priorities identified under this strategy was "Growing Our Leaders and People Managers" which included an emphasis on taking "active steps to build leadership and people manager capability at all levels across the organisation". At this time certain leadership training for senior leaders was not available in-house in our Department or centrally through OneLearning. Leadership training for the civil service is now centrally procured by DPER One Learning unit.

Question No. 873 withdrawn.

Community Development Projects

874. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will extend the street and shop front grant past November 2021 (details supplied). [46364/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The €7 million Streetscape Enhancement Initiative, which is a commitment in Our Rural Future, is designed to make 124 of our rural towns and villages more attractive and welcoming places for locals and visitors alike. Property owners will be part funded to improve the facades of buildings, carry out artwork and install features such as canopies and street furniture.

The initiative is being delivered by the Local Authorities on behalf of my Department. The maximum level of funding that can be provided to individual properties is set at a national level, with considerable discretion provided to Local Authorities to design the scheme locally to meet their individual needs.

The funding is being made available from savings elsewhere in my Department's vote and will not be available for use next year. As such, the works must be delivered by November and all grant funding fully utilised before the end of the year. My Department is working very closely with local authorities to ensure that as much flexibility as possible is being provided in the delivery of the scheme and to facilitate quick delivery on the ground.

I understand that there has been a good level of demand for the funding and I look forward to seeing the impact of this initiative on our towns and villages in the coming months.

Community Development Projects

875. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the streetscape enhancement initiative of her Department was open to applicants living in local authorities in rural areas of County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46565/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The €7 million Streetscape Enhancement Initiative, which is a commitment in Our Rural Future, is designed to make 124 of our rural towns and villages more attractive and welcoming places for locals and visitors alike. Property owners will be part funded to improve the facades of buildings, carry out artwork and install features such as canopies and street furniture.

The initiative is being delivered by the Local Authorities on behalf of my Department. Given the focus of the scheme, Local Authorities in Dublin, with the exception of Fingal, and the city councils in Cork and Galway are not eligible under the streetscape initiative.

Local Authorities throughout the country selected the individual towns and villages that would be targeted with this funding. In Dublin, this included Rush, Lusk, Donabate, Skerries, and Oldtown as selected by Fingal County Council.

Departmental Projects

876. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of upgrading a helipad (details supplied); the stage it is currently at; when it is likely to go to tender; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46590/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The construction of a new helipad referred to by the Deputy is a project being undertaken by Mayo

County Council, with financial assistance from my Department.

My Department provided funding for the purchase of land for this project in late 2020. Mayo County Council submitted an initial design however the Department required amendments to the original design and I understand that a revised design has now been agreed.

Mayo County Council are currently working with my Department in preparing tender documents for the helipad's construction and it is hoped that the tender process can commence shortly with a view to having the construction completed in 2022.

Community Development Projects

877. **Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the external review of the walks scheme will be published (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46676/21]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Walks Scheme, which is funded by my Department, contracts landholders to undertake maintenance work on National Waymarked Ways and other priority trails that traverse their lands. The landholders receive modest payments for maintenance work undertaken in line with agreed work plans.

My Department commissioned an external review of the Walks Scheme to examine the delivery and strategic development of the Scheme, and assess the role and resourcing of the Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) posts throughout the country. The reviewers were also required to consider the level of funding provided to the Local Development Companies to deliver the scheme. The recommendations contained in the review will inform decisions on the further strategic expansion of the scheme, including the resourcing of Local Development Companies and RRO posts in particular.

The reviewer's final Report was received by my Department in July. I expect to publish the Report shortly and to outline the next steps in implementing the findings outlined in the Report, including steps to address the type of issues identified by the Deputy. I am committed to working with all of the stakeholders to ensure that the scheme can continue to function effectively.