

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 29, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 30 to 67, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Question No. 68 answered orally.*

### Departmental Strategies

69. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of measures concluded in the *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025* document since it was launched in March 2021. [17872/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Our *Rural Future 2021-2025*, is the most ambitious rural development policy for Ireland in decades, and contains more than 150 measures across the whole of Government, for both short-term recovery and longer-term development.

Updates on its implementation are provided by a series of Progress Reports. In addition, annual work programmes are published, which will allow for priorities to be updated in light of emerging opportunities and challenges. Within these work programmes, the 150 overarching measures in the Policy have been broken down into individual actions for delivery.

The First Progress Report, which was published in February, provides updates on a total of 216 actions contained in the 2021 work programme for delivery right across Government. It should be noted that significant progress has been made to date across actions and implementation is ongoing. In terms of completion, just under 80% of actions to be carried out by the end of 2021 were completed by end year.

A new work programme for 2022 is currently being finalised in conjunction with Departments and I expect to publish this shortly. However, I can say that it will demonstrate continued commitment to realising the ambitions of *Our Rural Future*, including the development of some new actions under the policy.

Many of the 2022 actions are already underway, and updates on these will be provided in further Progress Reports to be produced every six months, as per the commitment in the Policy.

I am committed to ensuring that the momentum we have established in the first year of *Our Rural Future* is maintained, and that we can continue to deliver on the Government's commitment to and vision for rural Ireland.

Questions Nos. 70 to 76, inclusive, answered orally.

### Rural Schemes

77. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she has considered allocating additional funding to the local improvement scheme for private roads and laneways given the backlog of applications. [17942/22]

81. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation for local improvement scheme-funded roads for 2022, by county; if she envisages a top-up fund for such roads similar to 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17919/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 81 together.

As part of *Our Rural Future*, the Government is committed to ensuring that the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is funded into the future. The LIS supports the improvement of rural roads and laneways that are not normally maintained by local authorities. The scheme makes an important contribution to connectivity in rural Ireland.

The scheme was reintroduced in 2017, following a number of years with no dedicated funding. Since then, my Department has allocated €80 million towards improvement works on over 3,000 non-public roads and lanes. These works have benefited over 13,300 landowners and residents in these rural areas.

I launched the 2021 scheme with an initial budget of €10.5 million. I sourced additional funding last year from savings within my Department's vote, effectively doubling investment to bring the total for 2021 to €21 million.

I was pleased, as part of Budget 2022, to announce an increase in the base funding for LIS from €10.5 million to €11 million this year. I announced the details of the 2022 scheme earlier today, including the details of the individual allocations to each county this year. These details will be available in the accompanying written reply to the Deputies and are available on my Department's website.

I am sure this investment will be warmly welcomed.

I will keep the position in respect to the availability of further top-up funding under review.

I have also recently written again to my colleague, Minister Eamon Ryan, T.D., to explore whether funding may be available from the Department of Transport to support the scheme. I believe a cross-Government approach might reap dividends in dealing with the backlog of applications on hand and I will continue to keep all options open in this regard.

COUNTY	2022 LIS ALLOCATION
Carlow	€351,880
Cavan	€371,140
Clare	€582,690
Cork	€879,099
Donegal	€716,560
Galway	€958,831

COUNTY	2022 LIS ALLOCATION
Kerry	€704,030
Kildare	€351,880
Kilkenny	€390,790
Laois	€351,880
Leitrim	€351,880
Limerick	€485,970
Longford	€351,880
Louth	€351,880
Meath	€340,500
Monaghan	€351,880
Offaly	€380,760
Roscommon	€456,990
Sligo	€358,030
Tipperary	€644,070
Waterford	€92,910
Westmeath	€358,320
Wexford	€431,760
Wicklow	€384,390

*Questions Nos. 78 to 80, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 77.*

*Question No. 82 answered orally.*

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

83. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development her views on the use of community centres to accommodate Ukrainian refugees and the impact that this will have on service users and on communities at large; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17921/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** My Department is contributing to the effort by linking with key stakeholders at community level, providing information, assisting the co-ordination of supports through the community sector, and enabling flexibility in programme delivery to shift focus on the Ukraine response.

My Department also held a webinar recently with relevant stakeholders and organisations involved in the Ukraine response. The aim of the webinar was to provide as much information as possible to stakeholders on the national response and encourage and support co-ordination of responses being provided by stakeholders, while also seeking to ensure complementarity with relevant national and local government initiatives and provide central Department contact points for issues and queries.

New Community Response Fora are also being repurposed in each local authority area. These will enable all those involved at a local level to work together to support the integration of Ukrainian refugees. The role of each Forum will be to coordinate the community-led

response in the provision of assistance and support to Ukrainian refugees as they are accommodated around the country.

Ukrainian arrivals in to the country who are seeking accommodation are being accommodated through the International Protection Accommodation Service. My Department will continue to liaise with them and offer any assistance we can – this is a fluid situation which will require a flexible approach.

The response to COVID-19 showed what we can achieve by working together: national government, local government, and community, voluntary and local development sectors. My Department is coordinating with all our stakeholders, including Local Development Companies, LCDCs, Volunteer Centres, Community Volunteers, and Public Participation Networks, to maximise the effectiveness of the response.

### **Offshore Islands**

84. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to Parliamentary Question No. 5 of 17 February 2022, the status of the new policy for the islands; if the draft policy has been finalised to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17840/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Government is committed to publishing a 10 year policy on island development with associated three year action plans. Work on the policy is underway and my Department has now completed bilateral meetings with all relevant Government Departments. These bilateral meetings have provided an opportunity for detailed discussion of the issues raised by island communities and for Departments to assess how they might help address the various issues raised.

A number of islands have requested that a consultation meeting be held in person on the island in order for the community to have an opportunity to have an input into the policy. Due to Covid-19 it was not possible for officials to visit islands and these islands did not wish to engage with on-line meetings. The Department has now agreed to these meetings and I understand that they will be held after Easter.

At the most recent meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee for the Islands, participating Departments reviewed progress on the policy development and agreed the next steps to be taken. It was agreed that the various Departments would submit a list of action points that they could undertake to further enhance the future development and sustainability of communities on our offshore islands.

Work has begun on an initial draft of the policy document and I understand that, based on the development work to date, a draft is expected to be ready for my consideration by the middle of this year.

### **Regeneration Projects**

85. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will provide an update on the Government measures to address dereliction in rural towns and the creation of work hubs; and if these schemes are available to urban villages such as those in Dublin city. [17842/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government recently published Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns. This represents a whole of Government policy and aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres. It contains 33 actions, which will give our towns the tools and resources required to become viable, vibrant and attractive places to live, work, and socialise.

The policy is underpinned by significant levels of public investment spread across major Government schemes such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS).

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme prioritises the renovation of derelict and vacant buildings in our rural towns and villages, with a view to bringing these buildings back into use as remote working hubs, multi-purpose community spaces, and/or for residential occupancy. I increased the maximum grant available through the Scheme last year to €500,000 and I will be announcing the details of the 2022 scheme shortly.

The RRDF is also now open for applications until the 29th April 2022 for Category One projects i.e. those that have full planning and other consents in place and are ready to commence at the date of application. This call has a strong focus on supporting projects that will assist in revitalising our rural towns and villages through planned, sustainable regeneration and development including addressing vacancy and the re-use of heritage and other existing buildings.

Neither of these scheme funds projects located in metropolitan areas. Supports for such areas are available through the URDF operated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

### **Telecommunications Services**

86. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the work that has been carried out to date by the mobile phone and broadband task force, which was reconvened in December 2021; if the task force has met in 2022; if not, when the next meeting is scheduled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17938/22]

89. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if an update will be provided on the work of the mobile phone and broadband task force, which was re-established in December 2021; the action plan of the task force.; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17899/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 89 together.

In December 2021, Minister of State Smyth and I reconvened the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. We set out our priorities for the Taskforce in 2022 and beyond, and we made it clear that the new Taskforce will be expected to tackle some of the more complex and longer-term issues that are standing in the way of better mobile and fixed connectivity.

On foot of that meeting, Minister of State Smyth and I tasked our officials with engaging with all Taskforce members bilaterally to produce a proposed work programme for 2022, to include multi-year actions. These actions will, by their nature, require multiple bodies to work together in cooperation in order to resolve them.

To date, senior officials from our two departments have met with 11 organisations, including representatives of industry, local and central government. These meetings have resulted in a draft work programme that draws together multiple members working on shared actions to deliver real, lasting impacts on the way we roll-out communications infrastructure in Ireland.

The date for the next meeting of the Taskforce has been provisionally set for the end of April. At this meeting we will finalise the terms of reference and work programme for the Taskforce. A key outcome of the meeting will also be the assigning of the bodies that will take lead role responsibility, or a supporting role, for each of the work programme actions.

### **Regeneration Projects**

87. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the locations in Cork that will benefit from the town centre first plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17889/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government recently published *Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns*. This publication represents a major new policy that aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres.

The policy contains 33 actions which will give our towns the tools and resources they need to become more viable and attractive places in which to live, work, socialise and run a business. It will support Town Teams to develop their own Town Centre First Plans to chart the future direction of their towns and to address issues of vacancy and dereliction. Some 26 towns have already been allocated funding of €100,000 to produce their Town Centre First Plans, including Skibbereen in Cork. Additional towns in Cork and across the country will be supported to also develop plans as the policy is rolled out.

The implementation of the actions in these plans will be underpinned by significant levels of public investment spread across major Government schemes such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), the Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. This will include funding through these schemes to address the regeneration of vacant and derelict buildings as identified in the Town Centre First plans.

The local Town Team drawn from local community and business representatives will work with local stakeholders to progress drafting of the plans and to identify challenges, actions and integrated responses across a number of key themes

The policy also includes funding for new Town Regeneration Officers, who will support Town Teams and local stakeholders to implement Town Centre First, tackle vacancy and dereliction challenges, and bring vibrancy back into our town centres.

### **Community Development Projects**

88. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if her Department has engaged with Dublin City Council on the reconstruction of a community centre (details supplied); and if her Department will provide funding for this project. [17890/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O’Brien):** My Department has not had an approach from Dublin City Council in relation

to the reconstruction of a community centre in the area mentioned by the Deputy, although I am informed that there were meetings between the residents and Dublin City Council in the past on the matter.

The Community Centres Investment Fund recently announced by Minister Humphreys will be launched shortly. This fund will support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and development of their existing community centre facilities. This fund is not intended for the construction of new buildings.

My Department also runs a number of smaller capital schemes such as the Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) which provides small grants to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas. Funding is allocated by my Department to each Local Authority area. Further details of the programme can be found on my Department's website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd).

The Urban Regeneration fund, covering areas with larger populations, is available within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and further details are available from that Department.

*Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 86.*

### **Departmental Budgets**

90. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocated budget for her Department in each of the years since 2017; and the actual expenditure of her Department in each of the years since 2017, in tabular form. [17982/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The allocated gross budget and actual gross expenditure for the Department is provided below in tabular format for each of the years since 2017.

While the Department of Rural and Community Development was established in July 2017, the figures for 2017 reflect the full budget and expenditure for that year, for the functions transferred at that time.

It is also worth noting that since the establishment of the Department in 2017, additional functions have transferred under its remit. Notably, the Community Services Programme transferred in 2018 and the Islands function transferred in 2020. A full year of budget and expenditure is reflected in the below table for those functions for those years onwards.

The table shows where unspent capital appropriations in certain years were added to the estimate in the following year to produce the total budget available, as allowed for under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004. This is most notable for 2021 and 2022 where the impact of COVID-19 on activity within the construction sector was a significant factor in the level of unspent capital funding brought forward into those years. It is also important to note that the 2020 allocation included €37 million in once off funding for COVID-19 Supports, with a further €10 million in once off funding provided in 2021 for that purpose.

The Department's gross allocation has increased substantially from €163 million in 2017 to €379 million in 2022, which has allowed greatly increased support for communities across Ireland, in both urban and rural settings.

(€, 000)	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Estimate (Gross)	162,628	231,532	291,202	374,832	351,027	378,548
Unspent capital funding brought forward from previous year	-	7,700	-	-	13,180	16,860
Total budget (i.e. estimate plus unspent capital funding brought forward from previous year)	162,628	239,232	291,202	374,832	364,207	395,408
Expenditure at year end (Gross)	136,004	237,483	290,683	359,418	344,450	n/a

### Community Development Projects

91. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the steps that have been taken by her Department to ensure there is cross-departmental collaboration, so that new community-led projects can work efficiently to achieve the ambition of communities, particularly in coastal and island communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18046/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Whole-of-government collaboration requires us all to work together across our organisations to develop better co-ordinated public services and policy which enables delivery of the Programme for Government. This is a key element not just of national policies, such as the National Planning Framework, but also in the achievement of sectoral strategies, for example the rural development policy, Our Rural Future and Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) have been established in all local authority areas to bring about a more integrated approach to local and community development including on our islands and in our coastal areas. They provide a local forum where strategic, multi-agency approaches are implemented. LCDCs bring together representatives from the community, local government, State agencies and local development bodies to develop and agree coordinated responses to locally agreed priorities. Local Economic and Community Plans are used by LCDCs to facilitate a more joined-up approach. These plans are being implemented across the country with local authorities and LCDCs now positioned as key drivers of local economic and community development.



It is important that we continue to support the LCDC structures as the primary vehicle for collaboration between all national public service providers at local level. For example, LCDCs and the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP) provide a governance, planning and evidence based framework for the co-ordination and management of local funding including EU supported community-led local development funding to 2027. The Public Participation Network (PPN) also augments the LCDC and Local Authority supports for community led projects around the country.

In relation to energy generation projects, the Climate Action Plan 2021 sets a clear goal of having at least 500 MW renewables delivered through local community-based projects. These projects will be delivered through the dedicated Community category in the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) as well as through the forthcoming Microgeneration & Small-Scale Generation schemes. My colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, through the SEAI, has provided initial seed funding of €200k to support the establishment of the Community Enabling Framework under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). A further €2m in capital funding has been allocated to support the development of Community projects in 2022. The funding allocation this year will allow SEAI to rollout a trusted advisory service and enabling grants that are vital supports to enable the growth of the nascent community renewable electricity generation sector.

In addition to these measures, through Ireland's participation in the Clean Energy for EU Islands initiative, our rural island communities can be part of the clean energy transition of the more than 2,200 inhabited European islands. We also currently have 12 of Ireland's offshore islands as member communities across the Sustainable Energy Communities Network.

### **Foreshore Issues**

92. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if an update will be provided on the plans her Department has to address problems with the sandblocks at Céibh an Chóra, Inis Meáin, which are known to interfere with the freight service, especially during summer months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18036/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy is aware, Galway County Council is the responsible authority for the maintenance and development of infrastructure on the Aran islands, including Céibh an Chóra in Inis Meáin.

Galway County Council has been in contact with my Department and a meeting was held between officials from my Department and Galway County Council on 29 March 2022 to discuss various issues, including the issue the Deputy has highlighted.

In order to remove any material from the area around the pier, Galway County Council need to obtain a foreshore licence. They have been advised that a number of marine studies will need to be carried out as part of the licence application for dredging at the site.

I understand that Galway County Council will now undertake the required procurement process for these studies before making an application for funding to the Department.

### **Rural Schemes**

93. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on her discussions regarding a proposal put forward by this Deputy for a reformed

and revamped local improvement scheme involving funding from her Department, the Department of Transport and local authorities; the investment proposed by both Departments; when the scheme will be launched and open for applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17917/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As part of *Our Rural Future*, the Government is committed to ensuring that the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is funded into the future. The LIS supports the improvement of rural roads and laneways that are not normally maintained by local authorities. The scheme makes an important contribution to connectivity in rural Ireland.

The Scheme was reintroduced in 2017 following a number of years with no dedicated funding. Since then, my Department has allocated €80 million towards improvement works on over 3,000 non-public roads and lanes. These works have benefited over 13,300 landowners and residents in these rural areas.

I launched the 2021 Scheme with an initial budget of €10.5 million and I allocated additional funding last year from savings within my Department's vote, effectively doubling investment to bring the total expended under the Scheme in 2021 to €21 million.

I was pleased, as part of Budget 2022, to announce an increase in the base funding for LIS from €10.5 million to €11 million this year. I announced details of the 2022 Local Improvement Scheme earlier today, including the allocations to each individual county.

I have also recently written again to my colleague, Minister Eamon Ryan, T.D., to explore whether funding may be available from the Department of Transport to support the scheme. I believe a cross-Government approach might reap dividends in dealing with the backlog of applications on hand and I will continue to keep all options open in this regard.

## Rural Schemes

94. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the level of funding drawn down for local improvement schemes in County Cork for 2021; if all funding allocated to Cork County Council under the scheme for 2021 was drawn down; if not, if these moneys will be available to draw down as additional to the 2022 allocation to Cork County Council; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17926/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As part of *Our Rural Future*, the Government is committed to ensuring that the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is funded into the future. The LIS supports the improvement of rural roads and laneways that are not normally maintained by local authorities. The scheme makes an important contribution to connectivity in rural Ireland.

I launched the 2021 scheme with an initial budget of €10.5 million. Cork was allocated €920,000, primarily based on the physical area of the County. This amount represented the maximum level of funding allocated to any individual county.

I sourced additional funding last year from savings within my Department's vote, effectively doubling investment to bring the total for 2021 to €21 million. This additional funding was allocated based on each local authority's view as to their capacity to deliver improvement works by year-end.

Cork County Council submitted a request for funding of €700,000 under this second tranche,

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which was over-subscribed. It was determined each county would be allocated just over 70% of the amount requested. As a result, Cork County Council was awarded €492,738 in this second tranche. Thus, last year the total allocation to Cork amounted to €1,412,738

Local authorities were advised that their 2022 allocation would be impacted by any shortfall in delivery of funding in 2021. The total funding utilised for the delivery of roads in Cork in 2021 was €1,315,172, leading to a shortfall of €97,566.

My Department permitted Cork County Council to drawdown €95,000 of this shortfall in 2021 and to carry it over to spend on roads in 2022. An equivalent amount was then deducted from their allocation in 2022.

I announced earlier today details of an €11 million allocation for LIS in 2022. The allocation for Cork in 2022, excluding the funding carried over from 2021, is €879,099.

### **Harbours and Piers**

95. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to Parliamentary Question No. 12 of 17 February 2022, the status of the development of the pier on Inis Oírr; the engagement that her Department has had with Galway County Council and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to date in 2022 in relation to moving forward with the development of the pier; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17841/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy is aware, Galway County Council is the responsible authority for the maintenance and development of infrastructure on the Aran islands.

The development of the pier on Inis Oírr is listed amongst the strategic objectives set out in Project Ireland 2040. A steering committee consisting of representatives from my Department, Galway County Council and the Consulting Engineers has been meeting generally every two weeks to monitor progress.

The Department has approved the business case for the development of the pier and Galway County Council is now in the process of resolving a number of pre-construction issues prior to issuing a request for tenders for the development. These issues include: preparing CPO applications, development of bye-laws for the regulation of the pier and the application for a foreshore licence.

The Council has published a draft of the bye-laws and has collated submissions received from the public and is currently preparing a report based on those submissions. The CPO applications are also being finalised.

It is the Sponsoring Agency, Galway County Council in this case, rather than my Department, that engages with the Foreshore Unit in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

I understand that following the application for a foreshore licence and consultation with the Foreshore Unit, Galway County Council is undertaking a gap analysis study to ascertain the additional information needed from the original environmental reports that were submitted a number of years ago and to bring those reports up to current requirements. It is estimated that this will be completed in early May.

## Departmental Funding

96. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the forthcoming timelines for the funding streams under her remit, specifically the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, CLÁR, town and village and other funds that may be forthcoming; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17920/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department recently published opening and closing dates, which are decided upon for DRCD investment programmes for 2022, at the following link [assets.gov.ie/218465/a39f6b0f-38ef-4917-8c1a-4e17e4a3c676.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/218465/a39f6b0f-38ef-4917-8c1a-4e17e4a3c676.pdf).

In addition:

- The proposed PEACE PLUS Programme 2021-2027 is awaiting approval by the EU Commission. It is anticipated that the programme will be launched during 2022 and managed by the Special EU Programmes body, with a total value of over €1 billion.

- A call for proposals to support the continued roll-out of the *My Open Library* service is expected to issue from my Department to local authorities in Quarter 2 2022.

- LEADER is a multi-annual programme which is delivered through 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) around the country. The Transitional LEADER Programme came into effect from 1 April 2021 and will run to the end of 2022.

- The Community Centres Investment Fund is now scheduled to open this month (April).

Visit [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd) for further information on DRCD programme opening dates, as they become available.

## Rural Schemes

97. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the next Leader programme will become operational; the total funding in place for the programme; the funding that will be allocated for the programme in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17950/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The LEADER Programme is one of the key interventions of Our Rural Future, the Government's Policy for rural development launched last year.

An indicative budget of €180 million is allocated for the LEADER programme for the period 2023-2027. With the €70 million already provided for 2021 and 2022 under the Transitional LEADER Programme, a total of €250 million will be made available for the 2021 - 2027 period, thus maintaining the level of funding provided for the 2014-2020 programming period.

The draft CAP Strategic Plan, which includes LEADER, was submitted to the EU Commission by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at the end of December 2021. This is in line with the timelines set by the EU Commission.

The process of negotiating and agreeing the plan with the EU Commission has thus commenced. The timeline for implementation of the new LEADER Programme is closely linked to this process.

Accordingly, my officials will continue to work closely with colleagues from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and the EU Commission over the coming months with a view to obtaining approval for the CAP Strategic Plan, as a matter of priority.

Preparations for the design and delivery of the next LEADER programme from 2023-2027 are underway and my officials are also engaging with stakeholders in this regard. Decisions relating to all aspects of the programme including the distribution of funding at county level, will form part of the new programme design phase.

The ongoing engagement and consultation combined with the funding allocation ensures that the LEADER programme from 2023 will continue to support and further develop our rural communities and businesses.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

98. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the steps that she is taking to ensure Ukrainian citizens fleeing conflict who are accommodated in rural areas have access to vital services to support their integration into the community (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17934/22]

111. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the steps that have been taken to help support the integration of Ukrainian refugees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17957/22]

119. **Deputy Brian Leddin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development her views on the best way that her Department can support Ukrainian refugees, particularly in relation to access to local services and mobility; the measures that have already been taken by her Department in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17958/22]

125. **Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position regarding the measures taken by her Department to support the community integration of persons fleeing from Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18045/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 98, 111, 119 and 125 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, Government is working to ensure that local capacity, resources and knowledge are brought to bear on the overall humanitarian response to people fleeing Ukraine and seeking protection in Ireland.

My Department is contributing to the effort by linking with key stakeholders at community level, providing information, assisting the co-ordination of supports through the community sector, and enabling flexibility in programme delivery to shift focus on the Ukraine response. In this regard, my Department has offered every flexibility to Local Development Companies, freeing around 600 Community Development Workers to help support arrivals from Ukraine into their locality. In addition, organisations supported under the Community Services Programme can include Ukrainian arrivals in the target groups for their services. In some cases, exceptional additional funding for staff resources is being provided by my Department to organisations providing volunteer support in frontline reception hubs.

My Department has committed to meeting regularly with key national stakeholders from the Community and Voluntary sector and recently hosted an information webinar attended by

over 160 participants from organisations involved in the Ukraine response effort. The webinar provided information, disseminated key messages and encouraged communication and co-ordination.

I recognise that the capacity, willingness and expertise exists at local level to co-ordinate responses, signpost services, and link voluntary and statutory efforts. Huge efforts were made by volunteers during the pandemic, and dedicated volunteers across the country are already working again to help people from Ukraine arriving in Ireland. Government is working to ensure that local capacity, resources and knowledge are brought to bear on the overall humanitarian response and will work closely with Local Authorities to ensure a well-co-ordinated and seamless approach.

Building on structures developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Community Response Fora are being repurposed in each local authority area. The role of each Forum will be to coordinate the community-led response in the provision of assistance and support to Ukrainian refugees as they are accommodated around the country.

In this regard, my Department, together with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, has prepared a Community Response Framework to guide that work. It sets out a national template for arrangements to be put in place in each area to enable all involved at a local level to work together to support the integration of Ukrainian refugees to our communities, under the stewardship of the local authorities.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are strategically well-placed to assist with the local responses, linking in with state bodies represented on the LCDCs and with other local authority services and initiatives. In this regard, both the Chair and the Chief Officer of the LCDC are members of the relevant Community Response Forum.

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) in many local authority areas are serving as networking and information hubs for community and local member groups in their area. PPNs are providing information and resources on how people can assist or donate aid, and coordinating information from those responding to the crisis.

Our volunteer support programme, which includes Volunteer Ireland and the network of volunteer centres, is heavily engaged in sourcing volunteers to address the many requests for specific volunteer roles emerging across the country. These include reception centres, provision of basic supplies, integration services, access to information, etc. The Community Volunteers pilot programme is also providing a way for local communities to offer support to those in need. Developed based on lessons learned about volunteering during COVID-19, the programme is funded by my Department, coordinated by Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres, and supported by the Local Authority in each area.

The response to COVID-19 showed what we can achieve by working together: national government, local government, and community, voluntary and local development sectors. My Department is coordinating with all our stakeholders, including LCDCs, Volunteer Centres, Community Volunteers, and Public Participation Networks, to maximise the effectiveness of the response.

### **Local Development Companies**

99. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to a statement by An Taoiseach in November 2021 (details supplied), if she will provide an update on the proposed actions arising from this work; her plans to have such actions imple-

mented; and if she will provide an update of the first meeting of the strategic implementation group her Department is supplying to the secretariat. [17932/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** My Department supports Local Development Companies (sometimes referred to as 'area partnerships') via SICAP, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.

SICAP aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality by supporting communities and individuals using community development approaches, engagement and collaboration. SICAP actions are delivered by 46 local development companies nationwide.

It should be noted that the first meeting of the Strategic Implementation Group (4) of Reducing Harm and Supporting Recovery took place on the 25th of February. This group comprises sectoral, agency and Departmental officials. This introductory meeting was an information sharing exercise, identifying the members' areas of work and scoping relevant actions. These actions will be built upon and an implementation plan will be produced. A further three meetings are scheduled for later this year.

Local and regional drug and alcohol task forces fall under the remit of the Department of Health.

### **Parking Provision**

100. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding that is currently available for carpark facilities at amenities in rural areas such as a facility (details supplied) in County Laois. [17930/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department provides a wide range of investment programmes to support the development of rural areas, including through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the LEADER Programme, the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and the CLÁR programme. I would encourage potential applicants to engage with their local authority or LEADER Local Action Group to discuss the investment programme that is most suitable to their needs.

As regards the specific project referred to by the Deputy, the CLÁR programme provides funding under a number of different measures for small-scale infrastructural projects in designated rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population over a defined period. Applications are currently being accepted via local authorities for funding up to a maximum of €50,000 for community facilities, including car parking, under Measure 1 of the CLÁR programme. However, I understand that the location referred to by the Deputy may not be located in a CLÁR area.

The 2022 Outdoor Recreation Scheme was launched on 18th February last and provides funding to support access to outdoor infrastructure. Funding for car park access may be considered under that scheme where it improves access to recreational infrastructure and where it is part of the wider development of the linked outdoor amenity.

Funding may also be available through the LEADER Programme for the type of project referred to by the Deputy. LEADER is a multi-annual programme which is delivered through 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) around the country.

Support under the LEADER programme is provided under a broad range of themes, includ-

ing Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. This theme focuses on driving continued local economic development, including diversification of the rural economy, and the creation of employment opportunities for the local community.

In order for a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy for the relevant LEADER area, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme. Prospective applicants should, in the first instance, contact their relevant LAG, through its Implementing Partner, to discuss the eligibility of the project and the funding that may be available. The list of all Local Action Groups, their Implementing Partners and their contact details, is available on the Gov.ie website at: [www.gov.ie/en/publication/c45498-local-action-groups](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c45498-local-action-groups).

### **Digital Hubs**

101. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if her Department is exploring the possibility of establishing longer-term agreements between businesses and remote working hubs to enable more structured remote working schedules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17959/22]

958. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if her Department will examine the option of longer-term agreements between businesses and hubs which will allow more structured remote working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18023/22]

964. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if her Department is exploring the possibility of longer-term agreements between businesses and hubs to enable more structured remote working, particularly in rural communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18079/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 101, 958 and 964 together.

The National Hub Network currently comprises 223 remote and co-working facilities across the State. These facilities have been onboarded to [connectedhubs.ie](http://connectedhubs.ie), the shared online platform that handles bookings and payments for member hubs and their users.

It is expected that, in time, the National Hub Network and the [connectedhubs.ie](http://connectedhubs.ie) platform will include more than 400 facilities.

I have been clear throughout my tenure as Minister for Rural and Community Development that balanced regional development, sustainable and thriving communities, and indeed the wider national economy will all benefit from workers and employers embracing the remote working revolution.

At this stage of the development of the hub sector, particularly in rural areas, there is still a strong focus on the individual remote worker. Pricing plans are constructed with affordability for the worker in mind and bookings are, in general, made by the individual.

However, and as the Deputy will be aware, there are significant opportunities for employers of all sizes to leverage the National Hub Network directly. More workers than ever are expressing a preference for remote work and more employers, noting the strong professional performance of so many remote workers, see their own interests reflected in the those of their employees.



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The connectedhubs.ie team have for some time been developing a corporate service to engage with and support corporate clients interested in using our nationwide network to accommodate their employees, but also to gain access to the vast pool of talent that Ireland has to offer, whether those talented people live in our cities, towns, villages or rural parishes.

I will monitor the development of the corporate service with interest, as I believe this represents another great step forward for the National hub Network.

## Digital Hubs

102. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the connected hubs fund; and the number of applications that have been received. [17863/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** *Our Rural Future*, Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, recognises the potential of remote working hubs as key economic assets for our rural towns and villages. Notwithstanding the clear benefits to individuals and families in terms of quality of life indicators, remote working from hubs will also support local economies, reduce carbon emissions and may arrest or reverse the depopulation of certain areas.

Last May, I launched the National Connected Hubs network together with the connectedhubs.ie platform. The platform offers a suite of booking and hub management applications to members of the Network. There are currently 223 hubs live on the platform, with this number increasing on an ongoing basis.

In 2021, under the first Connected Hubs Call, almost €9 million was awarded to more than 100 remote and co-working hubs, including a significant number of public Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) throughout the country. This funding mechanism is designed to ensure additional capacity and improved facilities and to support the long-term viability of existing hubs.

In February, I announced a further €5 million for the sector under the 2022 Connected Hubs Call. The call closed to applications at 6pm yesterday evening, Monday 4th April. My officials are currently evaluating the applications submitted and I expect to announce the successful applicants in the next few weeks.

Details of all these schemes and successful applications will be available at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

The development of a National Hubs Network is a key commitment in *Our Rural Future* and I am committed to continuing my Department's support for the ongoing development of a comprehensive and integrated network of remote working hubs in recognition of the vital role that they can play in our post-Covid recovery.

## Land Issues

103. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when she intends to bring forward proposals regarding the indemnification of farmers with land that is accessible by the public for hill walking. [17900/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department has, for some time, been examining how best to introduce a scheme to indemnify private land owners in upland areas who allow access to their lands for recreational purposes.

This is a complex issue and my Department has been advised that an indemnity scheme such as has been proposed would require legislative provision and that a number of separate pieces of legislation might need to be amended.

In light of the complexities involved, my officials have been considering alternative pilot approaches, including an insurance solution, to address the matter on an interim basis. Through this process, a public liability insurance policy was secured by my Department for the two existing Mountain Access Project areas, the MacGillycuddy Reeks in Kerry and Binn Sléibhe in Galway, and came in to effect in August 2021.

This pilot solution was developed in consultation with Comhairle na Tuaithe and is being implemented on a two year trial basis. The policy represents a substantial step forward on this matter for landowners in the two Mountain Access Project areas involved.

Other options around indemnity and potential amendments to the Occupiers' Liability Act will continue to be explored and progressed over the coming months, including as part of the development of the new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy. My Department is also engaging further with the Attorney General on this matter.

### **Digital Hubs**

104. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on the funding for hubs under the connected hubs funding stream to facilitate remote working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17940/22]

962. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on the funding for hubs under the connected hubs funding stream; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18064/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 104 and 962 together.

*Our Rural Future*, the Government's Rural Development Policy, clearly recognises the transformative effect that remote working can have for employers and employees all across the country.

In recognition of this, my Department continues to invest heavily in the establishment and development of remote work hub facilities through various funding streams.

In May last year I launched the National Connected Hubs network - [connectedhubs.ie](https://connectedhubs.ie). There are currently over 220 hubs live on the platform, with this number rising on an ongoing basis. This represents significant progress within the first year of the existence of the network.

Details for the onboarded hub facilities can be obtained via the Connected hubs platform - [www.connectedhubs.ie](https://www.connectedhubs.ie)

I recently launched the Connected Hubs mobile app, which allow users to find their nearest hub facility and easily book a desk space using their mobile device. The Connected Hubs mobile app can be downloaded from the Apple App Store for iOS devices and the Google Play Store for Android.

Last year, I allocated almost €9 million to the 2021 Connected Hubs Fund, which supported over 100 hubs and BCPs, and enabled them to develop and leverage the capacity and quality of existing remote working facilities across the country.

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In February this year, I launched the 2022 Connected Hubs Call, a €5 million funding stream to further support remote working facilities, including Broadband Connection Points (BCPs), throughout the country and add further capacity to the National Hub Network. The closing date for this round of funding was 4 April.

The National Hub Network includes a diverse range of hubs, services and facilities, thus facilitating the needs of different employers and employees across Ireland. To date my focus has been on establishing the network and on achieving the initial critical mass. Following strong progress on the establishment phase of the project, my focus has now shifted to the next stage of development.

To this end, my officials have been consulting with hub managers across the country, and with other stake holders, to better inform the future strategic direction of the National Hub Network and of the connectedhubs.ie platform. I also recently announced the commencement of a major promotional campaign which will serve to raise awareness of the services available on connectedhubs.ie.

This shift of focus will help to ensure that the network continues to provide the level of service that employers and employees need as Covid restrictions are eased.

I am committed to continuing my Department's support for the ongoing development of a comprehensive and integrated network of remote working hubs in recognition of the vital role that they can play in our post-Covid recovery.

### **Broadband Infrastructure**

105. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development her Department's engagements regarding the report by the European Parliament in relation to regional connectivity and smart villages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18042/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** While my Department has not been directly engaged with the drafting of the report referred to, my officials have been active in this space for several years.

The Smart Villages concept is primarily about rural communities making best use of both technology and social innovation to respond to ongoing and emerging challenges.

In a recent briefing issued by the Commission, one of the barriers to the expansion of the Smart Village model identified across the EU was the lack of sufficient connectivity. The need for reliable, high-speed broadband has been recognised by the government and, accordingly, the National Broadband Plan (NBP) has commenced.

Notwithstanding delivery of the NBP, which is a matter for the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, my department has, through a number of schemes and initiatives, supported the development of Smart Communities, Villages, Towns and Cities for several years.

For example, the Broadband Connection Point (BCP) initiative is, by its very nature, a Smart Community programme of significant scale. When complete, 300 publicly accessible and broadband-enabled community hubs will make onsite connectivity available to enable a range of initiatives in areas such as the delivery of digital skills training and remote work and study.

Since early 2020, officials at my department have been investigating opportunities to further develop the smart offering at BCPs and have, to date, rolled out eHealth, arts and culture, digital skills training (including for older people) and remote work / study pilot programmes. These pilots will be expanded and scaled up over 2022 and into 2023.

The Smart Villages concept underlines the need for a greater focus on empowering communities at local level if rural areas are to thrive in the coming decades.

The LEADER Programme is one of the key interventions of *Our Rural Future*, the Government's policy for rural development. Given its reach and history, the LEADER programme can play an essential part in the Smart Villages concept in terms of mobilising and empowering local communities, in developing their capacity to design and implement community-led initiatives and promoting innovation and experimentation.

Preparations for the design and delivery of the next LEADER programme from 2023-2027 are well underway and support for the development of Smart Village Strategies will be strongly encouraged as part of that programme.

### **Community Development Projects**

106. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development her Department's plans to expand the community centres investment fund to include a strand specifically dedicated to the establishment of community centre facilities in communities in which none currently exists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17960/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department currently provides a number of funding streams which can be used for the improvement and development of Community Centres throughout the country.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) provides funding for the development and construction of large scale capital projects in towns and villages and rural areas across Ireland. I announced the fourth call for Category 1 applications in December 2021, with a closing date for applications of 29 April 2022.

Funding for community centre projects may also be available through the LEADER Transitional programme. This covers the period 2021-2022, and came into effect on 1 April 2021 for new project applications. The LEADER programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the county.

The Community Centres Investment Fund is a new capital fund with a budget of €15m to support community groups with the upgrade and refurbishment of existing community centres. This is an investment in both rural and urban communities across the country. It should be noted that the development of new community centres is not covered by the Fund.

The Community Centres Investment Fund will support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and development of their community centre facilities.

The fund will assist with projects such as:

- Energy retrofitting projects that reduce an organisation's carbon footprint;
- Works to address safety concerns, including as a result of fire safety audits;
- Works to improve disability access;

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- Works to improve communal facilities such as kitchen and toilet facilities, and
- Essential maintenance

Funding will be available under 3 Strands with grants of between €10k and €300K available:

- Strand 1: Small scale projects/improvements to facilities €10,000 - €25,000.
- Strand 2: Larger scale projects - €25,001 to €100,000.
- Strand 3: Major projects. €100,001 to €300,000.

I expect the fund to open to applications shortly. Guidelines and application forms will be available on my Department's website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd).

### **Parking Provision**

107. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding will be provided for a carpark at the Woodenbridge, Ballacolla, County Laois to facilitate better usage of the amenities located there. [17931/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department provides a wide range of investment programmes to support the development of rural areas, including through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the LEADER Programme, the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and the CLÁR programme. I would encourage potential applicants to engage with their local authority or LEADER Local Action Group to discuss the investment programme that is most suitable to their needs.

More details would be required in respect of the specific project referred to by the Deputy before indicating the most appropriate investment programme. The CLÁR programme provides funding under a number of different measures for small-scale infrastructural projects in designated rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population over a defined period. Applications are currently being accepted via Local Authorities for funding up to a maximum of €50,000 for community facilities, including car parking, under Measure 1 of the CLÁR programme. However, I understand that the location referred to by the Deputy may not be located in a CLÁR area.

The 2022 Outdoor Recreation Scheme was launched on 18th February last and provides funding to support access to outdoor infrastructure. Funding for car park access may be considered under that scheme where it improves access to recreational infrastructure and where it is part of the wider development of the linked outdoor amenity.

Funding may also be available through the LEADER Programme for the type of project referred to by the Deputy. LEADER is a multi-annual programme which is delivered through 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) around the country.

Support under the LEADER programme is provided under a broad range of themes, including Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation. This theme focuses on driving continued local economic development, including diversification of the rural economy, and the creation of employment opportunities for the local community.

In order for a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be compatible with the

actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy for the relevant LEADER area, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme. Prospective applicants should, in the first instance, contact their relevant LAG, through its Implementing Partner, to discuss the eligibility of the project and the funding that may be available. The list of all Local Action Groups, their Implementing Partners and their contact details, is available on the Gov.ie website at: [www.gov.ie/en/publication/c45498-local-action-groups](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c45498-local-action-groups).

### Regeneration Projects

108. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if it is intended to reintroduce town councils to assist with the town centre first policy. [17865/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government recently published *Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns*. This publication represents a major new policy that aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres.

The policy contains 33 actions which will give our towns the tools and resources they need to become more viable and attractive places in which to live, work, socialise and run a business. It will support Town Teams to develop their own Town Centre First (TCF) Plans

The TCF Plans will be developed collaboratively with local Town Teams involving community and business groups, as well as public and private stakeholders. There is no recommendation in the Town Centre First Policy as regards town councils, although local public representatives will have an important role in the process as part of the Town Teams, and through their role in directing the work of the local authorities.

The TCF Plans will cover the importance of “place-making”, town centre living, and the social and economic purpose of the town. They should respond to emerging opportunities such as those linked to remote working, climate action and digitalisation. The plans will also be central to addressing vacancy and dereliction.

The new policy refers to the provision of Town Regeneration Officers (TROs). TROs will be appointed in local authorities to drive the implementation of TCF and will be crucial to managing the implementation of the policy at a local level and ensuring the development and implementation of TCF plans.

I was delighted to secure additional funding for of €2 million for these posts in Budget 2022. As a result, it is envisaged that a TRO will be appointed in local authority areas across the country.

### Departmental Policies

109. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on the progress she has made in delivering the Our Rural Future policy. [18044/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Our Rural Future 2021-2025 is the most ambitious rural development policy for Ireland in decades.

It was published in March 2021 and contains more than 150 measures across the whole of Government, for both short-term recovery and longer-term development.

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Updates on the implementation of the five-year policy will be provided by a series of Progress Reports. Annual work programmes will also be published and will allow for priorities to be updated in light of emerging opportunities and challenges.

The First Progress Report, which was published in February, provides updates on a total of 216 actions contained in the 2021 Work Programme for delivery right across Government. I was delighted with the level of achievement detailed in the report, which saw a completion rate of just under 80% on actions to be carried out under the 2021 Work Programme.

There are a number of ongoing actions also reported on, and the progress report shows significant progress across these actions as well as on many of the individual actions which were not completed as planned in 2021.

A new Work Programme for 2022 is currently being finalised in conjunction with Departments and I expect to publish this shortly. However, I can say that it will demonstrate continued commitment to realising the ambitions of Our Rural Future, including the development of some new measures and actions under the policy.

Many of these actions are already underway, and updates on these will be provided in further Progress Reports to be produced every six months, as per the commitment in the policy.

*Question No. 110 answered with Question No. 75.*

*Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 98.*

### **Vacant Properties**

112. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the financial support that has been made available to local authorities in order to bring vacant properties in town centres back into use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17941/22]

963. **Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the detail of the financial support provided to local authorities to bring vacant properties in town centres back into use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18065/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 112 and 963 together.

The Government recently published *Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns*. This represents a whole of Government policy and aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres.

The policy is underpinned by significant levels of public investment spread across major Government schemes such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), the Croí Conaithe (Towns) Fund and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS).

The 2021 TVRS prioritised the renovation of derelict and vacant buildings in our town centres, with a view to bringing these buildings back into use as remote working hubs, multi-purpose community spaces, and/or for residential occupancy.

While the details of the 2022 scheme are still being finalised, there is no doubt that we will again be prioritising projects that bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy in town centres. I will be announcing the details of the 2022 scheme

shortly.

The RRDF has now provided €278 million for 191 projects with an investment of some €376 million. The fourth call for Category 1 application is now open for applications until the 29th April 2022. Category One projects are those that have full planning and other consents in place and are ready to commence at the date of application. This will assist in revitalising our rural towns and villages through planned, sustainable regeneration and development including addressing vacancy and the re-use of heritage and other existing buildings.

€50 million in funding is also available under tCroí Cónaithe fund to help service sites and refurbish properties in towns and villages. This scheme is administered by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

### **Rural Schemes**

113. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if additional transitional funding will be allocated for the Leader programme pending the commencement of the new programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17951/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The LEADER programme is a key intervention implemented by my Department, which will help to underpin the Government's rural development goals as outlined in Our Rural Future.

I announced details last year of a €70 million Transitional LEADER Programme which came into effect in April 2021 and will cover the period 2021-2022. €65 million of this budget has been allocated to the LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver the programme and approve projects at local level. This allocation covers both core project expenditure and the administration and animation costs of the LAGs. In addition, in the event that a LAG fully utilises their allocation of administration funding, they can avail of a maximum monthly contribution that will be Exchequer funded and will be available to them to the end of 2022.

A further €3 million of the funding has been allocated to support co-operation projects and innovation between LAGs, while the remaining €2 million has been allocated to provide preparatory support for the next LEADER programme.

I am confident that this level of funding will be sufficient to meet the demand for grant funding from rural communities and businesses and to continue the effective operation of the transitional LEADER Programme through to the end of 2022.

### **Offshore Islands**

114. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on the forthcoming island development strategy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17894/22]

128. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on the islands action plan. [18054/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 128 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government is committed to publishing a 10 year policy



on island development with associated three year action plans. Work on the policy is underway and my Department has now completed the bilateral meetings with all relevant Government Departments. These bilateral meetings have provided an opportunity for detailed discussion of the issues raised by island communities and for Departments to assess how they might help address the various issues raised.

A number of islands have requested that a consultation meeting be held in person on the island in order for the community to have an opportunity to have an input into the policy. Due to Covid-19 it was not possible for officials to visit islands and these islands did not wish to engage with on-line meetings. The Department has now agreed to these meetings and I understand that they will be held after Easter.

At the most recent meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee for the Islands, participating Departments reviewed progress on the policy development and agreed the next steps to be taken. It was agreed that the various Departments would submit a list of action points that they could undertake to further enhance the future development and sustainability of communities on our offshore islands.

Work has begun on an initial draft of the policy document and I understand that, based on the development work to date, a draft is expected to be ready for my consideration by the middle of this year.

### **Regeneration Projects**

115. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a town regeneration officer can be assigned to Macroom, County Cork under the town centre first programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17925/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government recently published *Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns*. This publication represents a major new policy that aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres. It contains 33 actions which will give our towns the tools and resources they need to become more viable and attractive places in which to live, work, socialise and run a business.

Some 26 towns have already been allocated funding of €100,000 to produce their Town Centre First Plans, including Skibbereen in Cork. Additional towns in Cork and across the country will be supported to also develop plans as the policy is rolled out. Action 3 of the new policy refers to the provision of Town Regeneration Officers (TROs). Town Regeneration Officers will be appointed in local authorities to drive the implementation of Town Centre First. They will be crucial to managing the implementation of the policy at a local level and to ensuring the development and implementation of Town Centre First plans. The role of the Town Regeneration Officers is outlined in Appendix 6 of the policy and includes supporting and building the capacity of the Town Teams.

I was delighted to secure additional funding of €2 million for these posts in Budget 2022. As a result, it is envisaged that a Town Regeneration Officer will be appointed in local authority areas across the country, including in Cork County Council. The officers will be responsible for delivery of the Town Centre First policy across the local authority area rather than being assigned solely to an individual town.

## Regeneration Projects

116. **Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there is a timeline for when town regeneration officers will be appointed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18043/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government recently published *Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns*. This publication represents a major new policy that aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres. It contains 33 actions which will give our towns the tools and resources they need to become more viable and attractive places in which to live, work, socialise and run a business. Action 3 of the new policy refers to the provision of Town Regeneration Officers (TROs). The TROs will be appointed in local authorities to drive the implementation of Town Centre First (TCF). TROs will be crucial to managing the implementation of the policy at a local level and ensuring the development and implementation of TCF plans. The role of the Town Regeneration Officers is outlined in the policy.

I was delighted to secure additional funding of €2 million for these posts in Budget 2022. As a result, it is envisaged that a TRO will be appointed in local authority areas across the country.

A National Town Centre First Office will drive the delivery of many of the recommendations outlined in the policy and support the co-ordinated roll-out of the policy by local authorities, Town Regeneration Officers, and Town Teams.

My Department has agreed the structure and funding for the national implementation office and the Town Regeneration Officers with local authorities. The first step is the recruitment of the head of the National Implementation Office which will be progressed shortly, and the recruitment of Town Regeneration Officers will follow on from this in the coming weeks.

## Refugee Resettlement Programme

117. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the pathways that have been developed in relation to community services programmes throughout the country to activate new and existing schemes under the remit of her Department for those community services programmes that are involved in assisting refugees from Ukraine; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17918/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** A whole of government approach is being adopted to support the Ukrainian refugees arriving in Ireland.

My Department's Community Services Programme (CSP), which is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department, currently supports over 420 community organisations nationwide, to provide an extensive range of local services and facilities within local communities, through a social enterprise model.

At a webinar held for key stakeholders on 16th March, my Department advised that its existing programmes could be utilised to support the needs of Ukrainian refugees arriving into our communities. My Department and Pobal are monitoring the situation closely, particularly as it affects the CSP Programme. Organisations funded under the CSP can include Ukrainians who have fled the war among the target groups for their services. Arriving Ukrainians are provided with an immediate right to work, and so are entitled to obtain a PPS number and to take up va-

cancies in CSP funded organisations.

In this regard, my Department has in recent days received a request for additional staffing in one of our CSP supported organisations in County Clare, which is currently being used as the central community hub to co-ordinate the local response. I am pleased to advise that an additional Full Time Equivalent position in the organisation was approved by my Department on 29 March with a start date of 1st April, to support the response effort.

Any further requests for such support under the CSP Programme will be dealt with by my Department on a case by case basis.

### **Regeneration Projects**

118. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of a town and village renewal scheme application by a centre (details supplied). [17843/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Town and Village Renewal Scheme aims to assist with the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages throughout Ireland, making them more attractive places to live, work and visit.

In line with the commitment in Our Rural Future, the 2021 scheme prioritised the renovation of derelict and vacant buildings in our town centres, with a view to bringing these buildings back into use. The scale of projects eligible under the scheme was also increased with funding of up to €500,000 available.

Under the 2021 scheme, each Local Authority was invited to submit up to 8 projects to the Department for consideration. Selection of projects for submission to the Department was a matter for each Local Authority to determine.

Almost 191 applications were received under the 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the level of funding sought far exceeded the available budget. Funding under the Scheme was awarded on a competitive basis, with all applications being assessed for suitability for funding.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to fund all of the proposals received and the application referred to by the Deputy was not among the 99 successful projects approved for funding of almost €18.3 million that I announced on 25th February.

It should be noted however that the opportunity is open to the community to review their application and resubmit to the Local Authority for consideration under the 2022 scheme which will be announced shortly, or alternatively to look at other avenues for funding a project like this proposal such as through LEADER or the Community Enhancement Programme.

*Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 98.*

### **Offshore Islands**

120. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress that has been made in addressing action 136 of the Rural Development Policy 2021-

2025 (details supplied). [18053/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government's objective is that sustainable, vibrant communities can continue to live on the country's offshore islands. My Department recognises that for this to be achieved it is essential that investment is made in the maintenance and upgrading of island infrastructure. To this end, I have increased the allocation available for capital works on the islands from €2.64m in 2021 to €4.64m for 2022.

This will enable me to approve an expanded works programme this year, which will include the annual programme for Minor Capital Works on the offshore islands, co-funded by the relevant Local Authorities. So far this year, I have approved works to the value of €2.09m on non-county roads on Donegal islands.

Additionally, island projects set out in Project Ireland 2040 are being progressed this year. These include three major harbour projects, namely: improvement works to piers on Inis Oírr and Inis Meáin in Co. Galway and at Machaire Rabhartaigh serving Oileán Thoraigh in Donegal. These projects are all at different stages in their development and they will continue to be progressed as rapidly as possible.

### Departmental Staff

121. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of staff employed by her Department in each of the years since 2017, in tabular form. [17984/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19th July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland.

I can confirm that the number of staff employed by my Department between 2017 and 2022 is as follows.

Year	Number of Staff (At year end)
2017	123
2018	151
2019	153
2020	169
2021	171
2022 (as of 30/03/2022)	181

### Refugee Resettlement Programme

122. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the actions she is taking to ensure that the large volumes of Ukrainian refugees being accommodated in small communities are supported to achieve the best outcome for those refugees and the communities themselves; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17928/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I have witnessed first-hand the great work being done by the community and voluntary sector to welcome new arrivals from the Ukraine. One local development company has welcomed over

200 families and provided them with services such as English language classes, translation services, access to computers, and assistance with setting up bank accounts.

Building on structures developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, new Community Response Fora are also being repurposed in each local authority area. These will enable all those involved at a local level to work together to support the integration of Ukrainian refugees. The role of each Forum will be to coordinate the community-led response in the provision of assistance and support to Ukrainian refugees as they are accommodated around the country.

My own department's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), is our country's primary social inclusion intervention. SICAP aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality. It is delivered in both rural and urban areas by Local Development Companies (LDCs) who work with the most disadvantaged and the hardest to reach in communities.

SICAP staff have valuable experience and knowledge of supporting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in their areas and will continue to ensure the emerging needs of their locality are responded to also. Every flexibility is being offered by the Department in relation to SICAP and approximately 600 Community Development Workers have been tasked with prioritising work around supporting people arriving from the Ukraine into their locality.

### **Broadband Infrastructure**

123. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there are plans to further increase the number of broadband connection points available across the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17968/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) identification and selection process closed at the end of 2020 resulting in 300 public sites identified for a broadband connection. Since then approximately 259 Public BCPs have been connected by National Broadband Ireland (NBI) and are now in operation, with a further 41 Public BCPs due to come on stream in the coming months.

As the selection process for NBI-connected BCPs is now closed, my Department cannot directly increase the number of BCPs across the country by providing connectivity. However, it is our intention allow appropriate facilities and premises that are able to secure their own connectivity to join the nationwide BCP network in 2022.

The addition of sites to the national network will form part of the 2 year development strategy for Public BCPs currently being developed. This development strategy will also support the scaling up of successful pilot projects that commenced this year, including eHealth, remote working, arts and culture and digital skills programmes.

Membership of the network will provide new BCPs with access to a range of supports including a peer network, development programmes and activities, and specific funding opportunities available only to BCPs.

I would strongly recommend that interested communities engage with their local authority Broadband Officer and should also feel free to contact officials at my department for further information via [rdi@drd.gov.ie](mailto:rdi@drd.gov.ie).

### **Rural Schemes**

124. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she can outline a pathway forward for a proposed marine training facility in west County Clare, which was unsuccessful in an application for funding. [17861/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The project referred to by the Deputy was the subject of an application to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) under the 3rd call for Category 2 applications in 2021.

Calls for applications to the RRDF are sought under two categories – Category 1 and Category 2. Category 1 relates to large scale ambitious capital projects with all necessary planning and other consents in place and which are ready to proceed. Category 2 provides smaller grant funding to enable the development of project proposals suitable for future calls for Category 1 applications

On foot of the aforementioned call for applications, in January 2022 I announced that 27 projects had been successful and approved €21.5m in development funding for the projects.

The application for the marine training centre for Kilrush, which was led by Clare County Council, was indeed unsuccessful and my Department provided feedback to the Council, as well as other unsuccessful applicants, following the conclusion of the process.

It is now a matter for the Council and its key partners to develop an appropriate funding strategy to progress the project. In terms of the RRDF, my Department is currently accepting Category 1 applications until April 29th 2022 and a further call for Category 2 applications will be opened later this year.

*Question No. 125 answered with Question No. 98.*

### **Community Development Projects**

126. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will provide further information on the pub as community hubs pilot programme; the way the pubs in the four counties involved in the pilot will be selected; the length of time the pilot will run for; the way funding will be allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17893/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In line with a commitment given in “Our Rural Future”, funding of €50,000 has been allocated to the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) to support a “Pubs as Community Hubs” pilot programme.

“Pubs as Community Hubs” will explore how the rural pub can be utilised as a space for community activities and services which may not be currently available locally.

Funded under the CLÁR Innovation Programme, the initiative is being rolled out on a pilot basis. The process of selecting five rural pubs in Cavan, Donegal, Clare, Cork and Kerry is now underway and is being undertaken by the VFI. The VFI will agree activities with the respective proprietors and submit funding recommendations to my Department for consideration and approval. The allocation of the €50,000 between projects will be agreed between my officials and the VFI.

The aim of the initiative is to assist and support rural pubs to diversify their facilities during quiet trading times for the benefit of local communities. A rural pub, may for instance, act as a

community cinema, become a meeting space for local community groups, or host a book club or arts and craft classes. It might set aside space to promote remote working, show-case local artisan products or highlight local tourism and heritage places of interest.

The pilot is set to run for one year, with a review expected to be undertaken in 2023 before any decision is taken in respect of next steps.

### **Departmental Funding**

127. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will provide an update on the north-east inner city initiative. [9691/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** In 2021, my Department provided €6.5 million to the North East Inner City Initiative (NEIC) and I am pleased that the funding has been increased by a further €1 million in 2022. This year under the NEIC Initiative, my Department will be providing €7.5 million towards the regeneration of the Dublin North East Inner City area to help ensure that the recommendations of the Mulvey Report and the actions contained in the NEIC Strategic Plan 2020 - 2022 are implemented.

On 2 December last, the 2021 Progress Report for the North East Inner City Initiative was launched by the Taoiseach highlighting all of the work progressed throughout the year. This Report, along with all of the Progress Reports since 2017, is available on the NEIC website, [www.neic.ie/news/neic-progress-report-2021](http://www.neic.ie/news/neic-progress-report-2021).

The Government remains committed to supporting and investing in the North East Inner City community and ensuring that the Chairperson and Programme Implementation Board have the necessary resources to help make the area a better place in which to live and work.

*Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 114.*

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

129. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she has engaged with the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications in relation to supporting island communities such as on Achill Island to develop community-owned renewable energy projects; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18048/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Climate Action Plan 2021 contains a number of measures to increase the rollout of renewables on the grid to help reduce emissions. A key priority within these measures is enabling citizen and community participation in the energy transition across the country, including in rural communities.

Whole-of-government collaboration requires us all to work together across our organisations to develop better co-ordinated public services and policy which enables delivery of the Programme for Government. This is a key element not just of national policies, such as the National Planning Framework, but also in the achievement of sectoral strategies, for example the rural development policy, Our Rural Future and Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector.

In relation to energy generation projects, the Climate Action Plan 2021 sets a clear goal

for renewable energy delivered through local community-based projects. These projects will be delivered through the dedicated Community category in the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) as well as through the forthcoming Microgeneration & Small-Scale Generation schemes.

My colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, has responsibility for energy matters and provides funding, through the SEAI, to support the development of community projects.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department's remit with regards to the islands function does not include islands which are connected to the mainland with a bridge. Therefore, within my Department's remit, Achill Island would be considered in terms of the broader supports available for the development of sustainable communities.

### **Community Development Projects**

130. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will extend the place-based leadership development programme to include Cherry Orchard. [17874/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** Funded by my Department, the Place-Based Leadership Development (P-BLD) Programme is being delivered in Darndale and Drogheda further to recommendations from the Nolan and Geiran reports. The Programme is an investment in local leaders to help them address the challenges experienced in those areas.

The P-BLD programme will strengthen the capacity of those already working hard to improve the quality of community life in Darndale and Drogheda. The programme will encourage and facilitate collaboration that will positively impact the culture of the area. It will build new community leaders to empower communities to address the issues they face. This approach will make a lasting impact and bring forward the solutions required.

I hope that the Place Based Leadership pilot programme will open up new perspectives and possibilities and provide opportunities for mutual learning that can be built upon and expanded to other communities in Ireland going forward once we see the results from Darndale and Drogheda.

### **Ferry Services**

131. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of funding for the cable car to Dursey Island in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17864/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy may be aware, I have agreed that once-off emergency funding will be made available to Cork County Council to provide a temporary ferry service for Dursey Island.

This funding for the service ensures that Dursey Island residents and the local farming community will continue to have reliable mainland connectivity while Cork County Council repairs the existing cable car infrastructure.

Cork County Council is responsible for all aspects of the temporary service including its



procurement, operation, timetabling and frequency of the sailings.

I am delighted that my Department and Cork County Council were able to come to an agreement on the temporary service, and it will greatly benefit the residents and farmers of Dursey island.

### **Departmental Strategies**

132. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she has received the report on rural-proofing; and when she intends to bring forward proposals to enable same, as committed to in Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025. [17901/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Our Rural Future is the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in Ireland for decades.

The policy contains more than 150 measures for delivery across the whole of Government, with the underlying theme of economic, environmental and societal sustainability. The policy has a vision of ensuring vibrant and thriving rural towns and villages, with a key objective to maximise opportunities for individuals, communities and businesses in rural areas. It recognises that rural areas play an integral role in the economic, social and cultural recovery and wellbeing of the country.

The policy commits to developing an effective rural proofing model. This will ensure that all Departments fully consider the effects of new proposals on rural communities, as well as the need to address the particular challenges and opportunities facing rural areas and will support the identification of impacts that may arise.

Following a competitive tender process, my Department has engaged independent consultants to fully examine the issue of rural proofing in Ireland in order to provide a strong evidence basis for further action. Their work will include consideration of rural proofing initiatives internationally so as to inform our approach based on the experiences of others.

I am expecting a report on the matter shortly, which will present a series of recommendations on approaches to rural proofing to my Department. Once received, the report will be given full and due consideration to determine the next steps.

### **Rural Schemes**

133. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the design and delivery of the next Leader programme will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18049/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The LEADER Programme is one of the key interventions of Our Rural Future, the Government's Policy for rural development launched last year.

The draft CAP Strategic Plan, which includes LEADER, was submitted to the EU Commission by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at the end of December 2021. This is in line with the timelines set by the EU Commission.

The process of negotiating and agreeing the plan with the EU Commission has thus commenced. The timeline for implementation of the new LEADER Programme is closely linked to this process.

Accordingly, my officials will continue to work closely with colleagues from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and the EU Commission over the coming months with a view to obtaining approval for the CAP Strategic Plan, as a matter of priority.

Preparations for the design and delivery of the next LEADER programme from 2023-2027 are underway and my officials are also engaging with stakeholders in this regard.

The ongoing engagement and consultation combined with the funding allocation ensures that the LEADER programme from 2023 will continue to support and further develop our rural communities and businesses.

### **Departmental Strategies**

134. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on the anticipated Our Rural Future strategy work programme for 2022; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17891/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Our Rural Future 2021-2025 is the most ambitious rural development policy for Ireland in decades.

It was published in March 2021 and contains more than 150 measures across the whole of Government, for both short-term recovery and longer-term development.

Delivery of the Our Rural Future rural development policy is monitored through a series of Work Programmes and Progress Reports - the First Our Rural Future Progress Report was published in February and provides updates on the actions contained in the 2021 Work Programme.

The development of annual work programmes allow for priorities to be updated in light of emerging opportunities and challenges.

A new Work Programme for 2022 is currently being finalised in conjunction with Departments and I expect to publish this shortly. However, I can say that it will demonstrate continued commitment to realising the ambitions of Our Rural Future, including the development of some new measures and actions under the policy.

Many of these actions are already underway, and updates on these will be provided in further Progress Reports to be produced every six months, as per the commitment in the policy.

### **Community Development Projects**

135. **Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the way the new community centre fund can be utilised to improve and maintain community centres, which are vital to local communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17967/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Community Centres Investment Fund is a new capital fund with a budget of €15m to support community groups with the upgrade and refurbishment of existing Community Centres. This

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is an investment in both rural and urban communities across the Country.

The Community Centres Investment Fund will support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and development of their community centre facilities.

The fund will assist with projects such as:

- Energy retrofitting projects that reduce an organisation's carbon footprint;
- Works to address safety concerns, including as a result of fire safety audits;
- Works to improve disability access;
- Works to improve communal facilities such as kitchen and toilet facilities, and
- Essential maintenance

Funding will be available under 3 Strands, with grants of between €10k and €300K available:

- Strand 1: Small scale projects/improvements to facilities €10,000 - €25,000.
- Strand 2: Larger scale projects - €25,001 to €100,000.
- Strand 3: Major projects. €100,001 to €300,000.

I expect the fund to be open to applications shortly. Guidelines and application forms will be available on my Department's website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd).

### **Vacant Properties**

136. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will report on the programme for Government commitment for an expanded town and village renewal scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy; when communities can start applying for this funding; and the estimated amount available to each local authority. [18051/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Town and Village Renewal Scheme aims to assist with the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages throughout Ireland, making them more attractive places to live, work and visit.

In line with the commitment in *Our Rural Future*, the 2021 scheme prioritised the renovation of derelict and vacant buildings in our town centres, with a view to bringing these buildings back into use. The scale of projects eligible under the scheme was also increased with funding of up to €500,000 available.

On 25th February last I announced funding of almost €18.5 million for 99 projects under the 2021 scheme, and a further €850,000 for 19 project development measure projects. This include 28 remote working projects, where the majority of these seek to bring vacant / derelict buildings and sites back into use.

I was delighted to secure increased funding across the range of rural development schemes in Budget 2022, and my officials are currently working on the follow up Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2022.

While the details are still being finalised, there is no doubt that we will again be prioritising

projects that bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy in town centres. I will be announcing the details of the 2022 scheme shortly.

I have also recently launched the new Town Centre First Policy, which includes a focus on vacancy and dereliction in towns. This new policy will align with a range of funding sources such as the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the new Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund, the Rural Regeneration Development Fund, and the Urban Regeneration Development Fund.

### **Regeneration Projects**

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which she continues to have dialogue with urban and rural communities in the context of strengthening and supporting their existence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17923/22]

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development her programme for rural and community development throughout the country in 2022; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17922/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 139 together.

My Department delivers a range of programmes and schemes to assist in rural and community development, which are available to eligible community groups and organisations throughout the country. In the 2022 Revised Estimates, my Department was allocated €378 million.

My Department's programme supports include:

**CLÁR 2022:** providing funding for small-scale infrastructural projects in rural areas that have suffered the greatest levels of population decline.

**Community Centres Investment Fund:** a capital grants programme for the maintenance, improvement and upkeep of community centres.

**Community Services Programme (CSP):** supports over 420 community organisations to provide employment opportunities and local services through a social enterprise model.

**Dormant Accounts funded Social Enterprise Measure:** provides capital grants for the scaling up of social enterprises.

**Community & Voluntary Supports programme:** provides a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector.

**LEADER:** a multi-annual funding programme delivered through 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) around the country.

**Town and Village Scheme (T&V):** designed to rejuvenate small rural towns and villages.

**Town and Village Renewal Scheme – Streetscapes:** supports the enhancement of streetscapes and shopfronts.

**Local Improvement Scheme:** provides funding to help local authorities carry out improvement works on private and non-publicly maintained roads.

**Connected Hubs Call:** supports the development of remote working facilities joining the

National Connected Hubs Network.

**Rural Regeneration and Development Fund:** supports large-scale, ambitious projects which can achieve sustainable economic and social development in rural areas.

**Community Activities Fund:** provides small scale grants to assist community groups. (Closed 25 February 2022).

**Community Enhancement Programme:** provides capital funding to community groups in disadvantaged areas across Ireland.

**Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme:** provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure. (Adventure Tourism type projects, Blueways, Walking Trails, Boardwalks, etc).

**Empowering Communities Fund:** a new targeted scheme to address area based disadvantage.

**The Scheme to Support National Organisations:** provides multi-annual funding towards core costs of national community and voluntary.

Further information on opening and closing dates for the investment programmes for 2022 available at [www.gov.ie/en/news/bd3c5-government-supports-for-thriving-rural-areas-and-vibrant-communities/](http://www.gov.ie/en/news/bd3c5-government-supports-for-thriving-rural-areas-and-vibrant-communities/).

Ongoing dialogue is maintained by my Department with rural and urban stakeholders in order to identify and respond to issues impacting on individuals and communities.

I am confident that the funding supports and policies provided by my Department will continue to deliver, tangible benefits for both urban and rural communities, supporting economic development, and enabling the local and community development sectors to continue to provide valuable much needed services and supports to all communities throughout the country.

*Question No. 138 answered with Question No. 75.*

*Question No. 139 answered with Question No. 137.*

### **Departmental Schemes**

140. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the provisions that are in place within the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme to ensure that funding is allocated to groups that provide infrastructure which is accessible for disabled persons; if her Department consulted with disabled persons organisations in the formation of this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18037/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) provides funding for the development and enhancement of outdoor recreational infrastructure such as trails, walkways, cycleways, blueways and bridleways in rural areas. The scheme is funded by my Department in partnership with Fáilte Ireland.

The scheme objectives include facilitating the development of outdoor recreational facilities that are accessible to people with disabilities and older people. In developing the scheme my Department has worked with Cara, a national pan-disability sport organisation providing a

collaborative and partnership platform to increase sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities across Ireland.

Project applicants under ORIS are required to indicate how the proposed project is inclusive of people with disabilities and older adults, and this forms part of the assessment criteria used to evaluate applications under ORIS.

Cara has developed an extensive range of guidance for the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure e.g. trails, greenways waterways, beaches. ORIS applicants are advised to refer to these resources when they are developing their project proposals.

My Department also hosted and funded an Outdoor Recreation Disability Awareness Workshop in June of last year for local authority and local development company staff which covered disability awareness delivered through the headings of the Cara Sports Inclusion Disability Charter – openness, people, activities, facilities and promotion. The workshop also informed participants of training and education resources that are available through Cara’s training framework and examined a number of workshops that could benefit individuals in this sector.

### **Rural Schemes**

141. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the measures that will be rolled out under the CLÁR programme in 2022; the total amount of funding allocated to the programme in 2022; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17915/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy is aware, the CLÁR programme provides funding under a number of different measures for small-scale infrastructural projects in designated rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population over a defined period.

In February, I launched this year’s programme, with a total budget of €7 million, an increase of €1.5 million on the previous year.

The measures being funded under CLÁR 2022 are:

Measure 1: Developing Community Facilities & Amenities

Measure 2: Mobility, Cancer Care and Community First Responders Transport

Measure 3: Our Islands

Measure 1 is being administered directly by the local authorities and will support a variety of capital interventions that contribute to the enhancement of existing and/or the development of new accessible community recreation facilities.

Measure 2 is being administered directly by my Department and is open to established organisations that operate entirely on a voluntary basis and provide:

- transport to/from day care or other medical/therapy/respite services for those with significant mobility issues; or

- transport to/from designated cancer treatment hospitals/centres under the National Cancer Care Programme; or

- community first response support or search and rescue operations.

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Measure 3 is being administered directly by my Department and will fund community transport vehicles and outdoor community recreation amenities on the islands.

The 2022 CLÁR programme scheme outlines, application forms and submission deadline dates for Measures 2 and 3 can be found on my Department's website.

### Expenditure Reviews

142. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach the estimated impact of voted expenditure for Vote 34, subhead A32 Affordable Housing Fund which amounts to €60,000,000 for 2022 in respect of the General Government Balance. [18144/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jack Chambers):** In the first instance it should be noted that, to the extent that the Exchequer contribution has to be financed, there will be an impact on the level of general government debt.

The Deputy should note that the Central Statistics Office (CSO) has not formally reviewed the planned Affordable Housing Fund. This work will commence once the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage provide the necessary information regarding the scheme and any associated legislation, if applicable, to the CSO. Accordingly, the response below should be considered in an *ex-ante* context and is based on publicly available information.

Any impact on the general government balance of the €60 million allocation to the Affordable Housing Fund will occur at the time the State, through the Affordable Housing Fund and/or the Local Authorities, engages with the private sector. Such transactions will be counted as general government expenditure and thus decrease the general government balance.

### Gender Equality

143. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Taoiseach the steps he is taking to identify and address gender pay disparity in his Department and public bodies and agencies that operate under his remit. [17369/22]

**The Taoiseach:** Both my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO), the only body under the aegis of my Department, actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace including gender balance. The Human Resources units in both organisations keep gender balance under ongoing review.

As at 1 April 2022, the gender balance of staff in my Department (excluding politically appointed staff) is 63% female and 37% male. Of the 9 members on my Department's Management Committee, 4 are female and 5 are male. The gender balance at Assistant Secretary level in my Department is 60% female and 40% male. My Department has a strong pipeline of future female leaders with 50% of its Principal Officers and 73% of its Assistant Principal Officers being female. The gender balance of all staff in NESDO is 76% female and 24% male and the gender balance of Management / Analysts staff in NESDO is 69% female and 31% male.

Recruitment to my Department and NESDO is, in the main, undertaken through the Public Appointments Service who plays a central role in recruiting diverse talent to take up public service employment opportunities and who recently launched their *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2021-2023*.

Rates of remuneration are based on pay-scales set by the Department of Public Expenditure

and Reform. These scales take into account grade and seniority and are unaffected by gender.

Both my Department and NESDO (a small body with 17 staff) will report on the gender pay gap in due course, as required under the Gender Pay Gap Information Act, 2021.

### **Transport Policy**

144. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Taoiseach the steps he is taking to encourage active travel modes to and from work in his Department and public bodies and agencies that operate under his remit. [17388/22]

**The Taoiseach:** Both my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office, the only body under the aegis of my Department, encourage and facilitate employees to use active travel, such as walking, running and cycling to commute to work by:

- providing shower and changing facilities for staff;
- supporting and encouraging staff to avail of the Cycle to Work Scheme; and
- providing bicycle parking for staff who cycle to work.

In addition, staff for whom walking, running or cycling to work is not an option, are encouraged and facilitated to avail of the Annual Travel Pass Scheme which allows staff to save between 28.5% and 52% on annual public transport tickets.

### **Departmental Appointments**

145. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if a selection board will be convened by the Public Appointments Service and a shortlisting process carried out by an independent chairperson when filling the forthcoming vacancy in the position of Secretary General to the Government and Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach; and if not, the reason the procedures applied to the recruitment of the most senior positions in the civil service at Assistant Secretary level and upwards will not be applied to this appointment. [17225/22]

**The Taoiseach:** The vacancy in the position of Secretary General to the Government and Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach has been filled following a request for expressions of interest from all suitable officers in the Civil Service.

The post does not come within the remit of TLAC. The appointment was made by the Government, on my advice.

There was no departure from the process that was followed in respect of this post on previous occasions, most recently in 2011.

Mr John Callinan, Second Secretary General at the Department of the Taoiseach has been appointed to the position with effect from 3rd May.

### **Public Sector Staff**

146. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in



agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; and the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form. [17607/22]

**The Taoiseach:** Neither my Department nor the National Economic and Social Development Office, the only body under the aegis of my Department, have any employees who are presently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes.

### **Departmental Contracts**

147. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [17831/22]

**The Taoiseach:** My Department had no expenditure on consultancy services in the period specified.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

148. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Taoiseach the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department. [18174/22]

**The Taoiseach:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant number of the staff of my Department have been working from home since March 2020. A phased return to the workplace has been underway since the easing of restrictive measures on 21 January 2022.

In line with the rest of the Civil Service, my Department will finalise and progressively roll-out its blended working policy for the longer-term. This policy will be guided by the Central Policy Framework for Blended Working in the Civil Service which was recently published by Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

In the meantime, remote working alongside attendance on site will continue in line with business needs and the phased return by staff over the coming period.

### **Census of Population**

149. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Taoiseach if he is satisfied there are sufficient census enumerators appointed to ensure there is an accurate statistical record for census 2022. [18260/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jack Chambers):** The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is employing over 5,500 temporary field staff to carry out the census taking place on 3 April 2022. This includes 6 Census Liaison Officers, 46 Regional Supervisors, 466 Field Supervisors and 5,100 Census Enumerators.

Thanks to the dedication of the enumerators and supervisory field staff, the delivery phase has been completed for 95% of households (as of the morning of 1 April) and with 3 days delivery remaining all is currently on target. There are a small number of homes where there are difficulties getting access to deliver forms, but alternative processes are being put in place to ensure these households receive their forms.

## **Visa Applications**

150. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will provide an update on the current visa backlog for overseas workers; when the timelines are expected to reduce; if consideration has been given to a reduction in requirements for sought after professions, for example, chefs such as the requirement to have a job offer before they arrive and the restriction of only being allowed to work for one employer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18296/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Damien English):** Ireland operates a managed employment permits system maximising the benefits of economic migration and minimising the risk of disrupting Ireland's labour market. The regime is designed to accommodate the arrival of non-EEA nationals to fill skills and labour gaps for the benefit of our economy, in the short to medium term. The system is, by design, vacancy led and driven by the changing needs of the labour market.

The State's general policy is to promote the sourcing of labour and skills needs from within the workforce of Ireland, the European Union and other EEA states. Employment opportunities which arise in Ireland should, in the main, be offered to suitably skilled Irish and other EEA nationals and should only be offered to non-EEA nationals who possess those skills and where no suitable candidate emerges from within the EEA to fill the vacancy. This policy fulfils our obligations under the Community Preference principles of membership of the EU.

In order to safeguard the employment opportunities of Irish/EEA nationals, restrictions exist on the granting of employment permits. Among the safeguards is the requirement for an employer to satisfy a Labour Market Needs Test before a General Employment Permit can be issued to a non-EEA national. Further protections in place include proof of an employer/employee relationship and minimum remuneration levels. Employment permit holders have exactly the same protections under Irish employment law as any other worker in the State.

Employment permit policy is part of the response to addressing skills deficits which exist and are likely to continue into the medium term, but it is not intended over the longer term to act as a substitute for meeting the challenge of up-skilling the State's resident workforce. In order to meet this demand, the Government is committed to building and retaining a highly skilled workforce to serve the needs of the economy and has introduced a series of initiatives focused on workforce upskilling of new workforce entrants and those made redundant by the pandemic.

My Department and I recognise the impact delays on the processing times for work permits has for businesses and their workers and has implemented an action plan to reduce processing times built up over the past year. The processing team has trebled in size and daily output has more than tripled compared to 2021 levels. Internal processes have been streamlined, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of permits awaiting processing.

Waiting time for Critical Skills Employment Permits (CSEPs) have been more than halved in the past seven weeks. The Department plans to maintain processing times for all CSEP applications at approximately its current level for all of Q2, on the assumption that demand remains at current levels.

All flexible resources have now been redeployed to other permit types with a view to expediting the reduction in the current backlog of applications in Q2. Further progress will be delivered after the completion of approximately 3,000 one-off applications we are currently processing for the meat and horticulture sector, which should take approximately six weeks to clear, in addition to normal processing workload. The Department expects to see a consistent

5 April 2022

strong fall in waiting times from mid-May, with waiting times considerably reduced by end Q2.

In Q3 the Department will continue to drive down waiting times across all permit types.

As of 4 April 2022, my Department are processing applications received on the following dates for the specific types of applications:

### **Critical Skills Employment Permit Applications**

Trusted Partner                      21 February 2022

Standard                                07 February 2022

### **New Applications (All other permit types excluding Critical Skills Employment Permits)**

Trusted Partner                      29 November 2021

Standard                                08 November 2021

### **Renewal Applications (All renewable permit types included)**

Trusted Partner                      01 December 2021

Standard                                05 November 2021

## **EU Directives**

151. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the status of the transposition of EU Directive 2020/1828; the presumptive timetable his Department is working towards for the transposition of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17587/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Robert Troy):** The Government approved the priority drafting of the Representative Actions for the Protection of the Collective Interests of Consumers Bill 2022 on 22 March 2022. The Bill will transpose the EU Directive on Representative Actions (2020/2018) into domestic law. The Directive is due to be transposed by 25 December 2022.

My department has published the general scheme of the Bill on its website. The primary purpose of the Bill is to permit a qualified entity to represent consumers in a representative action where a trader has infringed their consumer rights under one or more of the legislative provisions listed in the Schedule to the general scheme.

## **Public Sector Staff**

152. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17596/22]

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

**kar):** My Department operates within the Disciplinary Code, the Dignity at Work and other relevant HR policies developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for use in the Civil Service. Any instances of suspension or workplace disputes are managed through the processes as set out in these HR policies.

At present there are no staff in my Department or the agencies under the remit of my Department absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes. There have also been no staff absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes over the periods referenced in the Deputy's question.

### **National Planning Framework**

153. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when the next national plan on business and human rights will be published given the last one expired in 2020. [18100/22]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Ireland's first National Plan on Business and Human Rights 2017-2020 was launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs towards the end of 2017. Ireland was the 19th country in the world to publish such a plan in response to the endorsement of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by the Human Rights Council in 2011.

The implementation of this whole-of-government plan was overseen by an implementation group comprised of representatives of Government, civil society and business. Both the plan itself and the programme for Government committed to a review of implementation. This review was undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs in consultation with stakeholders during 2021. A draft report was considered at the special session of the multi-stakeholder implementation group on 31 May 2021. This forum included participation by a member of the UN working group on business and human rights, a business and human rights expert from the Danish Institute for Human Rights, and officials from three EU member state Ministries.

The Government noted the finalised review at its meeting on 3 December 2021. It is published on the Department of Foreign Affairs website: [www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/humanrights/Review-of-Implementation-of-National-Plan-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-2017-2020---for-website.docx.pdf](http://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/humanrights/Review-of-Implementation-of-National-Plan-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-2017-2020---for-website.docx.pdf)

Discussions have commenced about how to bring a new plan forward. Officials in my Department will proactively engage with colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs to provide necessary input into a new plan, in particular in respect of the issue of Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence in line with the Programme for Government commitments in this regard.

### **National Planning Framework**

154. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will provide an update on the Programme for Government commitment to develop a national plan on business and human rights which considers whether there is a need for greater emphasis on mandatory due diligence. [18101/22]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Ireland's first National Plan on Business and Human Rights 2017-2020 was launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs towards the end of 2017. Ireland was the 19th country in

the world to publish such a plan in response to the endorsement of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by the Human Rights Council in 2011.

The implementation of this whole-of-government plan was overseen by an implementation group comprised of representatives of Government, civil society and business. Both the plan itself and the programme for Government committed to a review of implementation. This review was undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs in consultation with stakeholders during 2021. The Government noted the finalised review at its meeting on 3 December 2021. It is published on the Department of Foreign Affairs' website: [www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/humanrights/Review-of-Implementation-of-National-Plan-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-2017-2020---for-website.docx.pdf](http://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/humanrights/Review-of-Implementation-of-National-Plan-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-2017-2020---for-website.docx.pdf)

As regards a further National Plan, my Department will actively contribute to this important project, including in respect of Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence in line with the Programme for Government reference with regard to whether there is a need for greater emphasis on mandatory due diligence.

On the 23rd of February the European Commission published a proposal for a directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CSDD). The proposal sets out obligations for companies regarding adverse human rights and environmental impacts arising from their operations, their subsidiaries and their value chains. Among the provisions is a requirement for relevant companies to integrate due diligence into their corporate policies and put in place a specific due diligence policy in relation to human rights, climate change & environmental issues. The due diligence measures must identify actual or potential adverse impacts and prevent/mitigate such impacts within a company's own operations or those of their subsidiaries and from within their value chains. My Department is currently examining this proposal in detail.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

155. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18163/22]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Since the start of the pandemic, my Department has made significant efforts to facilitate remote working for staff, and to invest in assisting staff to work safely and productively from home. Building on the National Remote Work Strategy launched in January 2021, my Department fully supports the move to a blended working environment. In finalising our longer-term policy, and transitioning to it, my Department will be informed by the Civil Service Blended Working Policy Framework published on 31 March 2021. This will inform the development of the Blended Working policy for my Department, which will be finalised and issued within the coming weeks.

In this context, my Department will build upon the learnings from our successful experience of remote and blended working in the past two years. We developed a ConnEcTEd Teams Action Plan ConnEcTEd Teams Action Plan - DETE ([enterprise.gov.ie](http://enterprise.gov.ie)) during this period and it supports our teams in a blended working environment.

The 'ConnEcTEd Teams' programme established behaviours that support effective remote/blended working for teams. The programme targets five key areas:

1. Maintaining team/ organisation-wide connectedness and trust;

2. Ensuring effective and efficient information flows;
3. Enabling continued on-the-job training and coaching activities;
4. Facilitating remote collaboration and innovation; and
5. Supporting employee wellbeing.

Our remote working options will evolve over time as we pilot blended working options including working from home two or three days per week while ensuring business needs are met. We will continue to survey staff and to work with our leaders, staff and unions to implement the optimum blended working policy that best serves my Departments delivery for the citizen.

### **Economic Sanctions**

156. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the investigations that are being undertaken by his Department or any agency under his authority into the potential circumvention of the sanctions against Russia in the International Financial Services Centre and elsewhere and, if so, the number of investigations. [18264/22]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** EU sanctions are given legal effect via EU Regulations. These Regulations have direct effect in all Member States of the EU, and, as such, are legally binding on all natural and legal persons in Ireland. Private companies, therefore, have an obligation to ensure that they are in full compliance with these new measures. A natural or legal person who contravenes a provision of an EU sanctions regulation shall be guilty of an offence and liable to prosecution.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is the National Competent Authority with specific responsibility for implementing EU Trade sanctions. It does not monitor compliance with financial sanctions, nor does it carry out investigations into suspected breaches of financial sanctions.

The Director of Corporate Enforcement is responsible for enforcing and encouraging compliance with company law, investigating suspected offences under the Companies Act 2014, prosecuting detected breaches of the Companies Act 2014 and referring cases to the Director of Public Prosecutions on indictment.

Section 949(3) of the Companies Act 2014 provides that the Director of Corporate Enforcement shall be independent in the performance of his functions. The purpose of this provision, and similar provisions in legislation in other areas of law enforcement, is to ensure that the law is enforced without the possibility of interference from any party or the appearance of any such interference.

### **Small and Medium Enterprises**

157. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the way that small and medium enterprises in areas of the country will benefit from higher aid intensity (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18329/22]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The revised Regional Aid Guidelines (RAG), adopted by the Commission on 19 April

2021 and in force since 1 January 2022, enable Member States to support the less advantaged European regions in catching up and reducing disparities in terms of economic well-being, income and unemployment – cohesion objectives that are at the heart of the Union. They also provide increased possibilities for Member States to support regions facing transition or structural challenges.

The RAGs require each Member State to have a map identifying areas where Regional Investment Aid can be granted. The RAGs also set out the criteria that Member States must use to identify areas on a Regional Aid Map eligible for regional investment aid.

The Commission approved Ireland’s Regional Aid Map on 22 March 2022 and the Map identifies areas eligible for regional investment aid. The Map also establishes the maximum aid intensities that apply in eligible area. Aid intensity is the maximum amount of State aid that can be granted per enterprise, expressed as a percentage of eligible investment costs.

The aid intensity rate that applies to an area on the Map depends on the criterion of the RAGs under which that area has been approved for inclusion on the Map. The base rate of assistance for an area eligible under Criterion 1, of the relevant section of the Guidelines, is 15%. The base rate of assistance for an area eligible under Criterion 5 or Criterion 3 (islands), is 10%. The base rate applies to all enterprises, irrespective of their size. The maximum aid intensities can be increased by 10% for investments made by medium-sized enterprises and by 20% for investments made by small enterprises, for their initial investments with eligible costs up to €50 million.

While the Map identifies areas where Regional Aid can be granted, inclusion of an area on the Regional Aid Map does not in itself mean that Aid will be granted in that area, furthermore, an enterprise operating in an excluded area can still be supported in a number of other ways by Enterprise Ireland, IDA or other State Agencies or Departments.

A full list of the LEAs included on the map and the base aid intensity rates are provided in the tables below.

#### **LEAs included under Criterion 1 on the Map**

LEA	County	NUTS3 Region	Base Aid Intensity
Carlow	Carlow	South-East	15%
Muinebeag	Carlow	South-East	15%
Bailieborough-Cootehill	Cavan	Border	15%
Ballyjamesduff	Cavan	Border	15%
Cavan-Belturbet	Cavan	South-East	15%
Buncrana	Donegal	Border	15%
Carndonagh	Donegal	Border	15%
Donegal	Donegal	Border	15%
Glenties	Donegal	Border	15%
Letterkenny	Donegal	Border	15%
Lifford-Stranorlar	Donegal	Border	15%
Milford	Donegal	Border	15%
Athenry-Oranmore	Galway	West	15%
Ballinasloe	Galway	West	15%
Conamara North	Galway	West	15%

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LEA	County	NUTS3 Region	Base Aid Intensity
Conamara South	Galway	West	15%
Galway City Central	Galway	West	15%
Galway City East	Galway	West	15%
Tuam	Galway	West	15%
Castlecomer	Kilkenny	South-East	15%
Kilkenny	Kilkenny	South-East	15%
Piltown	Kilkenny	South-East	15%
Borris-in-Ossory-Mountmellick	Laois	Midlands	15%
Portlaoise	Laois	Midlands	15%
Ballinamore	Leitrim	Border	15%
Carrick-on-Shannon	Leitrim	Border	15%
Manorhamilton	Leitrim	Border	15%
Ballymahon	Longford	Midlands	15%
Granard	Longford	Midlands	15%
Longford	Longford	Midlands	15%
Ballina	Mayo	West	15%
Belmullet	Mayo	West	15%
Castlebar	Mayo	West	15%
Claremorris	Mayo	West	15%
Swinford	Mayo	West	15%
Westport	Mayo	West	15%
Ballybay-Clones	Monaghan	Border	15%
Carrickmacross-Castleblayney	Monaghan	Border	15%
Monaghan	Monaghan	Border	15%
Birr	Offaly	Midlands	15%
Edenderry	Offaly	Midlands	15%
Tullamore	Offaly	Midlands	15%
Athlone	Roscommon	West	15%
Boyle	Roscommon	West	15%
Roscommon	Roscommon	West	15%
Ballymote-Tobercurry	Sligo	Border	15%
Sligo-Drumcliff	Sligo	Border	15%
Sligo-Strandhill	Sligo	Border	15%
Dungarvan	Waterford	South-East	15%
Portlaw-Kilmacthomas	Waterford	South-East	15%
Tramore-Waterford City West	Waterford	South-East	15%
Waterford City South	Waterford	South-East	15%
Athlone	Westmeath	Midlands	15%
Kinnegad	Westmeath	Midlands	15%
Moate	Westmeath	Midlands	15%



LEA	County	NUTS3 Region	Base Aid Intensity
Mullingar	Westmeath	Midlands	15%
Enniscorthy	Wexford	South-East	15%
New Ross	Wexford	South-East	15%
Rosslare	Wexford	South-East	15%
Wexford	Wexford	South-East	15%

### Inhabited Islands included under Criterion 3 on the Map

Island	County	NUTS3 Region	Base Aid Intensity
Aughinish Island	Clare	Mid-West	10%
Carrig Island	Kerry	South-West	10%
Bear Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Calf Island East	Cork	South-West	10%
Cléire	Cork	South-West	10%
Coney Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Dursey Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Haulbowline Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Hop Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Horse Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Inchydoney Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Inishbeg	Cork	South-West	10%
Inishodriscol (or Hare Island)	Cork	South-West	10%
Lambay Island	Dublin	Dublin	10%
Long Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Mannin Beg	Cork	South-West	10%
North Bull Island	Dublin	Dublin	10%
Ringarogy Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Sherkin Island	Cork	South-West	10%
Tarbert Island	Kerry	South-West	10%
Whiddy Island	Cork	South-West	10%

### LEAs included under Criterion 5 on the Map

LEA	County	NUTS3 Region	Base Aid Intensity
Ennis	Clare	Mid-West	10%
Shannon	Clare	Mid-West	10%
Corca Dhuibhne	Kerry	South-West	10%
Kenmare	Kerry	South-West	10%
Tralee	Kerry	South-West	10%
Limerick City East	Limerick	Mid-West	10%
Limerick City West	Limerick	Mid-West	10%
Ardee	Louth	Mid-East	10%
Drogheda Rural	Louth	Mid-East	10%
Dundalk-Carlingford	Louth	Mid-East	10%
Dundalk South	Louth	Mid-East	10%

Clonmel	Tipperary	Mid-West	10%
Cashel-Tipperary	Tipperary	Mid-West	10%

### Departmental Contracts

158. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18899/22]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Details of expenditure by my Department on external consultancy contracts during the period in question are set out in tables at the link.

[<a ref="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq158-05-04-22\_en.docx">Consultancy Contracts </a>]

### Turf Cutting

159. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if persons (details supplied) can continue to cut and sell turf after September 2022; and, if not, the deadline in this regard. [18340/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** New regulations on solid fuels are due to take effect from 1 September next. They are required, as each year, some 1,300 people die prematurely in Ireland due to air pollution from solid fuel burning. It is estimated that there are over 16,200 life years lost, while many people also experience a poor quality of life due to the associated short-term and long-term health impacts of this form of pollution. The National Peatlands Strategy acknowledges the tradition of burning peat in Ireland, but also recognises that the associated emissions to the air contain a range of pollutants. Research undertaken by the Environmental Protection Agency also demonstrates that the contribution of peat to air pollution levels is significant.

Turf cutting by citizens for use in their own homes is a traditional activity across many peatlands, and while measures are required to reduce the emissions associated with burning peat, these traditions will be respected.

Therefore, in order to accommodate those with rights to harvest sod peat, no ban on its cutting or burning will be introduced, but a regulatory provision will be made to prohibit the placing on the market, sale or distribution of sod peat. This approach will facilitate those with turbary rights to continue to cut and burn sod peat for their own domestic purposes, while also reducing the use of sod peat in urban areas.

As such, persons who have turbary rights will continue to be permitted to extract peat to heat their own dwelling, but will not be permitted to place it on the market for sale or distribution to others.

### Departmental Correspondence

160. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will review the submission by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [18380/22]

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

The Government is acutely aware of the effect of rising electricity and gas prices on households and on older people. Government's immediate response to the unprecedented surge in international gas prices, which is correlated to those rising electricity and gas costs to households, is to utilise the tax and social welfare system in Budget 2022 to counter rising costs of living for households.

As set out in the Programme for Government funding from carbon tax revenue is being used over the period to 2030 to ensure that increases in the carbon tax are progressive by tackling fuel poverty and providing for a Just Transition as well as to fund the retrofit programme, including free upgrades for lower income households.

ESRI research has demonstrated that recycling just one third of the revenue raised from the carbon tax increases through targeted social welfare payments helps the lowest income households and to reduce poverty. The Government will continue to be guided by the latest emerging research on the impacts of rising costs on households.

In recognition of the ongoing pressures on households, a further €505m package of measures to mitigate the wider cost of living increases were announced by Government on the 10th February, including:

1. The Electricity Costs (Domestic Electricity Accounts) Emergency Measures Bill 2022, that now provides for a credit payment to each domestic electricity account amounting to €176.22 (€200 including VAT). Approximately 2.1 million account holders will benefit from the payment in the coming weeks.

2. An additional lump sum payment of €125 to all households in receipt of the Fuel Allowance payment. It is expected that this additional lumpsum will cost an estimated €49 million in 2022. This means that low-income households will see an increase of 41% in Fuel Allowance support provided during this Fuel Allowance season compared to last season.

3. A special enhanced grant rate, equivalent to 80% of the typical cost, for attic and cavity wall insulation for all households, to urgently reduce energy use and cost.

It should also be noted that under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, a special heating supplement may be paid to assist people in certain circumstances that have special heating needs, and exceptional needs payments (ENP) may also be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which an applicant is unable to meet out of their own resources.

Government also provides a Living Alone allowance which is a supplement paid to people aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and who are living alone. Budget 2022 provided for a €3 per week increase to the Living Alone Allowance Increase from €19 to €22 per week with effect from January 2022.

### **Environmental Schemes**

161. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason a person who is in receipt of an invalidity allowance is not automatically entitled to the warmer homes scheme given not all invalidity allowance recipients receive the fuel allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17495/22]

162. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the reason a person who is in receipt of an invalidity allowance whose only income is an invalidity allowance cannot avail of the better energy homes programme if the invalidity allowance is their only income. [17496/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 and 162 together.

The Government recently approved a package of supports to make it easier and more affordable for homeowners to undertake home energy upgrades, for warmer, healthier and more comfortable homes, with lower energy bills.

The key measures include:

- a new National Home Energy Upgrade Scheme providing increased grant levels of up to 50% of the cost of a typical deep retrofit to a B2 BER standard (up from 30%-35% grants currently)

- One Stop Shops to offer a hassle-free, start-to-finish project management service, including access to financing, for home energy upgrades

- a significant increase in the number of free energy upgrades for those at risk of energy poverty under the Warmer Homes Scheme (400 per month – up from an average of 177 per month in 2021)

- a special enhanced grant rate, equivalent to 80% of the typical cost, for attic and cavity wall insulation for all households, to urgently reduce energy use and cost as part of the Government's response to current exceptionally high energy prices

- an Exchequer investment of €8 billion to 2030 will enable the supply chain to scale up, creating thousands of high quality jobs and delivering on this critical national objective.

Households in receipt of an Invalidity Pension, whose homes meet the eligibility criteria, can apply for support including whole home upgrade grants under the National Home Energy Upgrade scheme and individual grants for energy efficiency measures.

Free upgrades available under the Warmer Homes scheme are available to households who are in receipt of certain Department of Social Protection payments including the Fuel Allowance.

I understand that the Invalidity Pension is a qualifying payment for the Fuel Allowance, which is a means tested payment. Households can contact the Department of Social Protection to check whether they meet the relevant means test.

*Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 161.*

### **Public Sector Staff**

163. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17597/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department does not currently have any staff who are presently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes.

The information requested in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. The Department will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisations

### **Waste Management**

164. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will report on the Landfill Remediation Programme since its establishment in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17625/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** Since 2006 the landfill remediation programme has provided approximately €190m funding to risk assess and remediate 150 landfill sites. This includes €52m for the former ISPAT site at Haulbowline, Co. Cork. To date remediation work has been completed on 46 sites. In 2021 funding was provided for 72 sites across 22 local authorities with expenditure of just under €21m. This year 135 projects have been approved for funding across 29 local authorities with a budget of €26m.

The roadmap for the landfill remediation programme is set out in the Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2021 with the renewed roadmap to be published later this year in the new National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy in 2022. The programme has been a key component of Ireland's response to the judgment of the European Court of Justice in case C494/01.

The Comptroller and Auditor General published a chapter on the programme in the 2019 Appropriation Account- this can be accessed at the following link [www.audit.gov.ie/en/find-report/publications/2020/vote-29-communications-climate-action-and-environment.pdf](http://www.audit.gov.ie/en/find-report/publications/2020/vote-29-communications-climate-action-and-environment.pdf)

### **Departmental Reports**

165. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if the recommendation of the spending review Social Impact Assessment – SEAI Programmes Targeting Energy Poverty 2020 that the energy poverty schemes should collect information both before and after energy efficiency works which can be used to assess whether they are achieving their aims has been implemented; and if not, the reason therefor. [17666/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers free energy upgrades for eligible homeowners in low-income households who are most at risk of energy poverty. It is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Since the start of the scheme in 2000, over 145,000 free upgrades have been supported by the scheme. In 2021, the average cost of the energy efficiency measures provided per household had increased significantly to €17,100.

A budget allocation of €109 million has been provided for this scheme this year. This will support an increase in the number of free home upgrades, from an average of 177 per month in 2021 to 400 per month this year. This is a top priority in SEAI's work programme.

Following a review of the Scheme a number of changes were announced in February this year including a decision to commence the collection of both pre and post works Building Energy Ratings (BER) under the scheme.

The primary purpose of this is to improve targeting of the scheme to those most in need by providing better pre-works data. However, a pre works BER will also offer other broader benefits, including: more effective retrofit design; more housing stock data; and greater homeowner understanding of their property.

The provision of pre works BERs will also provide additional metrics and allow for improved measurement of the impact of the Scheme. This would address recommendations identified in the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service Social Impact Assessment referred to in the Question. Environmental Schemes

166. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the projected output for each retrofit scheme for 2022, in tabular form. [17667/22]

**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 equivalent), and to install 400,000 heat pumps to replace existing heating systems by 2030. The review of the National Development Plan (NDP) resulted in an unprecedented financial commitment to support achievement of the Government's retrofit targets. A total of €8 billion of Exchequer funding (including €5 billion in carbon tax revenues) will be available to support residential upgrades to 2030.

Building further on its clear financial commitment the Government recently approved a package of significant enhancements to make it easier and more affordable for homeowners to undertake home energy upgrades, for warmer, healthier and more comfortable homes, with lower energy bills.

The key measures include:

- a new National Home Energy Upgrade Scheme providing increased grant levels of up to 50% of the cost of a typical deep retrofit to a B2 BER standard (up from 30%-35% grants currently)

- One Stop Shops to offer a hassle-free, start-to-finish project management service, including access to financing, for home energy upgrades

- a significant increase in the number of free energy upgrades for those at risk of energy poverty under the Warmer Homes Scheme (400 per month – up from an average of 177 per month in 2021), and

- a special enhanced grant rate, equivalent to 80% of the typical cost, for attic and cavity wall insulation for all households, to urgently reduce energy use and cost as part of the Government's response to current exceptionally high energy prices.

The projected SEAI output for each home retrofit scheme for 2022 is set out in the table below.

SEAI Grant Scheme	Estimated Outputs 2022
Better Energy Homes	12,150

Solar PV	6,600
Better Energy Warmer Homes	4,800
Warmth & Wellbeing Pilot	300
National Retrofit Scheme OSS	2,080
Deep Retrofit Pilot	20
Community Energy Grant (Homes)	990
TOTAL	26,940

### Environmental Schemes

167. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the emissions saved per retrofit scheme for 2021, in tabular form. [17668/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The National Residential Retrofit Plan is one important measure contained in the 2021 Climate Action Plan (CAP21) aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment. Other measures announced as part of CAP21 include strengthening the building regulations, supporting the roll-out of district heating, the development of low carbon construction materials and technologies, and an ambitious public sector decarbonisation programme. These measures, in conjunction with the National Residential Retrofit Plan, will contribute towards emissions reductions in the built environment.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has provided the data below setting out the estimated emissions saved for each retrofit scheme in 2021.

SEAI Grant Scheme	Estimated CO2 Savings ktCO2 for 2021
Better Energy Homes	10.7
Solar PV	4.3
Better Energy Warmer Homes	2.4
Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot	0.2
Deep Retrofit Pilot	0.1
One Stop Shop Call	2.4
Communities Energy Grant- of which relates to Homes	18.71.5

### Environmental Schemes

168. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the shortfall, and the measures that are proposed to make up the shortfall, in emissions reductions from buildings, given that the retrofit schemes will only go part of the way to meeting the 2030 emissions target. [17669/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The 2021 Climate Action Plan (CAP21) sets out a range of emissions reductions for each sector that together will contribute towards achieving the 2030 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, 2021. The range of emissions reductions for the built environment published in CAP21 is 44% - 56% relative to 2018 levels and includes direct emissions associated with buildings in the residential, commercial and public sectors.

The National Residential Retrofit Plan is just one of many measures contained in CAP21 aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the built environment. Other measures announced as part of CAP21 include strengthening the building regulations, supporting the roll-out of district heating, the development of low carbon construction materials and technologies, and an ambitious public sector decarbonisation programme. These measures, in conjunction with the National Residential Retrofit Plan, will contribute towards the achievement of the targeted range of emissions reductions in the built environment.

In October 2021 the Climate Change Advisory Council published the first proposed carbon budget programme. This programme has since been approved by Government and has been laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas for approval. The programme is due to be discussed in both Houses in early April. When approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas, my Department will prepare proposed sectoral emissions ceilings, including a sectoral emissions ceiling for the built environment, for Government consideration and approval. I intend that the next iteration of the Climate Action Plan will, in turn, be informed by these agreed sectoral emissions ceilings.

### Environmental Schemes

169. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the average cost of retrofits for the deep retrofit scheme for each year since it opened, in tabular form; and the length of time after the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland stopped receiving applications that the payments will cease being made. [17670/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme was launched in 2017 as a time bound pilot to investigate the challenges and opportunities of deep retrofit in Ireland. Under the scheme 50% grant funding was available for homes that carried out retrofit to an A rating and replaced fossil fuel heating systems with heat pumps and renewables, with 95% support available for people at risk of energy poverty. The pilot has provided detailed information on the types of upgrades and technologies suited to particular homes, the costs associated with deeper retrofit, post works energy performance of homes retrofitted as well as customer and contractor experience of undertaking deeper retrofit projects. A key requirement of the scheme was that applications came from service providers rather than homeowners and involved at least 5 homes.

The following table gives the details of the number of projects approved, the total and average funding per project, the number of homes on each project approved and the average grant per home. They are assigned to the year in which the grant agreement was issued to the applicant.

-	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of projects approved	6	36	56	13
Total funding approved (€ million)	1.55	7.98	13.61	2.73



Average approved funding per project (€ million)	0.26	0.22	0.24	0.21
Total number of homes on approved projects	42	252	275	66
Average Grant per Home	€36,900	€31,700	€49,500	€41,400

The deadline for applications to be submitted was 19th July 2019. Each project was evaluated and the timeline between the application date and the date the letter of offer was issued is largely due to the speed of the responses to technical and cost queries raised by SEAI through the course of the evaluation process.

The final letter of offer was issued on 5th May 2020. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on works both in terms of the restrictions on the construction industry and the supply of materials. It is anticipated that all works will be completed and grant monies drawn down by the end of 2022.

Further information on the results of the Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme are available on SEAI's website: [www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/deep-retrofit-grant/key-findings/](http://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/deep-retrofit-grant/key-findings/)

### Environmental Schemes

170. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the steps that are being taken to increase warmer homes scheme output to 400 per month; and the average monthly output for the scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2021, in tabular form. [17671/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme delivers free energy upgrades for eligible homeowners in low-income households who are most at risk of energy poverty. It is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Since the start of the scheme in 2000, over 145,000 free upgrades have been supported by the scheme. In 2021, the average cost of the energy efficiency measures provided per household had increased significantly to €17,100.

Activity under the scheme, and the associated expenditure, were significantly impacted in both 2020 and 2021 by the COVID pandemic, when construction activity was paused for approximately 12 months in total, and access to properties during restricted periods, in line with Government guidelines, was challenging. SEAI data indicates that for homes completed so far in 2022, the average cycle time from application to completion was approximately 27 months. While this delay was largely driven by COVID related issues, the deeper measures being provided under the scheme since 2018, also involve more substantive works.

This is a top priority for my Department and SEAI and in order to reduce this timeline to completion and target a monthly average of 400 completions this year, the following actions have already been taken:

- The budget, at €109 million, is nearly three times the 2021 outturn (€38 million) and funding has also been sought through the European Regional Development Fund;
- SEAI has been allocated additional staff for the Warmer Homes Scheme;

- SEAI is working to Increase contractor output through active contract engagement and management.

Any necessary further measures identified as required by SEAI to increase output under this key Scheme will also be taken.

The average monthly output for the Warmer Homes Scheme from 2016 to 2021 is detailed in the table below.

Warmer Homes Scheme	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Average Monthly Output	562	546	434	262	127	177

In comparing the annual data, it is important to note that the depth and associated cost of the retrofits available under the scheme has increased significantly since 2018.

### Recycling Policy

171. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the status of, and the timeline for, the introduction of a deposit return scheme; if he plans to include glass in the scheme or has plans to introduce glass in the scheme at a later stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17851/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The roadmap for the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme for plastic bottles and aluminium cans was outlined in the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, published in September 2020. In November last year, I signed the Separate Collection (Deposit Return Scheme) Regulations 2021, providing the legal framework for the scheme, in particular the terms under which a scheme operator may be approved. The regulations also set out the obligations that will fall to producers, retailers and return point operators under the scheme, which will be launched later this year.

The introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme will assist in reducing single use plastics, thus helping Ireland meet EU targets while promoting a wider circular economy. Materials to be included in the scheme will be those for which Ireland faces immediate, challenging EU recycling and separate collection targets. The scheme will therefore focus on plastic bottles and aluminium beverage cans. Recycling rates in Ireland for glass are significantly above current EU targets. The Regulations provide that other materials may be considered for inclusion in the Deposit Return Scheme when the scheme is fully established.

### Departmental Funding

172. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the amount that is currently in the environment fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17852/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The most recent balance of the Environment Fund, reflecting the position at 28 February 2022, is €6.17m. Final accounts for 2021 have been prepared for submission to the Comptroller and

Auditor General in accordance with Section 74(6) of the Waste Management Act (amended) 1996.

The previous year's annual accounts for the Environment Fund are published at the following link: [www.gov.ie/en/publication/f6b84-environment-fund-accounts/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f6b84-environment-fund-accounts/)

## **Waste Management**

173. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if he will provide a list of activities that will be funded from the new circular economy fund to be established under the Circular Economy, Waste Management (Amendment) and Minerals Development (Amendment) Bill 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17853/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Circular Economy, Waste Management (Amendment) and Minerals Development (Amendment) Bill 2022 is a key step in the transition to a circular economy and will provide a robust statutory framework for moving from a focus on managing waste to a much greater focus on adapting patterns of production and consumption.

Recognising the role played by the Environment Fund since its inception, and the need to align its objectives more closely with the promotion of the Circular Economy, the Bill provides for the replacement of the Environment Fund by a new Circular Economy Fund. While the terms and scope of the Fund are generally unchanged, the new Fund will signal a key commitment to Circular Economy principles and the establishment of a Circular Economy. The objectives of the Fund will continue in the spirit of the Environment Fund in capturing environmental levy funds generated and utilising this to support projects in line with Fund objectives. The purposes for which monies may be paid out of the Circular Economy Fund are provided for under section 8(9) of the Bill.

## **Environmental Policy**

174. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the action that he is taking to end the use of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances in biodegradable containers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17854/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Per- and poly-fluoroalkylated substances (PFAS) are a family of chemicals used for their water repellent and heat resistant characteristics and can be found in many everyday products, such as outdoor clothing, non-stick coatings on cookware, fire-fighting foam as well as food packaging. Approximately 4,700 PFAS have been identified to date. PFAS are a significant concern in the EU and globally as they can cause long-lasting environmental damage and potentially adverse health impacts. In this regard it is important that they are strongly regulated at an EU level. In recent years the EU has set in place a number of new strategies aimed at strengthening chemical legislation to ensure that chemicals are safe and sustainable by design, and that the most hazardous chemicals are banned. My Department actively engages with the EU in this matter and strongly supports the initiatives being undertaken. These include: - EU Farm to Fork Strategy: The Commission is currently revising food contact materials legislation to improve food safety and public health. The proposed revisions are to be published by end of 2022. - EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability: The Commission is proposing a set of actions to address the use of, and contamination with, PFAS. This includes a commitment to address PFAS with a

group approach and to only allow PFAS use where it is proven to be essential. In addition, the European Commission-led review of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive is ongoing and may include measures to deal with compostable packaging, mandating recycled content in plastic packaging, reuse, prevention, and restricting substances of concern. I am committed to ensuring that Ireland plays a lead role in pushing the level of ambition for proposals emerging from the review.

## **Environmental Policy**

175. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications if additional staff or funding has been provided to the Environmental Protection Agency given the additional work the agency will have establishing a circular economy programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17858/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** In December 2021, the existing National Waste Prevention Programme, which is operated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was revised and restructured into a national Circular Economy Programme. The new programme was published on 16 December in tandem with the All of Government Circular Economy Strategy.

The Circular Economy Programme, which together with the Circular Economy Strategy will be placed on a statutory basis by the Circular Economy, Waste Management (Amendment) and Minerals Development (Amendment) Bill 2022, focuses on transitioning business, citizens, and the public sector towards the circular economy. The overall approach is to influence behavioural change, support sustainable choices and inform circular economy policy.

While the previous National Waste Prevention Programme was led by an EPA Programme Manager who also has responsibility for Climate Science, Evidence and Services, the Agency has now established an additional Programme Manager position to lead the Circular Economy Programme on a stand-alone basis.

The new programme is fully funded for 2022 and the Agency has allocated some €2,791,000 to the Programme this year. Some €825,000 of this allocation will come from the EPA's own resources, with the remainder provided by my Department.

## **Wind Energy Generation**

176. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans to increase the production of offshore wind energy; if climate change and the war in Ukraine have given an added impetus to these plans; the level of Government investment in offshore wind energy production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17946/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (MAP Act) and the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) (Ireland's first marine spatial plan) provide for long-term forward planning for Ireland's maritime area and will enhance the effective management of marine activities and more sustainable use of our marine resources. The MAP Act 2021 also provides for the establishment of a new agency to regulate development in the Maritime Area, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA). While MARA will take time to establish and become operational my Department have been developing the Maritime Area Consent (MAC) consenting regime and guidance to process the relevant Phase 1 projects for the first offshore wind auction.

A consultation on the MAC assessment regime for Relevant Projects concluded in February. Alongside this, my Department have been drafting the terms and conditions for offshore wind-specific auctions under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). Owing to the specific scale and nature of typical offshore wind farms, dedicated auctions are initially required to support the longer-term potential of this technology in Ireland. At least three offshore RESS auctions are currently planned for this decade.

Additionally, the new framework for Ireland's future offshore electricity transmission system, approved last year, provides for offshore grid development, operation and ownership. Progress in this area includes the publication of CRU's decision in February on the Phase 1 Grid Connection Assessment. Following engagement with industry, EirGrid will also shortly publish requirements for participants in the first offshore auction regarding offshore transmission system functional specifications, ownership boundaries, and timing of asset transfer from developers to EirGrid.

Our investment in offshore wind energy production includes a suite of actions in our Climate Action Plan to realise the potential of Ireland's offshore renewable energy (ORE), while the Programme for Government commits to the achievement of 5GW of installed offshore wind capacity by 2030 and a long-term plan to take advantage of a potential of at least 30GW of floating wind thereafter.

The current crisis in Ukraine has dramatically concentrated EU efforts to address European dependence on Russian oil and gas through proposed new measures to diversify fossil fuel imports, enhance security of supply, and accelerate energy system decarbonisation to remove regional reliance on fossil fuels. In this regard, the European Commission is working closely with Member States to protect the resilience of Europe's gas security of supply through solidarity measures.

Both the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the EU have stressed that the current situation further strengthens collective resolve to accelerate the clean energy transition, in line with the European Green Deal.

### **National Broadband Plan**

177. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the measures that are being considered to address the issue of component shortages that may impact the delivery of the National Broadband Plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18034/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Ossian Smyth):** The Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of good reliable broadband to ensure that citizens in rural Ireland can have the high speed connectivity required to facilitate remote working and schooling.

While substantial progress has been made to date, the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the delivery of the fibre network leading to delays to the build programme. The full extent of this impact continues to be assessed and NBI has committed to put in place measures to mitigate the impact in as far as possible.

My Department asked NBI about mitigating potential impacts and NBI have said that they are implementing a number of measures to help lessen the consequences of these delays on the rollout. Such measures include:

- Increasing the rate of pole replacement and duct remediation per month;
- Bringing in additional NBI resources;
- Earlier procurement of materials used in the build stages;
- Bringing in additional subcontractors.

As a result of the earlier procurement of materials necessary to rollout the fibre network, NBI have not highlighted any immediate issues or shortages to date through their regular engagement with the Department in terms of the key components necessary for the rollout.

As a result of actions taken by NBI the project has been building momentum and an increasing number of premises passed are being recorded. This is expected to continue throughout 2022 and beyond although it is likely that the impact of Omicron will be felt in Quarter 1 of 2022 outturns.

### Public Service Obligation

178. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the amount collected through the public service obligation levy each year since its introduction, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18153/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy is a vital policy support for the development of renewable electricity and to enable Ireland reach national and EU renewable energy and climate targets. The PSO levy is charged to all electricity final customers in Ireland and is collected from customers by electricity suppliers. The money raised from the levy is paid, via suppliers, to qualifying generators eligible for support under a number of Government schemes including the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff (REFIT) schemes.

The legal basis for the PSO levy and its method of calculation are set out in regulations made under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 and the Public Service Obligations Order 2002 (S.I. 217 of 2002). Under this legislation, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is responsible for the calculation of the levy each year and ensuring that the scheme is administered appropriately and efficiently.

The table below sets out the total annual PSO levy since 2011.

PSO Period	Total Levy (€M)
11/12	€92.12
12/13	€131.24
13/14	€210.89
14/15	€335.44
15/16	€325.25
16/17	€392.42
17/18	€471.90
18/19	€209.29
19/20	€176.46
20/21	€393.13

21/22	€263.70

The latest CRU Decision on the PSO Levy for the period October 2021 to September 2022 period is available at: [www.cru.ie/cru-publishes-public-service-obligation-levy-for-2021-2022](http://www.cru.ie/cru-publishes-public-service-obligation-levy-for-2021-2022).

## Energy Prices

179. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the role gas plays in setting the wholesale electricity price of other forms of generated electricity, particularly renewable energy. [18154/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Single Electricity Market (SEM) is the wholesale electricity market for the island of Ireland. The SEM is regulated by the SEM Committee and administration of the SEM is managed by the Single Electricity Market Operator. The SEM Committee comprises the two energy regulators, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and Northern Ireland’s Utility Regulator and an independent member.

In the SEM, all electricity generators, including gas and renewables, are obliged to sell their output into the “pool”. The wholesale price is based on the last bid by a generator that is accepted by the Market operator to meet the demand for electricity at that time. The market operator accepts all the available renewable power and any other power source that has priority and then accepts the lowest bid followed by the next lowest and so on until the demand is matched by supply. The last bid required to meet demand sets the wholesale price for electricity.

The regulation of the electricity market is carried out by the CRU, which is an independent regulator. I have no statutory function in the matter of the regulation of electricity prices. The Electricity Regulation Act provides that the CRU shall account for the performance of its functions to a Joint Committee of the Oireachtas.

## Wind Energy Generation

180. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the average cost of producing wind energy in the State; the average wholesale price of wind energy each month since January 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18155/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Single Electricity Market (SEM) is the wholesale electricity market for the island of Ireland. The SEM is regulated by the SEM Committee and administration of the SEM is managed by the Single Electricity Market Operator. The SEM Committee comprises the two energy regulators, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and Northern Ireland’s Utility Regulator and an independent member.

In the SEM, all electricity generators, including gas and renewables, are obliged to sell their output into the “pool”. The wholesale price is based on the last bid by a generator that is accepted by the market operator to meet the demand for electricity at that time. The market operator accepts all the available renewable power and any other power source that has priority and then accepts the lowest bid followed by the next lowest and so on until the demand is matched by supply. The last bid required to meet demand sets the wholesale price for elec-

tricity. The operation and administration of the Single Electricity Market is managed by the Single Electricity Market Operator (SEMO). Market-related data, including monthly day ahead prices, is available in the public domain via the SEMO website: [www.sem-o.com/](http://www.sem-o.com/).

According to the SEM Committee's most recent market monitoring report for Q4 2021, published February, the average day-ahead market wholesale prices in the SEM for Q4 2021 was €223.42/MWh with a highest average daily price of €378.35/MWh and lowest of €123.50/MWh.

Renewable energy generation such as wind lowers wholesale electricity prices during periods when they are generating power, highlighting the need to accelerate the delivery of renewable electricity projects and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels for energy generation.

The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) is one of the major Government policies to help deliver on the ambition in the Climate Action Plan 2021 of up to 80% renewable electricity by 2030. Renewable energy projects compete under the RESS in auctions for support for a period up to 16.5 years under a two way floating feed in premium. This means that they receive the price they bid in at which for RESS-1 projects was an average of €74.08/MWh, which is significantly below the current average wholesale electricity price.

### **Environmental Schemes**

181. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications when the one-stop-shop under the national home energy upgrade scheme will open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18156/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The recently launched National Home Energy Upgrade Scheme introduces a new, highly customer centric, way to undertake home upgrades. SEAI registered One-Stop-Shops will provide an end-to-end service for homeowners. This includes surveying; designing the upgrades; managing the grant process; helping with access to finance; engaging contractors; and quality assurance. The Scheme offers unprecedented grant levels, increased from around 30% to 50% of the cost of a typical B2 home energy upgrade with a heat pump.

Following Government approval, the SEAI registration portal opened for companies to apply to be a One-Stop-Shop. The SEAI advise that there are currently 19 companies going through the important registration process, at various stages, from Stage 1 pre-qualification review to having their OSS appointment letter issued. Of these, there are two One Stop Shops registered by the SEAI with one more to follow imminently. Once the One Stop Shops are registered, homeowners will then be able to make applications for upgrades under the new Scheme.

The One Stop Shop approach is one of a number of SEAI Schemes available for home energy upgrades, details of which can be found on their website at [Individual Energy Upgrade Grants | Home Energy Grants | SEAI](http://Individual Energy Upgrade Grants | Home Energy Grants | SEAI)

Homeowners can familiarise themselves with the scheme details on SEAI's One Stop Shop webpage covering the benefits of engaging a One Stop Shop, the ranges of services on offer and the grant amounts available per energy efficiency measures installed: [www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/one-stop-shop/](http://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/one-stop-shop/)

SEAI have also produced a homeowner guide to advise homeowners through the various steps to completing a whole house upgrade under the One Stop Shop Service:



SEAI are focused on engaging organisations capable of professionally managing all aspects of a One Stop Shop service. Organisations interested in becoming a registered OSS should visit the SEAI dedicated One Stop Shop registration webpage: [www.seai.ie/register-with-seai/one-stop-shop/](http://www.seai.ie/register-with-seai/one-stop-shop/)

### Flexible Work Practices

182. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18164/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** My Department, following engagement with staff, began new working arrangements to facilitate the transition to blended Working on Monday the 21st of March. Under the transition to blended working, staff are encouraged to work remotely for 2 days each week, from the Department's offices for 2 days each week and may work a third day either from home or from the office based on the business needs of the Department. These arrangements are planned to stay in place for 6 months, with the intention that we will be in a position to implement our formal Blended Working Policy at that point. The Department's Blended Working Policy will be fully aligned to Civil Service Blended Working Framework, which was publicly announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, and the Minister of State with responsibility for Public Procurement and eGovernment at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Ossian Smyth on the 31st March 2022.

The publication of the policy framework facilitates remote working on a blended basis across the Civil Service. It provides direction to individual organisations in the Civil Service to develop tailored policies on blended working that are appropriate to their business needs. It is also consistent with the Civil Service being an employer of choice. This move to blended working supports commitments in Our Rural Future, the Climate Action Plan and the National Planning Framework.

Blended working represents a fantastic opportunity to transform how we work, live, interact and deliver results for the citizen. I believe that blended working will facilitate and drive the Department, and each individual and team within it, to deliver on our vision as set out in **Le Chéile 23**, my Department's statement of strategy for a climate neutral, sustainable and digitally connected Ireland.

### Electricity Generation

183. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications his plans to ensure that persons with solar panels on their homes and smart meters whose excess units are going into the electricity grid will either get their units back or else have them taken off their bills, given the worsening cost of energy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18327/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** On the 15 February this year I signed the Regulations that transpose Articles 21 and 22 of the recast Renewable Energy Directive which brings these Articles into force. These Regulations mean the Clean Export Guarantee (CEG) tariff is now available for new and existing micro-and

small-scale generators so that they can receive payment from their electricity supplier for all excess renewable electricity they export to the grid, reflective of the market value.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) published a decision on an interim enabling framework for the CEG on 1 December 2021. This decision outlines the interim arrangements for the implementation of the CEG, including eligibility criteria and remuneration methodology. The CRU has decided that suppliers will set their individual CEG tariffs on a competitive market basis. A number of suppliers are now advertising their CEG rates and the CRU advise consumers to check with their supplier in the first instance.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is not setting a date or deadline for the timing of the first payment. Eligible micro- and small-scale generators can expect an initial payment or credit from their supplier within a reasonable time after June 2022. The CRU has asked suppliers to communicate their decision on when initial Clean Export Guarantee (CEG) payments will be made at the earliest opportunity.

From January 2022, a tax exemption will apply to income up to €200 per annum received by domestic micro-generators from their suppliers by way of the CEG. This will mean that for the vast majority of domestic renewables self-consumers, who will typically have an installation of below 6kW, there will be no need to declare their income from the CEG.

### **Pension Provisions**

184. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications further to Parliamentary Question No. 207 of 15 February 2022, if he will provide an update; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18350/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Further to my last update on this case, the relevant information has been sent to the National Shared Services Office who process such claims. My Department has sought an update on this case and will revert to the Deputy when it is received.

### **Departmental Contracts**

185. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18898/22]

**Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy.

### **Traffic Management**

186. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the implementation of the recommendation of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight Interim Pre-Budget Report 2022 for the examination of congestion charges to be undertaken. [17564/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Climate Action Plan makes clear that we need to reduce fossil fuelled passenger vehicle kilometres by up to 10% to fully achieve a 51% emissions reduction for the transport sector by 2030. While all options are on the table as

we strive to achieve carbon neutrality, we must ensure that if policies like this are pursued that they are evidence based and that viable alternatives exist for people to continue to make their journeys.

My Department published the *Five Cities Demand Management Study* in December 2021, pursuant to Action 81 of the *Climate Action Plan 2019*. The purpose of the Study is to identify transport demand drivers in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway, and to assess the impact and suitability of an array of different demand management measures for each city. The Study focused on addressing four main challenges facing our cities: decarbonisation, air quality, congestion, and, improving the overall urban environment. The Study is evidence-based using insight from an extensive international best practice review, national and local stakeholder engagement and supported by detailed qualitative (Phase 1) and quantitative (Phase 2) appraisal - available to view at: [www.gov.ie/en/publication/c6571-five-cities-demand-management-study/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c6571-five-cities-demand-management-study/)

While the Study has identified that the introduction of congestion charges can prove effective, the Study also found that there are a variety of alternative measures that can be pursued with greater effect. The three priority measures that have been recommended for implementation across the five cities are:

- Develop and embed the concept of 15-minute neighbourhoods through national and local plans and strategies, providing resources to incentivise their implementation through national funding/grants schemes.
- Enhance delivery of the National Planning Framework.
- Public Parking Controls.

Importantly, the Study has also made clear that there is no single solution to tackling the challenges facing our urban environments. Utilising an integrated Travel Demand Management approach to policy development, planning and delivery of our land use and transport systems will be fundamental to addressing these challenges in the coming years.

In line with our Climate Action Plan commitments, my Department, NTA and the Regional Assemblies are engaging to identify a pathway for the implementation of suitable demand management measures at national and local level, and to advancing these measures by 2025.

### **National Car Test**

187. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Transport if the long waiting times for persons requiring NCT tests will have consequences for persons waiting; the reason persons now have to pay upfront for NCT tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18406/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The operation of the National Car Test (NCT) service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred 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.

It is however worth noting that under road traffic legislation, all vehicle owners must be in possession of a valid roadworthiness certificate for their vehicle while it is being used in public places or on public roads. Enforcement of road traffic legislation is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

### **Airport Security**

188. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to significant delays for passengers on the ground side of Dublin Airport (details supplied); and his plans to assist the Dublin Airport Authority to process persons in a more efficient manner in advance of the summer holiday season. [17480/22]

196. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport the efforts his Department is making to alleviate the chronic delays to passengers going through security at Dublin Airport; if consideration has been given to requesting support from the Defence Forces or State agencies as an interim measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17629/22]

202. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if he has spoken recently with the CEO of the Dublin Airport Authority regarding the lengthy delays being experienced at the security baggage area at Dublin Airport; and the immediate steps being taken to resolve this issue. [17713/22]

210. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport his recent engagements with the Dublin Airport Authority in relation to the unacceptable delays that passengers are facing to transit through security in Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17856/22]

211. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport if the Dublin Airport Authority has requested additional funding for security staff or funding to upgrade the security screening systems in Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17857/22]

214. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport the communication he has had with Dublin Airport Authority to resolve staffing issues at security clearance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17904/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 188, 196, 202, 210, 211 and 214 together.

daa is a commercial state company funded through its own resources and has not sought funding for security staff or funding to upgrade the security screening systems in Dublin Airport.

I have met with and had briefings from the CEO, Dalton Philips, and other senior staff over the last week where I expressed concern at the current situation relating to security screening and the impact the delays are having on passengers. I have established a daily crisis management meeting between the Department and daa to monitor the situation.

The company has undertaken significant work to mitigate the security queue times at Dublin Airport. It has put in place a number of measures including establishing a senior management taskforce; stepping up recruitment efforts; redeployment of staff where possible; opening security lanes on a 24/7 basis, and enhancing communications with passengers. These measures made a difference last weekend compared to the previous weekend, with 95% of passengers through T2 on Sunday having a queue time of less than 30 minutes and 100% less than 45 minutes. The comparable passenger queue times for T1 on Sunday were 82% at less than 30 minutes and 97% at less than 45 minutes.

The company has also recruited over 100 new security staff recently and this should assist in the alleviation of the excessive queue times over the coming period. These security staff are being deployed following the necessary training.

Dublin Airport is planning for a significant increase in passenger volumes this coming weekend and into the Easter holidays. It does note that this increase will present a considerable challenge. Management is reviewing the experience of last weekend to further develop and refine measures to cater for the increased passenger numbers. I will continue to monitor the situation over the coming days and weeks and continue to engage with daa to ensure that all that can be done is being done for passengers using Dublin Airport.

### **Electric Vehicles**

189. **Deputy Francis Noel Duffy** asked the Minister for Transport if clarity and guidance will be provided in relation to charging electric vehicles in multi-unit developments in which there is a pathway between the home charger and the car; if households can charge their electric vehicle by running the charging cable on the pathway from their household to the car space; if cables should be covered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17490/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Climate Action Plan 2021 set a target of 945,000 EVs by 2030. 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, to facilitate the expansion of EVs in the Irish car fleet. A draft national charging infrastructure strategy has been published for public consultation which sets out a pathway to stay ahead of demand over the critical period out to 2030.

The EV Home Charger Grant Scheme has been in operation since January 2018 to support the installation of home chargers for purchasers of new and second-hand BEVs and PHEVs. The grant provides generous support towards the full cost of installation of a home charger up to a maximum of €600.

As regards existing apartment buildings and shared residences, work is currently being progressed to expand the EV home charger grant to include shared parking in apartment blocks and similar developments.

As per the draft strategy, for those who cannot charge at home, provision of residential charging solutions that give the same benefits and mirror the home charging option should be the first objective. This will provide a safe and accessible charging solution for those without access to a driveway without the use of cable extensions running from the house over pathways.

Residential charge points should replicate the home charging pattern of charging vehicles at night, during off peak periods, and at a low cost. There is an onus on national and local government to facilitate the provision of these charging solutions for citizens who do not have access to a home charge point. It is expected that as growing numbers of people switch to EVs, there will be an increased need for publicly accessible and on-street charge points to cater for those who do not have access to private off-street parking and cannot charge their vehicles at home.

Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland will provide co-funding to support Local Authorities in developing local area network plans for EV infrastructure, comprising both on-street charging in areas where residents do not have access to home charging solutions, and destination charge points at Local Authority facilities. Local Authorities will then be able to apply for funding from a new Residential Charging Scheme which will replace the Public Points Scheme.

### **Driver Licences**

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport the provisions in relation to driving licences that will be put in place for Irish persons who were living in Russia and had to leave due to the war in Ukraine (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17514/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** A person who is resident in Ireland must have an Irish or other EU driving licence to drive here.

Irish driver licensing law operates within a framework of EU law, which sets out the standards to be met in driving tests to qualify for a licence. When it comes to driving licences issued by non-EU states, we may make bilateral agreements on licence exchange, but only where the two licensing regimes are comparable. Ireland does not have a driving licence exchange agreement with Russia.

When people come to Ireland with a non-exchangeable licence, we have no option but to require them to go through the process of obtaining an Irish licence. This is a matter of public safety. While many may have a safe driving record, we have no way of measuring the standard of the driving test through which they obtained their licence.

A person who has held a full Russian driving licence for more than two years can avail of a shorter process to a full licence, involving Essential Driver Training of six lessons only instead of twelve, and they will not have to wait the minimum of 6 months before taking a driving test.

An Irish learner permit can be renewed up to 5 years after its expiry date.

### **Rail Network**

191. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport if he will request Irish Rail to include the Limerick to Ballybrophy via Nenagh railway line on the manual level crossing upgrade project and to ring-fence the required funding to automate the manual level crossings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17573/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC) provides the funding framework for the protection and renewal of our railway infrastructure, including the Ballybrophy to Limerick rail line.

This is the third year of the current five-year IMMAC programme, as approved by Government in 2020, and over the five years of the programme in excess of €1.1 billion in Exchequer funding will be made available to support delivery. This funding will increase service reliability and punctuality, improve journey times and ensure continued safety of rail services. Usage of level crossings is reviewed on an annual basis through an on-going programme of inspections.

The Deputy may wish to note that the IMMAC programme supports an enhanced programme of track relaying on the Ballybrophy line.

Noting Iarnród Éireann's (IÉ) responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to IÉ for a direct reply on the specific matter raised. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **Public Sector Staff**

5 April 2022

192. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Transport the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17609/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I wish to inform the Deputy that one member of my Department's staff is presently on suspension from work on full pay for a period in excess of 12 months.

I have asked the aegis bodies to provide the relevant information for their respective organisations, but if you do not hear from them within 10 days you should contact my office.

### **Air Services**

193. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport the number of operators which applied to his Department for multiple flight operation authorisations to operate in 2021. [17614/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** In 2021, my department received applications for a Multiple Flight Operations (MFO) authorisation from 34 air operators. All applications were approved.

### **Airport Policy**

194. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport if he will confirm the transportation of kerosene to or from Shannon via airplane (details supplied) on dates 21 or 22 March 2022. [17615/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** Shannon Group has confirmed to my department that there was no kerosene transported to or from Shannon via airplane on 21 or 22 March 2022.

### **Electric Vehicles**

195. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport the efforts that are being made to achieve national targets regarding the use of electric vehicles; if he will consider a strategy or policy to encourage the importation of second-hand EVs from the UK, including reducing VRT and other taxes, charges and levies on the importation of these vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17628/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy is aware, the transport sector accounts for approximately 20% of Ireland's national greenhouse gas emissions, with car use responsible for over half of these emissions. In recognition of this, the Climate Action Plan contains commitments to significantly increase electrification within the national fleet, including an ambitious target of 945,000 electric vehicles (EVs) by 2030. Meeting this target will be extremely challenging; however, it represents the scale of transformation needed in the transport sector if emissions are to be reduced to the extent required.

A positive policy environment has been fostered with a generous suite of financial and taxa-

tion incentives in place for those buying an EV as well as an extensive publicly accessible re-charging infrastructure network. Presently, there are approximately 53,000 EVs on Irish roads; a significant step-up is required if Ireland is to achieve its Climate Action Plan EV target.

The former Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport established the Electric Vehicle Policy Pathway Working Group to consider the optimum mix of regulatory, taxation and subsidy policies available to Government to significantly accelerate electric vehicle sales. This Group focused on mechanisms to achieve an immediate increase in EV uptake to attain over 175,000 EVs by 2025 in the line with the Climate Action Plan trajectory and, thereafter, to be well placed to reach full electrification by 2030. In its report, published in September, the Group noted that the UK second hand EV market is an important vector for vehicles entering the Irish fleet.

Matters relating to VRT & other taxation is a matter for which my colleague the Minister for Finance has primary responsibility, and with whom I will be engaging on these issues in preparation for Budget 2023.

I am supportive of all appropriate and proportionate supports for the EV industry providing momentum towards achieving the Government's emission reduction commitment.

*Question No. 196 answered with Question No. 188.*

### **Departmental Consultations**

**197. Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Transport if he will report on his Department's public consultation on the review of the sustainable mobility policy; the number of persons and organisations that engaged with the consultation; when a report will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17630/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** A collaborative approach has been taken by my Department in developing the forthcoming Sustainable Mobility Policy, through public consultation and extensive stakeholder and cross-government engagement.

A roundtable forum was held in 2018 which allowed for an initial exchange of views between stakeholders on a variety of issues relevant to the sustainable mobility sector, including potential challenges and competing priorities likely to arise in the future. Over 50 stakeholder organisations and individuals were invited to attend that event, including representatives from passenger and consumer interests; providers of bus, rail and taxi services; providers of transport infrastructure; trade unions with members working in public transport; cyclist and pedestrian advocacy groups; disability representatives; business groups; environmental interests; local authorities; regulators; legislators; policymakers; and analysts and academics who focus on sustainable mobility.

The roundtable discussion informed the development of a comprehensive set of background papers across a range of themes which were then published as part of the public consultation process launched at the end of 2019. A further stakeholder engagement event was held at that time with over 40 stakeholder organisations and individuals, along with engagement with the members of the three Regional Assemblies.

Over 250 submissions across a broad range of themes were received as part of the public consultation process which ended in February 2020, from people and organisations in the public, private and non-profit sectors. Following a review of the submissions received, a report of the public consultation was published on my Department's website and further bilateral engage-



ment has taken place with other government departments, State bodies, advocacy groups, business groups, disability representatives and academics.

Both the submissions received as part of the public consultation process and the extensive stakeholder engagement have significantly influenced the development of the new Sustainable Mobility Policy which will be published in April.

### **Public Transport**

198. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some Ukrainian families are walking along busy roads with children to get to town centres (details supplied) due to the lack of transportation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17639/22]

199. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Transport when arrangements will be in place for transportation to town centres for those Ukrainian refugees who are located in congregated settings outside town centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17641/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 199 together.

As the Deputy is aware, a whole of Government approach is being adopted regarding the Ukrainian crisis. In line with this approach, in my own Department, we have established a high-level group to monitor and respond as appropriate to the crisis and consider the role that the transport sector could play.

In this context, it was agreed that free travel would be provided for newly arriving Ukrainian refugees on any Public Service Obligation (PSO) or Local Link public transport service from port of entry to their end destination. This initiative is being applied across all PSO contracted services, including commercial bus services included in emergency PSO contracts, and those services that are part of the emergency commercial bus operator grant scheme. The situation is being monitored on an ongoing basis.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which operates under the TFI Local Link brand. In light of the NTA's responsibilities regarding the provision of Local Link services, I have referred your questions to the NTA for a direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

*Question No. 199 answered with Question No. 198.*

### **Haulage Industry**

200. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Transport if he will consider extending the recently announced Government support for the haulage sector to address cost pressures arising from current high fuel prices to include own account haulage given that these heavy goods vehicle operators face the same difficulties in terms of rising costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17653/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** On 15 March 2022, the Government approved an emergency support measure – the Licensed Haulage Emergency Support Scheme to address cost pressures arising from current high fuel prices.

I can confirm that the scheme is available only to operators holding a road haulage operator licence.

In deciding on this targeted, temporary scheme, the Government considered that the licensed haulage sector is a specific case for several reasons, primarily that the sector is of national strategic importance as a critical enabler of a functioning supply chain, bringing essential supplies into and around the State, supporting key infrastructure and enabling the maintenance of economic and social activity. While this is true for certain other operators also, fuel represents a greater overall proportion of overhead cost for hauliers than would be the case for other businesses who self-provide transport as part of their wider business.

Given the rapid increase in fuel prices linked to the crisis in Ukraine, the haulage sector reported to the Government a serious risk of cessation of business among haulage companies that would have had significant implications for supply chains into the State, including for essential goods.

You will be aware that on 9 March 2022, in recognition of rising fuel costs for all citizens and businesses, the Government reduced Excise duty by 20 cent per litre of petrol, 15 cent per litre of diesel and 2 cent in the excise duty charged on marked gas oil in order to reduce the cost of fuels.

The Minister for Finance has written to the European Commission to ask what flexibilities might be available on an emergency basis to reduce the tax on fuel. Currently, however, the EU Energy Tax Directive limits the possibility of further reducing the tax on fuel. Specifically, the Directive requires a minimum tax of €0.33 per litre and the measures already decided have reduced the tax on diesel to the minimum.

In general, however, it should be noted that the causes of these fuel price pressures are not within the control of Government and are being directly influenced by external factors, including the Ukraine crisis.

The Government has limited resources but through the Excise measure announced on 9 March, as well as the Licensed Haulage Emergency Support Scheme approved on 15 March 2022, it has responded to help to ease the impact of these price increases. However, we must accept that it will not be possible to insulate citizens and businesses from the full impact of these fuel price increases.

## **Road Network**

201. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport if he will provide an update on the allocation of community improvement scheme funding for 2022. [17665/22]

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

The purpose of the Community Involvement Scheme (CIS) is to facilitate local community participation in the repair of local roads. The focus of the programme is on the repair of more lightly trafficked public roads which might not be high on the list of a local authority's annual roadwork programme.

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Towards the end of 2021, my Department invited local authorities to submit applications for Community Involvement Schemes (CIS) for another two year programme for the period 2022/2023. While community contributions in the range 15% to 30% had been required up to 2021 depending on the mix between works and monies, the contribution rate has been reduced to a minimum of 10% for monetary contributions and 20% for works contribution for the 2022/2023 round of funding.

On 15th February 2022 I announced the regional and local road allocations for 2022 which includes funding of €15.2 million for the CIS. Details of the regional and local road grant allocations and payments to local authorities are outlined in the regional and local road grant booklets which are available in the Oireachtas Library.

*Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 188.*

### **Road Network**

203. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the extent to which he expects to ensure that the N5 route is sufficiently upgraded to meet traffic levels in the next five years. [17714/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport I have responsibility for overall policy and 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, management and upgrading 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 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.

### **Rail Network**

204. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the details of the investments or service improvements made on the Dublin-Wexford train line since 1 January 2020. [17715/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC) provides the funding framework for the protection and renewal of our railway infrastructure, including the Dublin to Wexford Line.

This is the third year of the current five-year IMMAC programme, as approved by Government in 2020, and over the five years of the programme in excess of €1.1 billion in Exchequer funding will be made available to support delivery.

Noting Iarnród Éireann's (IÉ) responsibility in this matter and regarding service improvements, I have referred the Deputy's question to IÉ for a direct reply on the specific matters raised. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **Bus Services**

205. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the details of bus stations in County Kildare that are included in the public transport accessibility programme; the type of works planned; and the date for completion of the works. [17716/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding for public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for developing an accessible, integrated and sustainable public transport network.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities, which includes managing the Public Transport Accessibility Programme, I have forwarded your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Rail Network**

206. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport when Kishogue rail station will open resulting in a local train service for commuters in Lucan, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17795/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy may be aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area including, in consultation with Iarnród Éireann (IÉ), Kishogue station.

I am informed by the NTA that various works need to be undertaken by IÉ before Kishogue Station can be brought into use. It is anticipated that the necessary works will be completed in the latter half of 2022. However, at this stage it is too soon to indicate when the new station will be operational.

### **Road Projects**

207. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the planned upgrade of the N4 Roosky to Dromod and in particular the bypass of Carrick-on-Shannon. [17820/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport I have responsibility for overall policy and 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 planning, design and construction 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 and the necessary statutory approvals. In this context, TII is best placed to advise you on the status of this project.

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

### **Road Network**

208. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if he has engaged with the National Transport Authority in respect of plans for the roads network that link the areas between the M4 and N7, M7 in north County Kildare; his plans to improve this network of roads

in view of the high level of use by heavy goods vehicles; if he has engaged with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Transport Infrastructure Ireland in the context of the increasing level of residential planning permissions and builds under way in areas such as Clane, Straffan, Maynooth and Celbridge, County Kildare; and if he has initiated a review of the designation of roads in these areas in the context of regional and-or national road status. [17833/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Individual local authorities have statutory responsibility for the improvement and maintenance of public roads, in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland in the case of national roads, under the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993.

In relation to broader policy decisions, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including county Kildare.

The Deputy will be aware that the NTA published a draft revised Transport Strategy for the GDA 2022-2042 last November for public consultation. The public consultation process ended on 10 January. The development of the strategy and the need for it to be reviewed every six years is a statutory function of the NTA and the process relating to that development and review is set out in section 12 of the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 (as amended). Ultimately a draft strategy will be submitted to me this year for approval as provided for in the Act.

The approved strategy will set out the framework for investment in transport infrastructure and services, including road investment, in the GDA over the next two decades to 2042. The strategy will reflect the objectives of the National Planning Framework and the Climate Action Plan, and the commitments in the National Development Plan.

My Department is actively working with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to strengthen the policy links between land use planning and transport planning. In line with an action in the Government's Housing for All plan, a working group has been established to consider opportunities for transport-led development in major urban centres. The working group is made up of my Department, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the NTA and the Land Development Agency. The group is tasked with identifying potential areas that can be developed off the back of previous and further investment in transport infrastructure.

## **Driver Licences**

209. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport the reason persons are being asked to submit a public services card when applying online for a driving licence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17848/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** To apply for or renew your driving licence you are required to provide photographic ID and evidence of your PPSN, address and residency entitlement. When an applicant applies in person at a National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) office, the required documents can be examined and a face to face verification can be made.

When applying online, the same information is required, but verifying a person's identity is more difficult. Accordingly, a verified MyGovID account, which requires a Public Service Card (PSC), is used to confirm a person's identity and image in place of a face-to-face verification.

Legal proceedings, in which the Department of Social Protection appealed an enforcement notice from the Data Protection Commission on processing of personal data for PSCs, were resolved in December 2021.

The agreement reached acknowledges that other public bodies listed in social welfare legislation (“specified bodies”) may use the PSC as a means of verifying the identity of the people they deal with, provided that they also accept other methods of authenticating identity. The NDLS accepts other methods, such as a passport. Details can be found on the NDLS website [www.ndls.ie](http://www.ndls.ie)

The agreement also accepted that the Department of Social Protection and other specified bodies can continue to use MyGovID as the sole means of authenticating identity for accessing online services, provided that an alternative service channel is available. The NDLS offices provide this alternative channel.

The Road Safety Authority is a specified body for the use of a PSC under the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended by the Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act 2009).

*Question No. 210 answered with Question No. 188.*

*Question No. 211 answered with Question No. 188.*

### **Bus Services**

212. **Deputy Darren O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport if additional funding has been sought by LocalLink services to allow them provide transport for Ukrainian refugees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17859/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As the Deputy is aware, a whole of Government approach is being adopted regarding the Ukrainian crisis. In line with this approach, in my own Department, we have established a high-level group to monitor and respond as appropriate to the crisis and consider the role that the transport sector could play.

In this context, it was agreed that free travel would be provided for newly arriving Ukrainian refugees on any Public Service Obligation (PSO) or Local Link public transport service from port of entry to their end destination. This initiative is being applied across all PSO contracted services, including commercial bus services included in emergency PSO contracts, and those services that are part of the emergency commercial bus operator grant scheme. The situation is being monitored on an ongoing basis and will be reviewed at the end of April.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which operates under the TFI Local Link brand. In light of the NTA’s responsibilities regarding the provision of Local Link services, I have referred your question to the NTA for a direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Road Projects**

213. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the A5 road transport corridor upgrade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17871/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** *The New Decade, New Approach* agree-

ment re-affirmed the Government's commitment to the A5 scheme. The Programme for Government includes a commitment to work with the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver key cross-border infrastructure initiatives, including the A5.

The planning and implementation of the proposed A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. The Northern Ireland Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) initiated Public Inquiry hearings for the scheme which concluded in March 2020 and the interim report was submitted by the Inquiry Inspector in September 2020.

In 2021, the Minister for Infrastructure published the PAC Interim Report. When doing so the Minister indicated her acceptance of the Inspector's recommendations regarding the preparation of and consultation on further documents on the topics of flood risk and the consideration of alternatives to the proposed scheme. Department of Infrastructure (DfI) officials were asked to prepare a further addendum to the Scheme Environmental Statement for public consultation.

While it had been anticipated that these assessments would have been completed with a view to the Public Inquiry reconvening early in 2021, the timetable has slipped and it is now anticipated that it will be convened later this year and a final report will be available early 2023.

The Government is committed to providing funding of £75 million (sterling) towards the cost of phase 1a of the A5 upgrade scheme once the statutory planning process in Northern Ireland has been concluded.

*Question No. 214 answered with Question No. 188.*

### **Airport Security**

215. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport if he has contacted the Minister for Justice about Garda vetting delays for new workers in Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17905/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** New security processes have been in place since the start of the year to support the implementation of new European regulatory requirements for conducting enhanced background checks on aviation personnel.

The processing times associated with the new security process have been challenging for industry and I have written to the Minister for Justice informing her of the difficulties this is causing and asking that her Department engage with An Garda Síochána to improve turnaround times. I understand that additional personnel have been assigned to the necessary processing areas in An Garda Síochána to manage the increased level of demand. I also understand from that the numbers awaiting security vetting have reduced considerably in recent weeks.

My Department has regularly engaged with industry on the issue and will continue to closely monitor the situation.

### **Driver Licences**

216. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport when an application for a driver licence transfer will be processed for a person (details supplied). [18078/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** All

enquires relating to driver licensing are handled by the National Driver Licence Service, the provision of which I have delegated to the Road Safety Authority under the relevant legislation. My Department does not have access to individual applications.

### **Offshore Islands**

217. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Transport the funding streams that are available to invest in infrastructure to improve access for persons with physical disabilities and mobility impairments to offshore islands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18127/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** While it is not under the remit of the Department of Transport, it is an objective of this Government to provide the necessary supports for our off-shore islands so that those communities can continue to live, and thrive, on the islands. The Department of Rural and Community Development manages a large suite of transport contracts that provide reliable and affordable mainland connectivity for island residents and visitors.

The development of quayside infrastructure, on the mainland and the islands, to cater for transport services users, including those of reduced mobility, falls under the remit of the local authorities. They are responsible for installing slipways, pontoons and quayside structures so that users can board and alight from passenger boats in a safe and dignified manner.

The Department of Rural and Community Development provides funding for these types of developments and recently increased the allocation for Capital works on the islands from €2.64m in 2021, to €4.64m for 2022.

This increase will enable the Minister of Rural and Community Development to approve an expanded works programme this year, which will include the annual programme for Minor Capital Works on the offshore islands, co-funded by the relevant Local Authorities.

The Department of Rural and Community Development is very aware of the challenges facing those of reduced mobility when using our subsidised transport services, and is currently engaging with service providers to explore options so that all users of these services can board and alight from a ferry safely with ease.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

218. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Transport the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18176/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** In July 2021, the Government approved a Policy Statement on Blended Working in the Civil Service. This statement committed the Civil Service to implementing a policy of blended working that could provide flexibility to both employees and their employers in a manner that supports the continued delivery of high quality services.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has worked with employers and unions to develop a central Blended Working Policy Framework for the Civil Service and this was published on the 31 March by Minister McGrath. This Framework allows Departments to develop their own policies with the flexibility to meet their own business needs and service delivery



functions.

Now that the Framework has been agreed, my Department will continue work on developing its own Blended Working Policy, which I hope will be finalised shortly in consultation with stakeholders, including with local staff representatives. In the meantime, my Department will continue with its transitional arrangements as we move towards formal blended working arrangements.

### **Driver Test**

219. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if an appointment for a driving test will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18255/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegard Naughton):** The protocols employed for scheduling driving test appointments is an operational matter for the Road Safety Authority, who are statutorily responsible for the operation of the National Driving Test Service.

I have therefore referred the Deputy's 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.

### **Greenways Provision**

220. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Transport if additional funding will be made available to provide loops to connect local towns to the national greenway route from Dublin to Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18261/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and exchequer funding in relation to Greenways. Once funding arrangements have been put in place with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), and in line with Section 32(2) of the Road Act 1993, the planning, design, and construction of individual Greenways is a matter for TII, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. It is important that any proposed Greenway has the support of the relevant Local Authority as funding is provided by TII to Local Authorities. This is also subject to the requirements of the Public Spending Code and necessary statutory approvals. In this context, TII is best placed to advise the Deputy on the matter raised..

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

### **Transport Costs**

221. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport the estimated amount it would cost to provide free public transport to all student Leap card holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18325/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, nor decisions on fares.

It is the National Transport Authority (NTA) that has the statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services and also has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of public transport services contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable. The funding of those services comprises both the fares paid by passengers and the subvention payments from the Exchequer. The main purpose of the subvention payment is to meet the gap between income from fares and the cost of operating services.

The provision of public transport services is heavily dependent on passenger fare revenue as it normally contributes about 65% of the operational cost. The remaining 35% of cost is covered by the PSO grant and the Department of Social Protection grant under the free travel scheme.

Prior to COVID-19, €287 million of Exchequer funding was provided for PSO services in Budget 2020; however, since 2020, additional funding has been required to continue to address the significant COVID impacts on public transport provision.

In 2022, I secured €538m to support PSO services including over €200m to address COVID expenses (i.e. loss of fare revenue, cleaning costs). Up to €12m will be provided as ongoing support for the licensed bus sector; while, over €15m has also been allocated to support Local Link regular service provision in rural Ireland.

The Government is strongly committed to helping combat the rising cost-of-living being experienced throughout the country. In this context, a suite of new measures is being introduced by Government to help with this issue, including a 20% average fare reduction on all PSO services until the end of 2022. These discounted fares will benefit the hundreds of thousands of people across the country who use PSO public transport every day. €54m in Exchequer funding has been secured to allow for the introduction of these discounted fares.

Also, in recognition of the importance of incentivising young people to use public transport, as part of Budget 2022 I secured €25m of funding to provide for the introduction of a young adult card (YAC) which will allow any person nationwide who is between 19 and 23 years old, to avail of an entitlement for discounted travel costs, and to increase the level of discount over and above the current student discount to an average of discount of 50% across all services, including city, intercity and rural services. It is envisaged that the discount will initially be made available on PSO services, and then broadened to include commercial operators at a later date. This will not only promote modal shift in the transport sector among this age group but should also contribute towards a reduced reliance on private transport with associated benefit of transport emission savings.

The PSO programme represents a significant expenditure of taxpayers' money, and funding has increased in recent years to cater for additional services and growing capacity. Any assessment of a proposed change to public transport fare structures would be a matter for the NTA to consider in the first instance. Therefore, I have forwarded the Deputy's specific question in relation to the estimated cost of waiving public transport fees for persons in possession of a student leap card. to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

## **Tax Reliefs**

222. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport if he has examined introducing a scheme similar to the cycle-to-work scheme for college students; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [18331/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** The Cycle to Work Scheme, which I am very supportive of, is a tax incentive scheme administered by the Revenue Commissioners and governed by tax legislation and tax policy which are matters for my colleague the Minister for Finance. In that regard I very much welcomed his announcement of increased thresholds under the existing scheme as part of the July Stimulus 2020. The increases are in line with the commitment made in the Programme for Government in relation to the scheme.

The Programme for Government commits to “widening the eligibility of the Bike to Work scheme”. To advance this commitment, my department in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development, introduced a pilot initiative last year for the provision of high quality up-cycled bicycles and e-bikes for those on low incomes and the most marginalised and disadvantaged, via the Community Services Programme.

Funding of up to €1m per annum (€3m in total) will be provided by my Department over a three-year period and will be made available through the Community Services Programme, which is managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development. Five applicants were approved for support under this pilot initiative.

Bikes will get a second life, and the people building them will provide a vital service in their communities with these pilot projects. This scheme keeps valuable materials in circulation, builds local expertise, and will shorten the turnaround time for those who have come to rely on the bicycle as a convenient way of getting around.

There are currently no plans to extend eligibility for the scheme further.

### Parliamentary Questions

223. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 152 and 153 of 1 March 2022, when the information referred to in the replies will be received from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland in view of the provisions of Standing Order 51(1) of Dáil Éireann in relation to referred replies to outside bodies.

[18346/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Parliamentary Question Nos. 152 and 153 of 1 March 2022 were sent to ESB eCars for further clarification. There was a recent change in staffing which led to a temporary delay in responses. The matter has been rectified and the Deputy can expect to receive a reply shortly.

### Legislative Reviews

224. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport if it is intended to introduce new legislation to repeal the Merchant Shipping Act 1892 and replace it with a modern Act suitable to the realities of the 21st century; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18347/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** Legislation for the maritime sector covers a wide timeframe ranging from before the foundation of the State until the present day. The core body of the Merchant Shipping Acts date from 1894 and consists of over 30 subsequent Merchant Shipping Acts. The Irish Maritime Directorate (IMD), made up of the Divisions across the maritime sector within my Department, has a

wide-ranging legislative work programme in place covering safety standards for vessels, ship and port security, seafarer certification, seafarer working conditions, marine environment/ship-source pollution prevention, marine recreational safety matters, ports and harbours, and marine casualty investigation. The legislative programme is informed by international, European and domestic requirements. The implementation of this legislative programme is framed over a ten-year period 2019-2029.

In February 2021, the IMD published its Strategy for the period 2021-2025. The Strategy includes key actions to be undertaken in relation to our legislative work programme having regard to a new analysis of requirements at domestic, international and EU level and emerging requirements for the maritime sector. As part of our action plan under the IMD Strategy, officials from my Department received training from the Law Reform Commission and produced a finalised consolidated text of the Merchant Shipping Acts 1894, 1952 and 1992. This is the first step towards the progression of a future modern Merchant Shipping (Consolidation) Bill scheduled for development in the latter part of the legislative work programme.

### **Driver Licences**

225. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Transport the technical matters that are being discussed to reach agreement on compatibility between the Irish and Ukrainian driving licensing regimes; if the Road Safety Authority benchmarked other European Union member counterparts on their recognition process; and if he will provide a timeline for the Authority and the Ukrainian authorities to establish an exchange agreement on driving licences. [18368/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** The Road Safety Authority (RSA) had been in discussions with Ukrainian authorities, with a view to considering a driving licence exchange agreement. This process, to examine whether the Ukrainian licensing system is in compliance with the system in Ireland under EU Directive 2006/126/EC, had not been completed before the current conflict in Ukraine. When the process was paused, the RSA had not arrived at a position where it could reach a decision on whether to proceed or not.

Benchmarking against other EU member state agreements is not an option as such agreements may be based on historical factors. It should be noted that undertaking the process of consideration of an agreement is no guarantee that an agreement will be concluded.

### **Driver Test**

226. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Transport the additional resources that will be provided to approved driving instructors to respond to the influx of Ukrainians applying for essential driver training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18369/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** Approved driving instructors are not employed by my Department or the Road Safety Authority. As independent operators, individual driving schools and instructors are best placed to determine how best to meet demand for driving lessons.

### **Driver Licences**

227. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport if the case of persons (details

supplied) will be reviewed; if the matter will be referred to the RSA ; if advice will be in relation to obtaining an appointment for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18377/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** An appointment to attend in person at a National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) office may be made by telephone on 0818 919 090.

### **Public Transport**

228. **Deputy Ivana Bacik** asked the Minister for Transport the proportion of moneys currently invested by his Department in night-time public transport services compared with investment in day-time services and if he is satisfied that current spending is adequate. [18381/22]

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

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. In addition, since 2010, the award of Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding falls under the independent statutory remit of the NTA. The allocations to the companies are decided by the NTA in exercise of its statutory mandate and in accordance with the various contract arrangements that it has in place with PSO service providers.

In light of the Authority's responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputy's specific question in relation to the proportion of public transport expenditure which is currently spent on overnight or 24 hour bus services to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **National Car Test**

229. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to long waiting times for persons requiring NCT tests; if this will have consequences for persons waiting; the reason persons now have to pay upfront for NCT tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18393/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** The operation of the National Car Test (NCT) service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred 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.

It is however worth noting that under road traffic legislation, all vehicle owners must be in possession of a valid roadworthiness certificate for their vehicle while it is being used in public places or on public roads. Enforcement of road traffic legislation is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

### **Departmental Contracts**

230. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role

of each. [18897/22]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Deputy, please see table below setting out the cost of consultants to the Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022 plus an outline of the role of each. The costs exclude legal advice and external support for interview boards.

Year	Division	Consultancy	Reason	Amount (€)
2021	MSPD	Clinchmaritime Ltd	Review of the Current Organisational Structures Underpinning Marine Casualty Investigation in Ireland in the context of national, EU and international obligations	€24,430
2021	SMPID	Arup Consultancy	All island Strategic Rail Review	€265,470.90
2021	Airports	Altitude Aviation Advisory	Advisory services supporting the delivery of a tender on the provision of Public Service Obligation air services	€18,316.24
2021		Aviation Advocacy SARRL	Appeals Panel to consider the appeals of the Determination of the Commission for Aviation Regulation on an Interim Review of the 2019 Determination in relation to 2020 and 2021	€9,692.40
2021		H Nixon Consulting	Appeals Panel to consider the appeals of the Determination of the Commission for Aviation Regulation on an Interim Review of the 2019 Determination in relation to 2020 and 2021	€5,330.82
2021		Eoin McCullogh	Appeals Panel to consider the appeals of the Determination of the Commission for Aviation Regulation on an Interim Review of the 2019 Determination in relation to 2020 and 2021	€18,415.56
2021	ASSD	Helios Technology Limited	Section 32 examination of the IAA - Final invoice on completion of SAR addendum	21,816.30
2021	SRAD	Jacobs Engineering	Environmental services in respect of the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland	€6,760

Year	Division	Consultancy	Reason	Amount (€)
2021		Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)	Development of the Aviation Carbon Tax Interim and Final Reports	€47,405
2021	CSAGD	Quadra Risk Management Consultants	Building Risk Analyses	€9,594
2021	Climate Delivery	Ipsos MRBI	Focus group tender for the EV Infrastructure Strategy	€14,980
2021	MSO	Antaris Consulting	To review and update Health and Safety documentation	€11,070
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Ernst & Young Business Advisory Services	Project Management Office Consultancy	€72,109
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Corporate Health Ireland Partnership	Medical Consultancy (Re COVID)	€3,690
2021	MSGD/IRCG	KPMG	Financial and Economic Advice	€165,442
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Graphite HRM	HR Consultancy	€16,607
2021	MSGD/IRCG	TMS Consultancy T/A Antaris	Management System Consultancy	€33,210
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Aerossurance Ltd	Aviation Consultancy	€101,268
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Great Place to Work (Ireland) Ltd	HR Survey/Consultancy	€20,627
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Bid & Tender Management Services Ltd	Procurement Consultant	€11,001
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Jane Beattie	Advisory Services and Valuations	€1,815
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Access Rescue Consulting at Height Ltd T/A ARCH	Health and Safety Advisory	€56,703
2021	MSGD/IRCG	Terence Woods Architect Ltd	Architectural and Building Consultancy	€185
TO-TAL:				€935,938
2020	ITS/CAV	Arup	Draft Roadmap for CAV Activity	€32,102.39

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Year	Division	Consultancy	Reason	Amount (€)
2020	Airports	Aviation Advocacy SARL	Appeals Panel to consider the appeals of the Determination of the Commission for Aviation Regulation on an Interim Review of the 2019 Determination in relation to 2020 and 2021	€14,538.60
2020	Airports	H Nixon Consulting	Appeals Panel to consider the appeals of the Determination of the Commission for Aviation Regulation on an Interim Review of the 2019 Determination in relation to 2020 and 2021	€8,480.85
2020	Airports	Eoin McCullough	Appeals Panel to consider the appeals of the Determination of the Commission for Aviation Regulation on an Interim Review of the 2019 Determination in relation to 2020 and 2021	€24,231
2020	RCPC	RSM Ireland Business Advisory Limited, T/A RSM Ireland	Protected Disclosure Investigation	29,590
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Atlantic Marine Survey	Marine Consultancy	20,570
2020	MSGD/IRCG	DBFL Consulting Engineers Ltd	Engineering Consultancy	2,399
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Leaseplan	Advisory Services and Valuations	10,824
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Graphite HRM	HR Consultancy	56,341
2020	MSGD/IRCG	TMS Consultancy T/A Antaris	Management System Consultancy	27,225
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Aerossurance Ltd	Aviation Consultancy	92,459
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Great Place to Work (Ireland) Ltd	HR Survey/Consultancy	17,509
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Bid & Tender Management Services Ltd	Procurement Consultant	7,868
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Petronia Consulting Limited	Preparation and Delivery of National Contingency Plan for oil and HNS	61,500
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Quadra Limited	HR Consultancy	1,292



Year	Division	Consultancy	Reason	Amount (€)
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Ray Carroll	IRCG Boat survey and re-view	5,000
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Search and Rescue International Ltd	Aviation Consultancy	14,680
2020	MSGD/IRCG	Sir Alan Massey	Independent chair National Search and Rescue Committee	10,656
2020	HR	Joe McDonagh – Mentoring Connections	HR Development Strategy facilitation (in 2019)	€952.88
2020	Climate Engagement	Byrne Ó Cléirigh	Low-emission bus trials	5282.86
2020	Climate Delivery	Dr Brian Caulfield	Demand Management Study	1500
2020	Climate Delivery	Systra	Demand Management Study	407,669.08
2020	ASSD	Helios Egis Avia	Examination of the performance by the IAA of its functions as required under Section 32 of the 1993 IAA Act	36,961.50
2020	ASSD	Aerossurance Limited	Aviation expertise on the opt-in provision of the EASA Basic Regulation and amendment of the 1993 IAA Act	3055
TO-TAL:				€892,687
2022 to date	MSGD/IRCG	Ernst & Young Business Advisory Services	Advisory Services and Valuations	63,776
2022 to date	MSGD/IRCG	TMS Consultancy T/A Antaris	Management System Consultancy	27,675
2022 to date	MSGD/IRCG	Aerossurance Ltd	Aviation Consultancy	27,713
2022 to date	MSGD/IRCG	Bid & Tender Management Services Ltd	Procurement Consultant	2,030
2022 to date	Airports	Altitude Aviation Authority	Balance of fees due to consultant engaged to assist with PSO tender process and possible consultancy services for a legal discovery procurement	€964.01
2022 to date	ISD	Deloitte	Review of Dept of Transport Draft Technology Strategy and Governance Arrangements	€25,000

Year	Division	Consultancy	Reason	Amount (€)
2022 to date	SMIPD	Ove Arup & Partners Ireland Limited	All Island Strategic Rail Review	€339,981
2022 to date	Climate Engagement	Byrne Ó Cléirigh	Low-emission bus trials	11,085.99
TO-TAL:				€498,225

### Primary Medical Certificates

231. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance if the comprehensive review of the disabled drivers and disabled passengers scheme has begun; and if he will provide a timeline for the completion of same. [17413/22]

233. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a forum for members of the public to make submissions to the primary medical certificate review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17416/22]

249. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance if an update will be provided with regard to the review of the primary medical certificate scheme in view of the Supreme Court decision in 2020; when he expects the review to be complete; if members of the public can make submissions to the review; the number of applications for the scheme in 2019, 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; the number of refusals in each of these years; the number of appeals in each of these years; and the number of appeals refused in each of these years. [18030/22]

250. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Finance if the public can make a formal submission to the consultation process in relation to the primary medical certificates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18102/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 231, 233, 249 and 250 together.

The Disabled Drivers & Disabled Passengers Scheme (DDS) provides relief from VRT and VAT on the purchase and use of an adapted car, as well as an exemption from motor tax and an annual fuel grant.

The Scheme is open to severely and permanently disabled persons who also meet one of six specified medical criteria, as a driver or as a passenger and also to certain organisations. In order to qualify for relief, the applicant must hold a Primary Medical Certificate issued by the relevant Senior Area Medical Officer (SAMO) or a Board Medical Certificate issued by the Disabled Driver Medical Board of Appeal. Certain other qualifying criteria apply in relation to the vehicle, in particular that it must be specially constructed or adapted for use by the applicant. In the event that a PMC is not granted by the relevant Senior Area Medical Officer an appeal may be made to the independent Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal (DDMBA) who operate out of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire.

The current 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).

As the Deputy will appreciate this Scheme confers substantial benefits to eligible persons and changing the medical criteria to more general mobility-focused criteria, would raise the already considerable cost of the Scheme in terms of tax foregone to the Exchequer. Any increase in the cost of the Scheme would require a concomitant increase in tax, reduction in public expenditure, or increase in the Exchequer deficit.

While I am very aware of the importance of this scheme to those who benefit from it, I am also aware of the disquiet expressed by members of this house and others in respect of the difficulties around access to the scheme.

Accordingly, I gave a commitment to the House that a comprehensive review of the scheme, to include a broader review of mobility supports for persons with disabilities, would be undertaken. In this context I have been working with my Government colleague, Roderic O’Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. We are both agreed that the review should be brought within a wider review under the auspices of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, to examine transport supports encompassing all Government funded transport and mobility schemes for people with disabilities.

This the most appropriate forum to meet mutual objectives in respect of transport solutions/mobility supports for those with a disability.

The NDIS working group, chaired by Minister Anne Rabbitte, with officials from both my Department and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth as well as others, held its first meeting on the 26th January 2022. My officials will continue to work closely with officials from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, to progress this review, and on foot of that will bring forward proposals for consideration.

Regarding the issue of whether the public can make a formal submission to the consultation process in relation to the primary medical certificates, the methods and structure of the NDIS working group is a matter for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. I cannot comment on any possible changes in advance of proposals arising from the review.

The number of applications for a Primary Medical Certificate and the number of those that were successful are a matter for the HSE. The below table outlines the number of appeals heard by the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal and of those, that were successful and unsuccessful for the years 2019 – 2022.

-	2019	2020	2021	2022*
New appeals	684	204	382	102
Number of Appeals Assessed	424	116	148	0
Number of Successful Appeals	9	4	12	0
Number of Unsuccessful Appeals	415	112	136	0

\*2022 figures are to 28.03.2022

\*\*307 appeals outstanding at 01/2019\*\*\*Appeal hearings were lower than usual for 2020 due to both public health considerations and the Supreme Court Case in June 2020. Appeal hearings resumed in early 2021 following an amendment to the Finance Bill to provide for the

existing medical criteria in primary legislation which, following the approval of the Finance Act 2020, allowed assessments to recommence.\*\*\*\*2021 appeal hearings have also been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Appointments to State Boards**

232. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance when a new board will be appointed in view of the resignation of all members of the previous Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal; and when assessments will resume. [17414/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Disabled Drivers & Disabled Passengers Scheme (DDS) provides relief from VRT and VAT on the purchase and use of an adapted car, as well as an exemption from motor tax and an annual fuel grant.

The Scheme is open to severely and permanently disabled persons who also meet one of six specified medical criteria, as a driver or as a passenger and also to certain organisations. In order to qualify for the Scheme, the applicant must hold a Primary Medical Certificate, a PMC, issued by the relevant Senior Area Medical Officer (SAMO) in the HSE. Assessments for the primary medical certificate, by the HSE, are continuing to take place. Certain other qualifying criteria apply in relation to the vehicle, in particular that it must be specially constructed or adapted for use by the applicant.

In the event that a PMC is not granted by the relevant Senior Area Medical Officer an appeal may be made to the independent Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal (DDMBA) who operate out of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire.

I have no role in relation to the granting or refusal of PMCs and the HSE and the Medical Board of Appeal must be independent in their clinical determinations.

In relation to the resignation of all members of the DDMBA, my officials engaged with the Department of Health and the Public Appointments Service to seek expressions of interest from medical practitioners to participate in the Board. I am informed that the formal notice seeking expressions of interest have been issued. It is hoped to move this process along as quickly as possible so that appeals can recommence as soon as possible.

Requests for appeal hearings can be sent to the DDMBA secretary based in the National Rehabilitation Hospital. New appeal hearing dates will be issued once the new Board is in place.

*Question No. 233 answered with Question No. 231.*

### **Irish Bank Resolution Corporation**

234. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 251 of 3 March 2022 (details supplied), if he will provide further schedules of the assets disposed of relating to each named legal entity on the response and the amount raised for each disposal and locations of same. [17430/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Special Liquidators (SLs) have advised they are currently compiling this schedule however are not in a position to finalise this within the given timeframe. As a result, I will provide this information directly to the Deputy once it is received from the IBRC SLs.

## Irish Bank Resolution Corporation

235. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a schedule of costs and real estate and-or property consultants who have made claims against him over the course of the special liquidation of IBRC to date. [17431/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Following discussions with the Deputy's office, we understand this question seeks a schedule of the professional fees (if any) paid to real estate/property consultants relating to the disposal of property to date in the special liquidation of IBRC by: (i) the Minister; and (ii) the Special Liquidators.

As Minister for Finance, I have not paid any fees to real estate /property consultants regarding the disposal of property assets in the liquidation of IBRC.

Regarding the schedule of fees incurred by the Special Liquidators ("SLs"), the SLs have advised they are currently compiling this schedule however are not in a position to finalise this within the given timeframe. As a result, I will provide this information directly to the Deputy once it is received from the IBRC SLs.

### EU Data

236. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the gross and net contribution respectively of Ireland to the European Union per annum for 2020 and 2021, in tabular form. [17508/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Ireland's gross contributions to the EU Budget in 2020 and 2021 were as follows:

2020	€2.569bn
2021	€3.507bn

Data on Ireland's EU Budget receipts for the previous year are published annually, in my Department's Budgetary Statistics each autumn. In 2020, Ireland received €2.080 billion in EU receipts (including Horizon 2020 receipts), which makes Ireland's net contribution to the EU Budget in 2020 €489 million.

EU Budget receipt data for 2021 will be published in autumn 2022. Therefore, it is not yet possible to confirm Ireland's net contribution to the EU Budget for 2021.

### EU Data

237. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the projected gross and net contribution of Ireland to the European Union by year from 2022 to 2025, in tabular form. [17509/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Ireland's gross contributions to the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) are expected to rise over the coming period. Ireland's gross contributions to the EU Budget from 2022 to 2025 are forecasted to be as follows:

2022	€3.50bn
2023	€3.52bn
2024	€3.65bn
2025	€3.85bn

These forecasts were published as part of Budget 2022, and are due to be updated in the coming weeks as part of the Stability Programme Update.

Data on Ireland's EU Budget receipts are published annually, for the previous year, in my Department's Budgetary Statistics each autumn – i.e. 2021 receipt data will be published in autumn 2022. Therefore, it is not yet possible to confirm Ireland's net contribution to the EU Budget for the remainder of the 2021-2027 MFF. However, my Department estimates that our receipts from the 2021-2027 MFF will be in the region of approximately €2 billion each year.

### Vacant Properties

238. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the Housing for All plan for the collection of data on vacancy levels with a view to introducing a new vacant property tax to ensure empty properties are used. [17550/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government's strategy '*Housing For All*' includes an action for my Department to collect data on vacancy with a view to introducing a Vacant Property Tax. The timeframe for delivery on this commitment is the second quarter of 2022. The Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2021 enabled Revenue to collect certain information in relation to the occupancy status of residential properties including, where unoccupied, the duration and reason for this, in the Local Property Tax (LPT) return forms submitted by residential property owners in respect of the new LPT valuation period 2022-2025. This information, together with information from other available sources, will be used to assess the merits and impact of introducing a Vacant Property Tax.

Revenue have completed a preliminary analysis of the LPT returns received to date which has recently been shared with my Department. The results of the preliminary analysis suggest that levels of vacancy are low across all counties. I anticipate that further detail in relation to this analysis will be available in the coming weeks.

### Tax Reliefs

239. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance if he will allow fresh start applicants including those who have judicial separations and divorces to avail of the help-to-buy incentive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17574/22]

248. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance if the help-to-buy scheme is being extended to persons whose marriages have broken down as well as to first-time buyers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17881/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 and 248 together.

Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 requires that applicants for the Help to Buy Scheme (HTB) must be first-time buyers. This includes circumstances where there is more than one person involved in the purchase or building of a new home.

The definition of first time buyer in Help to Buy is as follows:

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

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

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

I have no plans at present to amend the definition of first time buyer along the lines mentioned by the Deputies.

Finally, I announced in my Budget 2022 address that a formal review of the Help to Buy scheme will take place in 2022. The review will be fundamental in nature and will inform decisions for Budget 2023 and Finance Bill 2022. I understand that the tender process for the review is underway at present.

### **Public Sector Staff**

240. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17598/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to advise the Deputy that neither my Department, nor any of the bodies under the aegis of my Department, has any staff absent for the reasons outlined.

### **Tax Code**

241. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if the 2.5% transaction charge applicable to transactions handled by a company (details supplied) emanating from Northern Ireland versus the 1.4% fee applicable to those that originate in the Republic of Ireland is congruent with the Brexit agreement and financial protocols in it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17611/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Over the past few years, my Department has worked closely with the Central Bank of Ireland to limit the impact of key identified risks in the Irish financial system and to ensure that the sector was adequately prepared for Brexit. My Department and the Central Bank continue to monitor developments and activities in the financial sector.

However the issue raised by the Deputy is not a direct consequence of Brexit and is not related to the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, and is instead a commercial decision.

In that context, I am informed by the Central Bank of Ireland that in accordance with its Consumer Protection Code 2012, regulated firms, including Payment and Electronic Money

institutions, must ensure that in all dealings with customers and within the context of their authorisation, they make full disclosure of all relevant material information, including all charges, in a way that seeks to inform the customer.

It should be noted that the charging of fees is a commercial decision for regulated entities, within the parameters of the regulatory framework. In accordance with Regulation 78 of SI No.6 of 2018 European Union (Payment Services) Regulations, in the event that a payment service user rejects changes proposed by a payments service provider, the payment service user has the right to terminate the framework contract free of charge and with effect at any time before the date when the changes would have applied had the payment service user not rejected the changes.

### State Claims Agency

242. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request the State Claims Agency to provide a breakdown of claims by sector for the period 2016 to 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17626/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) which acts as the State Claims Agency in conducting the state’s claims management function has informed me that the information contained in the table below was extracted from the National Incident Management System (NIMS). This report shows the number of claims received by the State Claims Agency from 2016 to 2021. This report is correct as of 31 March 2022.

In answering this question I have taken “sector” to mean the areas under each Minister’s responsibility. Numbers reported under each Minister includes their relevant departments and any agencies under the aegis of the Minister that have been delegated to the SCA.

I refer to the NTMA (Amendment) Act 2000 which, inter alia, established the SCA and to Section 9(3)(f) of that Act which provides for the delegation of the claims management function to the State Claims Agency.

“(f) the delegation or declaration shall not remove or derogate from the responsibility of any Minister of the Government to Dáil Éireann or as a member of the Government for the performance of functions of that Minister of the Government thereby delegated or to which the declaration relates.”

On the basis of the foregoing if the Deputy requires any further information on matters to do with claims arising under a particular Minister’s area of responsibility he should direct such questions to the Minister concerned.

Table 1: Claims Received by the SCA 2016-2021

Location	Number of Claims
Healthcare*	11,743
Minister for Justice	5,195
Minister for Defence	744
Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	667
Minister for Education	438
Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform	248



Location	Number of Claims
Minister for Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	147
Minister for Finance	134
Minister for Social Protection	103
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine	98
Minister for Transport	69
Taoiseach	25
Minister for Health	24
Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gael-tacht, Sport and Media	24
Minister for Foreign Affairs	16
Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications	15
Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment	8
Minister for Rural & Community Development	1
Grand Total	19,699

\*Includes Healthcare and Healthcare private

### Electric Vehicles

243. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Finance the efforts that are being made to achieve national targets regarding the use of electric vehicles; if he will consider a strategy or policy to encourage the importation of second-hand EVs from the UK, including reducing VRT and other taxes, charges and levies on the importation of these vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17627/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, VRT is paid on a vehicle's first registration in the State. The same tax applies to new vehicles and used imports alike.

The Government is committed to incentivising electric vehicles (EVs) as has been reflected in the wide suite of measures which have facilitated an exponential growth in EV registrations over the past number of years. The Programme for Government 2020 outlined a commitment to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51% reduction over the decade) and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The need to make significant emissions reductions in the transport sector is fundamental to Ireland's policy around Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) and Motor Tax; the systems are designed to facilitate the uptake of EVs and to address the increasingly harmful environmental and public health effects of vehicle emissions.

The VRT system has been modified in recent Budgets to strengthen the environmental rationale of the regime, and is structured to provide a reduced rate for EVs of 7% of open-market selling price (OMSP), while vehicles falling into the highest emissions band are liable to a rate of 41%. The €5,000 VRT relief for electric cars and vans were due to end on 31st December 2021 but was extended for two years in Finance Act 2021 to end in 2023. As the rate of VRT

charged for EVs is already very low, many purchased in the next two years will pay no VRT at all.

In Finance Act 2019 I legislated for a carbon dioxide-based benefit-in-kind (BIK) regime for company cars from 1/1/2023. From that date the amount taxable as BIK remains determined by the car's original market value (OMV) and the annual business kilometres driven, while new carbon dioxide emissions-based bands will determine whether a standard, discounted, or surcharged rate is taxable. EVs will benefit from a preferential rate of BIK, ranging from 9 – 22% depending on mileage. Fossil-fuel vehicles will be subject to higher BIK rates, up to 37.5%. This new structure with carbon dioxide-based discounts and surcharges will incentivise employers to provide employees with low-emission cars.

The current €50,000 BIK exemption was extended in Finance Act 2021 with a tapering mechanism that represents a value for money consideration. This forms part of a broader series of generous measures including the preferential rates of VRT and Motor Tax, the VRT relief, SEAI grants, discounted tolls fees, and 0% BIK on electric charging; all designed to achieve national targets around EV uptake.

I am satisfied that this Government continues to provide a generous set of supports to achieve national targets regarding the transition to low and zero emission vehicles.

### Tax Data

244. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of reducing VAT on household energy bills, that is, gas, electricity and home heating oil to 9% and 13.5% from beginning of April 2022 to the end of August 2022 and to the end of December 2022, respectively. [17685/22]

**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 services on their VAT returns. Therefore, it is not possible to provide an accurate costing for the potential measures outlined. However, a tentative estimate of the likely cost of a change from the present rate of 13.5% on domestic electricity, home heating oil and gas supplies to 9% is as follows.

Fuel	April 2022-August 2022	April 2022-December 2022
Electricity	€35m	€65m
Gas	€14m	€27m
Oil	€6m	€13m

### Tax Reliefs

245. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he, his Department or the Government have requested a derogation with respect to VAT as it applies to domestic energy bills through energy, gas and home heating oil; if so, the date on which the request was made; the specifics in relation to same, such as the rate to which he, his Department or the Government have sought to reduce the current VAT rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17835/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As I previously stated, I wrote to Commissioner Gentiloni in early March regarding the need for Member States to have greater flexibility when responding the energy crisis, particularly in relation to the VAT and Excise Di-

rectives. I will continue to work with my European counterparts and the EU Commission to respond to the current energy crisis.

### Tax Code

246. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department will consider lowering the VAT rate to 0% on the sale and repair of bicycles and electric bicycles; if his Department will follow the lead of Belgium which has already passed legislation to take advantage of European rule changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17838/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I understand that the proposal for reform of VAT rates is currently being finalised, this process involves, inter alia, ensuring consistent translations of the text in every working language of the European Union. Once finalised, I expect the proposal will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union in the coming weeks.

Officials in my Department are currently reviewing the options now available to Ireland in setting VAT rates. This will include consideration of the new options available to Member States when setting VAT rates as well as the new limitations introduced on how reduced rates may be applied.

Decisions about tax changes are generally taken in the context of the Budget and, as part of our normal annual Budget preparations, various options for tax policy changes will be considered by the Tax Strategy Group prior to Budget 2023. The papers presented to the Tax Strategy Group, including a paper on VAT, are published in advance of the Budget.

### Tax Code

247. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Finance if he has examined the VAT rates applied to the sale of repaired or used goods given the need to promote the sale of these goods in line with the circular economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17855/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of the EU VAT Directive with which Irish VAT law must comply. In general, the VAT Directive provides that all goods and services are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23% in Ireland, unless they fall within categories of goods and services specified in the Directive, in respect of which Member States may apply a lower rate or exempt from VAT.

However, the Deputy may be interested to know about the margin scheme, which is used as a means of reducing the possibility of double taxation on the sale of second-hand goods. It operates by allowing taxable dealers who deal in margin scheme goods, pay VAT on the difference between the sale price and purchase price of certain second-hand goods. Broadly speaking, for the purpose of the margin scheme, second-hand goods are moveable goods which are suitable for use either as they are or after repair. The VAT rate which applies to a sale of goods under the margin scheme is, with some exceptions, the same rate of VAT which is normally applicable to the particular good. The scheme is optional however, so if a taxable dealer chooses not to operate the margin scheme, then normal VAT rules will apply.

Further information on the margin scheme can be found on the Revenue website.

*Question No. 248 answered with Question No. 239.*

*Question No. 249 answered with Question No. 231.*

*Question No. 250 answered with Question No. 231.*

### **Flexible Work Practices**

251. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Finance the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18165/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to advise the Deputy that all staff of my Department have been working on a blended working pattern since 28 January 2022. Each Division/Business Unit has an “anchor day” each week when all the team attend the office. Blended working patterns are agreed at a local level to ensure business needs are met.

My Department is currently working on a Blended Working Policy in line with the overarching Civil Service Blended Working Policy Framework, published 31st March 2022. My Department’s policy will be in place by end Q2 at the latest and staff will then have the opportunity to apply for a formal blended working arrangement.

A number of support mechanisms have been put in place by my Department to assist staff in adjusting to working from home; these include ICT supports and the supply of some office equipment and regular workplace health and wellbeing initiatives. In addition, staff have been provided the opportunity to avail of one to one with ergonomic home workstation assessments to ensure they have an optimum workstation set up in the home working environment.

### **Revenue Commissioners**

252. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance the number of serving and former Air Corps whistle-blowers who have been placed under surveillance by the Revenue Commissioners or their agents. [18188/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the Criminal Justice (Surveillance) Act 2009 authorises a small number of public bodies, including Revenue, to undertake surveillance of persons, places or vehicles using surveillance devices.

It provides that Revenue’s powers under the Act may be used in respect of a revenue offence, that is an arrestable offence, under section 14 of the Customs Act 2015; section 1078 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997; section 102 of the Finance Act 1999; section 119 of the Finance Act 2001; section 79 of the Finance Act 2003 (inserted by section 62 of the Finance Act 2005); or section 78 of the Finance Act 2005. Examples of revenue offences include tax or duty evasion, fuel fraud, supply or sale of illicit tobacco products.

Because of the intrusive nature of the powers which it confers, the Act delimits clearly the circumstances in which they may be used and lays down the authorisations and approvals which must be obtained before they may be utilised. I know that Revenue is committed to ensuring that the powers conferred by the Act are used only in appropriate circumstances and in full conformity with the provisions and requirements of the Act.

Revenue’s operation of the Act is overseen by a High Court Judge designated by the Gov-

ernment. The designated Judge has access to all official documents or records associated with authorisations under this Act. The Judge ascertains whether Revenue and other agencies are complying with the provisions of the Act and reports annually to the Taoiseach on any matters that are considered relevant. The designated Judge's Reports are published on the Oireachtas website.

Section 13 of the Criminal Justice (Surveillance) Act 2009 provides that it is an offence to disclose any information in connection with the operation of the Act or reveal the existence of an application for the issue of an authorisation. I am advised by Revenue that accordingly it does not disclose details of surveillance operations in which it may be engaged.

I am assured by Revenue that it would not place a person or persons under surveillance for reasons other than the investigation of a revenue offence. If the Deputy has any information to the contrary the Board of the Revenue Commissioners would be very interested in any such details.

### **Banking Sector**

253. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the mandatory charge that the Government applies to customers closing accounts with a bank (details supplied); if a charge is in place, the reason this is the case in this particular situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18217/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In the absence of more complete information, and in light of the fact that the annual stamp duty charge for a credit card account is €30, I must assume that the "accounts" referred to in this question are credit card accounts. No stamp duty charge of that amount applies in respect of other types of bank account.

I am informed by Revenue that there is no Government charge for closing a credit card account. However, and for the reason outlined above, on the assumption that the question relates to section 124 of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 which provides for an annual stamp duty at the rate of €30 to be charged on credit card accounts, I can confirm that the charge under section 124 is applied where a credit card account is maintained with a financial institution at any time during the 12-month period ending on 1 April in any year.

The €30 charge applies to the account and not to the card - the number of cards issued to that account are not relevant. Stamp duty is charged to the account on 1 April each year in arrears unless the account is closed during the year. If the account is closed during a year and the card is cancelled, this will result in the €30 charge to stamp duty being applied on the date of closure.

Where an account is closed and a stamp duty charge is applied, the financial institution should provide the account holder with a letter of closure, provided he or she has paid the €30 charge. In such circumstances, if the account holder opens a new account with another financial institution, he or she will not have to pay a stamp duty charge on the 1 April following the account closure if he or she presents this letter to the new financial institution.

Revenue has published guidance on stamp duty on credit and other financial cards on its website, which is available at Stamp Duty on financial cards ([revenue.ie](http://revenue.ie)).

On the wider matter of bank charges, the charging of fees is a commercial decision for regulated entities, within the parameters of the regulatory framework. This requires, under Section 149 of the Consumer Credit Act, 1995 (as amended), that credit institutions must notify the Central Bank if they wish to:

- Introduce any new customer charge for providing certain services; or
- Increase any existing customer charge for providing certain services.

As Minister for Finance, I do not have a direct function in the operations of any bank. Although the State is a shareholder in some of the banks operating in the State, they must be run on a commercial and independent basis.

I hope this clarifies the matter.

### **Economic Sanctions**

254. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the investigations that are being undertaken by his Department, the Central Bank or an agency under his authority into the potential circumvention of the sanctions against Russia in the International Financial Services Centre and elsewhere; if there are investigations underway; and if so, the number of investigations. [18263/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** It is important to note that all natural and legal persons in the State are obliged to comply with EU sanctions measures. Regulations issued at EU level have direct effect across the Union. A breach of such a sanction is a criminal offence.

Sanctions have been in place against Russian individuals and entities due to Russia's actions in relation to Ukraine since 2014. These have been updated and added to several times since late February 2022.

The Department of Finance does not undertake investigations into the potential circumvention of sanctions.

I am informed by the Central Bank of Ireland that it cannot comment on specific supervisory engagements but the Bank continues to engage with firms with respect to financial sanctions. Supervisors of regulated entities (including virtual asset service providers that are providing services but not yet registered) emailed firms to notify them of the increased sanctions and provided firms with a link to the Bank's dedicated page on these sanctions.

The Central Bank also took the opportunity to remind firms of the necessity to have processes in place to operationalise these sanctions as they pertain to the business and that firms should be monitoring the situation closely given the potential for further sanctions. Firms were reminded of their obligation to ensure that they have robust controls in place, including policies and processes, to ensure that risks to the business are effectively identified, monitored and mitigated on an ongoing basis. Supervisors were provided with sanctions related materials to assist in their engagement with firms, and there has been a significant focus on Ukraine related issues in supervisory engagements.

In banking, there was an AML sanctions questionnaire issued to Significant Institution and Less Significant Institution firms on the week ended 11 March, and all responses have been received with no significant areas of concern identified by the supervision teams. The Central Bank will continue to engage with its European peers and regulated entities to ensure that there is good awareness of the sanctioning regime and the need for firms to continue to operationalise those sanctions.

## Tax Reliefs

255. **Deputy Darren O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Finance if he has examined expanding the cycle-to-work scheme to college students; the estimated cost of such an expansion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18330/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 118(5G) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997) provides for the Cycle-to-Work scheme. This scheme provides an exemption from benefit-in-kind (BIK) where an employer purchases a bicycle and associated safety equipment for an employee.

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 bicycle and related safety equipment.

Where a bicycle or safety equipment is purchased under the Cycle-to-Work scheme or through a salary sacrifice arrangement certain conditions must be met, including:

- The exemption applies to the first €1,250 of expenditure incurred by the employer in obtaining a bicycle and related safety equipment. This exemption limit is increased to €1,500 for pedelecs or ebikes and related safety equipment. Employers may incur costs in excess of these limits, but any such excess will not qualify for the exemption and will be liable to tax.

- The bicycle and related safety equipment must be new and must be purchased by the employer.

- The bicycle and related safety equipment must be used by the employee or director mainly for the whole or part of their journey to or from work.

- An employee or director can only avail of the Cycle-to-Work scheme once in any 4 year period. A salary sacrifice arrangement is subject to the same time limits and any salary sacrifice arrangement entered into must be completed within a 12 month period.

The Cycle-to-Work scheme is only applicable where the bicycle and safety equipment is provided by an employer to either a director or someone in its employment. Thus, where college are employed in a full or part time capacity and their employer is willing to participate in the Scheme, they may participate in the scheme. However, where the employer-employee relationship does not exist, such individuals can't qualify for the scheme.

The Cycle-to-Work scheme operates on a self-administration basis. Relief is automatically available provided the employer is satisfied that the conditions of its particular scheme meet the requirements of the legislation. There is no notification procedure for employers involved. This approach was taken with the deliberate intention of keeping the scheme simple and reducing administration on the part of employers. Therefore, the cost of the existing scheme and of any potential changes can only be estimates.

Further comprehensive guidance can be found on Revenue's website.

While the scheme is kept under review by my officials, I have no plans at present for its expansion.

## Credit Unions

256. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if there is an enhanced and

more ambitious policy framework being planned or in discussion in relation to an issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18343/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** This Government recognises the importance of credit unions. The Programme for Government contains commitments to:

- Review the policy framework within which Credit Unions operate;
- Enable and support the Credit Union movement to grow;
- Support Credit Unions in the expansion of services, to encourage community development; and
- Enable the credit union movement to grow as a key provider of community banking in the country.

With regard to fulfilling the commitments for credit unions in the Programme for Government, the review of the Policy Framework is in its final stages following a recent engagement session with all the credit union representative bodies on the emerging proposals. The proposals being considered aim to better position credit unions to grow as a key provider of community banking

In developing these proposals, Minister Fleming and officials have conducted extensive stakeholder engagement, meeting with the representative bodies, collaborative ventures, service providers, the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Registrar of Credit Unions and individual credit unions. The information gained from this engagement has helped inform the proposals which will be considered by Government shortly.

### **Mortgage Interest Rates**

257. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if the thousands of mortgage holders who are customers of a bank (details supplied) will be offered the best available rate, whether it be fixed or variable; if they will be better than the rates being offered to new customers by another bank; if the other bank will make it seamless for the customers in that they will not have to be supplying endless paperwork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18351/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has indicated that, in the event of a regulated entity withdrawing from the Irish market, the withdrawal must be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of Irish financial services legislation, including the Central Bank's codes of conduct and specifically, Provision 3.11 of the Consumer Protection Code 2012.

Under Provision 3.11 of the Code, a regulated firm that intends to cease operating, merge with another, or to transfer all or part of its regulated activities to another regulated firm, must:

- provide affected consumers with at least two months' notice to enable them to make alternative arrangements if they so wish;
- ensure all outstanding business is properly completed prior to any transfer, merger or cessation of operations; or, in the case of a transfer or merger, inform customers as to how continuity of service will be provided following a transfer or merger; and
- in the case of a merger or transfer of regulated activities, inform customers that their details



are being transferred to the other regulated entity, if that is the case.

More generally in relation to loans, where they are sold or transferred to another regulated entity, the consumer protections in place for borrowers will not change. In addition, the legal rights and terms and conditions of a customer's mortgage agreement, including in relation to the interest rate, remain in place following a loan sale/transfer.

It is also worth noting that under the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2018 if a loan is transferred or sold, the holder of the legal title to the credit must be regulated and must act in accordance with Irish financial services law that applies to 'regulated financial service providers'. This ensures that consumers whose loans are sold or transferred, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had, including under the various Central Bank statutory Codes of Conduct, such as the Consumer Protection Code 2012 and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (CCMA).

The Central Bank has also advised that its supervision of any bank that withdraws from the market will be focused on ensuring that its customers are treated fairly, that it remains in compliance with the letter and spirit of regulatory requirements. The Central Bank has clearly communicated the requirement for a customer-focused approach to be taken in all aspects of their business throughout the period of change and that they ensure that customers understand what the withdrawal means for them.

Within the regulatory and contractual framework as outlined above, it is a commercial matter for individual banks and other lenders to set their lending interest rates. Neither I nor the Central Bank have a role in prescribing or setting interest rates on individual loans.

The Deputy may also wish to note that, on 25 June 2021, the Central Bank issued an industry letter regarding its consumer protection expectations in the changing retail banking landscape. These expectations reflect the Central Bank's assessment of possible risks to consumers during periods of change and reinforce previously communicated expectations, based on its experience of prior events. The Central Bank also expects that by clearly outlining its expectations, this will inform regulated entities' actions and decisions to ensure that customers' interests are protected and potential risks are mitigated.

## **Tax Data**

258. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of, or the revenue that is foregone by, the capital gains tax exemption provided under section 604A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which provides relief from capital gains tax for certain properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18372/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy will be aware that section 604A of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 provides for relief from Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on the disposal of certain investment property purchased between 7 December 2011 and 31 December 2014, where that property is held for 7 years. The gain attributed to that 7-year period will not attract CGT. However, where the property is held for more than 7 years, relief is reduced in the same proportion that the period of 7 years bears to the period of ownership, so if the property is held for 9 years, 7/9 of the gain will be relieved.

This relief was amended in Finance Act 2017 for disposals made on or after 1 January 2018, to provide that gains on land and buildings acquired between 7 December 2011 and 31 December 2014 are not chargeable gains where the land or buildings are held for at least 4 years and up to 7 years from the date they were acquired.

I would note that the structure of the relief means that 2018 is the first year that this relief could be claimed by taxpayers.

I am advised by Revenue that detailed statistics on the relief from Capital Gains Tax under section 604A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 are published on Revenue's website at: [www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/relief-on-disposal-of-certain-land-or-buildings.pdf](http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/relief-on-disposal-of-certain-land-or-buildings.pdf).

These statistics include the cost of the relief and other information.

## **Tax Data**

**259. Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of, or the revenue that is foregone under, section 705G of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which provides that a REIT is not chargeable to corporation tax or income from its property rental business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18373/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) is a quoted company used as a collective investment vehicle to hold rental property. The purpose of the REIT regime is to allow for a collective investment vehicle which provides a comparable after-tax return to investors as direct investment in rental property, by eliminating the double layer of taxation at corporate and shareholder level which would otherwise apply.

In order to ensure distribution of profits for taxation at the level of the shareholder, REITs are obliged to distribute at least 85% of property profits annually to shareholders. REITs are obliged to operate Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT), at the standard rate of 25%, on distributions to shareholders. The DWT is available as a credit against the shareholder's tax liability.

For Irish investors:

- Individuals are liable to tax at their marginal rates on dividends received, with credit for the DWT deducted;

- Corporates will be liable to tax at 25%, with credit for DWT; and

- Institutional portfolio investors are liable to tax on REIT dividends at 12.5%, this being the rate generally applicable to trading income.

Foreign investors are also subject to the DWT at 25%. Those resident in treaty-partner countries may be able to reclaim some of this DWT under the relevant tax treaty. Tax treaty rates on dividends vary from treaty to treaty, but the most common rate applicable to small shareholdings would be 15% - this means that Ireland would retain taxing rights of 15% on dividends paid from Ireland.

Excluded investors, such as pension schemes or charities investing in the REIT, may receive distributions gross, subject to completion of appropriate declarations. Such entities are more generally exempt from tax or subject to gross roll-up regimes in view of their own purposes or objectives.

To avoid a double layer of taxation, a REIT (or a group REIT) is ordinarily exempt from corporation tax on income from its rental property business and chargeable gains accruing on disposal of assets of their property rental business.

Due to Revenue's obligation to protect taxpayer confidentiality, and there being fewer than

10 REITs, it is not possible to provide an estimate of the net tax revenue which would accrue if REIT companies were subject to corporation tax, rather than the current regime of taxation at the level of the shareholder.

However, REITs are required to be publicly listed companies and therefore publish information such as annual accounts online, which may be of assistance to the Deputy.

In addition to the above, it should be noted that REITs are not entirely exempt from tax and there are a range of circumstances in which a REIT may accrue a direct tax liability, including the following:

- Any non-rental property profits are subject to corporation tax and capital gains tax in the normal manner.

- As REITs are designed to encourage long term property investment, there are anti-avoidance rules to prevent REITs being used as property development vehicles. If a REIT acquires an asset and following that acquisition, develops the asset to such an extent that the cost of development exceeds 30% of the market value of the asset at the time the development commenced, and the asset is then disposed of within 3 years of development, the corporation tax and capital gains tax exemptions will no longer apply.

- To prevent indefinite deferral of tax at the shareholder level, a REIT will be charged to corporation tax under Case IV of Schedule D if it distributes less than 85% of its annual property income.

- A REIT (or a group REIT) will also be charged to corporation tax under Case IV of Schedule D if it pays a dividend to a shareholder who holds more than 10% of its shares or if, in computing the profits available for distribution, it has taken a deduction for any amount which is not wholly and exclusively incurred for the purposes of:

- the property rental business, where it relates to the property rental business of the REIT, or
- the residual business where it relates to the residual business of the REIT.

I am informed by Revenue that gross REIT DWT collected in 2021 amounted to €15,361,133. Revenue processed €3,218,997 of REIT DWT refunds in 2021.

### **Real Estate Investment Trusts**

260. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the total gross amount of assets held by Irish real estate funds for 2016 to 2021, as reported to the Revenue Commissioners on form IREF - part 3 - schedule of IREF assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18374/22]

261. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the total amount of revenue for Irish real estate funds as included in their financial statements which are required to be filed with the Revenue Commissions for each accounting period under section 739FA of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18375/22]

262. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason that the accounts of Irish real estate funds are not made publicly available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18376/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 260

to 262, inclusive, together.

The questions all relate to the Irish Real Estate Fund ('IREF') regime.

An IREF is an investment undertaking which derives 25% or more of its value from IREF assets. An investment undertaking may also be regarded as an IREF where it is reasonable to consider that the main purpose or one of the main purposes of the investment undertaking is to acquire IREF assets or to carry on an IREF business.

'IREF assets' are defined in section 739K Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 as including one or more of the following:

- (a) relevant assets such as land (including buildings) in the State;
- (b) shares in a Real Estate Investment Trust;
- (c) shares that derive their value or the greater part of their value from relevant assets;
- (d) certain specified mortgages; or
- (e) units in an IREF.

I am advised by Revenue that the total gross value of IREF assets held by IREFs for the period 2016 – 2020, extracted from the data submitted in the IREF WHT returns, is as detailed below. Complete 2021 data will not be available until after 30 July 2022, that being the latest filing deadline for information relating to accounting periods ending in 2021.

**Total Assets as per the IREF WHT Returns Filed**

-	2017 1/1/17 – 31/12/17 €M	2018 1/1/18 – 31/12/18 €M	2019 1/1/19 – 31/12/19 €M	2020 1/1/20 – 31/12/20 €M
Gross Assets	7,929	7,501	18,417	20,293

In relation to the total amount of revenue generated by IREFs in the period 2018 to 2020, I am advised by Revenue of the following indicative amounts, extracted from the financial statement filings:

**Total Revenue as per the Financial Statements Filed:**

-	20181/1/18 – 31/12/18 €	20191/1/19 – 31/12/19 €	20201/1/20 – 31/12/20 €
Total Revenue	825,737,497	997,275,473	1,487,523,446

Revenue advise that the figures provided above for total revenue are for indicative purposes only, they have not been subject to full verification and should therefore be interpreted with caution. The total revenue is gross (i.e. before relevant expenses incurred) and is comprised of income from various sources, the primary source is rental income. The Revenue figure also includes "other income" which in some instances includes development contract income. Further, the above amounts *exclude* realised and unrealised gains booked as income in the financial statements.

In relation to Dail Question No. 262 (Ref: 18376/22), IREFs are obliged to electronically file financial statements with Revenue for each accounting period (under the Investment Undertaking Electronic Account Filing Requirements Regulations 2018 SI No. 368 of 2018). This information, once provided to Revenue, is taxpayer information which, for confidentiality reasons, cannot be shared by Revenue.

Irish real estate funds, where regulated, are authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland (“Central Bank”) in accordance with the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive (Directive 2011/61/EU) (“AIFMD”) AIFM Regulations and the Central Bank AIF Rulebook.

Qualified Investor Alternative Investor Funds (“QIAIFs”) can be established as an investment company, an ICAV, a unit trust, a common contractual fund or an investment limited partnership and will be authorised under the domestic legislation pertaining to the selected corporate structure.

The AIF Rulebook details the supervisory requirements applicable to Irish authorised AIFs and includes, inter alia, criteria on the content and frequency of reporting obligations for these funds. Chapter 2 of the AIF Rulebook sets out the requirement for QIAIFs to publish an annual report for the consumption of the unit holders for each financial year. The QIAIF shall prepare and submit to the Central Bank a set of accounts (whether an interim report or an annual report) within 12 months of the launch date and publish it within 2 months if an interim report or 6 months if an annual report. The Qualifying Investor AIF shall, on request, supply unitholders with copies of the annual reports and half-yearly reports (if any) free of charge.

Alternative Investment Fund Managers (“AIFM”) which are authorised by the Central Bank under the AIFM Regulations are required to prepare and submit half-yearly financial and annual audited accounts of the AIFM to the Central Bank. The half-yearly accounts shall be submitted within two months of the half year end and the annual audited accounts within four months of the year end, as per Chapter 3 of the AIF Rulebook.

*Question No. 261 answered with Question No. 260.*

*Question No. 262 answered with Question No. 260.*

### Departmental Contracts

263. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18887/22]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I can advise the Deputy that the amount my Department spent in respect of consultancy services in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022 is outlined in tabular form below.

#### 2020

Supplier	Amount	Description
William Fry	€228,459.62	Legal Advice
Indecon	€133,393.50	Economic Consultancy
Arthur Cox	€111,183.27	Legal Advice
Fitzpatrick Associates	€72,539.50	Bi-annual Credit Demand Survey
McCann Fitzgerald Solicitors	€52,034.16	Legal Fees
RSM Ireland Business Advisory	€30,442.50	Review of cost & outcomes of large scale liquidations/ bankruptcies

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Supplier	Amount	Description
KPMG	€24,600.00	Financial Advice re HBFI
Lilley Ventures T/A Work-products	€17,990.91	eDiscovery software licence
A & L Goodbody Solicitors	€15,990.00	Legal Advice
Social Finance Foundation	€7,700.00	Research re the borrowers of licensed moneylenders, in particular the home collection sector
Daniel J. Edelman Ireland Ltd	€4,878.99	Provision of specialist advice on using social media in overseas markets to promote Ireland for Finance

**2021**

Supplier	Amount	Description
Behaviour & Attitudes	€68,880.00	SME Credit Demand Survey
Arthur Cox	€11,372.58	Legal advice
Conan McKenna	€6,650.00	Review of Domestic Implementation of Restrictive Measures (Sanctions)
Dept. of Foreign Affairs	€64,633.53	Ireland's approved contributions to the OECD (Part II programme- FATF) for 2021. FATF is the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering.
KPMG	€36,900.00	Fee in connection with lot 2 - General financial advice - Home Building Finance Ireland - Market Economy Investor Principle
State Claims Agency	€726.00	Counsel Fees
William Fry	€142,425.97	Legal Advice

**2022**

Supplier	Amount	Description
Mazars	€40,468.84	Professional services - Provision of executive search services for the role of Tier 3 Temporary Tax Appeal Appeals Commissioners
William Fry	€2,243.52	Legal advice
Dept. of Foreign Affairs	€58,171.00	Ireland's approved contribution to the OECD (Part II programme- FATF) for 2022. FATF is the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering

### Departmental Expenditure

264. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount paid on rented accommodation at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17487/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The table below illustrates the rental amounts paid by the Office of Public Works in respect of leased buildings in Portlaoise occupied by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for 2019, 2020 and 2021.

The comments provide an explanation for variances for each year.

BUILDING NAME	2021	2020	2019	Comments
Portlaoise Agriculture Warehouse	€107,919.24	€134,899.05	€80,939.43	One Quarter's rent was held in 2019 pending verification of title and was subsequently paid in 2020
Portlaoise Agriculture Office Eircom - Eircom 2	€100,000.00	€100,000.00	€100,000.00	
Portlaoise Grattan House	€43,650.00	€43,650.00	€43,650.00	
Portlaoise Agriculture Records	€98,133.16	€98,133.16	€98,133.16	
Portlaoise DAF Appeals Office	€294,180.18	€0	€0	In accordance with the terms of the lease, rent was withheld in 2019 & 2020. The 2021 figure includes rent and arrears dating back to October 2018.
Portlaoise Agriculture Office Eircom - Eircom 1	€114,381.72	€114,381.72	€114,381.72	
Portlaoise Grattan Pavillions	€0	€0	€0	The annual rent is being withheld pending the outcome of ongoing litigation.

### **Public Sector Staff**

265. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17604/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I wish to advise the Deputy that there is currently one member of staff employed by my Department absent for a period greater than 12 months due to the circumstances set out in the question.

There are no staff in this position in the bodies under the aegis of my Department with the exception of the Office of Public Works (OPW), where there is one member of staff absent for a period between 3 to 6 months due to these circumstances.

### **Land Issues**

266. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a tender will be issued for the agricultural use of lands (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17620/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** It is the intention of the Office of Public Works that Expressions of Interest will be invited from interested parties for grazing licences for the Carrowmore site in early April.

Full details of this process will be advertised in the local newspapers at this time.

### **Public Sector Pay**

267. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of negotiations around pay and conditions for staff employed on the Houses of the Oireachtas scheme for secretarial assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17631/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** Under the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003, the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (the "Commission") has the power to regulate the provision of "secretarial facilities" to Members. "Secretarial facilities" is a term encompassing the staff employed under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance. The Act requires the Commission to obtain the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform before reaching an agreement with any person in relation to rates of pay, conditions of employment or superannuation rights. In practice, this means that the Commission advises on matters relating to resourcing, grading and terms and conditions of employment and submits proposals for the Minister's consideration and agreement.

In that regard, and as the Deputy is aware from a previous reply, there is a process underway at the Workplace Relations Commission dealing with the issues. This process is continuing and I understand that there is ongoing contact between the parties.

I look forward to a successful resolution of the matter and the early presentation of proposals for my consideration.



## Flood Risk Management

268. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an update on the catchment flood risk assessment and management programme to date; and if all of the pinch points identified have been resolved at this stage. [17663/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs) are an output of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management study. The OPW has produced an individual FRMP for each of the 29 River Basins including the Shannon Upper & Lower River Basin. The focus of the reply to the Deputy's question is on the Shannon River Basin District.

The Government has committed €1.3 billion to the delivery of flood relief schemes over the lifetime of the National Development Plan (NDP) to 2030 to protect approximately 23,000 properties in threatened communities from river and coastal flood risk. Since the launch of the FRMPs in 2018, as part of a phased approach to scheme delivery, this funding has allowed the OPW to treble to nearly 90 the number of schemes at design and construction at this time.

Today, work by the OPW is complete or underway to deliver protection to 80% of properties to be protected by this significant investment programme.

In the Shannon River Basin District, along with the 13 already completed schemes (see Appendix 1), a further 36 flood relief schemes will be delivered under the Government's €1.3bn investment in flood relief measures over the lifetime of the NDP.

The OPW and the Local Authorities have been engaging pro-actively on the arrangements and structures to be put in place to advance the implementation of the Tranche 1 schemes.

Of the 24 Tranche 1 schemes currently being progressed (see Appendix 2), 2 schemes (Athlone and Springfield) are at construction. Engineering Consultants have been appointed for a further 13 schemes which are progressing through Stage 1 - Option Assessment, Scheme Development and Design including Kings Island which has received planning permission. Construction is expected to commence in Q3 2022 with a completion date of approximately two years thereafter.

Work is ongoing to progress the other 9 schemes in the Shannon River Basin District. 8 of the schemes will be progressed directly by the relevant Local Authorities with full funding from the OPW. The OPW is progressing the scheme for Rahan.

While the other 12 schemes recommended in the FRMPs have not yet commenced, it is planned that they will be underway in the lifetime of the NDP (see Appendix 3).

The Government has noted the study by the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group that supports a programme of strategic maintenance to help mitigate flooding along the River Shannon and a further study on the removal of a series of constrictions or 'pinch points' through the Shannon Callows that can help to delay flooding in the area. The Government has agreed that the OPW will provide €7m for all of these works, of which €4m relates to the removal of 'pinch points' through the Shannon Callows.

Work is advancing to progress the project for the removal of the 'pinch points' in the Shannon Callows between Athlone and Meelick Weir. A Steering Group has been established to oversee this project and a brief has been developed for the appointment of a consultant to carry out the initial analysis and design work. It is anticipated that the tendering process for this service will commence during Q2 2022. Waterways Ireland, on behalf of the Shannon Group, will

act as the Contracting Authority for this project.

The works can only commence following the completion of the appropriate environmental assessments which are expected to be significant. In addition, planning consent will be required to progress the project. This is a time intensive process and there are a range of variables outside the control of the Shannon Group that may impact on the overall timescale for the delivery of this project.

Should the Deputy require any further information, the OPW will be glad to provide the specific details.

### Appendix 1 Completed Flood Relief Schemes

Completed Flood Relief Schemes	
1	Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare
2	Ennis Upper, Co. Clare
3	Foynes (Tidal), Co. Limerick
4	Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick
5	Cappamore, Co. Limerick
6	Dromcollogher, Co. Limerick
7	Harry's Mall, Limerick City
8	Clancy Strand, Limerick City
9	Tullamore, Co. Offaly
10	Ballymakeogh/Newport, Co. Tipperary
11	Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
12	Ennis Lower, Co. Clare
13	Ennis South, Co. Clare

### Appendix 2: Flood Relief Schemes currently being progressed (Tranche 1)

Flood Relief Schemes Under Construction	
1	Athlone, Co. Westmeath
2	Springfield, Co. Clare

Flood Relief Schemes At Design & Development Stage (Contracts Awarded)	
3	Adare, Co. Limerick
4	Athea, Co. Limerick <sup>^</sup>
5	Ballinasloe, Co. Galway*
6	Castleconnell, Co. Limerick* <sup>^</sup>
7	Carrick-On-Shannon, Co. Leitrim*
8	Clonaslee, Co. Laois* <sup>^</sup>
9	Killaloe, Co. Clare* <sup>^</sup>
10	Kilkee, Co. Clare
11	King's Island, Limerick City (Detailed Design Stage)
12	Leitrim, Co. Leitrim
13	Limerick City & Environs*
14	Shannon, Co. Clare
15	Tralee, Co. Kerry

Surveys and/or reviews commenced with a view to appointing Design & Development consultants (includes some schemes where the tender process has already commenced)	
16	Abbeydorney, Co. Kerry ^
17	Banna, Co. Kerry ^
18	Bunratty, Co. Clare ^
19	Kilrush, Co. Clare ^
20	Longford, Co. Longford*^
21	Mohill, Co Leitrim *^
22	Nenagh, Co. Tipperary* ^
23	Rahan, Co. Offaly* ^
24	Rathkeale, Co. Limerick ^

### Appendix 3: Future Flood Relief Schemes (Tranche 2)

Flood Relief Schemes Planned for Next Phase of Delivery	
1	Portumna, Co. Galway*
2	Ballylongford, Co. Kerry
3	Listowel, Co. Kerry
4	Dromod, Co. Leitrim*
5	Askeaton, Co. Limerick
6	Foynes, Co. Limerick
7	Newcastle West, Co. Limerick
8	Birr, Co. Offaly*
9	Athleague, Co. Roscommon*
10	Boyle, Co. Roscommon*
11	Roscommon, Co. Roscommon*
12	Roscrea, Co. Tipperary*

\*Communities in the catchment of the River Shannon

^Small projects (<€1m) that have been prioritised for delivery and which will be progressed directly by the relevant local authority

### Legislative Reviews

269. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the review of ethics legislation by his Department will be completed; if there are plans to publish the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17969/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** We made a commitment the 2020 Programme for Government to “reform and consolidate the Ethics in Public Office legislation”. The review of the statutory framework that I have initiated and to which the Deputy’ question refers is the first step in meeting this commitment.

In brief, this review is examining:

- Ireland’s existing ethics legislative framework;
- The recommendations made by the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) based

on its operation of the current regime;

- International best practice; and
- The views of stakeholders including through a public consultation.

It will also consider the outstanding recommendations of the Moriarty and Mahon tribunals and take account of more recent developments such as:

- The ‘Hamilton Report’ recommendations on preventing economic crime and corruption, published in December 2020; and

- The Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations on reform of our statutory framework for ethics.

The review’s tasks have been underway since September 2021: formal stakeholder engagement commenced in November and a public consultation exercise based on a detailed proposed policy approach closed in mid-January 2022. I envisage that this process will be completed by end June 2022 and a report published. The outcome of the Review will then inform proposals for legislative reform that I intend to bring to Government later in 2022. In this, my ultimate goal is a fit-for-purpose, easy to understand and user-friendly statutory framework that contributes to the quality and effectiveness of our public governance and by so doing enhances trust and confidence in public officials and democratic institutions.

### **Legislative Measures**

270. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he intends to publish and enact legislation similar to the public sector standards Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17970/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** The Bill to which the Deputy refers was brought forward by the previous government in 2015 with the broad aims of:

- Modernising, simplifying and streamlining the existing legislative framework covering Ethics in public office;

- Responding to the recommendations on conflicts of interest contained in the final report of the Mahon and Moriarty Tribunals; and

- Consolidating local and national ethics requirements.

The Public Sector Standards Bill (PSSB) was last considered in the Dáil at Committee Stage in April 2017, but it lapsed when the Dáil was dissolved in January 2020 in advance of the last General Election.

In the subsequent Programme for Government we committed to “reform and consolidate the Ethics in Public Office legislation”. However, instead of restoring the PSSB to the Dáil Order Paper, I asked my Department to undertake a review of the statutory framework in advance of bringing new proposals for reform back to Government. In this, my intention was to take account of any developments since the PSSB was last considered in the Dáil, such as, for example, further potential gaps in the ethics framework that have arisen as matters of public debate, as well as relevant recommendations of the Review of Structures and Strategies to Prevent, Investigate and Penalise Economic Crime and Corruption (the ‘Hamilton Report’), which

was published in December 2020.

The Ethics Review has been underway since September last, and I expect that the process will be completed by the end of June. The Review's outcome will then inform proposals for legislative reform that I intend to bring to Government later in 2022. In developing these fresh proposals, my Department will take as its point of departure the policy approach that was developed for the PSSB, given that it represents best practice on a number of fronts, and addresses many of the long-standing recommendations of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the Standards in Public Office Commission for reform of Ireland's statutory framework for standards in public life.

### **Departmental Funding**

271. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the proposed walking and cycling bridge across the River Liffey from the War Memorial Gardens, Islandbridge; if funding has been assigned to the project; if so, the amount; the proposed timeline for works to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17974/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The Irish National War Memorial Gardens at Islandbridge, Dublin, were designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens to commemorate the memory of the Irish men and women who died in the First World War. The original design for the Irish War Memorial Gardens included a bridge across the Liffey linking the northside of the river with the gardens. This element of the gardens has not been realised to date.

At present, the current access point to the Irish War Memorial Gardens from the South Circular Road is confusing and ill-defined, with many visitors have trouble locating the gardens.

In May 2019, the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) announced a competition to design a new commemorative bridge at the Irish National War Memorial Gardens in Dublin. Sixty one submissions were received from nine countries. The winning design was submitted by Ian Ritchie Architects based in London.

It is envisaged that the new commemorative bridge and entrance plaza linking the Irish National War Memorial Gardens to Cunningham Road and Phoenix Park will provide a formal entrance to the Gardens, will improve visitor experience and provide a significantly enhanced pedestrian and cycling access to the Gardens. The bridge will also support the development of blue way and greenway cycle infrastructure in this part of the city by providing a clear connecting route across the river.

To date there has been high-level engagement with key stakeholders including Dublin City Council, Fáilte Ireland, The Irish National War Memorial Garden Trustees, University College Dublin and local stakeholders including the various boat clubs based in the vicinity of the gardens. The development of this bridge is included in the Dublin City Council Development Plan 2022-2028.

The OPW is now working closely with Ian Ritchie Architects, who won the architectural design competition for the commemorative bridge, to bring the original concept design to full planning permission. All appropriate baseline studies have been completed including the Feasibility Study, Ecological studies and a Business Development Strategy. A variation to the local area development plan to support this type of development was approved by DCC councillors in 2021. It is anticipated that a planning application will be lodged later this year. Funding has

been approved to planning permission stage.

Subject to further availability of funding, a full procurement process will be undertaken and it is hoped that works will commence on site before the end of 2023.

### **National Parks**

272. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the proposed renovation of the Magazine Fort in the Phoenix Park; if funding has been assigned to the project; if so, the amount; the proposed timeline for works to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17975/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The Magazine Fort in the Phoenix Park is the major surviving Magazine Fort in the country. The complex has had a long history of continuous use spanning three centuries and is considered to have special architectural, military, historical, social and archaeological interest. The Magazine Fort came into the care of the Office of Public Works (OPW) in the 1980's from the Department of Defence. It is a Protected Structure in the Dublin City Council Development Plan 2016 – 2022.

Over the years, the OPW has undertaken certain works to protect the site and provide some minimal public access but is now embarking on a more substantial programme to conserve the Magazine Fort. The condition of the buildings and rampart walls is poor due to a series of interventions over the centuries. The OPW has commissioned a team of experts to progress the restoration and conservation of this unique fortification.

This is a complex conservation project which will be addressed in a phased manner. The first phase of the project will focus on the stabilisation and structural repairs to the Rampart walls; roof and structural repairs to the Vaulted Magazine Store Buildings; conservation refurbishment works to the Bakery and minor drainage works surrounding the Magazine Store Buildings. This first phase of works will be tendered in May and it is anticipated that works will commence on site later this year. These works will be funded from within the OPW vote and total costs for this phase will be in the region of €5million.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

273. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18171/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I was pleased to publish, along with Minister of State Ossian Smyth, the Civil Service Blended Working Policy Framework on Thursday 31st March.

This Framework provides direction to individual Departments on the development of their own tailored Blended Working policies, and ensures a consistency of approach across the Civil Service.

This new model of working marks another feature of the Civil Service as an employer of choice.

Each individual Department can now use this Framework to shape their own policy, strik-

ing the right balance of blended working appropriate to local business needs, and to continue to deliver high quality services to Government, the public and business.

My own Department is currently developing our local policy, and once complete, it will be published. It will follow the template available in the Civil Service Blended Working Framework, which is now publicly available.

In the interim, and in line with current public health guidelines, we are continuing with a phased return to onsite working, with most Department employees returning to a minimum of 3 days of onsite working with effect from Monday 4th April. As has been the case since restrictions were lifted, the staff in my Department also have the choice to work onsite full-time if they wish. Should public health advice change at any point, the Department will adjust its response accordingly.

### Ports Policy

274. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the additional resources that are being provided to Rosslare Port in response to, and in order to support, the growing number of persons seeking asylum arriving there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18280/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** In line with EU wide arrangements, the Government is fully committed to delivering a comprehensive humanitarian response to refugees who arrive in Ireland seeking protection having had to flee the war in Ukraine. Over the last number of weeks, the number of Ukrainian refugees arriving into Rosslare on ferry services from Cherbourg have been steadily rising from about 30 to around 200 at present. As a result of the increasing numbers, it was clear to the port authorities that new facilities were urgently required to provide for the care and comfort of refugees as they waited to be brought to suitable accommodation, while also meeting the needs of the various departments and agencies interacting with them on their arrival.

The Port authorities therefore obtained the agreement of the Revenue Commissioners to vacate, on a temporary basis, an area normally used by them to facilitate the location of a mobile hub “one stop shop” for the processing of Ukrainian refugees arriving into Ireland seeking safety and support. The Revenue Commissioners relocated their operation to their other facilities just outside the port at Kilrane.

Following a request for assistance on 24th March from the Department of Transport, officials from the Office of Public Works immediately visited the site and identified an appropriate solution involving the installation of a large Marquee, a portacabin and toilet facilities. The installation of these units commenced on Sunday 27th of March and the works were completed last weekend. As a result, new arrivals, predominantly women and children, can now access suitable facilities at the port to meet with relevant officials from a number of organisations to quickly complete the immigration process and immediately apply for access to relevant services. The facility also contains an open lounge area with seating for 110 people, which will be manned by a humanitarian team. Refugees will be provided with food and drinks and can also access a storage area where they can select essential items such as clothes, sanitary items and toys for the children provided by charities and local communities before being brought to their assigned accommodation. In addition to the main space two adjacent tents are being managed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with vets available to examine any pets coming through. Toilets are also available just outside the marquee.

These facilities will ensure that refugees can be provided with temporary protection and immediate access to essential services on arrival in a timely and efficient fashion with minimal delay after a long and arduous journey to reach Ireland.

The cost of the installation of this new infrastructure, including the initial month's rental payment, is €165,000. The overall cost will depend on how long it is necessary to keep these units in place which is dependent on the flow of new arrivals at the port seeking international protection. While it is not possible to predict, with any degree of certainty, the likely numbers over the coming months, I can assure the Deputy that the government is fully committed to maintaining these services at the port for as long as they are needed. The overall cost that would arise if the facilities remain in place for the rest of the year is estimated at €650,000 inclusive of the initial installation cost.

### **Departmental Contracts**

275. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18893/22]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath):** I wish to advise the Deputy that details of the spend by my Department on consultancy services, professional fees and legal advice is regularly updated and published on gov.ie. Details of this spend since the Department's establishment in 2011 up to the end of December 2021 can be found at the link below and the spend to end Q1 2022 will be published shortly.

[gov.ie/en/organisation-information/8b97d6-consultancy-costs/](https://gov.ie/en/organisation-information/8b97d6-consultancy-costs/)

### **Commemorative Plaques**

276. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when the inaugural 2008 national famine commemoration day plaque will be unveiled in the Custom House. [18205/22]

277. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the exact location in Custom House in which the inaugural 2008 national famine commemoration day plaque will be mounted. [18206/22]

278. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media when and the location in which the commemorative stone or plaque will be unveiled and placed at the famine sculptures on Custom House Quay given that the sculptures were part of the 2008 inaugural national famine commemoration day ceremony with a community group (details supplied). [18207/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 276 to 278, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware both the Customs House and its surrounding grounds are protected structures in the ownership of the Office of Public Works.

I am advised that, at the National Famine Commemoration in 2020, my predecessor as Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee, Minister Josepha Madigan T.D. unveiled a plaque marking the first Annual Famine Commemoration held in the Custom House



in 2008. This will be installed at the Custom House following the completion of the refurbishment works being undertaken there.

My officials are in contact with officials from the Office of Public Works and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage with a view to this plaque being installed at a suitable location within the Custom House campus later this year.

*Question No. 277 answered with Question No. 276.*

*Question No. 278 answered with Question No. 276.*

### **Heritage Promotion**

279. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media further to the granting by UNESCO of intangible heritage status to the game of hurling, the measures that are underway to animate this status; if funding has been granted by her Department to any entity to reflect this status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18259/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Since Ireland's ratification of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) four elements of our living heritage have been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of ICH; Uilleann Piping, Hurling, Irish Harping, and most recently Irish Falconry in 2020 joined the existing multinational inscription of Falconry.

Hurling was officially inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List in 2018 following the successful application process which was progressed in close cooperation between my Department and both the GAA and The Camogie Association. Since the inscriptions of Hurling, my officials have met with both organisations on a number of occasions to discuss how best the Department can support them in safeguarding and raising awareness Hurling as an ICH practice. These discussions are ongoing and as with all elements on the Representative List, my Department is conscious that practitioners are the custodians of their practice and therefore safeguarding and transmission of same are led by the practitioners themselves.

By achieving recognition of these practices on the UNESCO Representative List the practices are safeguarding for future generations. Inscriptions also serve to acknowledge and celebrate the work of the generations who have kept these traditions alive and provide a platform to highlight and share these cherished aspects of Irish culture with others.

Earlier this year, Ireland submitted its periodic report to UNESCO to outline the legislative, regulatory and other measures undertaken for the safeguarding of ICH. The preparation of Ireland's report focused on the broad surveying of and engagement with relevant stakeholders including the GAA and The Camogie Association. The findings of the report will help inform and guide plans and priorities for ICH safeguarding over the coming years, while incorporating the Vision, Mission and Principles outlined for ICH in Ireland.

My Department also works closely with its Expert Advisory Committee to examine how it can most effectively work with ICH practitioners and existing agencies to raise awareness of and safeguard these practices for generations and looks forward to continuing to work with both the GAA and The Camogie Association in this regard.

In relation to funding it should be noted that Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing partici-

pation at all levels and raising standards. This includes the allocation of funding across a variety of funding schemes to the GAA and The Camogie Association. In 2021, the GAA received in excess of €2.3m and The Camogie Association received in excess of €435,000 which assists with the wide promotion and engagement with Hurling. In addition, in December 2021, Government allocated Covid-19 funding under five separate streams to help sports organisations to recover and grow post-pandemic, support our grassroots networks of clubs and local sports partnerships, and ensure that people of all ages and abilities could return to sport and physical activity. This included €20m allocated to the GAA, primarily to offset losses from the lack of spectators at matches, with €6m being ring-fenced to support GAA, LGFA, Camogie & Handball Clubs.

### **Sports Funding**

280. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the date for the next round of sports capital funding. [17428/22]

**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 recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country. Over 13,000 projects have now benefited from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocations in that time to over €1.1 billion. The Programme for Government commits to continuing the SCEP and to prioritising investment in disadvantaged areas.

The 2020 round of the Programme closed for applications on 1 March 2021. By this date, 3,106 applications were submitted seeking over €200 million in funding. This is the highest number of applications ever received.

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 2021. The remaining capital applications were then assessed and 1,865 individual grant offers with a total value of over €143.8 million were announced on Friday 11 February 2022.

Currently my Department is assessing appeals from unsuccessful applicants. The deadline for submission of appeals was Monday 4 April 2022. Of the record €150 million made available for capital projects, €6 million has been kept in reserve for any successful appeals.

When the appeal process is complete, a full review of the 2020 round of the SCEP will be undertaken and recommendations arising will be reflected in the terms and conditions of the next round. The precise timing of this next round of the Programme will be announced once this review is complete.

### **Sports Funding**

281. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if an appeal regarding an allocation under the sports capital grant scheme has been received from a club (details supplied); when she expects to be in a position to adjudicate on these appeals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17475/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and**

**Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** I can confirm an appeal has been lodged by the club mentioned by the Deputy.

€6 million has been kept in reserve for any successful appeals lodged by unsuccessful applicants and Departmental officials, not involved in the original assessment process, will review all appeals submitted and determine the outcome of those appeals. The timeline for completion of the process will depend on the volume and complexity of appeals submitted but there will be no undue delay on the Department's part in bringing the appeals process to a close.

### **Tourism Schemes**

282. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she will report on the Housing for All new short-term lettings regulation through a Fáilte Ireland registration system. [17532/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Action 20.4 of Housing for All, the Government's housing plan to 2030, commits to the development of "new regulatory controls requiring short-term and holiday lets to register with Fáilte Ireland with a view to ensuring that houses are used to best effect in areas of housing need".

Funding was allocated in Budget 2022 to Fáilte Ireland which has been tasked with the design and implementation of a short term lettings registration system. The agency is currently recruiting staff to work on this project, with the project lead in place. My officials are also working in consultation with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on scoping out the legislative provisions that will be required to underpin such a system with a view to bringing forward legislative provisions in this regard later in 2022.

### **Public Sector Staff**

283. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in her Department and in agencies and public bodies within her area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17608/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** I am advised that there are no staff absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in my Department.

In relation to the State Agencies under my remit, this is an operational matter for those bodies.

### **Departmental Schemes**

284. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the considerations that will be given in terms of support for those rejected from Strand II of the live performance support scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17698/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Throughout the pandemic I have been very cognisant of the challenges the restrictions caused for the arts, culture and live entertainment industry and I remain committed to the live entertainment sector as the industry recovers following the lifting of all restrictions in January.

To this end I have provided a €50 million suite of supports for the live performance sector in 2022 including;

- €15 million allocated for the Live Performance Restart Grant Scheme to support the recovery of the live performance sector by providing business restart grants as a support to de-risk the planning of events across spring and summer of 2022. This scheme is open for applications and further details can be accessed on my department's website at [gov.ie/en/publication/d1d0c-live-performance-restart-grant-scheme-lprgs-guidelines/](http://gov.ie/en/publication/d1d0c-live-performance-restart-grant-scheme-lprgs-guidelines/);

- €4m allocated for the MEBAS 2022 (Music and Entertainment Business Assistance Scheme) scheme specifically to support small music and entertainment businesses which do not operate out of a rateable premises;

- €5m for Local Authorities to support local artists and performances through the LLPSS (Local Live Performance Support Scheme). This scheme in particular has provided thousands of hours of employment for local musicians, artists and crews;

- €5m to continue the capital supports scheme (CECGS) to venues, including for ventilation upgrades and other COVID adaptations. This scheme is open for applications until 31 May 2022, and

- €1m for the Saint Patrick's Festival 2022

€5m was allocated for the LPSS- Strand II to support pantomime and seasonal musical theatre impacted by the Covid restrictions in place in December and January. In order to be eligible for this scheme a business must have VAT-exclusive turnover of €100,000 or above as a result of seasonal musical theatre /pantomime for each of at least two of the past 3 years (2018-2020) in order to be considered.

An applicant may appeal a decision on their LPSS - Strand II application via the appeals process for this scheme, further details of which can be found on my departments website here - [gov.ie/en/publication/c2f62-live-performance-support-scheme-2021-strand-ii-seasonal-musical-theatre-panto-support-scheme-appeals/](http://gov.ie/en/publication/c2f62-live-performance-support-scheme-2021-strand-ii-seasonal-musical-theatre-panto-support-scheme-appeals/).

### **Departmental Meetings**

285. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if she or her officials have spoken with a person (details supplied) since her appointment as Minister. [17701/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The person referred to by the Deputy is a member of the Venue Operators and Promoters Forum with whom I have met a number of times during the pandemic to discuss the impact of Covid restrictions on the Live Entertainment Sector. The person was nominated as a representative of the Venue Operators and Promoters Forum to represent them at my Department's Live Entertainment Stakeholder Forum. That Forum, chaired by my Department, provided multiple stakeholders from across the arts and live events sector with the opportunity to discuss issues arising during the pandemic. Stakeholder consultation has been at the heart

of my approach to the Covid and to ensure I had the best information available when framing supports for the live entertainment sector.

### **Swimming Pools**

286. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if there is a dedicated fund for the building of new swimming pools; the amount that is allocated to that fund since 2016; the amount that has been drawn down since 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17906/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Jack Chambers):** In relation to my Department's capital funding for new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools, previously this support was provided through the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP). A total of 52 pools has been completed under the LASPP and three swimming pool projects (Lucan, Buncrana and Edenderry) remain in the programme with the Lucan project currently under construction. Since 2016, €11.1 million has been drawn down under the LASPP.

My Department's capital support for any new swimming pools is now being provided through the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). The National Development Plan provided a capital allocation of at least €100m for the Fund over the period to 2027.

The first call for proposals under the LSSIF closed in 2019 with applications confined to local authorities and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sport. All applications were assessed in accordance with the published Evaluation Procedures and Guidelines and the first allocations were announced in January 2020. Thus far, approximately €86.4 million has been awarded to 33 different proposals. These initial allocations include funding for 8 swimming pool projects as follows:

The priority in the short term is to advance all LSSIF projects, including these swimming pools, to construction stage. To date, none of the funding in respect of swimming pools has been drawn down.

In relation to future swimming pool funding, my Department is currently undertaking a review of progress on all existing LSSIF grants. As part of this review, my Department is also considering the timing of any new call for proposals. The review work is at an advanced stage and is expected to be finalised shortly.

In addition, the National Sports Policy commits to the development of a National Swimming Strategy. As part of this, there will be a review of swimming pool provision to identify where gaps exist and how these can be met. Furthermore, the Sports Action Plan 2021-2023, which was published in November 2021, contains an action to develop and implement a National Swimming Strategy to provide additional swimming opportunities indoors and outdoors. Initial preparatory planning work has been undertaken by my Department in this regard. It is intended to establish a working group in the near future to take forward the detailed work of preparing a national swimming strategy, with a view to its completion and publication later this year.

The outcome of these reviews and strategies will be fully considered when deciding on the future funding provision for swimming pools.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

287. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18175/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** Implementation of blended working arrangements commenced in September 2021 in my Department. My Department currently has an Interim Blended Working Policy in place to facilitate transition arrangements to blended working. Under this policy, staff are currently attending the office 2 days per week.

Following publication of the Civil Service Blended Working Policy Framework on 31 March 2022, my Department is committed to implementing a new blended working policy that aligns with and includes all the appropriate elements referred to in the Civil Service framework, and is also in line with business needs of the Department to ensure continued delivery of quality public services.

To facilitate remote working, the Department has provided laptops and mobile phones to staff where required and also carried out a home working health and safety assessment.

My Department will continue to provide employees with ongoing up-to-date guidance and supports on blended working arrangements.

### **Tourism Promotion**

288. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media if the membership of the tourism recovery task force has changed; if this task force has made recommendations to her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18398/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** The Tourism Recovery Taskforce was established in May 2020 to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan which included a set of recommendations on how best the Irish Tourism sector can adapt and recover in a changed tourism environment due to the Covid-19 crisis. The Tourism Recovery Plan 2020 – 2023 made a number of recommendations to help tourism businesses to survive, stabilise and recover.

In line with the recommendation in the Tourism Recovery Plan, a Recovery Oversight Group was appointed in December 2020. The purpose of the Group is to oversee the implementation of the Recovery Plan and monitor the sector's recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. The Recovery Oversight Group is made up of an independent chairperson and 8 other members with a broad spectrum of backgrounds. The group has met 12 times to date and has presented three reports which evaluate the progress made to date and make a number of recommendations. I continue to use these reports as an important policy consideration as I continue to work, alongside my colleagues in Government, to support the tourism sector. In addition, officials continue to engage with the tourism agencies and colleagues across Government in pursuing progress on specific recommendations.

The reports of the Recovery Oversight Group can be viewed at [gov.ie/tourismrecoverytaskforce](http://gov.ie/tourismrecoverytaskforce)

### **Tourism Promotion**

289. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the funding allocated to the Tourism Ireland Regional Co-operative Marketing Fund, which seeks to encourage new access and maximise the potential of existing air and sea services to those areas outside of Dublin, in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022. [18399/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** As the Deputy is aware, Tourism Ireland promotes regional air and sea access to Ireland in overseas tourism markets through initiatives like the Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund, which seeks to encourage new access and maximise the potential of existing services to the regions, with matched funding from airlines, sea carriers, airports, ports and regional tourism stakeholders including Local Authorities.

The Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund has been very important in enabling tactical partnerships that have helped drive increases in visitors to the regions, amplifying the Ireland message overseas and supporting direct access. This scheme will continue to form a very important part of Tourism Ireland's plans in supporting the recovery of our tourism sector in a post-pandemic environment.

The allocation to Tourism Ireland in respect of the Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund was €2.5 million in 2020, €3 million in 2021 and €3 million is also allocated for 2022.

### Departmental Contracts

290. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media the cost of consultants to her Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if she will provide an outline of the role of each. [18896/22]

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin):** As advised to the House in response to Dáil Question No. 202 of 10th March, I am advised that no expenditure was incurred on external consultancy from my Department's Administrative Budget during the period from its establishment in June 2020 to date.

From time to time, my Department commissions experts to provide technical reports or advice on specific issues. While the providers of these services may describe themselves as consultants, their work is not classified as consultancy services and is not funded from my Department's Administrative Budget.

Details of expenditure for 2020 is available in the published Appropriation Accounts in respect of Vote 33 and can be viewed at [www.audit.gov.ie](http://www.audit.gov.ie).

### Special Areas of Conservation

291. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of raised bogs in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18337/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** Raised Bogs are extremely rare in global and European terms. Ireland holds approximately 50% of all raised bogs remaining in the Atlantic region of North West Europe and so we have a particular responsibility for their conservation at an international level.

The National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, approved by government and published in 2017, sets out a roadmap for the effective management and conservation of Ireland's raised bog Special Areas of Conservation and Natural Heritage Areas, which represents approximately 9% of the original raised bog resource.

Ireland has designated 55 raised bogs as Special Areas of Conservation in accordance with the Habitats Directive, selected for active raised bog habitat. 75 raised bogs are designated as Natural Heritage Areas under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000.

In county Kerry, 2 raised bogs are designated as Special Areas of Conservation for the conservation of active raised bog with a further 2 raised bogs designated as Natural Heritage Areas selected for the conservation of raised bog. Further details on these bogs are set out in the table under.

Raised Bog Name	Site Code	Designation	Other details
Sheheree (Ardagh) Bog Special Area of Conservation	000382	Special Area of Conservation	This bog lies 2 km south-east of Killarney in Co. Kerry, in a depression within a high ridge (103 m). It has developed by succession from a small lake to a ridge basin bog with similarities to a raised bog. The bog is rather unique in an Irish context as it is the only raised bog system to be completely surrounded by a wet lagg zone.
Moanveanlagh Bog Special Area of Conservation	002351	Special Area of Conservation	Situated in Co. Kerry approximately 6 km east of Listowel, mainly within the townlands of Carhooeara and Bunagarha. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog.



Raised Bog Name	Site Code	Designation	Other details
Bunnaruddee Bog Natural Heritage Area	001352	Natural Heritage Area	Situated approximately 4 km west of Moyvane in the townlands of Bunnaruddee, Leitrim West and Lamore, Co. Kerry. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog.
AnnaMore Bog Natural Heritage Area	000333	Natural Heritage Area	Approximately 4 km south of Castleisland, mainly in the townlands of Anna More and Ballybeg in County Kerry. The site comprises a raised bog that includes both areas of high bog and cutover bog.

Information on the number of other non-designated raised bogs in county Kerry is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

### Invasive Species Policy

292. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the development of a new national invasive species management plan as outlined in the Programme for Government considering that an invasive species of alpine newt has been found in three counties in Ireland. [18401/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** My Department is responsible for the implementation of the Wildlife Acts and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, both of which prohibit activities to introduce or spread invasive species. In addition to national legislation, EU Regulation 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species also provides for a range of concerted EU wide measures to be taken with respect to listed species of Union concern (the 'Union list').

The development of a national invasive alien species management plan is a priority in my Department and work is underway on establishing the scope and requirements of such a plan. The National Parks and Wildlife Service will report to me in the coming weeks with updates on progress in this matter.

The alpine newt is not listed as an invasive species in Ireland or on the Union list. However, sightings of this non-native species may be submitted to the National Biodiversity Data Centre through its online portal or mobile application, through the following link:

[invasives.ie/what-can-i-do/report-sightings/](https://invasives.ie/what-can-i-do/report-sightings/)

I would also like to remind people not to release unwanted pets into the wild.

### **Building Regulations**

293. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will address matters raised in relation to building regulations in correspondence from a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17479/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Building Control Acts 1990 to 2020 set out the statutory framework for the regulation and oversight of building activity based on:

- clear legal requirements as set out in the Building Regulations;
- detailed Technical Guidance Documents to outline how these requirements can be achieved in practice;
- clear administrative procedures for demonstrating compliance in respect of an individual building or works as set out in Building Control Regulations
- the responsibility for compliance resting first and foremost with building owners, developers/builders and designers; and
- the responsibility for enforcing compliance with the building regulations resting with the 31 local building control authorities.

The Building Regulations 1997 to 2021 provide for the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings and apply to the design and construction of a new building (including a dwelling) or an extension to an existing building. The minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve are set out in the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations.

The overarching requirement under Part D (Material and Workmanship) of the Building Regulations requires that all works should be carried out:

- Using proper materials which are fit for the use for which they are intended and for the conditions in which they are to be used.
- With a proper standard of workmanship and the appropriate use of any material to achieve compliance with the requirements of the Regulations.
- By competent persons with sufficient training, experience and knowledge appropriate to the nature of the work he or she is required to perform and having particular regard to the size and complexity of such works so as to ensure a proper standard of workmanship.

The primary responsibility for compliance with the Building Regulations rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings. Interpretation of the legislation is, ultimately, a matter for the Courts and implementation of the Building Control system is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, who are independent in the exercise of their statutory powers.

Following a review undertaken by an independent fire expert, my Department published the 'Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in dwellings where concerns arise' in 2017. The framework which is available on my Department's website at [gov.ie/en/publication/2d9a3-framework-for-enhancing-fire-safety-in-dwellings-where-concerns-arise/](http://gov.ie/en/publication/2d9a3-framework-for-enhancing-fire-safety-in-dwellings-where-concerns-arise/) contains the following:

- an explanation of the statutory provisions in respect of fire safety and the respective re-

sponsibilities of owners, designers, builders, occupants, local authorities;

- a range of actions that may reduce risk and improve the level of fire safety where deficiencies arise in dwelling houses, apartments and /or the common areas of apartment buildings; and

- a fire risk assessment methodology for professional advisors to prioritise the remedial actions, if any, that may need to be carried out on a dwelling.

The Framework is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. In addition to owners and occupants, the Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable the continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

### **Local Authorities**

294. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will consider an issue (details supplied) from a local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17482/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Applications for social housing support are assessed by local authorities, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set out in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations.

Where relevant to the circumstances, a copy of a separation or divorce agreement for both applicants is required with the social housing application form. However, if there is no agreement, a letter from the applicant's solicitor or a legal affidavit signed by a practising solicitor will suffice. The letter should confirm there is no formal separation agreement and no court proceedings pending under family law legislation, as well as the position in relation to maintenance payments, overnight access/ custody arrangements for children and property ownership. It is considered appropriate that such confirmation is provided by a solicitor given the sensitivity and complexity of issues involved.

This requirement has been in place since the Social Housing Assessment Regulations were introduced in 2011, which standardised the assessment process.

### **Housing Provision**

295. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the up-to-date position with regard to a development (details supplied) in south County Kildare; when it is expected to open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17484/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** The project that the Question refers to is a significant initiative which will support communities, and create exciting opportunities for recreation and ways to experience interesting places from new perspectives.

Waterways Ireland obtained planning permission for the Project, a 46 kilometre stretch from Lowtown to Athy, including the canal side works and the roadside works. Work commenced on site in the late summer of 2020 with completion of works by Waterways Ireland expected in

late 2022.

To date, Waterways Ireland has completed 20.2km of the canal side works, which equates to 55% of the towpath to be developed. A further 5.6km are nearing completion and in Q2 2022 it is scheduled to commence the section from Athy to Milltown Bridge in south County Kildare.

Kildare County Council is the Project Manager for the Project and is responsible for overall project delivery. Project updates are published regularly by Kildare County Council on its website.

### **Housing Provision**

296. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All support for 4,000 affordable purchase homes on average each year. [17524/22]

297. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All new local authority led affordable purchase scheme targeting average prices of €250,000. [17525/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 296 and 297 together.

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to step up housing supply and put affordability at the heart of the housing system, with an ambitious target of 300,000 homes over the next decade for social, affordable and cost rental, private rental and private ownership housing.

Measures to deliver this housing are supported by over €4 billion in funding annually, representing the highest ever level of Government investment in building social and affordable housing. 54,000 affordable home interventions will be delivered between now and 2030 to be facilitated by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency (LDA) and through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks.

Delivery of affordable housing, in accordance with the schemes set out in the Affordable Housing Act, 2021 and the funding being made available, will be underpinned by local authorities' Housing Delivery Action Plans. Local authorities submitted their Plans to me in December 2021. Preparation of these Plans allowed each local authority to assess the level of demand with affordability constraint in their area based on the Housing Need and Demand Assessment and plan provision accordingly. The Plans are being revised and updated by local authorities in the light of ongoing engagement and clarifications, and I expect that they will be ready for publication by local authorities before the Summer. They will provide a comprehensive overview of projected delivery of affordable housing nationally.

Funding is being made available by Government to assist local authority of affordable housing delivery, for purchase and rent, through the Affordable Housing Fund, and Approved Housing Body delivery and the Cost Rental Equity Loan.

The first local authority affordable purchase homes to be completed will be at Boherboy Road in Cork City next month, where 22 two and three-bed dwellings are expected to be delivered at discounts of up to 20% on market value. These homes will range in price from €218,000 to €243,000.

5 April 2022

Affordable purchase homes will also be delivered at Dun Emer in Lusk, Co Dublin by Fingal County Council in three phases this year. These two and three bed dwellings are expected to be delivered at an average discount of 25% on market values, ranging in price from €166,000 to €258,000. In addition, South Dublin County Council recently advertised 16 affordable purchase homes in Kilcarbery, all to be delivered this year, that will cost between €245,600 and €285,300.

The LDA has an immediate focus on managing the State's owned lands to develop new homes, and regenerate under-utilised sites. In the longer-term, it will assemble strategic landbanks from a mix of public and private lands, making these available for housing in a controlled manner, which brings essential long-term stability to the Irish housing market.

There are 7 sites that the LDA are currently engaged in which are at advanced stages of pre development with an addition three at the early stages of pre development.

The Government's Housing for All Strategy identifies a further 20 sites, in addition to the LDA's initial sites, with the potential to yield up to 15,000 units over time. These lands will transfer to LDA ownership as soon as practicable. The LDA, in consultation with the relevant Department, will undertake the process of due diligence on these lands, which will determine the appropriate residential yield for each site and other issues arising such as relocation of services.

The First Home Scheme will be delivered via a strategic partnership between the State and participating mortgage lenders and I can confirm that all parties are working with a view to deploying the scheme by the end of Quarter 2 this year. It will improve access to newly-built homes, below the median price point, by using a shared equity model to bridge the gap between mortgage finance and the cost of new homes. This measure, targeted at First Time or fresh start buyers, will allow purchasers to exit the rental market, help to build developer confidence in realisable consumer demand, and contribute to the recovery of our construction sector following the Covid-19 emergency. It will be available nationwide.

Other measures to allow buyers to access newly-constructed housing affordably such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the Local Authority Home Loan (formerly the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan), are also available to eligible purchasers nationally to make home ownership more affordable. Information on these schemes is available at the following links: [revenue.ie/en/property/help-to-buy-incentive/index.aspx](https://revenue.ie/en/property/help-to-buy-incentive/index.aspx) and [localauthorityhomeloan.ie/](https://localauthorityhomeloan.ie/).

*Question No. 297 answered with Question No. 296.*

## **Housing Provision**

298. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All new first home shared equity scheme for private developments. [17526/22]

346. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the roll-out of the provision of a first home market based on the shared equity scheme as set out in Housing for All; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18004/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 298 and 346 together.

The Affordable Housing Act 2021, the provisions of which I commenced in August and September 2021, laid the foundation for three new affordable housing schemes: ‘Cost Rental’ housing, the ‘Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme’, and the ‘First Home’ shared equity scheme which will support purchases in the private market.

Part 4 of the Affordable Housing Act 2021 provides the basis for the First Home Scheme, which will be available nationwide. This scheme will support eligible first-time buyers to buy a new-build home in private developments by means of an equity share model, similar to that employed in the Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme.

First Home will operate for the period 2022 to 2025. Subject to final approvals, it is anticipated the scheme will deploy overall funding of €400 million, jointly funded on a 50:50 basis by the State and participating mortgage lenders, in order to support 8,000 purchases of new homes. A new First Home Designated Activity Company, incorporated last December, will operate this scheme.

Significant work is continuing on the detailed design and parameters of the scheme, and full details will be confirmed upon completion of this work. Activity on key areas of work, including public communications, will be undertaken over the coming months in advance of the First Home Scheme’s first receipt of applications and deployment of equity support, anticipated from the end of Q2 this year.

### Housing Provision

299. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All for a reformed local authority home loan. [17527/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** Building on the commitment in Housing for All – pillar 1 *Pathway to Supporting Home Ownership and Increasing Affordability*, the Regulations establishing the reformed Local Authority Home Loan were signed in December 2021.

The introduction of the Local Authority Home Loan was announced as part of Housing For All. This is the successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme. It has been available nationwide from local authorities since 4 January 2022 for people on modest or low incomes who cannot get sufficient funding from commercial banks to purchase or build a home. The loan can be used both for new and second-hand properties, or to self-build. It is available for first-time buyers and fresh start applicants. The Local Authority Home Loan can also be used for the purchase of homes through State schemes such as the Tenant Purchase Scheme and Affordable Housing Schemes, with the exception of the First Home Scheme.

The Local Authority Home Loan assists borrowers in securing an affordable, long-term fixed rate mortgage to purchase a home of their own. The Scheme supports homeownership amongst lower to moderate income households by reducing the cost of mortgage finance and increasing the level of financing available, particularly for single applicants in urban areas.

Under the Local Authority Home Loan scheme the income ceiling for a single applicant seeking to purchase a home in counties where the scheme’s house price limit is €320,000 (Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow) has been increased from €50,000 to €65,000. In the rest of the country, where the scheme’s house price limit is €250,000, the income ceiling for a single applicant will remain at €50,000. The income ceiling for joint applicants remains at €75,000.

A ‘Fresh Start’ principle also applies to the Local Authority Home Loans scheme. This means that people who are divorced, legally separated/separated or the relationship has ended and have no interest in, or any financial obligation for any borrowings in respect of the family home are eligible to apply under this scheme. People who have undergone personal insolvency/bankruptcy proceedings will also be eligible to apply for the Local Authority Home Loans Scheme.

Further details can be found on the following websites: [revenue.ie/en/property/help-to-buy-incentive/index.aspx](https://revenue.ie/en/property/help-to-buy-incentive/index.aspx) and [localauthorityhomeloan.ie/](https://localauthorityhomeloan.ie/).

## Housing Provision

300. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All owner occupier guarantee in housing developments to secure homes exclusively for first-time buyers and other owner occupiers. [17528/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Under the Housing for All strategy, the Government plans to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 per year over the next decade.

Under Housing Policy Objective 1.10, of the “Supporting Homeownership and Increasing Affordability” pillar of “Housing for All”, the Government committed to introducing a form of ‘owner-occupier guarantee’, which would enable Local Authorities to specify the proportion of houses and duplexes in a development for owner-occupiers.

In support of this commitment the Government introduced a series of measures in May 2021 designed to prohibit the bulk buying of houses and duplexes. This included the Section 28 Guidelines for Planning Authorities “Regulation of Commercial Institutional Investment in Housing” to planning authorities which aimed to prevent multiple units being sold to a single buyer. In addition a 10% stamp duty levy was introduced for the cumulative purchase of 10 or more residential houses in a 12 month period. This policy was aimed at ensuring a level playing field for traditional family home buyers, including but not limited to first-time buyers, while facilitating vital investment in high density apartments.

These Section 28 Guidelines aim to provide an ‘owner-occupier’ guarantee by ensuring that new ‘own-door’ houses and duplex units in housing developments can no longer be bulk-purchased by institutional investors in a manner that causes the displacement of individual purchasers or social and affordable housing, including cost-rental.

In addition, the Planning and Development (Amendment) (Large-scale Residential Development) Act 2021 (No. 40 of 2021) came into effect on 17 December 2021. Section 7 provides that the housing strategy prepared by a local authority shall take into account the need to ensure that home ownership as a tenure type is provided for and estimated in its housing strategy. This amendment supports the implementation of Housing Policy Objective 1.10 and introduces the principle of home ownership, as a specific tenure type within a local authority’s housing strategy, with particular regard to developments comprising houses and duplexes and gives further legislative effect to the provisions of the Section 28 Guidelines issued in May 2021.

Initial data indicates that this policy has been impactful. Industry analysis suggests that, with changes made in 2021 in relation to the bulk purchase of single family residential units, the proportion of such purchases fell from 11% of residential deals in 2020 to 2% in 2021. In addition, more than 30% of the 46,000 homes purchased in 2021 were bought by first-time buyers.

As we approach one year on from the introduction of these measures, I wrote to the Chief Executives of all 31 Local Authorities and the Chairperson of An Bord Pleanála on 11 February requesting information on the number of units that have been permitted with a planning condition to prohibit multiple sales to a single purchaser arising from last year's Section 28 Guidelines and accompanying circular, as well as any information on compliance with the conditions and enforcement.

My officials are currently collating and reviewing the data received and following this analysis, I intend publishing the data.

### **Housing Provision**

301. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective for 20% of all developments to be set aside for affordable and social housing. [17529/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** The primary purpose of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) is to capture a portion of the increase in land value resulting from the granting of planning permission for residential development. Part V allows local authorities purchase a percentage of land at less than the enhanced market value, with such land used thereafter to deliver social and affordable housing.

In line with Government commitments, the Part V provision was increased, via the Affordable Housing Act 2021, from 10% for social housing to a mandatory 20% for social, affordable and cost rental housing requirements. The link to a specified percentage need in the Housing Strategy reflected in the Development Plan objectives was removed, ensuring the full share of the planning gain could be captured for the State on all applicable sites. The amended Part V provisions now require at least half of the planning gain to be applied to social housing provision, with the remainder to be applied to affordable housing, which can be affordable purchase, cost rental or both.

The amendments came into effect on 3 September 2021 and apply to land purchased before 2015 and on or after 1 August 2021. Transitional arrangements have also been introduced and provide that the previous 10% Part V requirement will continue to apply to extant planning permissions and land purchased between 2015 and 2021. Near term supply will not be affected by these changes; however, this will change in 2026 when the 20% Part V requirement will apply to all land.

This approach taken is balanced and fair, allowing supply to come forward at pace while also ensuring the State derives as much benefit as possible for social and affordable purposes.

### **Housing Provision**

302. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective for an average of 2,000 new cost rental homes each year with rents targeted at least 25% below market level. [17530/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Cost Rental represents a new tenure option, targeted at those people within the middle-income cohort, who do not qualify for social housing but who are facing affordability pressures on the



private rental market. The pipeline for Cost Rental delivery is being developed and delivery is expected to increase incrementally over the period to 2030, with the target of an average of 2,000 Cost Rental homes per year or 18,000 in total.

The introduction of Cost Rental will provide a more affordable and more secure form of long-term rental housing in Ireland. Rent levels for Cost Rental tenancies are based on the cost of the provision of homes, rather than being subject to market driven movement.

Once tenanted, rents will increase only in line with consumer inflation, remaining stable in real terms, while continuing to cover management and maintenance costs for the properties. Cost Rental schemes delivered by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and local authorities will target cost-covering rents of at least 25% below comparable open market rates.

Under Housing for All, 10,000 Cost Rental homes will be delivered from 2021 to 2026 by AHBs, supported by Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) funding, along with funding for Local Authorities through the Affordable Housing Fund. The Land Development Agency will also deliver Cost Rental, either on its own portfolio of sites or through acquisitions under Project Tosaigh.

A Housing Delivery Action Plan prepared by each Local Authority will underpin delivery of cost rental homes to 2026. Each local authority submitted the first iteration of their plans in December and my officials have now met with each and the final Delivery Action Plans are expected to be published in Q2.

To date, funding support has been provided to deliver almost 900 Cost Rental homes. The first 65 Cost Rental homes were tenanted by the Clúid AHB in 2021, with 25 at Taylor Hill in Balbriggan and a further 40 at Barnhall Meadows in Leixlip, with funding from the CREL scheme covering up to 30% of the capital costs in each of the two developments. Both developments also delivered cost-covering rents at least 40% below comparable open market prices.

The tenanting process is currently underway for a further 44 new Cost Rental homes at the Parklands development in Citywest, also supported by CREL funding and being delivered by the Tuath AHB. Projected rents are €1,264 per month for two-bedroom apartments and €1,297 per month for two-bedroom duplexes. Tenants have been moving into a further 50 Cost Rental homes since the 14th of March 2022 at Enniskerry Road, Stepside. These Cost Rental homes were delivered by the Tuath and Respond AHBs, in collaboration with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. The cost-covering rent for these two-bedroom apartments is €1,200 per month, which represents a very significant discount on market prices in the area (c. €2,000).

## Rental Sector

303. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All extended rent pressure zones to 2024 and rents linked to the harmonised index of consumer prices. [17531/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021 introduced measures in July 2021 to extend the operation of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) until the end of 2024. The designation of all existing RPZs has also been extended until 31 December 2024. The Act provides that rent reviews outside of RPZs can, until 2025, occur no more frequently than bi-annually. This provides rent certainty for tenants outside of RPZs for a minimum 2 year period at a time.

The Act also introduced measures to better protect tenants with affordability by prohibiting

any necessary rent increase in a RPZ from exceeding general inflation, as recorded by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP).

To address the rent affordability challenges building on foot of the unexpectedly fast rising inflation rate, as recorded by HICP (CSO data for February 2022 shows HICP inflation of 5.7% p.a.), the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2021 provides, from 11 December 2021, a cap of 2% per annum pro rata on rent increases in RPZs, where the inflation rate is higher. In effect, this will mean that rents in RPZs may only increase by a maximum of 2% per annum pro rata during times of higher inflation.

In all cases, section 19(1) of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2021 prohibits the setting of a rent that exceeds market rent.

## **Rental Sector**

304. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective for indefinite tenancies to strengthen security for renters. [17533/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** In accordance with both the Programme for Government and Housing for All commitments, the Government has provided for Tenancies of Unlimited Duration through the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2021.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2021 was signed into law on 11 December 2021.

All new tenancies created on or after 11 June 2022 will become tenancies of unlimited duration once the tenancy has lasted more than 6 months and no notice of termination has been validly served on the tenant.

The Act amends Part 4 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (Security of Tenure), to provide for enhanced tenancy protections on the basis that after 6 months' duration, a 'Part 4 tenancy' is established for an unlimited duration and not subject to expiry at the end of a 6 year term, should the landlord exercise his or her right to terminate the tenancy as currently provided under section 34(b) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004.

The aim is to enhance security of tenure for tenants and to simplify the operation of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004 - 2021 through a transition to tenancies of unlimited duration. This provision respects the landlord's constitutionally protected rights to terminate a tenancy in accordance with section 34 of the Acts.

Only new tenancies commencing on or after 11 June 2022 must be on the basis of an unlimited duration, but naturally over time, all 'Part 4 tenancies' will be of unlimited duration.

As existing Part 4/further Part 4 tenancies terminate/expire over time or are renewed, it will involve the creation of a new tenancy of unlimited duration in respect of any such dwelling, should it remain in the rental sector. By 11 June 2028, (i.e. within 6 years of the coming into operation of sections 5 and 6 of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2021), all residential tenancies will have commenced on the basis of becoming a Part 4 tenancy of unlimited duration (following the initial 6 month period).

In the interim, the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2021 provides that a landlord

may grant his or her consent to any existing tenancy being treated as a tenancy of unlimited duration. However, the landlord is not be compelled to grant his or her consent and where consent is not granted, the existing protections of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 apply.

### **Building Energy Rating**

305. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All for minimum building energy rating standards for private rental dwellings. [17534/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Government is committed under Housing for All to developing a roadmap to implement minimum Building Energy Rating (BER) standards, or 'Cost Optimal' equivalent, for the private rental sector beginning in 2025. This will increase energy efficiency, help to alleviate fuel poverty, help to protect tenant's health and improve comfort levels in rental homes. Work in this area, which will support the objectives set down in the Government's Climate Action Plan, is underway. The detailed parameters of the work including the scope, detailed approach to its implementation and associated timelines are under examination.

### **Rental Sector**

306. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All upfront deposit and rent payments capped at two months value. [17535/22]

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

### **Housing Provision**

307. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to provide over 90,000 social homes by 2030, including an average annual new-build component of over 9,500 social housing homes to 2026, the highest number in the history of the State. [17536/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** 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. This includes the delivery of 90,000 social homes by 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 and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency.

Under Housing for All, the Government will deliver 47,600 new build social homes and 3,500 social homes through long-term leasing in the period 2022-2026. In September 2021, I

issued social housing delivery targets to each local authority for the period 2022-2026.

A key action under Housing for All is that local authorities will develop and submit Housing Delivery Action Plans to include details of social and affordable housing delivery. The Plans set out details of both social and affordable housing delivery as appropriate over the period 2022 - 2026, in line with targets set under Housing for All.

My Department publishes comprehensive programme level statistics on social housing delivery for each local authority on a quarterly basis. The statistics are published on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link: [www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-over-all-social-housing-provision/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-over-all-social-housing-provision/).

### Housing Provision

308. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to end long-term leasing by local authorities and approved housing bodies through phasing out new entrants and focus on new build to provide social housing homes. [17537/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Housing for All is the Government's plan to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 homes per year over the next decade. 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.

This includes the delivery of 47,600 new build social homes in the period 2022-2026. 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 and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency.

It is envisaged that 3,500 units are to be delivered through long term leasing over the lifetime of the Housing for All plan, tapering down from 1,300 units in 2022 to 200 units in 2025. As such, annual Housing for All targets were allocated to 13 Local Authorities. Table 1 below outlines the number of long term leasing units to be delivered per annum under Housing for All by Local Authority.

Table 1: Long Term Leasing Housing For All Target allocation to Local Authorities 2022 – 2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Cork City	81	71	50	-	202
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	210	39	100	30	379
Dublin City	480	475	410	100	1,465
Fingal	44	160	120	30	354
Galway County	10	-	-	-	10
Kerry	31	-	-	-	31
Kildare	262	86	-	-	348
Louth	34	-	-	-	34

	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Meath	73	80	-	-	153
Roscommon	10	-	-	-	10
South Dublin	40	90	120	40	290
Waterford	-	46	-	-	46
Wicklow	25	153	-	-	178
Total	1,300	1,200	800	200	3,500

### Housing Provision

309. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to strengthen the mortgage to rent scheme to ensure it meets the needs of those in long-term mortgage arrears. [17538/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Both the Programme for Government and Housing for All commits to strengthening the Mortgage to Rent scheme and ensuring that it is helping those who need it. Building on the significant amendments already made to the scheme in 2017, the 2021 Review, which was published on the 24 January 2022, examined the impact of these changes and what further changes would benefit those in need of the scheme. While the scheme is performing well, it was assessed that some further enhancements were needed to enable more households in need of State support with their long-term housing needs to avail of this scheme. Four broad categories of actions are identified in the review, including:

- a) broadening eligibility criteria;
- b) improving the scheme process, structure and financing;
- c) increasing communication and awareness raising; and
- d) responding to developments around mortgage arrears solutions.

As part of the enhancements to broadening the eligibility criteria to ensure more households will be eligible for the scheme there is a new amendment to allow flexibility where the household concerned is over accommodated (i.e. has more than 2 spare bedrooms above the current needs of the household). Flexibility on over accommodation may be allowed where:

- a) the borrower or one of the joint borrowers is aged 65 and over
- b) the borrower, one of the joint borrowers or one of the borrower's dependents has a disability and the property has been significantly and permanently adapted to their needs
- c) the borrower, one of the joint borrowers or one of the borrower's dependents has a disability and the property is specifically suitable to their needs without adaptations

In the case of (b) and (c) above, the household must also qualify for Social Housing Support on disability, medical or compassionate grounds in line with the local authority's allocation policy. Such flexibility is subject to the local authority or AHB (as appropriate) reserving the right to accommodate the household in more appropriate accommodation, if available, in the future.

This is one of a number of changes outlined in the 2021 Review and has been implemented under the scheme since 14 February 2022.

Full details of the recommendations and associated actions are outlined within the 2021

Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme for people who have borrowed from commercial private lending institutions and this review is available on the Department's website under Publications: [www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed57b-2021-review-of-the-mortgage-to-rent-scheme-for-borrowers-of-commercial-private-lending-institutions/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed57b-2021-review-of-the-mortgage-to-rent-scheme-for-borrowers-of-commercial-private-lending-institutions/)

### **Housing Provision**

310. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to reform the tenant purchase scheme. [17539/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Tenant Purchase Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the scheme.

The scheme was reviewed in 2021 in line with Programme for Government and Housing for All commitments. The Government approved a number of amendments on foot of the review and these came into effect on 1st February 2022.

The amendments include a reduction in the minimum reckonable income required to be eligible under the scheme from €15,000 to €12,500. This means older tenants, whose only income might be the contributory or non-contributory State pension, may qualify to buy their homes if they have the financial means to do so. The time an applicant is required to be in receipt of social housing supports to be able to apply under the scheme has also been revised. This has been increased from one to ten years.

Further changes to the scheme are currently being examined as part of the work on the broader social housing reform agenda.

### **Housing Provision**

311. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to revise and reform income eligibility for social housing. [17540/22]

336. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he is considering changing the income limits for social housing to reflect the reality faced by many persons who cannot afford housing from their own means but are over the income thresholds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17907/22]

379. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the review of social housing income limits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18192/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 311, 336 and 379 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 343 of 22 March 2022 which sets out the position in the matter.

### **Housing Provision**

312. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All to objective to work towards eradicating homelessness by 2030. [17541/22]

313. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to increase Housing First targets to 1,200 tenancies over five years for homeless people. [17542/22]

314. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to establish a new national homeless action committee. [17543/22]

315. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to expand street outreach teams for rough sleepers nationwide. [17544/22]

348. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the development of a youth homelessness strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18006/22]

349. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the progress of the expansion of street outreach services to engage with rough sleepers in key urban areas outside Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18007/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 to 315, inclusive, 348 and 349 together.

Supporting individuals and families facing homelessness is a key Government priority. Through *Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland*, the Government's strategic housing plan to 2030, the Government is committed to taking action to prevent entries into homelessness in the first instance and to help those experiencing homelessness to exit into secure and sustained tenancies. It also 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.

Under *Housing for All*, my Department has committed to actively participate through the newly established European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH) to advance the Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness signed in June 2021. Under EPOCH, Ireland has committed to "promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing and the provision of enabling support services to the homeless". *Housing for All* outlines how the Government will work towards ending homelessness by 2030, detailing 18 distinct actions tailored to achieve this target. This includes increasing access to supports for both individuals and families.

Ireland has committed to support EPOCH policy measures with adequate funding and, when appropriate, make use of EU funding as a lever to improve the way the EU address homelessness. Budget 2022 made provision for €194 million in funding for homeless services. This funding in 2022 reflects the priority the Government is giving to homelessness.

Under EPOCH, Ireland has committed to share good practices in combatting homelessness. I recently attended a ministerial level meeting of EPOCH, whereby I discussed the most pressing issues in homelessness today with my European colleagues, and where the work programme of the Platform was adopted.

As provided for in *Housing for All*, the National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC) was established in Q4 2021. The first meeting took place in December 2021 and the second took place in February of this year. The work of NHAC is informed by *Housing for All*. The overarching objective of NHAC is to ensure that a renewed emphasis is brought to collaborating across Government to implement actions in the Plan, along with bringing better coherence and coordination of homeless-related services in delivering policy measures and actions to address homelessness. It is intended that meetings of NHAC will take place quarterly, with the third meeting due to be held in April. Details in respect of NHAC and a note of its meetings are published on my Department's website on an ongoing basis

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to develop a Youth Homelessness Strategy and this is articulated in *Housing for All*. It was agreed at the first meeting of the NHAC that the development of this Strategy would be one of the first priorities of NHAC.

The aim of this Strategy is to help young people who are aged 18 – 24 and who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

A 3-week Public Consultation ran from 22 February and further consultations will take place in the next month. My Department, with the support of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, is also consulting directly with a number of key stakeholders. The Strategy is currently being developed and is intended for publication later this year.

*Housing for All* also committed to the further expansion of Housing First. A new National Implementation Plan, which provides for a further 1,319 tenancies covering the period 2022-2026, was published in December 2021. The new Plan outlines the targets for each region and in each year.

The implementation of the Plan is a joint initiative of my Department, the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive (HSE), the criminal justice sector (the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service) and Local Authorities, in conjunction with NGO partners. Each partner is committing the necessary resources and supports to implement the programme. A new Housing First Directorate has been established, and is based in the Housing Agency. The newly appointed Director is responsible for managing the implementation of the new Plan.

To aid in the further expansion of the Housing First approach, and in line with commitments made in *Housing for All*, it is planned to extend outreach and intensive engagement services to every region in the country ensuring that those most in need of the intense supports provided by Housing First will be able to avail of them.

To support this commitment The Housing Agency, in partnership with the HSE and in consultation with key Departments and agencies, is developing a good practice manual for the operation of assertive outreach services. This manual will assist regions in expanding outreach services into those urban areas in which rough sleeping is understood to be a concern. This manual is to be published by mid-2022.

Resources are being made available to expand outreach services. As part of their homelessness expenditure programmes for 2022, which are supported by Exchequer funding, local authorities were invited in November 2021 to submit proposals to my Department for additional outreach services in their annual expenditure programme for 2022.

*Question No. 313 answered with Question No. 312.*

*Question No. 314 answered with Question No. 312.*

*Question No. 315 answered with Question No. 312.*



## Housing Provision

316. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective to introduce a new national policy on rightsizing to highlight the potential of rightsizing for households that no longer fully occupy their current privately owned accommodation and exploration of options to support and incentivise rightsizing on a voluntary basis. [17545/22]

360. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the progress of the development of a national policy on rightsizing; his plans to support and incentivise rightsizing on a voluntary basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18018/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 316 and 360 together.

Housing for All (published in September 2021) provides a new housing plan for Ireland to 2030 with the overall objective that every citizen in the State should have access to good quality homes through a steady supply of housing in the right locations, with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system. The strategy sets out, over four pathways, a broad suite of measures to achieve its policy objectives together with a financial commitment of in excess of €4 billion per annum.

The Housing for All policy objective to make more efficient use of existing housing stock includes the development of a national policy on rightsizing and to explore options to support and incentivise rightsizing on a voluntary basis. Work is underway through my Department to inform and progress the development of national policy on rightsizing this year.

## Housing Provision

317. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All objective for a fresh start principle for applications to State affordable housing and loan schemes. [17546/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** While most affordable housing measures are primarily targeted at first-time buyers, the Housing for All strategy explicitly provides for the Fresh Start principle. The Fresh Start principle extends the supports available under both Affordable Purchase schemes and the Local Authority Home Loan scheme to applicants who are divorced, legally separated, or where the relationship has ended and where they retain no beneficial interest in a home. The Fresh Start principle will also apply to those who have previously purchased a residential property but have been divested of this through personal insolvency or bankruptcy arrangements, proceedings or other legal processes.

Specifically in relation to the Local Authority Affordable Purchase scheme, the Fresh Start principle has already been accommodated under Part 2, Section 10 of the Affordable Housing Act 2021. This scheme assists first-time buyers (as well as those eligible under the Fresh Start principle) purchasing Local Authority-delivered new homes by bridging the gap between the market value of the home and the combined value of the buyer's mortgage and deposit. Regulations setting out the detailed eligibility criteria for the scheme are at an advanced stage and will be issued in the coming weeks.

Part 4 of the Affordable Housing Act 2021 provides for the establishment of the First Home scheme, which will act in a similar way to the Local Authority-led scheme, though it will apply to homes purchased through the private market. Under both schemes, an equity stake corresponding to the level of support provided is taken in the market value of the home. The supported home-owner will have an option to achieve full ownership by buying-out the equity stake in the purchased property at a timing of their own discretion. An equity buy-out will be required in circumstances where the home is sold or passed on, or ceases to be the primary residential residence.

The First Home scheme will be available at a national level and will incorporate regional price caps reflecting median house price sales. Confirmation of the final details of this scheme is ongoing in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders and it is anticipated that the First Home scheme will be available for applications, including those eligible under the Fresh Start principle, in the second half of this year. This initiative is being designed to ensure support is provided to those that, because of the current income levels, cannot secure a sufficient mortgage to meet the cost of a modest newly constructed home in their preferred location.

The Local Authority Home Loan is a Government backed mortgage scheme for those on modest or low incomes who cannot get sufficient funding from commercial banks to purchase or build a home. It has been available nationwide from local authorities since 4 January 2022 for first-time buyers and fresh start applicants. The loan can be used both for new and second-hand properties, or to self-build.

The 'Fresh Start' principle applies for applications to State loan schemes such as the Local Authority Home Loan. The following categories of persons are eligible to apply for the Local Authority Home Loan under the Fresh Start principle:

- Applicant(s) that previously purchased or built a residential property, but is divorced and has left the property and divested themselves of their interest in the property are eligible.

- Applicant(s) that previously purchased a residential property, but have been divested of this through insolvency or bankruptcy proceedings, are eligible to apply. The applicant must be discharged from bankruptcy proceedings. It should be noted that a return to solvency should not be interpreted as a return to creditworthiness, which is a separate assessment.

The final decision regarding the Local Authority Home Loan application is made by the relevant Local Authority Credit Committee on a case by case basis.

Further details can be found on [localauthorityhomeloan.ie/](http://localauthorityhomeloan.ie/)

## Housing Provision

318. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All plan to introduce radical new modern Kenny report style powers to ensure sharing of the increase in land values from re-zoning decisions and greater community gain. [17547/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** The Report to which the Question refers is that of the *Committee on the Price of Building Land* presented to the Minister for Local Government in 1973. The Report considered what measures could be undertaken to ensure that a substantial portion of the increase in land value attributable to the decisions of public authorities, could be secured for the benefit of the community.

A commitment was included in the Programme for Government to review how such community gain proposals could be captured and the principle of Land Value Sharing was subsequently adopted in *Housing for All*. Land Value Sharing involves securing a share of the difference in land value before zoning or designation and the point at which planning permission is granted. Land Value Sharing will apply in the first instance to all newly-zoned residential land, and to Urban Development Zones which are also proposed in *Housing for All*. Urban Development Zones will provide for a coordinated plan-led approach to the development of areas with significant potential for residential and urban growth, where Land Value Sharing will also apply and will involve land assembly provisions to ensure that land critical to the provision of infrastructure can be secured.

In line with Housing Policy Objective 12.1 contained in *Housing for All*, my officials are now in the process of developing Land Value Sharing Mechanisms.

A General Scheme for a Heads of Bill was approved by Government in December 2021 outlining the general provisions for the establishment of Land Value Sharing obligations. Work is now progressing on the more detailed aspects of how this legislation may be implemented, including all necessary due diligence and scrutiny. A detailed economic appraisal of the proposed measures, involving an assessment of the potential implications in different locations and circumstances, is being undertaken to determine what uplift in value would be reasonable for the State to secure. This includes independent expert advice. This research and expert advice will provide the basis for the detail of these measures.

A key aspect of this work will include stakeholder engagement, including with representatives of Local Authorities and State agencies, through a working group to ensure a workable set of measures is progressed. Proposals for engagement are currently being finalised in parallel with the economic appraisal, with detailed drafting of the Bill to commence in Q3 2022 and the enactment of the legislation proposed for Q4 2022.

### **Housing Provision**

319. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All plan for ending strategic housing developments, returning planning decisions to local authorities and reforming the judicial review process. [17548/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** The Programme for Government - Our Shared Future committed to not extending the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) arrangements beyond their legislative expiry date of end December 2021, which was subsequently extended to 25 February 2022 arising from the Covid-related extension of statutory timelines within the planning system by eight weeks in respect of the period March to May 2020 due to the shutdown of the construction sector.

The Planning and Development (Amendment) (Large-scale Residential Development) Act 2021 (Act of 2021) was signed into law by the President on 14 December 2021. Furthermore, the Planning and Development (Amendment) (Large-scale Residential Development) Act 2021 (Commencement) Order 2021 which brings the provisions of the Act into effect was signed with an effective date of 17 December 2021.

The main purpose of the Act of 2021 is to restore the two-stage planning process, with decision making for Large-scale Residential Development (LRD) type applications returning to

the local planning authority in the first instance, with the subsequent right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála (the Board), thereby delivering on the commitments in the Programme for Government as well as Housing for All.

The Act of 2021 also includes a number of transitional arrangements in relation to the expiry of the SHD arrangements and their replacement by the new LRD arrangements. Under the Act:

- SHD prospective applicants/developers already in receipt of an SHD opinion under the SHD arrangements on the commencement of the Act (17 December 2021) have 16 weeks to submit an SHD application to the Board from that date.

- SHD prospective applicants/developers who had formally commenced consultations with the Board and were awaiting an SHD opinion on the commencement of the Act (17 December 2021) will have 16 weeks to submit an SHD application to the Board from the date of receipt of the SHD opinion.

On the matter of judicial review reform, it is intended that the substantive legislative changes will be enacted by end 2022 in the context of the overall Planning Review and in tandem with the establishment of the Environmental and Planning Court which is being progressed by my colleague the Minister for Justice. The Minister is considering some minor technical amendments before the Summer in this regard, mainly to align provisions with EU law.

### **Vacant Sites**

320. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All plan to introduce a new tax to activate vacant land for residential purposes. [17549/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Action 15.2 of Housing for All requires the introduction of a new tax to activate vacant land for residential purposes (to replace the current Vacant Site Levy) by Q4 2021. The Residential Zoned Land Tax was introduced by the Minister for Finance in the Finance Act 2021. The purpose of the proposed measure is to incentivise the activation of land which is zoned and serviced for residential development, but remains undeveloped. It is primarily intended to influence behaviour towards increased housing output, rather than to raise revenue. The tax will replace the Vacant Site Levy.

The significant benefit of the tax is to incentivise the development of suitably zoned land across the State which has been the beneficiary of costly investment in servicing for housing construction. This includes lands in cities, towns and village centres which are vacant or idle where zoned for mixed use including residential. The tax measure, in conjunction with the ongoing review of development plans throughout the state to identify and zone housing land needed to meet statutory Housing Supply Targets will ensure that delivery of housing on zoned and serviced land is progressed. The tax will, when it comes into effect in 2024, be applied at an annual taxation rate of 3% of market value of the land to encourage use for appropriate development.

The tax will apply to all land zoned for residential or a mix of uses including residential and which are serviced throughout all 31 local authorities, with certain lands excluded from scope, as set out within the legislation. The role of the local authorities is to identify the lands in scope via a mapping process commencing November 2022, which includes appeal provisions where the relevant landowner considers that a parcel of land does not meet the criteria for falling within the scope of the tax.

The tax will be managed by the Revenue Commissioners. After the publication of the final maps in December 2023, the maps will be reviewed annually by local authorities to ensure they are up to date. The tax will remain as a charge on the land, will be applied annually and will be collected by the Revenue Commissioners, incentivising the development of the land-bank by the owners, or the sale of the land to those who will undertake development.

Existing dwellings and their gardens, while they will be included in the maps, are not included in the scope of the tax.

Landowners may also make submissions to local authorities during the public consultation periods on the maps in 2022/23 only to amend zonings to remove their lands from the scope of the tax. In considering these submissions and the potential for varying the adopted development plan as a result, the local authorities must take into account the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and the need to zone sufficient land to meet the statutory Housing Supply Targets.

My Department notified all local authorities of the introduction of the tax measure on signing of the Finance Act 2021. My Department is preparing guidance on the mapping process and the management of rezoning requests and will liaise with stakeholders through a working group. Financial support and assistance to the local authorities will also be provided on this matter to ensure that the maps will be published as required by the legislation. My Department will bring forward separate transitional legislation to repeal the vacant site levy arrangements and this will take account of lands that might otherwise fall out of the full scope of the Vacant Site Levy, that are currently subject to the Vacant Site Levy.

### **Housing Provision**

321. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All for a new croí cónaithe fund to increase owner-occupier apartment development in city centres. [17552/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The national housing policy *Housing for All*, as launched in September 2021, provides a new pathway to a sustainable housing system, by clearly setting out how we plan to address the short, medium and long-term challenges ahead. The overall aim of this new housing plan for Ireland 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 the overall objective for compact growth, vibrant, liveable cities must offer options for both owner occupiers and renters in cities, at all income levels. A key focus of *Housing for All* is to ensure that those who wish to purchase a home, have sufficient location choice. This is particularly the case for the core of our cities, towns and villages.

The new Croí Cónaithe fund as outlined in *Housing for All*, is intended to ensure that aligned with the objectives of the National Planning Framework, additional choices are made available to home buyers in our urban cores, and town centres. It will do this by expanding home ownership options, where the choice is currently limited:

- In urban areas, for apartment living over a certain height/density threshold
- In towns, where options for building new private dwellings has been constrained by the lack of serviced sites.

It is clear that in higher density locations, there is insufficient apartments being built for sale. To overcome this viability challenge, and given the high level of unactivated permissions particularly for apartments in our urban areas, a Croí Cónaithe (Cities) fund is being established, which will ensure that these developments can be built more viably for sale to owner occupiers. This measure is based on 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 the Department, and will be operated on an open book accounting basis, to ensure that financial support provided feeds through in reduced costs to the home-buyers. It is also envisaged that measures in *Housing for All* to support greater construction productivity and reducing the cost of land through changes to planning legislation, will also encourage a more sustainable market for such housing thereafter.

My Department is currently working with the Housing Agency on finalizing the operational basis for the new fund and expect to engage prospective proposers in a call for proposals in Q2 2022.

### Housing Provision

322. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All plan for increased funding capacity for the Land Development Agency for strategic development of public lands for affordable and social housing in city and town centres. [17553/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Housing for All provides a new housing plan for Ireland to 2030 with the overall objective that every citizen in the State should have access to good quality homes through a steady supply of housing in the right locations, with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system. The Land Development Agency (LDA) are at the heart of this plan, advancing their remit to develop land, including public lands, for housing or other purposes.

The enactment of the Land Development Agency Act, 2021, providing for the establishment of the LDA as a commercial State Agency, marked an historic move to use State lands to provide for housing supply and affordability needs.

The Act provided for the establishment of a new LDA Designated Activity Company (DAC) and the initial capitalisation of the LDA DAC by the National Treasury Management Agency from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund.

Housing for All recognised that additional resourcing, likely to be in the form of borrowing will be required to meet the increased level of activities envisaged under the plan. Approximately €1 billion will be required to assist in funding the pipeline of housing, including on additional State lands, and accelerated housing through Project Tosaigh.

This additional funding will bring the total capital available to €3.5bn, positioning the LDA as a very significant State-owned participant in this sector.

### Regeneration Projects

323. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All plan for targeted funding via the urban regeneration and development fund and rural regeneration and development fund to support the town centre

first approach as part of the wider objectives for the regeneration of cities, towns and rural areas. [17554/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Town Centre First, jointly developed by my Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development, sets out 33 actions which will provide a co-ordinated framework across established national policy objectives (in particular the National Planning Framework, Housing for All and Our Rural Future), to address the decline in the health of our towns and sets out actions to regenerate and revitalise them.

A key elements of the Town Centre First policy will be the development of Town Centre First (TCF) Plans. These non-statutory plans will be produced by a local Town Team drawn from local community and business representatives. The TCF Plans will identify challenges, actions and integrated responses across a number of themes (business/commercial; community/cultural; housing; built environment; heritage). The TCF Plans will be action and project orientated in nature and will assist towns in accessing a range of potential funding programmes available for town regeneration across a number of government departments and agencies.

The development and delivery of TCF Plans will be supported by a network of Local Authority Town Regeneration Officers and also a National Town Centre First Office, which will be established within the Local Government Management Agency.

The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is already providing funding for projects that will enable a greater proportion of residential development to be delivered within the existing built footprints of both our cities and large towns, while also ensuring that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest and to visit. To this end, the fund has already provided €323m in funding to town regeneration projects since its inception in 2018 as well as committing over €1 billion to the cities and the five regional growth centres identified in the NPF. It is intended that a third call for URDF project proposals will be issued later in 2022, to include a focus on supporting the delivery of Town Centre First.

In addition, the RRDF, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Rural and Community Development seeks to support ambitious and strategic projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities and achieve the objectives of Our Rural Future. In total, the RRDF has now provided over €278m with a further €60m allocated for investment in 2022. A fourth call for Category 1 RRDF applications is now open and the closing date for applications is the 29th April 2022. This call has a strong focus on supporting projects that will assist in revitalising rural towns and villages through planned, sustainable regeneration and development including addressing vacancy and the re-use of heritage and other existing buildings in alignment with the Town Centre First approach.

## Planning Issues

324. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All planning exemptions for above-shop conversions and guidance relating to protected structures. [17555/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires

planning permission. Exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of specific forms of development are provided for, when they are considered to be consistent with proper planning and sustainable development. These exemptions provided for in the Planning and Development Regulations are kept under regular review.

The Planning and Development Act (Exempted Development) Regulations 2022 - which extend the operation of the previous 2018 Regulations in this regard until end 2025 - provide for an exemption from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of the change of use of certain vacant commercial premises to residential use, including the conversion of vacant areas above ground floor commercial premises to residential use. This measure is aimed at facilitating the productive re-use of qualifying vacant commercial buildings as homes, while also facilitating urban renewal and the bringing on stream of increased housing supply.

The conditions and limitations that applied to the 2018 exempted development provisions continue to apply under the new regulations which includes provision that works to protected structures shall not be allowed under the exemptions save where the relevant planning authority has issued a declaration under section 57 of the Act to the effect that the proposed works would not materially affect the character of the structure or any element of the structure which contributes to its special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

Furthermore works shall not be permitted in a number of limited areas, such as areas of special planning control and areas to which special amenity area orders relate. Under section 82 of the Act, works to the exterior of a structure located in an architectural conservation area shall be exempted development only if those works would not materially affect the character of the area. Where a person wishes to seek advice in relation to whether proposed works might materially affect the character of an architectural conservation area, they should contact the local Heritage Officer or the local planning office.

My Department recently issued Circular Letter PL 02/2022 to planning authorities advising them of the newly extended exempted development regulations. The Circular references the conditions and limitations that continue to apply under these regulations and makes explicit reference to those conditions mentioned above.

If a person wishes to establish whether or not planning permission is required for a particular development proposal, they can seek a declaration from their local planning authority under Section 5 of the Act.

### **Vacant Properties**

325. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on the Housing for All nationwide and local-authority-led compulsory purchase order scheme to purchase vacant homes. [17556/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Housing for All commits to a range of measures to address vacancy and maximise the use of existing housing stock such as plans to introduce a new programme for the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) of vacant properties to ensure their use for residential purposes. Such a new programme for CPO of vacant properties is expected to support a broader programme of affordable housing in order to maximise opportunities to return vacant properties to productive use.

The CPO programme is to be supported by a bridging finance facility from the Housing



Finance Agency for property acquisitions. In addition, a central advisory service is to be established in The Housing Agency to assist Local Authorities with the process. The objective is for Local Authorities to acquire at least 2,500 vacant units by 2026.

The detailed arrangements for this CPO programme are currently being developed, with aim of advancing it this year, and it will build on the experience of many Local Authorities that already utilise CPO acquisitions, for example, in their delivery of new social homes through the Buy and Renew scheme.

### Local Authorities

326. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the current salary scale for each chief executive officer in each local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17572/22]

327. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of programme managers who have been approved for each local authority in the State, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17589/22]

328. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the salary scale for programme managers in each local authority in the State, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17590/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 326 to 328, inclusive, together.

The annual salary of the Chief Executive in each local authority is detailed in the table below.

Local Authority	Category	Chief Executive Remuneration @ 1 February 2022
Dublin City	1	€204,443
	Category	
Cork County	2	€175,027
Fingal	2	€175,027
South Dublin	2	€175,027
	Category	
Cork City	3	€165,519
Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown	3	€165,519
Kildare	3	€165,519
Limerick City & County	3	€165,519
Meath	3	€165,519
	Category	
Clare	4	€153,864
Donegal	4	€153,864
Galway County	4	€153,864
Kerry	4	€153,864
Kilkenny	4	€153,864
Louth	4	€153,864

Local Authority	Category	Chief Executive Remuneration @ 1 February 2022
Mayo	4	€153,864
Tipperary	4	€153,864
Westmeath	4	€153,864
Wexford	4	€153,864
Wicklow	4	€153,864
Waterford City & County	4	€153,864
	Category	
Carlow	5	€143,111
Cavan	5	€143,111
Laois	5	€143,111
Leitrim	5	€143,111
Longford	5	€143,111
Monaghan	5	€143,111
Offaly	5	€143,111
Roscommon	5	€143,111
Sligo	5	€143,111
Galway City	5	€143,111

Under Section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible. My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority on a whole time equivalent basis.

However, granular data, in terms of the number of Director of Services in each local authority, is not collected and consequently is not available in my Department. The relevant information should be available from each local authority.

The salary scale for the Director of Service grade in the local government sector is detailed in the table below.

Director of Service Salary Scale Points	Salary @ 1 February 2022
1	€97,690
2	€102,129
3	€106,571
4	€111,009
5	€115,451

*Question No. 327 answered with Question No. 326.*

*Question No. 328 answered with Question No. 326.*

### Public Sector Staff

329. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heri-

tage the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to 12 and over 12 months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17602/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department complies with all central policy and guidance in relation to suspension or workplace disputes.

As requested please see set out below the numbers of staff absent from work on fullpay due to suspension or workplace disputes.

Period of Absence	No. of staff absent on fullpay due to suspension or workplace disputes
Up to 3 months	0
3-6 months	0
6-12 months	0
Over 12 months	1

The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email addresses for each agency are set out in the table below.

State Body	Contact E-mails
An Bord Pleanála	oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
An Fóram Uisce (the Water Forum)	info@nationalwaterforum.ie
Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority	oireachtasqueries@ahbregulator.ie
Docklands Oversight and Consultative Forum	infodocklands@dublincity.ie
Ervia	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Heritage Council	oireachtas@heritagecouncil.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Land Development Agency	oireachtas@lda.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
National Oversight and Audit Commission	info@noac.ie
National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	ntacc@housing.gov.ie
Office of the Planning Regulator	oireachtas@opr.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	oireachtas.enquiries@VALOFF.ie

State Body	Contact E-mails
Water Advisory Body	info@wab.gov.ie
Waterways Ireland	ceoffice@waterwaysireland.org

### Departmental Reports

330. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage further to Parliamentary Question No. 217 of 10 March 2022, the reason the report for the provision of research and information on the rural water sector to support the rural water working group in carrying out its work has been categorised as not for publication (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17632/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** In April 2018, the Rural Water Working Group was established to conduct a review of the wider investment needs relating to rural water services. The Group's aim is to recommend measures to ensure an equality of outcome for those who receive water services from Irish Water and non-Irish Water customers. The establishment of the Working Group was also undertaken in response to the recommendations of the Joint Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services.

The outcomes and reports of the Working Group will inform future policy and investment decisions, by myself as Minister and the Government, on rural water services. While not intended for publication in isolation, the report for the provision of research and information on the rural water sector to support the Rural Water Working Group, will of course be publically available when the report is completed and fully considered by the Rural Water Working Group.

### Rental Sector

331. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of plans to change the differential rent scheme to align all local authorities in respect of the way rent is calculated; the timeline for the introduction of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17633/22]

352. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the reform of the differential rents scheme and the planned introduction of a national scheme to standardise differential rents across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18010/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 331 and 352 together.

My Department is considering proposals for a standardised national differential rents scheme as an alternative to the current devolved schemes operating across the 31 Local Authorities.

However, given the emerging cost of living challenges in recent months, it is appropriate to defer implementation of any changes pending a full review of Housing for All.

### Housing Policy

332. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Her-

itage if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the proposed demolition of a number of houses at a location (details supplied) puts the Housing Agency in breach of its mortgage agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17695/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 327 of 22 March 2022 in which I provided an update on this project. My Department understands from Donegal County Council that it is not proposed to demolish social housing at the location referred to and that local authority officials have updated Councillors on this matter.

Further specific information on the future plans for this housing development will continue to be available directly from the local authority. I understand that they met recently with Clúid Housing Association to discuss the options for the redevelopment of the apartment block to make it fit for purpose as long term social housing accommodation.

I look forward to the local authority and Clúid Housing Association agreeing the approach to the renewal of this housing as soon as possible so that the necessary works can be undertaken and the housing units fully tenanted.

### **Defective Building Materials**

333. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when he expects to publish the general scheme of the legislation for the enhanced defective block remediation scheme for counties Donegal and Mayo; and if other counties including County Clare will be included in this scheme. [17729/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I brought a Memorandum to Government on an enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme on the 30 November 2021. It included an unprecedented suite of improvements to the current scheme. Government approved the enhanced scheme which it is estimated will cost approximately €2.2 billion.

I aim to bring the required primary legislation to give effect to the enhanced scheme before the Oireachtas as soon as possible with Spring 2022 being the indicative target timeline.

In the interim three enhancements from the new scheme have been brought into effect through amendments to the existing scheme regulations. On the 24 February 2022 I signed the Dwellings Damaged by the Use of Defective Concrete Blocks in Construction (Remediation) (Financial Assistance) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 which amend the Dwellings Damaged by the Use of Defective Concrete Blocks in Construction (Remediation) (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2020, so as;

1) to make provision, in the case of an application for confirmation of eligibility received before the date of the coming into operation of these regulations, for the recoupment of the fees connected with the provision of the engineer's report without the need for a prior stage 1 confirmation of eligibility

2) to make provision for the inclusion as an allowable cost 'essential immediate repair works', up to a value of €5,555, which are identified by a competent engineer in a 'building condition assessment report' and relate to the structural stability of any part of a home affected by defective concrete blocks

3) to make provision for an increase from 75% to 85% in the value of stage payments which

can be recouped to an approved applicant prior to the final grant payment

There has been ongoing engagement between Clare County Council and my Department in respect of the Defective Concrete Block Grant scheme. I understand that Clare County Council are now finalising the I.S. 465 reports in respect of a number of properties and will submit details to my Department as soon as possible for further consideration. I may, with Government approval, extend the scheme beyond the counties of Donegal and Mayo to additional counties, where the evidence supports such an extension.

### **Grazing Rights**

334. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the derogations that are proposed to farmers that have habitually used heather and gorse mountain burning as a means of regenerating new growth for sheep grazing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17785/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** The Wildlife Act 1976 prohibits the burning of vegetation growing on uncultivated land between 1 March and 31 August annually. I have no power to permit burning during that period.

In relation to the six month period between 1 September and the end of February annually, the Wildlife Act 1976 does *not* prohibit such burning, although special rules may apply in certain areas such as in Special Areas of Conservation.

### **Housing Schemes**

335. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will extend housing assistance payments as outlined in correspondence (details supplied). [17832/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Government is committed to delivering a humanitarian response to welcome people fleeing the war in Ukraine and seeking protection in Ireland as part of the EU response. It is examining all options as part of its humanitarian response, including the accommodation issues arising in the short, medium and long-term and the appropriate responses to address these.

As part of its response, Government is currently providing accommodation through the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) and is working closely with Local Authorities to provide accommodation for Ukrainian arrivals in a variety of settings including:

- Hotels, guest houses and B&Bs;
- Accommodation pledged by the general public, which is being assessed for suitability;
- State-owned or private properties, which may be suitable for short-term accommodation;
- Religious properties; and
- Local authority community facilities.

Regarding pledged accommodation, the Red Cross is the centre point for offers of assistance for accommodation coming in through local authorities or the public and will liaise directly with

the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on same. The Housing Assistance Payment or HAP is not available for accommodation pledged to the Irish Red Cross.

*Question No. 336 answered with Question No. 311.*

### **Heritage Sites**

337. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans to safeguard, protect and conserve ancient raths, also known as ringforts or fairy forts, particularly given the decision not to designate raths as areas for nature under the new iteration of the Common Agricultural Policy and the potential impact this could have on discouraging farmers from protecting raths on their land and given that half of the 60,000 raths have already been wiped out in recent decades; and if he has discussed or will discuss the matter with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Minister of State with special responsibility for land use and biodiversity, the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media or with the Heritage Council given the importance of raths to heritage, land use, biodiversity, tourism and culture, with a view to ensuring their protection. [17954/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan):** Under the provisions of the National Monuments Acts, my Department has established and maintains a Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) which affords legal protection to all recorded archaeological sites and monuments in the State, including those on agricultural land. I am advised that reports of the decision referred to were erroneous and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine has since clarified that all such monuments are to be included for payments under the next CAP, designated as landscape features. My Department's National Monuments Service is engaging with DAFM over the CAP Strategic Plan and stands ready to further advise as to the role archaeological heritage may play in meeting the objectives of the new CAP.

### **Local Authorities**

338. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage further to Parliamentary Question No. 330 of 22 March 2022, if his Department has clarified the matter regarding the refusal by South Dublin County Council of applicants for social housing support on the basis of savings or capital; if local authorities are free to create their own policies regarding the assessment of means in this manner; and his views on whether it is appropriate or correct for a local authority to assess capital or savings, including inheritance, pension lump sums and redundancy payments when considering an application for social housing support. [17961/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Decisions on eligibility for social housing support are a matter solely for local authorities with reference to eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations.

The 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. My Department issued a guidance note to assist local authorities when applying the Household Means Policy.

More recently, my Department has also advised South Dublin County Council that the guid-

ance provides that savings are relevant to the income assessment only in so far as they generate an income for applicants, by way of dividend or interest. Households may re-apply for social housing support at any stage subject to meeting the eligibility and need criteria at the time they re-apply.

### **Legislative Measures**

339. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will commence section 212 of the Local Government Act 2001; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17971/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** I have no plans at this time to commence section 212 of the Local Government Act 2001 which deals with the holding of public local inquiries.

The establishment of public local inquiries is a legally complex matter, particularly with regard to how such inquiries would function in practice. Careful consideration would be needed regarding the powers of such inquiries to compel persons to appear before them, how the Constitutional rights of such persons could be protected and how they could seek to assert their rights through the Courts.

The potential costs of public local inquiries would also need very careful consideration and whether such an option would represent best value for money as a means for addressing issues of local concern.

It is also important to recognise that, in October 2011, a referendum was held on a proposed amendment to the Constitution that, if successful, would have granted full investigative powers to Oireachtas committees to hold full inquiries. This proposal was rejected by the electorate. Concerns raised at the time would also apply in the case of public local inquiries held by local authorities. It would not seem appropriate therefore to try to introduce public inquiries at the level of local government when these were rejected by the people at Oireachtas level.

### **Local Authorities**

340. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he intends to conduct a full audit of individual local authority finances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17972/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** In accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended), the Local Government Audit Service conducts a yearly audit of the annual financial statements of each local authority. Once presented to the members of the local authority, the audit reports are published on my Department's website, as is the Annual Overview of the Work of the Local Government Audit Service. These reports are available at this link: [www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/2031c-local-government-audit-service/](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/2031c-local-government-audit-service/)

### **Local Authorities**

341. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of local authority social homes that were subject to retrofitting energy upgrades



for each year from 2016 to date, in tabular form; the amount of funding provided each year for these schemes; if there was an underspend in a particular year; if so, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17978/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department launched the Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme (EERP) in 2013 with the aim of funding the retrofit of social homes requiring insulation and energy upgrade works. Since the programme commenced in 2013 up to the end of 2021 over 75,000 units of social housing stock have been retrofitted with a total exchequer spend of €183 million under the scheme.

Up to 2020, the EERP was carried out in two Phases:

- **Phase 1** of the programme provided funding targeted at the less intrusive cavity wall/attic insulation

- **Phase 2** focused on fabric upgrade works to those dwellings with solid/hollow block wall construction and included the provision of heating upgrades.

The Phase 1 and Phase 2 approach to retrofitting is now withdrawn with the introduction in 2021 of a 'deeper' retrofit programme designed around the Programme for Government commitment that calls for the 'retrofit' of 500,000 homes to a B2/Cost Optimal Equivalent (BER) standard by 2030, of which, approximately 36,500 are expected to be local authority owned homes.

Works eligible under the revised Programme include attic/cavity wall insulation or external wall insulation where required, windows and doors replacement, heat pump installation and ancillary and associated works.

The Programme has experienced significant delays due to the effects of COVID-19 and other obstacles including tendering and supply chain issues particularly concerning Heat Pumps, Windows & Doors, and Insulation. This has led to an increase in prices for certain local authorities in retrofitting properties. Learning from the 2021 programme will inform the 2022 programme.

In 2022, the EERP will see a significant increase in funding support to €85 million, allowing approximately 2,400 homes nationally to be upgraded to a B2 or cost optimal equivalent (BER). Allocations for 2022 will issue to local authorities shortly.

An annualised breakdown of the units retrofitted under both the Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme and Midlands Retrofit Programme, is available on my Department's website at the following links:

[www.gov.ie/en/publication/668c1-energy-efficiency-retrofitting-programme-expenditure-output/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/668c1-energy-efficiency-retrofitting-programme-expenditure-output/)

[www.gov.ie/en/publication/b86b3-midlands-energy-retrofit-programme-expenditure-and-units/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b86b3-midlands-energy-retrofit-programme-expenditure-and-units/)

## **Housing Provision**

342. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the total number of social housing developments that have availed of the one stage approval process; the total number of social housing units delivered via this process to date; and

the total number in the pipeline as yet not completed. [18002/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Since introduced in 2018, there are 52 projects delivering 150 new social homes that have availed of the single stage approval arrangement which have been completed or are currently on site. A further 35 projects to deliver 89 new social homes, are in the pipeline and progressing through planning and design before moving to tender stage and onto site.

### **Departmental Staff**

343. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the total number of new staff funded by his Department who have taken up their posts in local authority housing departments in recent months by local authority and the position held in tabular form. [18003/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Housing for All recognises the need to strengthen the capacity of local authorities to initiate, design, plan, develop and manage housing projects. It also commits to making additional resources available to local authorities to further build housing delivery teams.

During 2021, the Housing Delivery Coordination Office engaged with each local authority to identify their additional staff requirements to deliver social housing. Following this engagement, my Department approved funding for over 200 housing posts in local authorities nationally to address social housing. The resource requirements for the four Dublin local authorities with respect to the delivery of social housing are still being examined and further posts will be approved for the Dublin local authorities, as appropriate, when this examination has concluded.

The recruitment and filling of posts in the local authority sector is undertaken both by individual local authorities and the Public Appointments Service. Following the approval of a staffing sanction request it is then a matter for the Chief Executive, who is responsible under Section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001 for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible, to progress the appointment as appropriate.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff numbers in each local authority on a whole time equivalent basis.

However, granular data, in terms of the number of new staff funded by my Department who have taken up employment at a point in time in each local authority housing department is not collected and consequently is not available. The relevant information should be available from each local authority.

### **Housing Provision**

344. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the status of the resolution of the unsold affordable homes held by the Dublin local authorities; if as part of the use of the unsold affordable units post 2010, some of these units were included in a rent to buy scheme in Dublin city; and if so, the status of these rent-to-buy units. [18029/22]

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

In September 2020, I convened a working group to examine the issues relating to unsold affordable properties. The working group has discussed a number of options to date and is keen to develop a long term solution which works for all parties including the tenants, the approved housing bodies who have long established relationships with the tenants, and the local authorities. Any proposals must also achieve the best value for the Exchequer. I expect the group to finalise its work and submit a report and recommendations to me later this year.

I understand that Dublin City Council included some unsold affordable units in a rent to buy scheme. This scheme is a matter for the local authority and these units are not currently being considered by the Working Group.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

345. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the reason for the delay in finalising the new wind energy guidelines; when the new guidelines will come into force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18032/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. The review is addressing a number of key aspects including noise, setback, shadow flicker, community obligation, community dividend and grid connections.

Guidance on the noise aspect is currently being finalised by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, which has primary responsibility for environmental noise matters. Significant work has been undertaken on the noise elements and the two Departments have met to discuss new developments in this regard including consideration of the impact of the revised 2030 target to generate up to 80% of our electricity from renewable sources and the need to ensure that proposals regarding the measurement and assessment of noise from wind turbines are fit for purpose. These aspects are currently being considered and further engagement between the Departments is expected imminently. Following this inter-departmental engagement, I will be in a better position to provide an update on the expected publication date of the revised Guidelines, the finalisation of which remains a priority.

It should also be noted that the review and finalisation of the Guidelines has been included as a specific action in the recently published Climate Action Plan.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála, must have regard to guidelines issued under section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts. In the meantime, the current 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines remain in force.

*Question No. 346 answered with Question No. 298.*

### **Legislative Measures**

347. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on his plans to legislate through the Residential Tenancies Acts for default conciliation as part of the dispute resolution process within the Residential Tenancies

Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18005/22]

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

The Government recognises that it is in the interest of both the tenant and the landlord to resolve any disputes as early as possible without recourse to lengthy adjudication and tribunal processes. Mediation and conciliation are proven to help resolve disputes at an early stage.

My Department is working with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to better implement its existing mediation powers under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2021 to deliver faster dispute resolution outcomes, based on mediation agreements between parties. Such outcomes can be achieved under the existing mediation provisions under the Acts. The RTB has agreed that disputes will be resolved via its free mediation service in the first instance, unless one of the dispute parties opt for its adjudication service. The RTB will promote the merits of its mediation service and it is expected that the vast majority of disputes can be resolved through mediation, which is the RTB's fastest and most successful dispute resolution service. The RTB plan to commence this approach as soon as possible in Q2 2022.

*Question No. 348 answered with Question No. 312.*

*Question No. 349 answered with Question No. 312.*

### **Housing Provision**

350. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the review of the Housing Agency Acquisition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18008/22]

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

The €70 million revolving Housing Agency Acquisitions Fund (HAA fund) was established with effect from the 1 January 2017 with the objective of acquiring vacant property portfolios from banks and financial institutions that could then be used for social housing. The target for the HAA fund was to acquire 1,600 units over a four year period to 2020 with this target subsequently extended out to 2021.

The HAA fund has enabled the Housing Agency to actively engage with banks and investment companies in relation to the acquisitions of properties. Through the provision of direct access to capital funding for the Housing Agency, the aim was to simplify the current acquisition process for vacant portfolio purchases; speed up the acquisition process and to encourage investors to make additional supply available. The HAA fund is replenished by the Housing Agency through the sale of units primarily to the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector and the funds received are recycled back into the fund for future acquisitions.

This was intended to be a medium term initiative, targeting the vacant property portfolios of financial institutions and investment companies, in direct response to the social housing shortage that would be designed to complement, not displace, ongoing targeted acquisition activity by local authorities and AHBs.

As at Q3 2021, 888 units were delivered under the Housing Agency Acquisitions fund programme and an additional 562 properties were acquired by the Housing Agency Acquisitions team on behalf of local authorities. The number of homes acquired through the HAA fund and made available to AHBs under Caretaker Lease are included in my Department's overall quarterly reporting which is available at the following link:

[www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision](http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision).

The Housing Agency continues to engage with financial institutions and it is clear that the supply of properties that the fund was established to acquire has substantially declined.

Under the commitment in Housing For All, my Department has completed a review of the HAA fund, which investigated the challenges faced by the HAA fund and explored opportunities that centred on potentially repurposing the fund to support other initiatives within Housing for all. This review was recently submitted to me for consideration. It will also be necessary for the conclusions and recommendations of the review to be discussed with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in terms of possible amendments to the original sanction for the fund which they provided.

### **Local Authorities**

351. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the preparation of housing delivery plans to include social and affordable housing delivery by each local authority; if each local authority has furnished his Department with these plans; when he plans to publish housing delivery action plans for each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18009/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** A key action of Housing for All is that local authorities will develop and submit Housing Delivery Action Plans to include details of social and affordable housing delivery. The Plans set out details of both social and affordable housing delivery as appropriate over the period 2022 - 2026, in line with targets set under Housing for All. All local authorities submitted their Housing Delivery Action Plans to me in December and my Department is now working closely with the local authorities to review and finalise the Plans, having regard to the targets and policy objectives set out in Housing for All. The Plans will be published by local authorities before the end of Quarter 2.

*Question No. 352 answered with Question No. 331.*

### **Housing Policy**

353. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the review of the range of housing grants available to assist with meeting specific housing needs; the changes he plans to make to the range of housing grants available on foot of that review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18011/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department provides funding to local authorities under the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, to assist people in private houses to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs.

Housing for All commits 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. An initial element of this review has begun and is currently focused on the existing grant limits and income thresholds applicable to the grant schemes. The wider scope of the review, to be completed this year, is also under consideration and is being informed by ongoing

engagement with external stakeholders including the Department of Health, the HSE, the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disability Federation of Ireland.

### Local Authorities

354. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if disability friendly housing technical advisers have been nominated in each local authority; the number of disability friendly housing technical advisers that have been nominated in each local authority in tabular form; the details of the role specification for disability friendly housing technical advisers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18012/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** The role of the Disability Friendly Housing Technical Adviser is to provide technical expertise on housing for disabled people primarily to the local authority and Approved Housing Bodies supporting the delivery of the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 at the local level. Disability Friendly Housing Technical Advisers have been nominated in each local authority as outlined in the table attached.

#### Local Authority Disability Technical Advisers

Local Authority	Number of Disability Technical Advisers Nominated
Carlow	1
Cavan	1
Clare	1
Cork City	1
Cork County	1
D/Laoghaire	1
Donegal	1
Dublin City	1
Fingal	2
Galway City	1
Galway County	1
Kerry	1
Kildare	1
Kilkenny	1
Laois	1
Leitrim	1
Limerick	1
Longford	1
Louth	1
Mayo	1
Meath	1
Monaghan	1
Offaly	1
Roscommon	1
Sligo	1

Local Authority	Number of Disability Technical Advisers Nominated
Sth Dublin	1
Tipperary	1
Waterford	1
Westmeath	1
Wexford	1
Wicklow	1

### Housing Policy

355. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if a quarterly report of the housing and disability steering group has been provided to each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18013/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Local authority Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) are required under *Housing for All* to submit a quarterly report on their strategic plans for the housing for disabled people to the Chief Executive and the Strategic Policy Committee. This requirement will also be incorporated into the Implementation Plan for the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People (NHSDP) 2022-2027 which is currently being prepared by the Housing Agency in collaboration with my Department and the Department of Health.

The Implementation Plan is the framework on which all of the actions under the NHSDP will progress, including the collation of the quarterly reports from the local authority HDSGs. Following completion of the Implementation Plan the Housing Agency will work with local authorities to ensure that the reports are being submitted to the Chief Executive and the Strategic Policy Committee, as required.

The Housing Agency will collate these quarterly reports into a national report for the National Implementation Subgroup responsible for implementation of the NHSDP and, in addition, will publish them on the Agency's website.

### Departmental Schemes

356. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the roll-out of the preferential caravan loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18014/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** My Department sought and received sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to roll out a pilot Caravan Loan Scheme to improve access to traditional Traveller-specific accommodation options for Traveller families. My Department commenced the pilot scheme in July 2021 for a trial period of 6 months, following consultation with stakeholders including the local authorities, the National Traveller MABS and the Traveller representative organisations.

The participating local authorities are Cork City Council, Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council and Limerick City and County Council. The maximum funding available under the pilot Caravan Loan Scheme is €30,000 per loan. The terms of the Caravan Loan

Scheme do not specify that units must be new or second hand, allowing the loan recipient the freedom to source a unit suitable to their needs.

With the pilot phase now complete, officials from my Department are reviewing the operation of the pilot Caravan Loan Scheme with input from the local authorities and other stakeholders. A report will be prepared for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and options for the expansion of the pilot scheme will be considered at the conclusion of this process.

### **Departmental Policies**

357. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on his plans to liaise with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to the feasibility of an all-island approach to the provision of a network of transient sites across the island of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18015/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** My Department met with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on 3 November 2021 to explore the feasibility of an all island approach to the provision of a network of Transient Sites. While the shared membership between the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will assist close cooperation to facilitate continuing exploration, as a next step, my Department is liaising with The Housing Agency in relation to the timely initiation of a research project on the provision of transient sites.

### **Planning Issues**

358. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the review and consolidation of planning legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18016/22]

394. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage when the review of planning guidelines will be completed and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18388/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 358 and 394 together.

Housing for All sets out a number of objectives with the aim of improving the functioning of the planning system including the comprehensive review and consolidation of planning legislation. The Planning Legislation Review forms one of the actions in Housing for All and is set in the context of the broad policy outlined therein, and it is assumed that this is the review being referred to in both questions.

The review is being led by the Attorney General and he has appointed a working group of professionals with planning law expertise to assist him in this work. Extensive work is underway on the review and my Department is engaging with the Attorney General and the working group on it. The review is due to be finalised by September 2022 to allow updated legislation to be enacted by December 2022.

My Department is also engaging with stakeholders with regard to the review and in this regard, has established a Planning Advisory Forum consisting of representatives from a broad



range of sectors, including the public sector, business, environmental, social and knowledge based sectors. The role of this Forum, which I chair, is to input to the evolving policy and legal agenda, particularly in relation to the Planning Legislation Review.

### **Legislative Measures**

359. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans to commence section 9 of the Local Government Rates and other Matters Act 2019; the guidance he is issuing to local authorities to offer rates-based incentives for the conversion of suitable vacant commercial properties to residential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18017/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Local authorities have a statutory obligation to levy rates on the occupiers of rateable property in accordance with the details in the valuation lists prepared by the Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015.

Legislative provision is made for the refund of rates paid on vacant commercial properties in certain circumstances. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 allows local authorities to offer less than 100% refund and to vary the level of refund for vacant properties at its annual budget meeting. Since the introduction of the Act, a number of local authorities have taken the decision to reduce the percentage refund of rates available. In agreeing budgets for 2022, 19 local authorities made the decision to offer less than 100% refund to vacant properties, ensuring in those local authorities that some rates are paid on vacant commercial properties, helping discourage prolonged vacancy.

The Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 modernised the legislation governing commercial rates and contains provision for schemes for the abatement of rates on vacant properties. Section 9 of the Act provides that the Minister may specify the maximum vacancy relief to be applied and that schemes can be made to provide abatement to a specific class or classes of vacant property. The main objective of section 9 of the Act is to discourage commercial vacancy and incentivise occupancy by ensuring all vacant properties pay some rates. This marries with the main objectives in “Town Centres First”.

Amendments are required to address key issues in the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019. The remaining provisions of the Act cannot be commenced until these issues are addressed. Plans to achieve necessary amendments, commence the legislation and introduce associated regulations were delayed due to the COVID crisis, with the revised aim of commencement in 2022.

Maximising the use of existing housing stock and properties is a critical element of a sustainable housing policy. Action 19.13 of Housing For All commits to commencing section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019. Guidance for elected members on the making of schemes under section 9, and on the flexibility and potential provided by the provision, will be key to empowering them to make schemes that will affect improvements locally to commercial vacancy. It is expected that guidance in this regard will issue to local authorities concurrently with the commencement of the legislation and taking effect of associated regulations.

*Question No. 360 answered with Question No. 316.*

## Housing Schemes

361. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the introduction of a targeted energy efficiency retrofit scheme for approved housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18019/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** In 2021, my Department launched a 'deeper' retrofit programme designed around the Programme for Government commitment to 'retrofit' 500,000 homes to a B2/Cost Optimal Equivalent (BER) standard by 2030. It is expected that approximately 36,500 of the overall target will be local authority owned homes. In 2022, my Department will fund the retrofit of 2,400 local authority owned social homes at a cost of €85 million.

My Department does not run an energy efficiency retrofit scheme for Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). AHBs have traditionally accessed SEAI grants for this purpose. The recently announced new National Home Energy Upgrade Scheme is available to homeowners, non-corporate landlords and AHBs, whose property or home was built and occupied prior to 2011 offers. The new scheme offers increased grant levels of up to 50% of the cost of a typical B2 home energy upgrade. This is a significant increase on the previous grant levels of 30-35%.

The scheme introduces a new way to undertake home energy upgrades with SEAI registered one stop shops providing an end-to-end service. This includes surveying the home; designing the upgrades; managing the grant process; helping with access to finance; engaging contractors to deliver the work; and quality assuring the work. Other key elements of the Scheme include:

- Applications are made to the Scheme through SEAI-registered, privately-owned one stop shops.
- Grants will be paid through the one stop shops.
- Grants are available for Home Energy Assessments; Heat Pumps; Wall and Roof Insulation; Solar PV; Windows and Doors; Ventilation Systems and Project Management.
- Upgrades completed under the scheme must reach a post works BER rating of B2 or better.
- All upgrades completed must deliver a minimum primary energy uplift of at least 100 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year

A new system is being established by the SEAI which will streamline and automate the grant application process. One stop shops will provide AHBs with the appropriate documents in electronic and paper form, as required.

Registration for companies wishing to apply to be a one stop shop is open via SEAI's website: [www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/one-stop-shop/](http://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/one-stop-shop/).

## Water Supply

362. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide an update on the roll-out of a national water supply capacity register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18020/22]

**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. Under section 7 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, I have no direct function in relation to this matter.

However, as part of Irish Water's commitment to support growth and development, it publishes annual water supply and waste water treatment capacity registers, details of which are available on the Irish Water website at [www.water.ie/connections/developer-services/capacity-registers/](http://www.water.ie/connections/developer-services/capacity-registers/).

Irish Water has also established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on a dedicated number, 0818 578 578.

## **Housing Provision**

363. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the engagement his Department has had to date with Longford County Council and an approved housing body in relation to an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18136/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are making an important contribution to social housing delivery, as envisaged under current Government policy. My Department operates a number of funding programmes that assist local authorities to work in partnership with AHBs to construct, purchase and lease new homes and make them available for social housing. One such programme that AHBs progress construction projects through is the Capital Advance Loan Facility (CALF).

CALF funding is capital support provided to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) by local authorities to facilitate the funding of construction, acquisition or refurbishment of new social housing units. This loan facility can support up to 30% of the eligible capital cost of the housing project, with the housing units provided to local authorities for social housing use under long-term lease arrangements known as Payment and Availability Agreements. A nominal interest rate of 2% fixed per annum is charged by the local authority on the initial capital amount. Repayments on either the capital or interest are not required during the term of the loan (between 10 and 30 years), although where an AHB chooses to, repayments can be made during the term. At the end of the term, the outstanding capital amount plus the interest accrued, is owed and repayable to the local authority. The local authority issues the CALF monies to the AHB and the local authority, in turn, recoups same from the Department.

With regard to the specific project to which the Question refers, I can confirm that the project received conditional CALF funding approval in 2018. The most recent update from both the AHB and Local Authority is that they are currently working collaboratively to progress the project to Tender stage, which is anticipated shortly, with expected final delivery in 2023.

My Department publishes a quarterly Social Housing Construction Projects Status Report, which sets out the continuing progress being made in advancing the national local authority and AHB new-build pipeline. The latest report, setting out the position at end Q4 2021, can be accessed at the following weblink: [www.gov.ie/en/publication/af746-social-housing-construction-projects-status-report-q4-2021/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/af746-social-housing-construction-projects-status-report-q4-2021/).

## **Housing Provision**

364. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of persons from outside of the local authority area that were allocated social housing in Athlone, Mullingar, Moate and Kilbeggan, County Westmeath in 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18137/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department does not hold information on the allocations of the specific type requested by the Deputy.

The oversight and practical management of housing waiting lists, including the allocation and transfer of tenancies, is solely a matter for the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and associated regulations. Section 22 of the Act requires local authorities to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded when allocating dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

### **Regeneration Projects**

365. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the proportion of funding allocated to Vote 34, subhead A15, estate regeneration and refurbishment, which will be used to achieve the output target for 2022 of 100 units; and the average cost of delivering each unit. [18140/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Through the voted capital funding under subhead A15, my Department supports multi-annual programmes of large-scale regeneration projects in Limerick, Cork and Dublin and smaller projects in Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk. These projects seek to address the causes of disadvantage in these communities through a holistic programme of physical, social and economic regeneration. Projects funded under this subhead include the provision of social housing, other capital projects, social interventions and thermal upgrade programmes. The regeneration projects being funded by my Department target the country's most disadvantaged communities, including those defined by the most extreme social exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour.

In order to provide as much flexibility as possible to local authorities in terms of delivery, I have not allocated specific funding within the subhead to the individual elements of regeneration, that is, the delivery of physical, social or economic projects. This allows my Department to deploy the A15 funding where it is most needed at any particular time to maximise the implementation of the regeneration programme.

For 2022, the allocation for the subhead is €50m and it will be used to advance a wide range of social projects as well as the delivery of housing in the regeneration areas. The target referenced in the Question is comprised of the delivery of new social housing units, the refurbishment and/or thermal upgrade of vacant or existing units, and other projects under the various regeneration delivery streams.

### **Housing Provision**

366. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the proportion of funding allocated to Vote 34, subhead A17, repair and leasing, which will be used to achieve the output target for 2022 of 120 units; and the average cost of delivering

each unit. [18141/22]

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

The maximum cost of repairs allowable under this scheme was increased from €40,000 (including VAT) to €60,000 (including VAT) in November 2020. Therefore, should 120 properties be delivered in 2022 under the Repair and Leasing scheme, the maximum cost to the Exchequer of refurbishment (capital costs) would be €7,200,000. The allowable cost of the repairs is offset against the agreed rental payment until the capital cost is repaid.

Data on the average cost of delivering each unit in 2022 is not yet available.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

367. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the estimated impact of voted expenditure for Vote 34, subhead A8, capital advance leasing facility, which amounts to €293,905,000 for 2022 in respect of the general government balance. [18142/22]

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

The Housing for All Strategy delivers on the Programme for Government commitment to step up housing supply and put affordability at the heart of the housing system, with an ambitious target of 300,000 homes over the next decade for social, affordable and cost rental, private rental and private ownership housing.

Measures to deliver this housing are supported by over €4 billion in funding annually, representing the highest ever level of Government investment in building social and affordable housing.

Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are important partners for local authorities in the delivery of social housing. My Department operates a number of funding programmes that assist local authorities to work in partnership with AHBs to construct, purchase and lease new homes and make them available for social housing. One such programme that AHBs progress projects through is the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF).

The specific General Government Balance impacts of Exchequer Investment from the voted expenditure provision is a matter that would fall to be determined by the Central Statistics Office.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

368. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the estimated impact of voted expenditure for Vote 34, subhead A28, cost rental equity loan, which amounts to €70,000,000 for 2022 including additional approved housing body borrowing in respect of the general government balance. [18143/22]

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

Under Housing for All, 10,000 Cost Rental homes will be delivered from 2021 to 2026. These new homes will be delivered by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), supported by Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) funding, and Local Authorities, funded by the Affordable Housing Fund. The Land Development Agency will also deliver Cost Rental, either on its own portfolio of sites or through acquisitions under Project Tosaigh.

Budget 2022 allocated €70 million to the CREL scheme for Cost Rental delivery by AHBs in 2022. Over 900 homes have been approved for funding under the scheme to date, with a total of almost 4,000 CREL-funded homes being targeted for delivery over the 5 years to 2026.

Under the Second Call for Proposals for CREL funding, issued to AHBs in October 2021, I approved in principle the allocation of €53.6 million for the provision of 521 Cost Rental homes across 11 sites in 7 Local Authority areas. Details of the funded projects, including locations, unit types and cost-covering rents will be released when the relevant AHBs have completed necessary financial and commercial arrangements.

With regard to the CREL scheme, the Government provides loans to AHBs to finance up to 30% of the capital costs for new Cost Rental homes. The CREL loans will be for a 40-year term, with simple rather than compound interest, fixed at 1% for the loan term, and will not require any repayment until the end of the loan term. CREL funding will reduce the financing costs of AHB projects and will therefore directly reduce the cost-covering rents to be charged to tenants. While AHBs may invest their own equity, it is anticipated the majority of remaining capital costs will be primarily sourced from long-term commercial debt funding. To this end, the Housing Finance Agency has indicated 40-year loans will be made available for CREL-approved projects, with very competitive interest fixed for the first 30 years and variable rate for the remaining 10 years. The decision to grant CREL funding will always be taken on the basis of value for money.

Furthermore, an open Rolling Call will be established under CREL this year. This will facilitate ongoing applications from AHBs, as projects present themselves, will assist with applications for Cost Rental and social housing, through the Capital Advance Leasing Facility, on the same sites and will facilitate longer-term developments, where AHBs can purchase land and undertake design and build contracts directly.

### **Departmental Funding**

369. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the funding provided to the Land Development Agency in respect of its non-commercial activities, as included in schedule 12 of the Land Development Agency Act 2021, for the years 2021 and 2022. [18145/22]

**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 Act 2021 was signed into law in July 2021. Following the recent commencement of relevant provisions of the LDA Act and the dissolution of the interim LDA entity, the LDA has now been established as a wholly commercial state body, with all functions and staff of the interim LDA entity transferred to the new LDA Designated Activity Company (DAC). This LDA DAC was incorporated by the Company Registration Office in December 2021.

Exchequer funding of €7.1 million has been allocated to the LDA DAC Commercial Agency in 2022 to cover expenditure associated with their non-commercial functions. These functions are detailed under Section 29 of the LDA Act and include the development of a Register of Relevant Public Lands, the development of a report to Government on relevant public lands and any expenditure incurred by it in the performance of its functions under Part IX of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

In 2021, Exchequer funding was provided to the Interim LDA entity through my Department's Vote to meet its operational costs as well as initial capital funding in relation to the development of its projects. The LDA drew down €10m of capital funding and €6.6m of current funding overall during 2021. It should be noted that Covid related safety restrictions impacted the progression of the LDA's projects during 2021. From a 2021 Exchequer funding perspective, there was not a distinction between commercial and non-commercial activities for the recently dissolved Interim LDA entity under its 2018 Establishment Order.

Under the LDA Act, equity investment funding of up to €1.25 billion will be made available to the LDA for the purposes of its economic activities through transfers from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund ("ISIF"). The LDA will also have the ability to borrow up to €1.25 billion to fund these activities. In accordance with Section 25(2) of the LDA Act, an initial €100 million of the LDA's €1.25 billion ISIF investment capital has now been transferred from ISIF by the National Treasury Management Agency to the LDA DAC.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

**370. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the estimated impact of voted expenditure for Vote 34, subhead A33, Croí Cónaithe, which amounts to €50,000,000 for 2022 in respect of the general government balance. [18146/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Government's "Housing for All, a new Housing Plan for Ireland", launched in September 2022, 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.

The new Croí Cónaithe fund as outlined in Housing for All, is intended to ensure that, aligned with the objectives of the National Planning Framework, additional choices are made available to home buyers in our urban cores, and town centres.

In higher density locations, the number of apartments being built for sale poses a challenge. There is 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. The fund will be managed by the Housing Agency on behalf of my Department. My Department is working with the Housing Agency in finalising the operational basis for the new fund and expect to engage prospective proposers in a call for proposals in the near future. 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. The Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund is currently under consideration and it is expected that a call for proposals will issue to local authorities shortly.

The specific General Government Balance impacts of Exchequer Investment from the voted expenditure provision for both schemes is a matter that would fall to be determined by the Central Statistics Office.

## **Departmental Funding**

371. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the additional funding required to increase the Vote 34 subhead A7, capital assistance scheme outputs target to 1,000 units. [18147/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), capital funding of up to 100% of project costs is advanced by local authorities to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to provide housing for specific categories of housing need including older people, persons/families who are homeless and people with a disability. CAS funding also supports other important and emerging areas of housing need including the development of refuges for victims of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, housing for care leavers (people exiting State care at the age of 18), and de-congregation (people with a disability being enabled to move from large institutions (congregated settings) to their own homes in the community with the support they need.

Exchequer funding of €96 million in 2021 delivered 352 units of independent living accommodation for a range of priority categories of housing need and 150 bed spaces for single homeless individuals although it should be noted that delivery of new accommodation units does not always arise in the same year as expenditure and projects may cross a number of payment periods. At the same time, CAS accommodation delivery can range from atypically large units for people with physical disability to group homes for people with intellectual disability to domestic violence refuges and the cost of delivering additional CAS housing will depend on which categories are involved. While the cost per bedroom under CAS build projects varies significantly, the average cost in 2021 was €130,915. The data involved is drawn from a variety of project types ranging from new greenfield build, brownfield, turnkey and renewal projects.

Another factor in relation to additional delivery under CAS is the capacity of the AHBs involved which are frequently smaller, locally-based organisations.

## **Departmental Expenditure**

372. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will provide a breakdown of Vote 34, subhead A3, local authority housing, in terms of delivery models and funding streams employed, including corresponding output targets to achieve an overall total of 5,030 units as per the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2022. [18148/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Through the Voted capital funding under subhead A3, my Department provides support to local authorities in delivering new social homes via the construction and acquisition of houses/apartments; the construction of new social homes under the Public Private Partnership model (PPPs); delivery through Part V and also through turnkey arrangements in partnership with developers.

For 2022 the allocation to the subhead will be used to advance the 10,000 local authority homes currently in the construction pipeline, including moving those schemes in planning and design stage, through to tender and onto site and completing new social homes currently on site and under construction, as well as adding new homes to the current pipeline.

Under Housing for All, there is a target to deliver 9,200 social homes in 2022 primarily



through construction-related activity and also a limited and targeted acquisitions programme. Of this 9,200 new social homes, 5,250 are targeted for delivery through the funding available under subhead A3.

Local authorities work strategically to deliver social homes in line with the targets that have been set. However the advancement of individual projects against a range of milestones cannot be predicted in all cases; for example projects designed by the local authorities can be refused or altered as part of the Part 8 planning process. Accordingly, it's important to allow as much flexibility as possible in local authority delivery across the range of programmes and for the range of individual projects and therefore, I have not allocated specific funding or targets to the individual delivery streams such as construction, PPPs, turnkeys, Part Vs or acquisitions; instead local authorities can draw funding as and when required which allows my Department to deploy the A3 funding where it is needed to ensure that social housing delivery is maximised in every budgetary cycle.

I am keen that all local authorities advance their construction related activity as rapidly as possible and my Department will fully support them in this regard.

### **Housing Schemes**

373. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the average subsidy per unit envisaged through the first home scheme as included in Vote 34, subhead A31. [18149/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** With an overall budget of in excess of €4 billion per year, the Government's *Housing for All* strategy commits to supporting 54,000 new affordable homes by 2030, 36,000 of which will be for purchase and 18,000 for Cost Rental.

Part 4 of the Affordable Housing Act 2021 provides the basis for the First Home Scheme, which will be available nationwide. This scheme will support eligible first-time buyers to buy a new-build home in private developments by means of an equity share model, similar to that employed in the Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme. This equity support will cover up to 30% of the price of a new home (or 20% if the purchaser also benefits from the Help to Buy incentive), subject to regional price ceilings which will reflect the median prices paid by first-time buyers for new homes.

First Home will be jointly funded on a 50:50 basis by the State and participating mortgage lenders, thereby increasing the pool of funding available to potential new homeowners. Subject to final approvals, it will operate for the period 2022 to 2025, deploying an anticipated funding of c. €400 million and supporting an estimated 8,000 home purchases. Budget 2022 allocated €44 million to my Department for First Home this year.

A new First Home Scheme Ireland DAC, incorporated in December, will operate this scheme. Significant work is continuing on the detailed design and parameters of the scheme, and full details will be confirmed upon completion of this work. Initial activity on key areas of work, including public communications, will be undertaken over the next months in advance of First Home's first receipt of applications and deployment of equity support, scheduled for Q2 this year.

It should be noted that there is no 'subsidy' element in the support offered by the First Home Scheme. Through the First Home DAC, the State is making an investment in these purchases in order to enable people to achieve home ownership. The DAC's equity interest in the homes will

be redeemed in time and the State's share of the proceeds returned to the Exchequer. The benefit for purchasers is the opportunity to become a homeowner now at a reduced cost, with the ability to redeem the DAC's equity share at a future time of the homeowner's choosing, but with no obligation for redemption save for particular circumstances such as the sale of the home.

### **Housing Provision**

374. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the breakdown of the 1,000 units to be delivered by the Land Development Agency in 2022 in terms of affordable purchase and affordable rental homes. [18150/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Housing for All provides a new housing plan for Ireland to 2030 with the overall objective that every citizen in the State should have access to good quality homes through a steady supply of housing in the right locations, with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system. The Land Development Agency (LDA) is at the heart of this plan, advancing their remit to develop land, including public lands, for housing or other purposes.

The LDA's Project Tosaigh is a market engagement initiative to unlock land with full planning permission that is not being developed by private sector owners due to financing and other constraints and use it to accelerate the supply of affordable housing. It allows the LDA to supplement the State lands it is already working on and accelerate the delivery of cost rental and affordable purchase homes by unlocking private land that is ready to be developed but where construction has stalled or not commenced.

It is characterised by:

- Activation of planning consents that have not commenced or are proceeding more slowly than optimal;
- Achieving delivery both in the near term, as well as providing a 5-year programme of delivery;
- An open and transparent process, compliant with procurement rules;
- A focus on delivery of affordable homes with some social homes to be secured if conditions allow, while securing value for money for the State.

Under this initiative, the target is to deliver 5,000 new homes by 2026 through cost rental or affordable purchase to eligible households. I am advised by the LDA that the proposals they received on foot of their Expressions of Interest call for Phase 1 of Project Tosaigh related to delivery in 2022, 2023, 2024 and beyond. Negotiations with housebuilders for homes for cost rental and affordable purchase, with priority afforded to schemes with 2022 and 2023 delivery, are ongoing. While it is challenging to secure delivery at the targeted scale within 2022, the LDA is focussed on this through its negotiations and is clear on the Government's priorities in this respect. The LDA will be able to provide a clearer view on numbers and tenures as it gets closer to contractual commitments.

### **Housing Schemes**

375. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of active HAP tenancies in place at the end of each year from 2016 to 2021.

[18180/22]

376. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of active RAS tenancies in place at the end of each year from 2016 to 2021. [18181/22]

377. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of active long-term leases of privately owned properties for social housing including those leased by local authorities, associated housing bodies and enhanced leases at the end of each year from 2016 to 2021. [18182/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 375 to 377, inclusive, together.

The number of active tenancies relating to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and the Long Term Leasing schemes, for the years 2016-2021, as at year end, is set out in the following table:

Scheme	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Leasing*	1,886	2,174	2,331	2,607	3,269	4,312
HAP	16,493	31,228	43,443	52,529	59,821	61,907
RAS	20,306	19,756	18,916	18,154	17,682	17,183

\*Leasing data in the table above comprises Local Authority Long-term Leasing, Approved Housing Body Leasing and Enhanced Leasing.

Under the Government's Housing for All Plan, long term leasing will be phased out by 2025 and my Department is continuing to engage with local authorities in this regard. Under the Plan, the Government also plans to increase the supply of housing to an average of 33,000 homes per year over the next decade, including an average of 10,000 new build social homes. As new build supply of social housing ramps up, there will be reducing reliance on the HAP and RAS schemes.

*Question No. 376 answered with Question No. 375.*

*Question No. 377 answered with Question No. 375.*

### **Flexible Work Practices**

378. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18169/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The vast majority of staff in my Department worked remotely in line with COVID-19 restrictions since end of March 2020, attending the workplace only for essential business purposes. Since the Government in September 2021 announced the lifting of restrictions to allow for a phased return to physical attendance in the workplace, staff in my Department have resumed attendance. Staff are now generally attending on a 2 days a week basis, as part of the transition back to the workplace, subject to prevailing public health advice.

A central policy framework for Blended Working in the Civil Service has been developed

and was published by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on 31 March 2022. The term blended working refers to a combination of working from the employer's work premises and working remotely. This framework will ensure a consistency of approach across Government Departments and Offices.

The framework will inform the development of organisation-level blended working policies tailored to the specific requirements of Departments. It is intended to offer employees of my Department with qualifying roles, performance and remote workstations the option to apply for blended working, later in 2022.

The framework may be viewed at this link: [www.gov.ie/en/press-release/67fed-minister-mc-grath-and-minister-of-state-smyth-publish-civil-service-blended-working-policy-framework/](http://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/67fed-minister-mc-grath-and-minister-of-state-smyth-publish-civil-service-blended-working-policy-framework/)

*Question No. 379 answered with Question No. 311.*

### **Housing Policy**

380. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if he will report on any review of the HAP limits given spiralling rents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18193/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Programme for Government commits to ensuring that Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) levels are adequate to support vulnerable households, while we increase the supply of social housing. Maximum rent limits for HAP were set for each housing authority area in 2016, 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.

Local authorities also have the flexibility to agree to a HAP payment of up to 20% above the maximum rent limit, because of local rental market conditions and up to 50% in the Dublin region for those households either in, or at immediate risk of, homelessness.

Under Housing for All, my Department was tasked with undertaking an analytical exercise to examine whether an increase in the level of the 20% discretion available to Local Authorities under HAP is required, in order to maintain adequate levels of HAP support. The Housing Agency undertook to carry out this analytical exercise on behalf of my Department. The review was submitted on 20 December 2021. It is undergoing analysis by my Department and I expect to receive recommendations following that analysis.

### **Housing Policy**

381. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage his plans for affordable housing to remain affordable considering recent comments by an organisation (details supplied) that increasing costs of raw materials will impact on its involvement in Housing for All; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18194/22]

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

Our targets include the delivery of 90,000 new social homes and 54,000 new affordable 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 and €5bn funding through the Housing Finance Agency and through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks.

Specifically in relation to affordable homes, using various funding streams available to help reduce the ultimate purchase or rental cost, Housing for All targets the delivery of 36,000 Affordable Purchase homes and 18,000 Cost Rental homes up to 2030. These homes will be delivered by Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency as well as through a strategic partnership between the State and participating retail banks (the First Home shared equity scheme).

The CSO Wholesale Price Index shows the annual increase for building and construction materials to be 17.7% to the end of February 2022. The latest data shows that productivity in the construction sector remains below 2010 levels and is less productive than EU average. Construction costs have risen considerably over recent years through a combination of the increased cost of regulatory compliance and general increases in labour and materials costs.

Housing for All commits that the Government and relevant State agencies will advance methods to reduce residential construction costs, particularly the cost of apartment construction, by increasing the focus of existing and planned construction related initiatives on the residential construction sector, and by ensuring a coordinated, whole-of-government, approach to residential construction.

In this regard, the Government will enhance the intended role of the new Construction Technology Centre, which is under development by Enterprise Ireland, beyond the standard remit of Technology Centres in general for its first three years of operation in order to prioritise residential construction, in particular by incorporating:

- structures and funding to enable innovation in residential construction prior to the National Standards Authority of Ireland compliance processes, including demonstration, certification, standardisation and commercialisation as well as research and development;
- a proactive role in strengthening the residential construction value chain;
- promotion, development and support for innovation / modern methods of construction (MMCs) using digital and manufacturing technology;
- support for SMEs to develop scale and to adopt MMCs and Building Information Modelling techniques for residential construction; and
- support for digitisation in the manufacturing sector for residential construction e.g. digitally controlled manufacturing equipment.

This will be complemented by an increased focus for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform-led Construction Sector Group (CSG) on the residential construction sector. This will include the introduction and full implementation of a pipeline of cost reducing innovations and productivity measures, in line with its established remit to improve productivity and efficiency, and to temper price inflation.

In addition the CSG supported by my Department are also in the process of preparing a study to carry out an analysis for each component of cost of construction (including cost of compliance) of house and apartment development, with a view to reducing cost (including cost of compliance) and increasing standardisation. It will also identify opportunities for cost reduc-

tion for consideration by relevant Government departments and industry.

In accordance with Government policy, social and affordable housing construction projects (as with all publicly funded construction projects), must be procured in accordance with the Capital Works Management Framework. The Office of Government (OGP) is responsible for implementing national policy on public procurement, particularly in relation to construction procurement.

The OGP recently introduced the following interim measures to address the impact that the recent price increases in construction materials is having on public works tenders:

- Reduced fixed price period duration to 24 months (previously 30 months minimum).
- Permit mutual cost recovery within the fixed price period for material price changes in excess of 15% (previously 50%)
- Introduction of a new mechanism to address the period between tender submission and award through limited indexation of the tender price

The above measures relate to new public works contracts going forward.

### **Housing Schemes**

382. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the protections that will be put in place to safeguard the State’s investment in homes as part of the shared equity and the local authority affordable purchase schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18240/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** The Affordable Housing Act 2021, the provisions of which I commenced in August and September 2021, laid the foundation for two new affordable purchase schemes: (1) a scheme to be delivered via Local Authorities and the Land Development Agency, and (2) a national ‘First Home Scheme’ supporting purchases in the private market. Together these two schemes will support the purchase of 36,000 affordable homes under the Government’s *Housing for All* strategy.

Both of these schemes will use an equity support model to assist eligible purchasers. In the case of Local Authority Affordable Purchase, this equity stake will be equivalent to the reduction in price from the full market value of the home and will be held by the Local Authority. In the case of the national First Home Scheme, the equity stake will be the funding provided to bridge the gap between someone’s maximum mortgage under the Central Bank Mortgage Measures and the price of a new home (within regional price ceilings reflective of median first-time buyer prices). Subject to final approvals, equity under the First Home Scheme is to be funded by the State and participating mortgage providers on a 50:50 basis and will be held by a Special Purpose Vehicle (the First Home Scheme Ireland DAC).

For both schemes contractual arrangements will be put in place between the equity holder, be it a local authority or the First Home scheme, and the purchaser. These contracts will fully detail the rights and responsibilities of the signatories and will contain the necessary covenants to fully protect the State’s interest.

The State’s interest will be registrable as a beneficial interest in the Land Registry as an act of the homeowner affecting the dwelling. Under both schemes, the purchaser of the home can

redeem or 'buy out' this equity stake, in full or in part, at a time of their choosing. Since the equity stake will be redeemed at the current market price of the home, there is potential for its value to both rise and fall, though over the long term it is expected that market prices will rise. This brings both risk and benefit for the holder of the equity, but the potential risk is proportionate to the size of the equity stake in the home, and in the case of the jointly funded First Home Scheme the risk is shared 50:50 by the State and participating mortgage lenders.

### **Housing Provision**

383. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of new build social housing homes that were delivered in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18241/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** My Department publishes comprehensive programme level statistics on social housing delivery for each local authority on a quarterly basis. The statistics are available to the end of 2021 and are published on the statistics page of my Department's website, at the following link: [www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/).

In 2021, a total of 9,183 new social homes were delivered despite housing delivery being impacted by the enhanced Level 5 restrictions introduced in January 2021 which resulted in most residential construction being halted for over three months. This total includes 5,202 new build homes, 1,270 acquisitions and 2,711 homes delivered through leasing programmes.

Increasing the delivery of social housing is a central element of Housing for All, with a target to deliver 47,600 new build homes between 2022-2026, including 9,000 new build homes in 2022.

### **Housing Provision**

384. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of new homes that were delivered under the Serviced Sites Fund and Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18242/22]

**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. It's important to note that LIHAF projects involve complex, large scale public infrastructure developments which pave the way for associated housing development. This requires extensive design, planning, public consultation and procurement processes in advance of the projects moving to construction. With this in mind, construction of housing has started on a number of LIHAF projects across the country.

Local Authorities have been requested by my Department to submit information regarding LIHAF housing delivery in 2021 and overall. A small number of Local Authorities are still in the process of collating total housing delivery figures for 2021 and will provide this information to my Department once they are finalised.

Based on data provided by Local Authorities to my Department in September 2021, 494 units had been completed up to that point in 2021, of which 186 were cost reduced units. The overall total housing delivery under the LIHAF scheme at September 2021 is 3,348 units, which includes 1,592 cost reduced units.

The Serviced Site Fund (SSF) provided for key enabling infrastructure to help unlock publicly-owned lands specifically for the provision of affordable homes to buy or rent. The SSF has been replaced by the Affordable Housing Fund, however a number of projects approved under the SSF are progressing as planned.

There were three SSF projects under construction in 2021 and the Covid pandemic has had an impact on the projected timelines for delivery of housing due to the closure of the construction sector in early 2021. Accordingly, no units were delivered in 2021, however the delivery of units has already commenced this year, with 50 cost rental units completed in March 2022.

### **Housing Provision**

385. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of cost rental homes that were tenanted in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18243/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** The COVID-19 pandemic and associated closures and restrictions of construction sites, had significant impacts on the anticipated timelines for the delivery of Cost Rental developments in 2021.

Despite this, the first 65 Cost Rental homes were tenanted in 2021, with 25 at Taylor Hill in Balbriggan and a further 40 at Barnhall Meadows in Leixlip. Both of the Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) supported developments delivered cost-covering rents at least 40% below comparable open-market prices.

Under Housing for All, 10,000 Cost Rental homes will be delivered from 2021 to 2026 by Approved Housing Bodies, supported by CREL funding. Local Authorities will be able to avail of funding for Cost Rental delivery through the Affordable Housing Fund. The Land Development Agency will also deliver Cost Rental, either on its own portfolio of sites, or through acquisitions under Project Tosaigh.

### **Vacant Properties**

386. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the number of vacant homes that were brought back into use using the repair and lease scheme in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18244/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O’Brien):** Data to end 2021 in relation to the number of dwellings delivered by each local authority under the Repair and Leasing scheme (RLS) is available on my Department’s website at the following link:

[www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/#repair-and-leasing-scheme-rls](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/#repair-and-leasing-scheme-rls)

The Government’s new Housing Plan, Housing for All, has committed to supporting local



authorities to drive expanded take-up of the scheme.

### **Vacant Properties**

387. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if an update will be provided on the work of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to identify vacant houses and other appropriate locations for the housing of Ukrainian refugees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18257/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Government is committed to delivering a humanitarian response to welcome people fleeing the war in Ukraine and seeking protection in Ireland as part of the EU response.

As part of its response, Government is providing accommodation through the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) and is working closely with local authorities, including Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, to provide accommodation for Ukrainian arrivals in a variety of settings including:

- Hotels, guest houses and B&Bs;
- Accommodation pledged by the general public, which is being assessed for suitability;
- State-owned or private properties, which may be suitable for short-term accommodation;
- Religious properties; and
- Local authority community facilities

The Government is examining all options as part of its humanitarian response, including the accommodation issues arising in the short, medium and long-term and the responses to address these.

In this regard, my Department recently requested local authorities to identify and inventory potentially available 'quick turn-around', multi occupancy accommodation facilities. This includes properties that might already be configured, or which might need to be reconfigured, for multi-occupancy residential purposes.

There has been a strong response from local authorities to date and returns continue to be received and updated. My Department is currently collating these responses, which will be screened and validated for suitability for use as medium and longer-term residential accommodation in the coming weeks.

### **Local Authorities**

388. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the circumstances in which a section 183 vote is required by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18265/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Local authorities are independent statutory bodies with their own democratically elected councils and management structures. It is a matter for each individual local authority to decide on the utilisation of its assets, including its land bank.

Under section 211 of the Planning and Development 2000 a local authority may propose to dispose of land no longer required by it for its statutory functions or in order to secure the best use of that land for the proper planning and sustainable development of its functional area.

Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 provides inter alia that a prior notice of any proposed land disposal be sent to each of the elected members of the local authority. Details must also be provided of the person to whom the land is to be sold and any conditions relating to the sale.

At the next relevant meeting of the Council the elected members may decide whether or not the sale shall proceed and any conditions to be applied shall be set out in the members' resolution. This is a reserved function of the elected members.

The provisions of section 183 do not generally apply to the sale of dwellings under the Housing Acts except -

1. where a dwelling is proposed to be sold to another housing authority; or
2. where an unoccupied dwelling is proposed to be sold to any person.

### **Rights of Way**

389. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the way a local authority can create a new public right of way; if there are any constraints on local authorities to do this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18267/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** The provisions relating to the creation of a new public right of way by a local authority are set out in sections 206 and 207 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Section 206 (creation of public right of way pursuant to agreement (PROW)) provides enabling power to a planning authority to enter into an agreement with any person having the necessary power in that behalf for the creation of a public right of way. Such agreement shall be on such terms as to payment or otherwise as may be specified in the agreement and may, if agreed, provide for limitations or conditions affecting the PROW. Particulars of any such agreement are required to be entered in the planning register of the concerned planning authority.

Section 207 (compulsory powers for creation of public right of way) provides that if it appears to the planning authority that there is need for a public right of way over any land, the planning authority may, by resolution, make an order creating a public right of way over the land. In such case, the planning authority is required to serve notice in this regard on the owner and occupier of the land and publish the notice in one or more newspapers circulating in its functional area. Members of the public can make submissions or observations on the proposal which shall be considered. The planning authority, having considered the proposal and any submissions or observations made in respect of it, may by resolution, as it considers appropriate, make the order, with or without modifications, or refuse to make the order and any person on whom notice has been served shall be notified accordingly.

Any person who has been notified of the making of an order under section 207 may appeal to the Board against the order within 4 weeks of being so notified. The Board may confirm the order with or without modifications or annul the order. Particulars of a public right of way created under the section 207 procedure are also required to be entered on the local planning register.

The making of, or refusing to make, an order creating a public right of way over any land is a reserved function of local authorities as provided by Local Government Act 2001, as amended, and is not one in which I have any statutory function in my role as Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

### Housing Schemes

390. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the total number of recipients of HAP and RAS support in County Mayo each year since 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18274/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The table below shows the number of recipients of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) at year end in Co. Mayo from 2016 to 2021:

Scheme	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
HAP	402	817	1,120	1,280	1,356	1,336
RAS	893	866	817	821	799	786

The HAP and RAS schemes continue to be effective and secure forms of social housing support and remain a part of the suite of social housing options currently available across the country.

The '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. As new build supply of social housing ramps up, there will be reducing reliance on the HAP and RAS schemes.

### Housing Policy

391. **Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the last time that income thresholds were increased; the effect in real terms on income thresholds due to inflation in that time period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18275/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 introduced maximum net income limits for each local authority in 2011. The limits are unchanged since then.

Cognisant of significant rental price growth across the country since thresholds were originally set and the need to take account of the variation in the cost of private accommodation across the State, Housing for All committed to reviewing income eligibility for social housing. The review, which examined inter alia the continued relevance of the current banding model and income limits applicable to local authorities, was completed in Q4 2021.

I am currently considering its findings and expect to decide on proposed changes and recommendations shortly.

### Water Services

392. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the extent to which group water schemes in receipt of public funds should be required to become companies limited by guarantee in circumstances in which they come under the remit of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement and in circumstances in which directors are answerable for their actions, therefore considerably strengthening governance practices of existing water scheme co-operatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18277/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** Group Water Schemes are community-owned and community-run enterprises. In order to be eligible for support from my Department (as administered by local authorities) Group Water Schemes must meet the general terms and conditions of my Department's funding schemes. In particular schemes must also be, for their enduring operation, properly constituted in a way that recognises the members as the owners of the scheme. Further details can be found on my Department's website at the following link: [www.housing.old.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/circular-1218-subsidy-towards-operational-costs-group](http://www.housing.old.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/circular-1218-subsidy-towards-operational-costs-group)

In the case of medium sized and larger group water schemes, which are typically regulated schemes under the Drinking Water Regulations, this must be through a legal structure of either a Co-operative or Company Limited by Guarantee in which members are equal shareholders.

In the case of smaller schemes, which are typically exempted schemes under the Drinking Water Regulations, this may be as a Trusteeship, Co-operative or Company Limited by Guarantee.

Currently I have no plans to change the above arrangements.

### **Ceadúnas Imill Trá agus Dobharshaothraithe**

393. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta cén uair a aistrefar an fhreagracht maidir le hiarratais ar cheadúnais imeall trá a mheas, agus maidir leis na ceadúnais sin a eisiúint, chuig na húdaráis áitiúla; an gclúdfar ceadúnais le haghaidh feamainn a bhaint san aistriú seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [18370/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Tríd an Acht um Pleanáil Limistéir Mhuirí, 2021, (Acht MAP) a achtaíodh i mí na Nollag 2021, bunaítear córas nua pleanála muirí, a bhfuil Ráiteas Beartais Pleanála Muirí atá teoraithe ag an gCreat Náisiúnta Pleanála Muirí (NMPF) mar bhonn taca faoi, córas a bhfuil réisim nua bainistithe ceadúnaithe agus forbartha ón líne bairr láin chuig teorainn forimealach scairbh ilchríochach an Stáit i gceist leis. Déanfaidh an tÚdarás Rialála Limistéir Mhuirí (MARA), An Bord Pleanála (ABP) agus údaráis áitiúla an chósta an réisim nua seo a riar in am trátha.

Tiocfaidh an córas nua pleanála muirí in áit réisimí Stáit agus toilithe forbartha atá ann cheana (i.e. an córas urthrú atá ann cheana seachas freagrachtaí an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara) agus déanfar socruithe a shruthlíniú leis ar bhonn prionsabail toilithe aonair, i.e. toiliú stáit amháin (Toiliú an Limistéir Mhuirí) chun cead isteach sa Limistéar Muirí a thabhairt agus toiliú forbartha amháin (cead pleanála), agus measúnacht timpeallachta amháin leis.

Is é MARA a bhronnfaidh Toilithe Limistéir Mhuirí (MACanna). Go ginearálta, is é an t-údarás áitiúil ábhartha a chomhlíonfaidh freagracht toilithe forbartha i leith limistéir chósta laistigh de limistéar nua-ainmnithe cois cósta i.e. 3 muirmhíle chun farráige ón líne bairr láin. Beidh ABP freagrach as aicmí áirithe forbartha laistigh den Limistéar Muirí ar fad agus

as ginearáltacht forbartha níos faide amach ná an limistéar cois cósta. Is é MARA a dheonóidh ceadúnais, lena n-áirítear ceadúnais a bhaineann le Baint Feamainne (beidh freagracht ar údarais áitiúla fós i leith gníomhaíochtaí áirithe).

Leagtar amach leis an Acht MAP forálacha speisialta maidir le tionscadail fuinnimh in-athnuaite amach ón gcósta (ORE) a shásaíonn an sainmhíniú ar “úsáid mhuirí ábhartha”. Á aithint dó go dtógfaidh sé am gníomhaireacht nua a bhunú, shocraigh an Rialtas gur cheart cumhachtaí teoranta a dheonú don Aire Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide chun fáilte a chur roimh iarratais MAC ar thionscadail ORE a shásaíonn an sainmhíniú ar “úsáid mhuirí ábhartha” go ceann tréimhse sonraithe roimh bhunú MARA. Á aithint dó go dtógfaidh sé am gníomhaireacht nua a bhunú, shocraigh an Rialtas gur cheart cumhachtaí teoranta a dheonú don Aire Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide chun fáilte a chur roimh iarratais MAC ar thionscadail ORE a shásaíonn an sainmhíniú ar “úsáid mhuirí ábhartha” go ceann tréimhse sonraithe roimh bhunú MARA. Beidh iarratas le déanamh ansin ar an gcead forbartha riachtanach ón mBord Pleanála faoin réisim nua i gcás tionscadal ar bith a shásóidh an sainmhíniú ar “úsáid mhuirí ábhartha” a mbronnfaidh an tAire Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide MAC air.

Is é an aidhm go mbeidh MARA ar an bhfód faoi R1 2023 agus, d’fhonn é seo a éascú, bunaíodh Aonad tiomanta laistigh de mo Roinn chun an Plean Cur Chun Feidhme a chur chun cinn leis an ngníomhaireacht nua seo a bhunú. Beidh obair ullmhúcháin chuimsitheach ag teastáil le linn na míonna atá romhainn chun cur ar chumas MARA tabhairt faoin réimse leathan feidhmeanna reachtúla a bheidh air i ndiaidh a bhunaithe. Áirítear ar an obair seo orduithe tosaigh feidhme a dhréachtú agus sraith rialachán agus treoirínte reachtúla a ullmhú, mar aon leis na próisis a bheidh ag brath orthu sin a fhorbairt.

San idirlinn, déanfar freagracht as forbraíocht ar urthrá na hÉireann a rialú go fóill faoi fhorálacha an Achta Imeacha Trágha, 1933, arna leasú. I mo cháil mar Aire, is mise an ‘tAire cuí’ chun críocha an Achta seo (ach amháin i gcás roinnt réimsí sonracha inarb é an tAire Talmhaíochta, Bia & Mara an tAire cuí), agus leanfaidh mé orm ag glacadh le hiarratais ar léasanna agus ceadúnais urthrá, ag déanamh iad a mheas agus a dheonú / a dhiúltú faoin réisim urthrá go dtí go mbunófar MARA. Tar éis bhunú MARA, ní ghlacfar le hiarratais nua faoi réisim reatha toilithe Urthrá, ach tabharfar próiseáil iarratas atá idir lámha (e.g. iarratais iniúchta láithreáin etc.) chun críche.

Tháinig méadú suntasach ar líon agus ar chastacht na n-iarratas ar cheadúnais agus léasanna urthrá le dhá nó trí bliana anuas. Baineann an chuid is mó den ghníomhaíocht mhéadaithe seo le forbraíocht bhonneagair maidir le Fuinneamh Inathnuaite Amach ón gCósta (ORE), lena n-áirítear gníomhaíocht iniúchta ar láithreáin forbartha a d’fhéadfadh a bheith i gceist, forbairt cáblaithe Eirgrid, agus obair feabhsúcháin ar bhonneagar calafort. Ina theannta sin, tá méadú tagtha ar ghníomhaíocht feidhmithe cáblaí cumhachta agus teileachumarsáide mar gheall ar thionscadail tráchtála agus stát-treoraithe araon. Ag an am céanna, tá an próiseas breithmheasa ag éirí níos casta mar gheall ar chásdlí atá ag teacht chun cinn agus ceanglais bhreisithe a eascraíonn as Treoracha éagsúla maidir le measúnachtaí timpeallachta.

Le hocht mí dhéag anuas, tá níos mó ná dhá oiread ball foirne curtha ar fáil ag mo Roinn laistigh den Aonad Urthrá chun aghaidh a thabhairt ar an ualach oibre atá ag dul i méid. Ina theannta sin, tá painéal de shainchomhairleoirí timpeallachta seachtracha ag obair chun cuidiú le measúnú teicniúil a dhéanamh ar iarratais. Cé go bhfuilim sásta go bhfuil na hacmhainní cuí i bhfeidhm, tá fonn orm na socruithe a choinneáil faoi athbhreithniú nó go mbunófar MARA.

Faoin Acht um Pleanáil Limistéir Mhuirí, 2021, tabharfaidh MARA, in am agus i dtráth, faoi gach freagracht riaracháin agus gach feidhm bainistithe eastáit i ndáil leis an bpunann léasanna agus ceadúnas urthrá reatha chomh maith (níos mó ná 2,200).

Question No. 394 answered with Question No. 358.

### National Parks

395. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage if an education liaison officer has been appointed in each of the national parks to work with schools across the country (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18400/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The appointment of Education Liaison Officers is a matter for the Minister of Education and Skills. My Department is engaging with that Department to optimise the appointment of these Officers.

The National Parks and Wildlife Guide Service which operates from our National Parks and a number of other centres across the country provide a different service than that of the Education Liaison Officers. These centres run events for the general public, offer visits for community groups such as senior citizens and scouts. The Parks promote the importance of biodiversity and the natural world, to both primary and secondary school groups, through nature days and fieldwork. This service has continued over the course of the pandemic, where appropriate, and my Department expects another busy summer for the Parks and Wildlife Centres as the numbers of people holidaying at home in Ireland are expected to remain at a high level this year.

### Vacant Sites

396. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the total amount levied under the vacant sites levy; the total amount collected by local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18407/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke):** Under the vacant site levy provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (the Act), planning authorities were empowered to apply a vacant site levy of 3% of the market valuation of relevant properties which were listed on local authority vacant site registers in 2018, which relevant owners were liable to pay in January 2019. The rate of the levy increased to 7% for sites listed on local authority vacant sites registers from 2019 onwards which site owners became liable to pay in January of the following year.

The most recent data available in relation to the collection of the levy is based on returns submitted to my Department further to the issuing of Circular Letter PL 03/2021 on 8 March 2021 requesting the submission of a progress report on the implementation and collection of the levy by each local authority. This information is provided in the Table below.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq396-05-04-22\_en.xlsx">Vacant Site Levy</a>]

My Department recently issued Circular Letter PL 03/2022 requesting the submission of a further progress report on the implementation and collection of the levy by local authorities. This report will provide information regarding the levies collected in 2021, and to 31 March 2022, in respect of previous years.

It should be noted that under section 19 of the Act, unpaid levies due remain a charge on the land in question until they are paid. My Department will continue to engage proactively

with local authorities to ensure that all vacant site levies due are paid and that the measure can achieve its full potential.

### Departmental Contracts

397. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18891/22]

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Darragh O'Brien):** The table below shows the cost of consultants for the Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022. It also outlines the role of each consultancy. Consultancy service providers are only engaged by my Department where specific expertise is required which is not available in the organisation at the relevant time.

Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
CDM Smith	Expert advisory services for the Parteen Fish Passage project, and implementation measure of the 2nd cycle River Basin Management Plan.	2020	€ 74,043.19
CERTIFICATION EUROPE LTD	External Validation Group Process Assessment-The Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management mandated a second round of External Validation (EVG II) to be undertaken in all local authority fire services and the three Regional Communications Centres. It was previously agreed that the EVG II would be subject to an independent quality assurance process.	2020	€ 5,412.00
Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors	External quality assurance review of the Internal audit unit as required by International Audit Standards.	2020	€ 14,145.00
Conor Bean	Review of acceptable Construction Details -Acceptable construction details are drawings that assist installers and construction managers in the most acceptable methods of construction. These are being updated to include more energy efficient methods.	2020	€ 11,542.69

Questions - Written Answers

Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
Des Johnson	Non-statutory environmental review of Derrybrien Wind Farm.	2020	€ 5,972.00
Dr Hugh Maguire	Advice in relation to proceeding with Museum Standards Programme for Glenveagh National Park further to C&AG recommendation	2020	€ 500.00
Economic and Social Research Institute	The consultancy is a 3 year research collaboration agreement which involves the publication of housing economics research papers.	2020	€ 200,000.00
Economic and Social Research Institute	Review of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan	2020	€ 1,308.01
Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)	Planning and spatial research to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) (this is an extension of ESRI consultancy “Joint Research Programme on Housing Economics between the Department and the ESRI).”	2020	€ 100,000.00
ESRI	Research on behaviour and attitudinal change on Ireland’s water resources and implementation of measures of the 2nd cycle River Basin Management Plan	2020	€ 94,697.53
Levett Therivel	Review draft guidance on strategic environmental assessment for regional and planning authorities	2020	€ 1,800.00
Michael Martyn Agri-Environment	Agricultural Advisor(s) to assist in assessing applications for compensation following the refusal of the Minister to give consent for activities requiring consent within designated sites	2020	€ 3,025.00
O’Herlihy Access Consultancy	Development of an Access Policy and Action Plan at the Custom House	2020	€ 8,595.24
PMCA Consulting	Provision of an expert report as part of Ireland’s response to State Aid Case SA 52512 concerning Local Authority health and leisure facilities	2020	€ 9,225.00



Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
Quadra Consultancy Ltd	Carry out Health and Safety Risk Assessments throughout the Department in accordance with our statutory obligations	2020	€ 6,457.50
Quadra Consultancy Ltd	Covid Risk Assessment - Ballina, Wexford and Custom House	2020	€ 2,117.50
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)	Part of a joint research project on “Measuring Planning Outcomes” in conjunction with the Office of the Planning Regulator, and the Governments of Scotland, Wales and England coordinated by the Royal Town Planning Institute.	2020	€ 17,374.86
RPS	Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessments of the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)	2020	€ 69,390.11
RPS Group	Preparation of a guidance document for Planning Authorities on the River Basin Management Plan 2018 – 2021	2020	€ 152,292.44
School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice,UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4	To carry out a review of the Role of Social Workers and Traveller Liaison officers who are employed to assist Travellers with their accommodation needs.	2020	€ 28,269.92
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)	Development of a Heat Pump Standard -development of a standard operating procedure for the installation and maintenance of heat pumps. Heat pumps are a more energy efficient method of heating homes	2020	€ 15,000.00
Word Perfect	Translation services	2020	€ 1,255.37
YCD Limited , T/A Yellowstone	Provide design/artwork, web hyperlinks for Irish Translation of Report on Significant Water Management Issues	2020	€ 1,168.50
Arthur Cox	Legal Fees in relation to the Transitional Protocol	2021	€ 15,514.00

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Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
Arthur Cox	Legal Fees in relation to Ark-low Banks windfarm	2021	€ 7,406.00
Bruce McCormack Consulting	To carry out a review of EIA screening thresholds in the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2022	2021	€ 3,880.00
Carla Mateus	Met Éireann Researcher for Building Regs. Part C & Climate data	2021	€ 41,500.00
Chris Blandford	World Heritage Strategy Project	2021	€ 14,925.00
Dr Alison Sheridan	Ordinary member of Expert Advisory Group to assess and advise on UNESCO World Heritage Site Tentative List.	2021	€ 3,000.00
Dr Carol Westrik	Chair of Expert Advisory Group to assess and advise on UNESCO World Heritage Site Tentative List.	2021	€ 5,000.00
Dr Christine Morrow	Expert support for OSPAR Deep Sea Habitats Workshop	2021	€ 5,250.00
Dr Will Megarry	Ordinary member of Expert Advisory Group to assess and advise on UNESCO World Heritage Site Tentative List.	2021	€ 2,100.00
Economic and Social Research Institute	The consultancy is a 3 year research collaboration agreement, which operated from 2017 to 2020 and which was renewed for a further 3 years in September 2020. Note that this return is based on the full life of the research programme, from 2017 to 2023.	2021	€ 200,000.00
Fehily Timoney & Company Ltd	Provision of Guidance for Public Authorities on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive	2021	€ 67,650.00
Governance Ireland	Review of governance arrangements for the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA)	2021	€ 22,878.00

Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
Indecon	This payment was made to the LGMA (Local Government Management Agency), for consultancy services in respect of Indecon undertaking a review of LA Mortgage Protection insurance. LGMA paid an additional €14,000 + VAT.	2021	€ 70,110.00
KPMG (FAC)	To conduct a socioeconomic impact study regarding implementation of the EU LIFE14/NAT/IE/000032 raised bog restoration project	2021	€ 3,934.92
Maeve Thornberry & Assoc	Oceanwise Project to reduce the impact of Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) and Extruded Polystyrene (XPS) as marine litter Work Package 5.6 reports - (1) to identify and assess policies, incentives and producer responsibility schemes relating to the use, disposal and recycling of EPS & XPS around the world and (2) a life cycle analysis of EPS/XPS products used for packaging food or food related products. INTERREG Funded	2021	€ 41,005.80
Maeve Thornberry & Assoc	Oceanwise Project Work package P 8 report - Final report of project (INTERREG Funded)	2021	€ 34,501.50
Marine & Environmental Resource Conservation Consultants	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Trinity Wharf	2021	€ 7,380.00
Marine & Environmental Resource Conservation Consultants	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Celtix Connect	2021	€ 11,992.50
Ms Jane Jackson	Ordinary member of Expert Advisory Group to assess and advise on UNESCO World Heritage Site Tentative List.	2021	€ 1,550.00
Niall Crowley	Paper on best practice on Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees.	2021	€ 1,845.00

Questions - Written Answers

Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
O Maille Group	Facilitator for Marine Protected Areas Stakeholder workshops	2021	€ 2,460.00
O'Briain Beary	Social Housing Standard Layouts	2021	€ 76,312.00
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Development of a GIS Information Tool for local authorities to enable better planning of housing for older people	2021	€ 104,550.00
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Codling	2021	€ 17,847.50
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Drogheda Port Company Dredging of River Boyne	2021	€ 15,746.46
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Energia Site Investigation off Wexford Coast	2021	€ 15,313.50
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Energia SI for offshore windfarm	2021	€ 14,637.00
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Loughs Agency Sea Monitor Project	2021	€ 5,928.60
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Cheekpoint Boat Owners Association Pontoon	2021	€ 14,126.55
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - America Europe Connect 2 Transatlantic Cable	2021	€ 21,033.00
Ove Arup & Partners Ltd ( Consulting Engineers)	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Cork County Council Dredging for Courtmacsherry Pier	2021	€ 15,264.30
Padraic Thornton	Report to DHLGH in relation to the Marine Planning (Development Management) Bill 2019	2021	€ 10,950.00

Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
Paul Forde (DBFL Consultant Engineers Ltd)	Preparation of draft report in respect of the Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme "High level Preliminary Overview of Four Specific Areas".	2021	€ 4,920.00
Roughan & O'Donovan Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Statkraft	2021	€ 16,445.10
Roughan & O'Donovan Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Foynes Jetty Extension	2021	€ 44,218.50
Roughan & O'Donovan Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Gibbon's Quay	2021	€ 10,590.30
Roughan & O'Donovan Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Morrison's Island Flood Relief	2021	€ 20,571.75
Roughan & O'Donovan Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Glengarriff Pier	2021	€ 11,008.50
Roughan & O'Donovan Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Simply Blue (Emerald) ORE Site Investigations	2021	€ 14,870.70
RPS Consulting	Environmental Assessments (SEA and AA) of National Marine Planning Framework	2021	€ 17,670.98
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Review of Fenit Harbour Dredging	2021	€ 13,329.36
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Coiste Forbaithe na Sceilige Pontoon	2021	€ 5,691.84
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Greenlink Interconnector	2021	€ 15,990.00
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Ion Organics Ltd	2021	€ 5,904.00
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - AMETS Floating Wind Test Site Investigations	2021	€ 9,163.50

Questions - Written Answers

Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Greenlink Interconnector DHPLG Foreshore Panel	2021	€ 5,220.12
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - DCC Dredging at Magheraroarty Pier	2021	€ 11,838.75
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Reen Pier	2021	€ 9,212.70
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	Environmental Assessment in relation to Foreshore Application - Enniscorthy Flood Defence Scheme	2021	€ 3,485.82
TOBIN Consulting Engineers	For the provision of research and information on the Rural Water Sector, to support the Rural Water Working Group in carrying out its work.	2021	€ 125,600.22
UCC	Phase II of DECC -led OBSERVE Programme marine research & surveys. (marine Environment Section element of funding - also funded by DECC and NPWS)	2021	€ 300,000.00
UCD	Conduct research into the local authority role of social workers and liaison officers employed to assist Travellers with their accommodation needs.	2021	€ 42,046.00
UCD-Katestone	Guidance in relation to the assessment of the impacts of atmospheric nitrogen deposition (incl. ammonia) on Natura 2000 sites and biodiversity.	2021	€ 1,687.56
Version 1 Consulting	To carry out an independent R12 Oracle FMS upgrade assessment	2021	€ 22,180.00
O Maille Group	Facilitator for OSPAR (mechanism by which 15 Governments & the EU cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic) Artic Workshop	2022	€ 4,840.00

Consultant Name	Role	Year Paid	Cost
Bearingpoint Ireland Ltd.	Change management support and advisory services	2022	€ 22,874.93
Ove Arup & Partners Ireland Ltd (Arup)	Screening for Appropriate Assessment on draft Regulations that make changes to the circumstance where solar PV/thermal panels and equipment constitute exempted development	2022	€ 5,596.50
Faith Wilson Ecological Consultant	Screening for Appropriate Assessment on draft Regulations relating to a temporary use of specified buildings as a public vaccination centre or public infection testing centre	2022	€ 2,460.00
RPS Consulting	Nitrates Strategic Environmental Assessment/ Appropriate Assessment Action Plan	2022	€ 33,457.23
TOBIN Consulting Engineers	For the provision of research and information on the Rural Water Sector, to support the Rural Water Working Group in carrying out its work.	2022	€ 44,856.87
TOBIN Consulting Engineers	For the provision of research and information on the Rural Water Sector, to support the Rural Water Working Group in carrying out its work.	2022	€ 18,939.54
Carla Mateus	Climate Action Policy and Construction Industry Regulation Unit	2022	€ 10,555.00

### Citizenship Applications

398. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of a citizenship application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18339/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The processing of Foreign Birth Registration applications has resumed and will be gradually scaling up in line with the recruitment of additional resources. Foreign Birth Registration applications are citizenship applications, and as in all jurisdictions involve a complex and lengthy process.

Due to an unprecedented surge in applications as a result of the Brexit referendum in the UK, and the pause in the Service due to Covid-19 restrictions, applicants should allow over 2 years from date of receipt for processing of FBR applications at this time.

The application referenced was registered 7th May 2020, and is being stored in a secure environment.

The FBR service operates a transparent general policy of processing applications in order

of receipt. FBR staff continue to provide an emergency service for Foreign Birth Registration in cases of exceptional urgency, such as expectant parents, or stateless persons. Such applicants may continue to contact the Passport Service directly.

The Department is determined to ensure that the Passport Service is sufficiently resourced to respond to current and anticipated unprecedented demand for Passports and Foreign Birth Registrations.

### **Passport Services**

399. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of the online portal that will allow queries for all application types to be submitted directly to the passport service by Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17418/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service is developing an online portal that will allow Oireachtas Members to query the status of passport applications on behalf of their constituents.

The testing element of this project is yet to be completed. Once the online portal is finalised, the Passport Service expects to roll it out over the summer of this year.

In the meantime, Members of the Oireachtas can avail of the temporary phone line that was established in October 2021 to respond to Members' queries on urgent passport cases.

In each case raised by an Oireachtas Member, the Passport Service reviews the application in question. However, applications can only be expedited in cases of genuine emergency such as a need for urgent medical treatment overseas or the death of a family member abroad. Such applications are expedited through the Travel Emergency service.

In cases where the estimated issue-by date has passed and the application is fully complete, the Passport Service will prioritise the application to ensure that no further delay is experienced.

Passport applicants can also track the status of their passport application online via the Passport Tracker which is available on my Department's website - [www.dfa.ie/passporttracking/](http://www.dfa.ie/passporttracking/)

### **Passport Services**

400. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if passport renewal applications (details supplied) can be examined and expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17421/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific applications about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has issued a passport to one of the applicants and has provided an update on the status of the other application to the applicant's parent.

### **Consular Services**

401. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he plans to approve the establishment of a resident full-time Irish consulate in Western Australia; and if he



will make a statement on the matter. [17492/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Our network of diplomatic missions in the Asia Pacific Region is kept under constant review, in the context of commitments set out in the Programme for Government, in *Global Ireland 2025* and in our Asia Pacific Strategy.

In the Asia Pacific Region, we have recently expanded our network through opening a Consulate General in Mumbai and an Embassy in Manila. At present, there are no plans to open a new Consulate General in Western Australia.

In conjunction with our Embassy in Canberra and State Agencies, our Honorary Consul in Perth currently provides consular services and assistance to Irish citizens, supports local Irish community efforts and assists in developing trade and economic relations with Western Australia.

### Passport Services

402. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the passport application by a person (details supplied) will be examined and expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17493/22]

403. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport application by a person (details supplied) will be examined and expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17566/22]

417. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18177/22]

425. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** 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. [18286/22]

426. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** 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. [18309/22]

430. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if an urgent passport appointment can be facilitated for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18352/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 402, 403, 417, 425, 426 and 430 together.

With regard to the specific applications about which the Deputies have enquired, the Passport Service has issued passports to the applicants.

*Question No. 403 answered with Question No. 402.*

### Public Sector Staff

404. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months,

in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17599/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Within the Department of Foreign Affairs there are currently no staff absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes. The Department has no agencies or bodies under its aegis.

### Passport Services

405. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 84 of 23 March 2022, if the requested data on the outstanding passport applications will be provided. [17654/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The information requested by the Deputy is outlined below in tabular form. This information has also been sent to the Deputy by email.

Passport applications submitted

Registration Date (as of 20 March 2022)

-	Total	Passport Service Processing	Requires further action from applicant	% Total requiring further action from applicant
more than 1 month	103,939	65,411	38,528	37%
more than 2 months	50,372	24,429	25,943	52%
more than 3 months	34,105	13,905	20,200	59%
more than 4 months	26,367	9,532	16,835	64%
more than 5 months	18,019	6,085	11,934	66%
more than 6 months	11,816	3,562	8,254	70%

The number of complete passport applications that are with the Passport Service for six months or more represents 0.01% of the total number of applications in the system. In the majority of cases, applicants may have applied online six months ago, but it may have taken several weeks and often even months for the applicants to submit the supporting documents that are required to complete the application. The Passport Service cannot process applications until they are fully complete. However, once they are fully complete, they are processed within the normal processing times.

There are a small number of very complex or sensitive cases that may involve citizenship, guardianship or legal issues. These require very thorough examination by experienced staff and can take longer to process.

### Passport Services

406. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of full-time fraud experts working in the Passport Office in each of the past three years; and the grade of staff that this staff member is normally assigned. [17711/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Passport Service takes its responsibility to protect the integrity of the Irish passport very seriously. The Irish passport has a strong international reputation due to the strength of the security features within the passport book and the robust processes involved in its issuance. The Irish passport was recently ranked 5th in the Henley Global Passport Index as it provides our citizens with visa-free access to 187 countries.

The Integrity Unit of the Passport Service was established in 2015 to improve all aspects of passport fraud detection and prevention. Significant resources have been invested in the Integrity Section with an increase in staff numbers and new and improved systems being put in place. A considerable investment in technology and structures has helped to improve the detection and recording of instances of fraud. These resources, along with new procedures introduced by the Passport Service, have prevented fraudulent applications from being submitted and have closed down avenues of access previously used by fraudulent applicants.

The Integrity Unit has been staffed by an average of 22 officers in the grades of Clerical Officer, Executive Officer, Higher Executive Officer and Assistant Principal over the period of March 2019 to March 2022. All officers in the Integrity Unit receive training in various types of fraud relevant to fraudulent passport applications. This training is conducted by in-house experienced officers and complimented by additional training from external experts. Some officers concentrate on particular areas within the unit and become very proficient at uncovering certain types of fraud, which is of significant benefit to the work of the unit. In addition, Integrity Unit staff can be assigned to this critical area because of the expertise or experience they bring to their role.

### Official Engagements

407. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he plans to invite his Portuguese counterpart to Dublin later in 2022. [17712/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Following parliamentary elections held at the end of January, my colleague and outgoing Minister for National Defence H.E. João Gomes Cravinho was appointed as Portugal's new Minister for Foreign Affairs last week.

I have written to Minister Cravinho to convey my best wishes in his new role. I have also indicated that I hope to travel to Lisbon to meet with Minister Cravinho for in-person discussions at an early stage over the period ahead and likewise to invite him to visit Dublin in due course thereafter. Our respective officials will liaise to identify suitable dates in each case.

I also look forward to engaging with Minister Cravinho along with other EU colleagues at our regular Foreign Affairs Council meetings. The next such Foreign Affairs Council meeting is scheduled to take place on 11 April.

### Passport Services

408. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue to a child (details supplied) in County Mayo in view of the fact that this application was

received on 7 January 2022 in the Passport Office and the supporting documentation has been submitted for a number of weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17726/22]

418. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18218/22]

427. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport will issue for a person (details supplied) on time for a travel date; if the documents that were supplied are correct; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18321/22]

428. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if an update will be provided with regard to a passport application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18328/22]

429. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport will issue on time for a school trip to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18335/22]

431. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue in respect of a minor (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18389/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 408, 418, 427 to 429, inclusive, and 431 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 applications to the applicants.

### **Passport Services**

409. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps that will be taken to help a person (details supplied) who needs to retrieve their passport which was submitted as part of the application process for their son given they require the document in order to travel due to an emergency. [17849/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has returned the requested passport to the applicant's parent.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

410. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the total value of expenditure from his Department's annual accounts in 2019, 2020 and 2021, in tabular form, that related to financial transactions with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; and if he will provide a breakdown of the nature of expenditure. [17866/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland is not a member of NATO, and accordingly does not contribute to NATO common costs or common funding.

Ireland's relationship with NATO is set within the framework of Partnership for Peace (PfP), which we have been a member of since 1999. Over the last two decades, Ireland's participation

in PfP has been of significant importance in the development of the peacekeeping capabilities of our Defence Forces and their interoperability with other potential peacekeeping contributing nations. This has allowed the Defence Forces to operate seamlessly alongside other countries on UN peacekeeping operations and other crisis management missions overseas.

Ireland's engagement at NATO is tailored in line with Ireland's policy of military non-alignment and non-membership of military alliances. There is no membership fee to be part of PfP.

In order to manage our partnership with NATO, Ireland maintains an office in a NATO building in Brussels, the rental and maintenance costs of which are directly payable to NATO.

Separately, Ireland has also made a number of voluntary contributions to NATO Trust Funds which provide capacity-building support to partners such as Ukraine, Jordan, Georgia, Tunisia and Moldova, as well as other UN Troop Contributing Countries. We have provided this support only where the activities supported by the Trust Funds align with Ireland's foreign and security policy. Irish contributions have primarily been in support of disarmament activities.

In 2021, Ireland made a contribution of €100,000 to the NATO Trust Fund to build the capacity of African UN Troop Contributing Countries by the provision of medical training, communication training and countering improvised explosives device training by NATO experts. A member of the Defence Forces has also been seconded to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Uganda to provide expertise as part of the implementation of this wider UN-NATO package. Ireland also provided €50,000 to the Trust Fund for Jordan in 2021. Ireland made no other voluntary contributions to NATO Trust Funds in the period 2019 – 2021.

#### Irish Liaison Office Costs

Year	Description	Amount
2019	Rent & phone costs	€170,681
2020	Rent & phone costs	€66,989
2020	Pro rata contribution to renovation of office space	€407,328
2021	Rent & phone costs	€66,303

#### NATO Trust Funds

Year	Description	Amount
2021	Trust Fund for African UN Troop Contributing Countries	€100,000
2021	Trust Fund for Jordan	€50,000

### Cybersecurity Policy

411. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if Ireland has sought to be joined as a notice party in a court case in the United States against Russian Government employees in relation to malicious cyber activity in which the evidence suggests that this activity targeted Irish infrastructure in a period between 2012 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17883/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government is aware of the charges brought in US courts against four Russian government employees in relation to malicious cyber activity, targeting a range of critical energy infrastructure across 135 countries, including Ireland, between 2012 and 2018. We will continue to engage with the United States,

our fellow EU Member States and other international partners on next steps in relation to this case.

In general terms, hybrid threat actors seek to exploit the vulnerabilities of states to their own advantage through the use of a range of coordinated measures, including offensive cyber operations against critical infrastructure. Our open and internationalised economy and society means that we as a country need to be particularly aware of the potential of these threats. Given the current international context, I know that the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has been operating at a heightened state of preparedness for some months and contingency plans are in place to deal with any escalation of malicious cyber activity.

### **Passport Services**

412. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will examine the reason that a person (details supplied) is being refused a passport in their chosen name despite having legally changed their name through deed poll; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17953/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has contacted the applicant directly in relation to the application. The Passport Service are currently processing this application.

### **Passport Services**

413. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the reason for the delay in processing a passport for a person (details supplied) submitted on 24 November 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18063/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has contacted the applicant's parent to provide an update as to the steps they must take to progress the passport application. The Passport Service regrets the delay in processing this application.

### **Passport Services**

414. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if advice will be provided in relation to the case of a person (details supplied). [18084/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Where a passport applicant is unable to provide a civil birth certificate in respect of parent born in Ireland, baptismal records may be considered as part of the overall suite of documents that is submitted in support of their application. These applications will be considered on a case by case basis.

Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths commenced in Ireland in 1864 and are available from the General Register Office. Their contact details are as follows:

General Register Office,

Government Offices,

5 April 2022

Convent Road,  
Roscommon Town,  
Co. Roscommon F42 VX53,  
Ireland  
Tel: +353 90 6632900;  
e-Mail: gro@welfare.ie;  
Website: www.certificates.ie

### Passport Services

415. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport application by a person (details supplied),## which was received by the Passport Office on 28 December 2021, will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18087/22]

420. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18234/22]

432. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18394/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 415, 420 and 432 together.

With regard to the specific applications about which the Deputies have enquired, the Passport Service has provided an update to the applicants as to the steps they must take to progress the passport applications.

### Flexible Work Practices

416. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18166/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Department of Foreign Affairs supports the aims of the National Remote Working Strategy and is committed to implementing a model of blended working that will provide flexibility to staff, while supporting the continued delivery of high quality services to Government and the Irish people.

While a formalised policy is currently under consideration and due for implementation in April 2022, it will align with the Blended Working Policy Framework for Civil Service organisations.

At present, those staff whose work activities allow them to work from home can do so remotely up to 3 days a week. This is subject to the exigencies of the Department.

*Question No. 417 answered with Question No. 402.*

*Question No. 418 answered with Question No. 408.*

## **Ukraine War**

419. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the call for the cancellation of Ukrainian national debt. [18233/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I refer the Deputy to the answer by the Minister for Finance to Question 14365/22 on 22 March 2022, on the subject of IMF debt cancellation for Ukraine, which is a matter within the remit of the Department of Finance.

As the Minister for Finance stated in that response, the IFI community has reacted quickly to provide vital financial support for Ukraine. On 9 March, the Executive Board of the IMF approved a disbursement of US\$1.4 billion under the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) to help Ukraine meet urgent financing needs and mitigate the economic impact of the war. This follows a US\$723 million package of support approved by the World Bank; a €668 million immediate financial support package for Ukraine to be provided by the EIB; and a €2 billion ‘resilience package’ approved by the EBRD.

In the absence of full funding by bilateral donors, debt cancellation or debt forgiveness by the IMF risks impairing the Fund’s financial integrity which, in turn, could jeopardise future financing for Ukraine and other countries in need. Instead, the IMF’s ability to provide debt service relief on its loans to members must be underpinned by donor grants for the repayment of those loans. For example, during the COVID-19 crisis, the IMF used the donor-supported Catastrophe and Containment Relief Trust to provide debt relief totalling almost US\$1 billion to cover debt obligations owed to the Fund between April 2020 and April 2022.

Ireland remains steadfast and unwavering in its support to Ukraine, including through provision of humanitarian aid, the European Peace Facility package for Ukraine, and the EU’s emergency macro-financial assistance operation of €1.2 billion in the form of loans to foster stability in Ukraine.

*Question No. 420 answered with Question No. 415.*

## **Departmental Meetings**

421. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he has had any engagement regarding a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18270/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Respect for human rights is an integral part of Ireland’s foreign policy and we consistently seek to raise our concerns on human rights issues through the most appropriate and effective channels.

Ireland is opposed to the death penalty in all circumstances, and we have made this position clear to the Singaporean authorities. The Embassy of Ireland in Singapore, together with our European Union partners has actively monitored the case of Nagaenthran Dharmalingam, including calling on the authorities to halt his execution and to commute his sentence to a non-capital sentence. We learned with grave concern that Mr. Dharmalingam’s death sentence has been upheld by the courts in Singapore on 29 March. On 30 March, a spokesperson for the EU’s High Representative also issued a statement deeply regretting the execution in Singapore of Abdul Kahar bin Othman, who was the first person to be executed in Singapore since 2019.



Ireland is unequivocal in its stance against the death penalty and the abolition of capital punishment is one of Ireland's international priorities. My Department regularly conveys our stance on this matter to all countries where the death penalty is still in use. Our active participation at the United Nations Human Rights Council is a particularly important fora in which to raise our concerns regarding human rights. At the 48th Session of the Council, Ireland, as part of the EU27, co-sponsored the biennial resolution on the question of the death penalty which was adopted by vote. The resolution calls on those States that have not yet abolished the death penalty to ensure transparency and respect for human rights. In our intervention at the last Universal Periodic Review of Singapore's human rights record in May 2021 Ireland called on Singapore to consider a moratorium on executions as a step towards abolition.

I remain deeply concerned about the use of the death penalty and Ireland will continue to monitor developments in Singapore in this regard.

### **Foreign Birth Registration**

422. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of full, part-time and casual staff processing applications for the foreign births register monthly from January 2020 to date in tabular form. [18271/22]

423. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the status of the scaling-up operations in regard to applications to the foreign births register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18272/22]

424. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the month in which the foreign birth register applications currently being worked on were received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18273/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 422 to 424, inclusive, together.

My Department is responsible for citizenship by descent through the Foreign Births Register under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended.

Before the onset of Covid-19, 18 staff were assigned to Foreign Birth Registration (FBR) entitlement checking. Due to the pandemic, from March 2020, FBR staff were redeployed to assist in the delivery of essential services, which resulted in a pause in overall FBR processing for a total of 15 months across the 2020-2021 period. Despite this pause, 12,000 FBR applications were processed in 2020, and 7,000 applications were processed in 2021 as FBR staff continued to provide an emergency service for Foreign Birth Registration in cases of exceptional urgency, such as expectant parents, or stateless persons.

Given the redeployment of staff from the FBR team to passport checking and other essential services during the pandemic the Passport Service does not have a monthly record of the numbers of staff assigned to FBR entitlement checking during that period.

Since the reopening of the FBR Service in November 2021, there have been 17 staff assigned to FBR entitlement checking. Three thousand applications have been processed to date in 2022. The Entitlement Team are currently processing applications for which supporting documents were received in January 2020.

The processing of FBR will continue to gradually scale up in line with the recruitment of additional resources. Due to the complex nature of the FBR process, the large increase in appli-

cations received following the Brexit vote in the UK, and the pause in the service due to necessary Covid-19 restrictions, applicants should allow over 2 years from the receipt of supporting documentation for processing of FBR applications at this time. The FBR service operates a transparent general policy of processing applications in order of receipt.

My Department is fully committed to the continued allocation of additional resources over the coming period to assist with the processing of the Foreign Birth Registration applications currently on hand and the high volume of new applications anticipated this year.

*Question No. 423 answered with Question No. 422.*

*Question No. 424 answered with Question No. 422.*

*Question No. 425 answered with Question No. 402.*

*Question No. 426 answered with Question No. 402.*

*Question No. 427 answered with Question No. 408.*

*Question No. 428 answered with Question No. 408.*

*Question No. 429 answered with Question No. 408.*

*Question No. 430 answered with Question No. 402.*

*Question No. 431 answered with Question No. 408.*

*Question No. 432 answered with Question No. 415.*

### **Passport Services**

433. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when a passport will be issued to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18409/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With regard to the specific application about which the Deputy has enquired, the Passport Service has contacted the applicant directly to provide an update on the status of the passport application. The estimated issue date for this application is 22 April 2022.

Applications can only be expedited in cases of genuine emergency such as a need for urgent medical treatment overseas or the death of a family member abroad.

In cases where the estimated issue-by date has passed and the application is fully complete, the Passport Service will prioritise the application to ensure that no further delay is experienced.

### **Departmental Contracts**

434. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18888/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department commissions external contractors, consultancy services and outsourcing services where highly specialised skills are not available internally and in particular, where ongoing independent evaluation of

programmes and projects is necessary.

External expertise has informed, and continues to inform, my Department's strategies and policies and the effective delivery of our services to our citizens in a transparent and accountable manner representing value for money.

Such external expertise may involve the provision of specialised reports, expert analysis or expert technical services to the Department.

A small number of consultancies are engaged directly by our Missions abroad from time to time and in some instances they prepare technical reports relating to Ireland's overseas development aid programme.

My Department ensures that there is an appropriate focus on good practice in procurement and that procedures are in place to ensure compliance with all relevant procurement guidelines. Procurement takes place in compliance with Directive 2014/24/EU and supported by Procurement Guidelines published by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP).

My Department participates fully in on-going initiatives of the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) focusing especially on achieving procurement savings, including the use of shared framework agreements for the provision of different categories of supplies and services.

The table below details the amount spent on consultancy services by my Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022.

	Consultant	Role/Nature of Consultancy	Cost
2020	Mark Durkan	Options for Steps to Advance Reconciliation, Inclusive Dialogue, Cooperation and Partnership on the Foundation of the Good Friday Agreement After Brexit	€14,760
	Gill Roe – Southern Cross Consulting	Appraisal of the Irish Aid Fellowship Training Programme and evaluation of online application system	€31,668
	Rob Kevlihan – Gumfoot Consultancy	Consultancy Services for Process Review of Irish Council for International Student (ICOS) Systems	€16,335
	Enabling outcomes	EVOLVING IRELAND'S PRIVATE SECTOR	€32,689
	Helen Newman	Facilitation Services Strategy Planning and Review Women's rights orgs and movements, and gov institutions	€1,875
	MJB Consulting	TASK FORCE FOR RURAL AFRICA AND FOOD SYSTEMS	€60,594
	Stewart Gee Consulting	Agricultural Research Partnership Review CGIAR and Teagasc	€20,298

Questions - Written Answers

	Consultant	Role/Nature of Consultancy	Cost
	EY Consultants	Climate change and gender equality	€25,765
	EY Consultants	Climate change and gender equality	€31,633
	Deirdre Clancy	Consultancy on Protection intervention cluster	€11,588
	Rachel Widdis	Review of Access to Remedy (in regard to Business and Human Rights)	€17,000
	Change by Degrees	Climate Consultancy	€984
	John Moody Risk Management	Strategic Partner Systems Review	€24,539
2021	Public Good Ltd	Consultancy Services to DFA on IFAD and Food Systems	€89,298
	Social Development Direct	Consultancy for safeguarding policy engagement	€26,028
	Gumfoot Consultancy Ltd	Review of the Civil Society Fund	€28,430
	Change by Degrees	To support the development of Ireland's international Climate Finance Roadmap, a commitment made in the Programme for Government, "Our Shared Future".	€23,650
	Arab World for Research and Development	Gender Review of the Palestine Programme	€7,500
	William Langslet	Review of the Embassy's support to mine action and unexploded ordnance across Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar over the previous Mission strategy (2017-2020)	€7,500
	Gill Roe	Review of the IDEAS programme over the previous Mission Strategy (2017-2020)	€8,674
	Pham Thai Hung	Review of the EMPRO portfolio in support of ethnic minorities up to 2020	€1,315
	IOD PARC - Vietnam	Review of Ireland's Mission strategy for Vietnam and the Mekong sub region.	€37,379
	Boris Gandon	Consultancy Support on Francophone Africa and the Sahel	€34,560
	Dillon Development Associates Ltd	Advisory role to the evaluation of the Programme Grant II/Humanitarian Preparedness Programme Funding Schemes	€4,182

	Consultant	Role/Nature of Consultancy	Cost
	Tony Tyrell	Advisory role to the Review of Ireland's Mission strategy for Vietnam and the Mekong sub region	€4,750
	Bernard McLoughlin	Review the Performance and Effectiveness of Management Arrangements in place for the Zimbabwe Programme	€23,616
	Lisney	Advisory role to the Spending Review of the Management of the Department of Foreign Affairs' Overseas Leased Property Portfolio	€5,658
	GARTNER IRELAND LIMITED	ICT Research and Advisory Services to support the ongoing ICT Strategy and associated activities of the ICT Unit.	€72,570(covers September 2021 to August 2022)
2022	Mokoro Ltd	FRM Consultancy	€7,156
	Deirdre Waldron t/a Fuzion Communications	Fuzion Communications – AADP Programme	€6,210
	Boris Gandon	Consultancy Support on Franco-phone Africa and the Sahel	€8,820
	Dr. Richard Collins	Consultancy Services to Support an Assessment of the Antarctic Treaty System	€11,250
	Bernard McLoughlin	Review the Performance and Effectiveness of Management Arrangements in place for the Zimbabwe Programme	€5,904
	Irish Centre for Diversity	The Irish Centre for Diversity conducted a review of results from a DFA survey on Diversity through Recruitment. As part of this analysis, the Irish Centre for Diversity also conducted a number of focus groups with staff employed by the Department	€3,690

### Air Corps

435. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence the number of serving and former Air Corps whistle-blowers who have been placed under surveillance by the State Claims Agency or its agents. [18187/22]

444. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence the number of serving and former Air Corps whistle-blowers who have been placed under surveillance by the Defence Forces. [18185/22]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 435 and 444 together.

The conduct of surveillance activities by the Defence Forces is an operational security matter carried out in line with relevant national legislation. The relevant military authorities provide regular assessments, reports and briefings to me, as Minister for Defence, to the Secretary General of the Department of Defence and to the Chief of Staff. These assessments, by their nature, are confidential.

I am informed by the State Claims Agency that they do not comment on individual claims. The Agency's statutory mandate is to manage claims in such a manner as to ensure that the State's liability is contained at the lowest achievable level.

### **International Bodies**

436. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Defence the projected initial cost and projected annual cost for the first five years of membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation for Ireland. [17510/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland is not a member of NATO nor are there any plans for Ireland to join NATO. Accordingly, Ireland does not contribute to NATO common costs or common funding.

Ireland's relationship with NATO is set within the framework of Partnership for Peace (PfP), which we have been a member of since 1999. Over the last two decades, Ireland's participation in PfP has been of significant importance in the development of the peacekeeping capabilities of our Defence Forces and their interoperability with other potential peacekeeping contributing nations. This has allowed the Defence Forces to operate seamlessly alongside other countries on UN peacekeeping operations and other crisis management missions overseas.

There is no membership fee associated with PfP. The only costs relate to Defence Forces attendance at training and other activities that ensure that the Defence Forces can operate safely and effectively in crisis management operations and for some services, including secure comms and Role 2 medical facilities in KFOR. Costs in respect of office accommodation and services for the PfP Liaison Office in Brussels are discharged by the Department of Foreign Affairs with the Defence element being recouped from the Defence Vote.

### **Naval Service**

437. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Defence the number of patrol days scheduled from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022; the number of patrol days lost from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022; the reasons for the patrol days lost from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, by year in tabular form. [17511/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am assuming the Deputy's query 's relates to Naval Service patrol days.

The Naval Service is the State's principal sea-going agency and is tasked with a variety of defence and other roles. The primary day-to-day tasking of the Naval Service is to provide a fishery protection service in accordance with the State's obligations as a member of the European Union. In terms of fishery protection the Naval Service is tasked with patrolling all Irish waters from the shoreline to the outer limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone. These patrols

are carried out on a regular and frequent basis and are directed to all areas of Irish waters as necessary.

A range of factors including adverse weather conditions and unscheduled maintenance, as well as staffing issues can impact scheduled patrol days. For example, a total of 10 scheduled Naval Service patrol days have been cancelled up to 28 February this year as detailed in the table. All of the cancelled patrol days are due to members of a ship's crew contracting Covid-19.

The table below provides information on Naval Service patrols from January 2011 up until the end of February 2022.

Year	Fishery Patrol Days	Non-Fishery Patrol Days	Cancelled Patrol Days - Personnel reasons	Cancelled Patrol days - Mechanical reasons	Total days for year
2011	1267	223	0	0	1490
2012	1086	172	0	36	1294
2013	1238	111	0	39	1388
2014	856	218	0	7	1081
2015	716	452	0	276	1444
2016	1068	308	0	104	1480
2017	1091	317	0	72	1480
2018	1076	221	53	154	1504
2019	1036	25	52	42	1155
2020	781	226	28	53	1088
2021	786	66	196	44	1092
To end February 2022	104	22	10	0	136

The increase in cancelled patrol days in 2021 is mainly due to issues relating to Covid-19 as one of the ships, LÉ Ciara could not go to sea given its inability, due to its size, to implement safely the necessary Covid-19 precautions. There were also some unforeseen mechanical issues. In particular 47 scheduled patrol days were cancelled in 2021 due to a fire which occurred on board LÉ Niamh in late 2020. A shortage of suitably qualified and experienced personnel during the period in question was also a factor.

Notwithstanding the mechanical and staffing challenges being experienced, I am satisfied that the Naval Service continues to carry out the roles assigned by Government.

### Public Sector Staff

438. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Defence the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to 12 and over 12 months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17594/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The number of staff presently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in my Department for any of the time periods requested by the Deputy is nil.

The only State body currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. The Army Pensions Board is an independent statutory body established under the Army Pensions Act 1927. There is no absenteeism due to suspension or workplace disputes in the Army Pensions Board.

### **Defence Forces**

439. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence if construction works have commenced on a new cadet school headquarters in the Defence Forces Training Centre; when works will be completed; and the name of the company that was awarded the contract for same. [17702/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I can advise the Deputy that Duggan Lynch Ltd have been appointed as the contractor for the provision of a modernised Cadet school at the DFTC. I am advised that works have now commenced onsite with a construction programme of 12 months expected to complete the project.

### **Air Corps**

440. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence the number of vacant air traffic controller posts currently in the Air Corps; and if there are plans to increase the number of air traffic controllers. [17703/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The military authorities have advised that there are currently 10 Air Traffic Controller (ATC) vacancies in the Air Corp.

The Government remains committed to returning to, and maintaining, the agreed strength of each branch of the Defence Forces. In that context, training of ATC's continues with the aim of returning to full establishment. Currently, 4 personnel are undertaking ATC training and intake is planned for a further 3 students, with the induction process due to commence in Q2 2022.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

441. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Defence the total value of expenditure from his Department's annual accounts in 2019, 2020 and 2021, in tabular form, that related to financial transactions with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; and if he will provide a breakdown of the nature of expenditure. [17867/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland's relationship with NATO is set within the framework of Partnership for Peace (PfP), which we have been a member of since 1999. Over the last two decades, Ireland's participation in PfP has been of significant importance in the development of the peacekeeping capabilities of our Defence Forces and their interoperability with other potential peacekeeping contributing nations. This has allowed the Defence Forces to operate seamlessly alongside other countries on UN peacekeeping operations and other crisis management missions overseas.

There is no membership fee associated with PfP. Costs detailed below relate to Defence Forces attendance at training and other activities that ensure that the Defence Forces can operate safely and effectively in crisis management operations and for some services, including secure comms and Role 2 medical facilities in KFOR.



The total value of expenditure from the Department of Defence to NATO institutions in 2019, 2020 and 2021 is as follows:

SUPPLIER - NATO INSTI- TUTION	2019	2020	2021	TOTAL
NATO COOP- ERATIVE CY- BER DEFENCE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE	0	0	500	500
NATO MARI- TIME INTER- DICTION OP- ERATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE	0	0	11,000	11,000
NATO SCHOOL OBERAM- MERGAU SHAPE	7,800	24,400	18,850	51,050
BICES GROUP EXECUTIVE	164,935	125,393	142,651	432,979
NATO SUP- PORT AGEN- CY for Role 2 Medical Facili- ties for person- nel deployed in KFOR	206	0	6,003	6,209
TOTALS	172,941	149,793	179,005	501,739

The above costs do not include reimbursement to the Department of Foreign Affairs for office and accommodation costs in respect of the PfP Liaison Office in Brussels.

### Traffic Management

442. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Defence if he will liaise with officials in his Department regarding granting access to a location for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18178/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In light of the reported concerns of An Garda Síochána in relation to potential impacts on traffic management arising from the intended building works, I have instructed my officials to engage further with the requestor to ascertain how best this matter can be resolved.

### Flexible Work Practices

443. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Defence the current policy with respect

to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18161/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, my Department, in line with other civil and public service organisations, has adhered to public health advice and to the Guidance for Public Service Employers published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This has meant employees working from home, but also attending the workplace to carry out essential work that cannot be discharged from home.

A central government policy, the Civil Service Blended Working Framework was launched by Minister Michael McGrath and Minister Ossian Smyth on 31st March 2022. The Blended Working Policy Framework provides an overarching framework to inform the development of blended working policies in government departments and offices and to ensure a consistency of approach across the Public Service. My Department is currently reviewing this framework with a view to finalising a Blended Working Policy tailored to the specific business needs of my Department.

This policy is expected to be in place no later than the end of June 2022.

*Question No. 444 answered with Question No. 435.*

### Departmental Contracts

445. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18901/22]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The table below provides details of consultancy services engaged by my Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; the reason for each consultancy, the name of the provider of the consultancy service and the cost incurred.

Year	Provider of Consultancy Service	Purpose of Consultancy	Amount
2020	Col EV Campion	To provide expert advice to the Army Equitation School's Horse Purchase Board	€5,000
2020	Vedette Consulting	To provide expert advice on the Feasibility of the Establishment of a Research, Technology & Innovation (RTI) Capability for the Irish Defence Organisation	€30,012
2020	Marman & Associates Ltd	Watercraft Safety Consultancy in relation to Passenger Boat Licences in Civil Defence Units in various Local Authorities across the country.	€5,040

Year	Provider of Consultancy Service	Purpose of Consultancy	Amount
2020	Padraig Love	Review of recruitment practices and processes in the PDF: project arising out of the 2019 Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force	€17,700
2020	John O’Hehir Consulting Ltd	Embedding Workforce Planning in the PDF: project arising out of the 2019 Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force	€69,246.38
2020	Iron Mountain	File decant project carried out in late 2020	€50,825.47
2020	Info Security Assur Services Ltd T/A Isas	ICT Security Advice	€44,135.48
2020	Anthony Kerr SC	Professional legal opinion under direct access.	€7,032.50
2020	Bewell Management Ltd T/A ID Doctor	Medical	€480
2020	David P Moore Orthopedic Surgeon	Medical	€356
2020	Dublin Audiology Ltd	Medical	€1,216
2020	Michael P Colreavy	Medical	€3,456
2020	Veronica O’Keane	Medical	€1,280
2021	Marman & Associates Ltd	Watercraft Safety Consultancy in relation to Passenger Boat Licences in Civil Defence Units in 13 Local Authorities across the country.	€14,400
2021	Survey Drones Ireland	UAS (Drones) Consultancy: Advice on the implications of EU/EASA Regulations (EU) 2019/945 and (EU) 2019/947 and how these regulations may impact the responsibilities of Civil Defence at a national and local authority level.	€3,198
2021	Padraig Love	Review of recruitment practices and processes in the PDF: project arising out of the 2019 Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force	€25,200

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Year	Provider of Consultancy Service	Purpose of Consultancy	Amount
2021	John O’Hehir Consultancy Ltd	Embedding Workforce Planning in the PDF: project arising out of the 2019 Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on Recruitment and Retention in the Permanent Defence Force	€34,629.97
2021	The Circa Group	Feasibility Study regarding proposed Institute for Peace Support & Leadership: project arising out of the 2015 White Paper on Defence	€7,405.20
2021	Col EV Campion	To provide expert advice to the Army Equitation School’s Horse Purchase Board	€5,000
2021	Quadra Ltd	Covid-19 risk assessments for Department offices in 2020 and 2021 and the provision of online ergonomic assessments home workstations.	€26,783.09
2021	Storm Technology Ltd	IT consultancy services	€79,886.04
2021	Iron Mountain	File decant project carried out in late 2020	€18,810.29
2021	Info Security Assur Services Ltd T/A Isas	ICT SECURITY	€78,540.60
2021	KPMG	ICT TARGET STATE ARCHITECTURE REPORTING	€69,187.50
2021	Dr Aoife Hunt T/A IUSMEDICUS LTD	Medical	€800
2021	Dr Mike Scully	Medical	€3,520
2021	Dr Patricia Walsh	Medical	€2,400
2021	Michael P Colreavy	Medical	€5,184
2021	Anthony Kerr SC	Professional legal opinion under direct access.	€8,241
2022	Altea Aerospace	MATS – Short term Contingent arrangements	€15,150
2022	Marman & Associates Ltd	Watercraft Safety Consultancy in relation to Passenger Boat Licences in Civil Defence Units in various Local Authorities across the country.	€4,320
2022	John O’Hehir Consulting Ltd	PDF Strategic Workforce Plan 2020-2035	€25,368.75
2022	Info Security Assur Services Ltd T/A Isas	ICT SECURITY	€8,575.56

Year	Provider of Consultancy Service	Purpose of Consultancy	Amount
2022	Storm Technology Ltd	IT consultancy services	€24,354
2022	Anthony Kerr SC	Professional legal opinion under direct access.	€615
2022	Dublin Audiology Ltd	Medical	€800
2022	Dr Milke Scully	Medical	€1,100
2022	Dr Patricia Walsh	Medical	€2,000

### School Transport

446. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education if funding will be approved for transport for a student (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18210/22]

**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 121,400 children, including over 15,500 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 €289m in 2021.

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers.

The pupil referred to by the Deputy has been deemed eligible under the terms of the scheme. Bus Éireann has advised that the pupil had been availing of a school transport service up to the end of the 2019/20 school year, when Bus Éireann were advised by family that the pupil would no longer require a transport service and therefore a ticket was not issued for the 2020/21 school year.

This pupil has been approved for transport to this school for the 2022/23 school year. Bus Éireann's local office will liaise with the school authorities to ascertain if a school transport ticket is required for this pupil for the remainder of the 2021/22 school year and if a ticket is required, a ticket will be issued to this pupil. A school transport ticket will also be arranged to be issued to this pupil in the 2022/23 school year in the Summer of 2022 if required.

### Departmental Schemes

447. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education if there are grounds for an appeal by a person (details supplied) to be included in the redress scheme for persons who were sexually and physically abused in Catholic schools in view of the fact that the original appeal was refused on the grounds that legal proceedings had not been brought against the State before 1 July 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18320/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** A revised ex gratia scheme to implement the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgment in *O'Keeffe v Ireland*, which

concerned sexual abuse in day schools, is open for applications. This scheme, which was developed in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, provides for ex gratia payments to be made to those who are eligible to apply and 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. The revised scheme opened for applications on 21 July 2021.

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'Keefe 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 legal 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.

### **Special Educational Needs**

448. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education her views on a policy issue raised by persons regarding the new proposed frontloading model for deployment of special needs assistant resources (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17412/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource. The deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management of the school. SNAs should be deployed in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school. It should be noted that not every student with a special educational need requires SNA support.

Where a school considers that it requires additional SNA support to meet the needs of its students, it can seek a review from the NCSE.

### **School Patronage**

449. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education if she will clarify the ownership of a school property (details supplied); if it is not in the ownership of her Department, if she will provide details of the owners and all monies paid by her Department to the owners since the lease commenced; if her Department has plans for this property; if she will provide details of discussions it has had regarding its future; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[17420/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership as Minister for Education.

In respect of the other matters raised by the Deputy my officials will be in contact with the Deputy's office in the coming days.

### School Transport

450. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education if she will address the issue of rising fuel costs for the providers of school transport; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17425/22]

**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 121,400 children, including over 15,500 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 €289m in 2021.

The purpose of the 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.

The Department of Education is considering in consultation with other relevant departments and Bus Éireann the implications that increasing fuel costs may have on the provision of school transport services. The Department is also very aware of the potential impact of the current situation unfolding in Ukraine which is impacting fuel prices further.

Government has announced a reduction in excise on fuel will result in a decrease in the cost of fuel. The reduction of 20 cent per litre on petrol and 15 cent per litre on diesel will be in place until 31 August at an estimated cost of €320m. This is a national measure aimed at easing the financial burden on contractors and families at this time.

### Educational Disadvantage

451. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education if she plans to allow more schools to obtain DEIS status further to her recent announcement. [17427/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I announced on 9 March, 2022 the expansion of the DEIS programme benefitting 347 schools. These schools were identified as having the highest levels of educational disadvantage. In the 2022/23 academic year there will be 1,194 schools in the DEIS Programme - 960 Primary and 234 Post Primary. This will also mean a €32million increase in my Department's expenditure on DEIS programme from 2023. This is the largest ever single investment in the programme and will extend DEIS status to schools serving the highest proportions of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage.

This announcement follows an extensive body of work by the DEIS technical group to develop the refined DEIS identification model to identify the concentrated levels of disadvantage of schools. Schools were identified for inclusion in the programme through the refined DEIS identification model which is an objective, statistics based model which uses information from the Department of Education enrolment databases and the Pobal HP Deprivation index. The

DEIS identification model now takes into consideration the significant educational disadvantage experienced by Traveller and Roma learners and by students residing in direct provision or emergency homeless accommodation. Schools were not required to apply for inclusion in the DEIS programme and the model has been applied fairly and equally to all schools.

As outlined on the information issued at the time of the announcement, there is an appeals process. Schools will have an opportunity to have that decision reviewed. Details of how to make an appeal are on my Department's website: [www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/](http://www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/)

### **School Enrolments**

452. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education if her Department has plans to provide a second level school in Duleek, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17444/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy, that in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, including Child Benefit 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.

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, the Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date information on significant new residential development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes.

The most recent analysis undertaken by my Department projects that over 76% of the 314 school planning areas at primary level have stable or decreasing projected enrolments for the period to 2025, whereas some 88% of the school planning areas at post-primary level are anticipated to have increased enrolments for the period to 2028, with most expected to reach a peak in the next two or three years. Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, be provided through:

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

Duleek is located in the Drogheda School Planning Area, the most recent projections indicate a slight increase in requirements at post primary level up to 2023 followed by a projected reduction in enrolments thereafter.

The requirement for additional school places is kept under on-going review in the context of available information on population, enrolments and residential development activity. Additionally, the Department will continue to liaise with Meath & Louth County Councils in respect of their County Development Plans and any associated Local Area Plans with a view to identifying any potential long-term school accommodation requirements across the counties.



## School Admissions

453. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education if there is a service or hotline operated by her Department for Ukrainian families or for those hosting Ukrainian families to assist with school places for children arriving into Ireland. [17485/22]

454. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education if there is no service or hotline operated by her Department to assist with school places for children arriving into Ireland, if she will establish such a service to direct families to. [17486/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 453 and 454 together.

Families from Ukraine arriving in Ireland are provided with information on point of entry on children's right to education and how to find a school place. Information is being kept up to date on [www.gov.ie/Ukraine](http://www.gov.ie/Ukraine) in English, Ukrainian and Russian. Children aged between 4 and 18 will be supported to access public primary or post-primary education.

Guidance has issued to schools on supporting students from Ukraine that enquire about enrolling. Where children of school-going age have arrived and require access to the school system, schools that have capacity locally will welcome those children in the usual way. The information provided to schools informed them on how to respond if they don't have capacity in their school, so that we can make accessing a school as easy as possible for these families.

My Department has set up a helpline and email address for Principals of schools where there is additional demand for places, details of which have been communicated to schools.

My Department has also established Regional Education and Language Teams (REALT) to support the needs of children from Ukraine arriving in Ireland. These teams will be hosted by the 16 regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and will be staffed by existing regionally-based education support personnel working closely together to ensure good coordination and alignment of supports for children from Ukraine.

The REALT will support existing services and co-ordinate the following work areas:

- Align current school capacity with the placement of Ukrainian families, as much as possible.

- Identify additional capacity within their geographic areas to prepare for situations where demand may exceed available school capacity, and work with the Department and other organisations as necessary with a view to making this additional capacity available.

- Assist schools and families with accessing information on school places for children from Ukraine who have moved into the area.

- Assist schools and families with accessing resources and supports for additional capacity, wellbeing, language and educational needs.

- Assist with work in the area of staff supply, including where required, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutors who would assist with the English language needs of Ukrainian children, young people and their parents/guardians.

- Liaison with other local co-ordinating structures that may be established to coordinate the delivery of public services for families from Ukraine, including Community Response Fora.

*Question No. 454 answered with Question No. 453.*

## School Equipment

455. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education the number of primary and secondary schools in the Dublin region that have had renewable energy equipment installed in the past ten years; the number that have applied for funding; the amount of electricity being generated; the overall cost of installation; and the value of the grant availed of. [17494/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department is at the forefront of design with respect to sustainable energy in school buildings and this performance has been recognised at both National and International level with sustainable energy awards for excellence in Design and Specification.

New renewable technologies and approaches are tested to ensure compatibility with school design and operational requirements under the research programme. Successful and repeatable results are then incorporated into all new school designs and refurbishments through my Department's Technical Guidance Documents, which set the benchmark for sustainable design in school buildings with a clear focus on energy efficiency. The Department's policy is supported by a strong research programme with fifty three research projects at various stages including the energy website [www.energyineducation.ie](http://www.energyineducation.ie). which is a joint partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

Schools designed and built in accordance with the Department's schools technical guidance documents have been achieving A3 Building Energy Ratings since 2009 with schools typically achieving up to 20% higher performance than required by the current Building Regulations, along with 10% of primary energy provided via photovoltaics and infrastructure provision for electric vehicle charging.

These new schools include:

- A3 BER standard
- Fully evaluated natural ventilation strategy to all spaces
- 20% higher energy performance and 25% better carbon performance than required by the 2019 Building Regulations even though it was designed pre 2019
- 10% of primary energy provided via photovoltaics
- Provision to enable Energy Supply Companies (ESCO's) to sell renewable biomass heat to the school under the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH), as the heat as a service area matures in Ireland. SSRH is a government funded initiative designed to increase the energy generated from renewable sources in the heat sector.
- A system that automatically shuts down power to nonessential electrical power outlets when the school is closed (eliminating energy use out of hours)
- Infrastructure provision for electric vehicle charging
- Rainwater harvesting
- CO2 monitors
- Excellent daylight
- Internal and external LED lighting

- Variable speed pumping
- Building Management System control of energy including energy metering
- Zone and individual room heating control
- Educational signage draws attention to environmental aspects of design
- Support will be offered to the school in terms of understanding energy usage and optimising controls.

The A3 BER in schools is achieved using a hybrid approach of:

- Maximising nature through passive solar design, quality daylighting and quality ventilation.

- Enhanced technologies including LED lighting and controls with daylight and absence detection, digital individual room heating controls, maximum water efficiency and rainwater harvesting systems, high quality air tightness and photovoltaic panels to produce an electrical renewable energy.

- Schools have a system that automatically shuts down power to nonessential electrical power outlets when a school is closed (eliminating energy use out of hours).

In the interest of sustainability, the potential of renewables is maximised in school design, whilst ensuring that renewable applications are properly suited to needs and reflective of school opening hours and school holiday periods. It is also critical that an energy reduction plan is part of any investment in renewable energy applications.

The Department's approach is also based on future proofing to ensure school buildings are renewable compatible and are able to take advantage of developing technologies as they become viable, thus enabling a just transition for school management, teachers, pupils and parents to include:

- Direct modulating high efficiency gas boiler systems that can support the integration of heat pump systems, in series at a base level, with controls.

- Optimum envelope fabric that will not require additional enhancement for compatibility with decarbonised heating systems, (note further enhancement of the external building fabric will result in overheating in Spring and Autumn, requiring air conditioning).

- Low water content radiators and operating temperatures for compatibility with decarbonised heating systems.

- Provision to enable Energy Supply Companies (ESCO's) to sell renewable heat to schools using biomass boilers, with provision for the ESCO to provide, operate and maintain the boiler plant system and maximise the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat.

The Department have been using test schools to evaluate the suitability of renewable energy options for schools over the past twenty plus years. Nearly 60 % of the research programme features renewable aspects. These renewables include wind generation, solar hot water heating, photovoltaics, rain water recovery, geothermal heat pumps, air source heat pumps and biomass heating systems. Results have varied with respect to their applicability in a school environment. Research continues in many areas.

My Department and the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications estab-

lished a jointly funded pathfinder programme with the SEAI, testing and demonstrating energy efficiency and decarbonisation retrofit approaches. This pathfinder is a great example of collaboration ensuring the deployment of new design approaches and technologies are introduced to the educational environment on an evidence based approach.

This Pathfinder programme is paving the way for, and informing, a much larger national schools' programme for the energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008 as included in the National Development Plan. It is facilitating research on a range of typical retrofit options, which will have been tried and tested. It is providing valuable development information for a solution driven delivery strategy which will be founded on a solid evidence base that has proven the robustness and scalability of renewable solutions within the schools' sector.

The Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland are involved in an energy efficient retrofit pathfinder scheme for schools since 2017. The longer-term outcome of the pathfinder will be to create an accurate and scalable model for energy efficient retrofits of schools across Ireland. A deep energy retrofit programme for schools built prior to 2008 is due to be rolled out as included in the National Development Plan.

The pathfinder programme has retrofitted 41 schools across Ireland to date with work on an additional 9 schools added in 2021 underway. 2022 sees six additional schools undergoing deep retrofit to a Building Energy Rating (BER) of B with renewable heating systems. Each school undergoes a comprehensive assessment to ensure that the measures are suitable for that school and will deliver value to both the school and learnings for the national retrofit programme.

The pathfinder programme builds on significant investment by the Department of Education in energy efficiency through the 2009/10 Cavity and Attic Insulation/Water Conservation Scheme and ongoing Summer Works and refurbishment projects.

The schools for the 2022 programme are:

- Ennis Community College
- Bishopstown Community School
- St Marys Secondary School Killester
- Our Lady of Consolation Killester
- Scoil Mhuire NS Abbeylax
- St Annes Primary school, Tallaght

The upgrades target a Building Energy Rating of B, 50% energy efficiency improvement and 51% emissions reduction. The works typically involves upgrades to the building fabric including wall and roof insulation, doors and windows, air tightness improvements, LED lighting and heating upgrades as well as renewable technologies.

The Department recognises that transition to full decarbonisation raises the bar even higher in terms of requirements with feedback from our pathfinder projects as noted above indicating a greater depth of challenges at a significantly enhanced cost for primary and post primary schools.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 Annex of Actions published in January this year actions the Department to confirm its decarbonisation pathway trajectory to meet 2030 and 2050 targets for the schools sector by end of 2022.

Work is ongoing on decarbonisation options for new schools with a focus on the standard of required design criteria and specification to achieve a net zero energy school building and establishing the trajectory for the integration of suitable solutions on a phased basis in a risk controlled manner providing a credible cost effective transition to zero carbon school buildings while ensuring no delays to school accommodation delivery.

Under Project Ireland 2040, the education sector will receive a total of approximately €4.4 billion capital investment over the period 2021-2025. This significant investment allows us to move forward with certainty on our ambitious plans and deliver high quality building projects, with a real focus on sustainability, for school communities across Ireland. This investment will also build on the good progress being made on adding capacity to cater for demographic changes and provision for children with special educational needs. This investment will also facilitate an increased focus on the modernisation of existing school stock and help transition the school system for an era of net zero carbon by 2050.

The total budget for the Pathfinder programme of works from 2017 - 2022 is €78m.

### **Schools Building Projects**

456. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education the status of a building project (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17579/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** As the Deputy is aware, this project has been devolved for delivery to Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB).

I can confirm that the Design Team to deliver this project was appointed by WWETB in April 2021. The Design Team is now preparing the Stage 1 report (preliminary design), which the Department expects to be submitted in Q2 2022.

While at this early stage it is not possible to provide a timeline for completion of the project, WWETB will be engaging directly with the school authority to keep it informed of progress.

### **Special Educational Needs**

457. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the criteria for the allocation of SNAs under the new front-loaded model. [17591/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource. The deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management of the school. SNAs should be deployed in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school. It should be noted that not every student with a special educational need requires SNA support.

Where a school considers that it requires additional SNA support to meet the needs of its students, it can seek a review from the NCSE.

### **Public Sector Staff**

458. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in her Department and in agencies and public bodies within her area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to 12 and over 12 months, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17595/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** There are no staff at my Department or the bodies under the aegis of my Department absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes.

### **School Admissions**

459. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education if she has received correspondence from a school (details supplied) in County Cork with regard to assistance in respect of the school's response to the Ukrainian crisis; if she will be in a position to facilitate its request in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17618/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can advise the Deputy that I have received the correspondence referred to. My officials have recently responded directly to the school in question, thanking them for their efforts to assist those affected by the war in Ukraine, and advising on the appropriate steps to take in relation to their request.

### **School Equipment**

460. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education if her Department will examine the installation of domestic type solar PV in schools (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17635/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department is at the forefront of design with respect to sustainable energy in school buildings and this performance has been recognised at both National and International level with sustainable energy awards for excellence in Design and Specification.

Schools that are designed and built in accordance with the Departments Schools technical guidance documents must achieve an A3 Building Energy Rating A3 and have typically up to 20% higher performance than required by the current Building Regulations, along with 10% of primary energy provided via photovoltaics and infrastructure provision for electric vehicle charging.

All new technologies and approaches are tested to ensure compatibility with school design and operational requirements. Successful and repeatable results are then incorporated into all new school designs and refurbishments.

My Department's Technical Guidance Documents set the benchmark for sustainable design in school buildings with a clear focus on energy efficiency and they are based on solid energy research projects.

The Departments policy is supported by a strong research programme with forty eight research projects at various stages including its joint SEAI partnership energy website project

www.energyineducation.ie.

Solar PV is also funded for schools that are having their electrical installations replaced.

Under Project Ireland 2040, the education sector will receive a total of approximately €4.4 billion capital investment over the period 2021-2025. This significant investment allows us to move forward with certainty on our ambitious plans and deliver high quality building projects, with a real focus on sustainability, for school communities across Ireland. This investment will also build on the good progress being made on adding capacity to cater for demographic changes and provision for children with special educational needs. This investment will also facilitate an increased focus on the modernisation of existing school stock and help transition the school system for an era of net zero carbon by 2050.

My Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland are involved in an energy efficient retrofit pathfinder scheme for schools since 2017.

This Pathfinder programme is paving the way for, and informing, a much larger national schools' programme for the energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008 as included in the National Development Plan. It is facilitating research on a range of typical retrofit options, which will have been tried and tested. It is providing valuable development information for a solution driven delivery strategy which will be founded on a solid evidence base that has proven the robustness and scalability of renewable solutions within the schools' sector.

The longer-term outcome of the pathfinder will be to create an accurate and scalable model for energy efficient retrofits of schools across Ireland which will include solar PV. The deep energy retrofit programme for schools built prior to 2008 is due to be rolled out as included in the National Development Plan.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 Annex of Actions published this year includes for the introduction of interim regulations amending solar panel planning exemptions, with defined exclusion zones around airports and aerodromes for solar installations in Q1 2022 and once published will be considered by my Department.

### **State Examinations**

461. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to a request by an organisation (details supplied) that reasonable accommodations be made at State examinations for a particular provision for students with epilepsy; if examination candidates who suffered a seizure will be given the opportunity to re-sit any impacted examinations within the same examination cycle and within the same academic year; her views on whether students who suffered a seizure will have an unfair disadvantage in respect of other candidates in the same examination cycle; if she has discussed this matter with the State Examinations Commission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17638/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your question to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **School Facilities**

462. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Education when she intends to begin the development of sports halls in existing schools in cases in which such schools have no indoor sports facilities or very limited facilities. [17656/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the main focus of resources over the last decade and for the coming period is on provision of additional capacity to cater for increasing demographics particularly at post-primary level and for special education needs provision. The Deputy will appreciate that the immediate priority of my Department is providing new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place.

However, the latter part of the National Development Plan will see an increasing focus on the upgrade and refurbishment of the existing school stock. This will include a PE Hall build and modernisation programme to ensure that students in all post-primary schools have access to appropriate facilities to support PE provision. The ancillary accommodation needs of primary schools, such as General Purpose rooms will also be considered in this context.

### **Special Educational Needs**

463. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education the level of demand for places in special classes at post-primary level in Dublin by children with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum; the number of places in special classes that are currently available; the number of pupils who require such places based on information available to her Department and the National Council for Special Education from primary school principals; and the action her Department will take to address a dramatic shortfall in such places for children with autism. [17673/22]

**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.

This year, my Department will spend in excess of €2 Billion, or over 25% of the Department's budget on providing a wide range of schemes and supports for children with special educational needs.

This includes additional teaching and care supports.

As a result, the number of special education teachers, special needs assistants and special class and school places are at unprecedented levels.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children with special educational needs nationwide.

Over the last two years, my Department and the NCSE have worked closely on a more streamlined and joined up planning process which has ensured a targeted approach to meet demand for special needs placements ahead of each new school-year.

I am satisfied that this more joined up approach is delivering. Through this intensive intervention, we have seen an additional 300 special classes (primary and post-primary), providing 1,800 new places, opened nationwide for the 2021/22 school-year. Budget 2022 also provides for the creation of 287 additional special classes for the 2022/2023 school year. These additional classes will provide over 1,700 new places from September next.



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I also acknowledge that notwithstanding the extent of this investment, there are some parts of the country where increases in population and other issues have led to concerns regarding a shortage of school places.

The NCSE has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents and seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

The NCSE is currently engaging in a process of establishing new classes for the 2022/2023 school year and beyond. Both my Department and the NCSE are always grateful to schools who express a willingness to open a special class to meet the educational needs of students in their local communities. It is of course open to any school to engage with the NCSE to establish a special class.

There are Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) located across the country and they have a specific remit in helping and supporting parents in accessing the education necessary for their children, including in identifying suitable school placements.

The Deputy may be aware that Minister Foley and I recently announced the establishment of a new special school in Cork together with an update on the expansion of existing special class and special school capacity in Cork and Dublin.

In line with the demographics and as part of forward planning, it is envisaged that special classes will be required at most, if not all, post-primary schools.

A range of measures to meet additional SEN capacity demands have already been put in place including the utilisation of spare capacity in existing schools and delivery of additional SEN capacity within the scope of existing building projects.

Additionally, it is general practice to include a SEN Base in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless exceptional local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. The extent of provision made at these schools is informed by the level of demand in the area as well as the size of the school.

My Department, together with the NCSE, is monitoring the availability of places for students with special educational needs throughout the country as a priority issue and will continue to work with relevant stakeholders to ensure a supply of placements coming on stream to meet emerging demand.

I want to reassure the Deputy that my Department will continue to support the NCSE and schools through the provision of the necessary funding and capital investment to ensure all children and young people are successful in accessing an education.

### **State Examinations**

464. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education if the alternative set of leaving certificate examinations planned for 2022 will result in a delay of results for students who wish to take up a place for further study in the academic year 2022-23; if she has engaged with the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science regarding the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17679/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your question to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **School Enrolments**

465. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education if she will provide a breakdown of capacity within schools around the country by county. [17681/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The question of enrolment in individual schools is the responsibility of the managerial authority of those schools. It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018. The enrolment policy of individual schools takes account of the school's own assessment of school capacity which is influenced by each school's own characteristics.

The Department has data on potential capacity and under/over subscription at individual schools from its National Inventory of School Capacity based on schools' annual enrolment returns, and utilises its Geographic Information System to facilitate spatial analysis of this and other data. On a national level, total primary enrolments peaked in 2018 and have been reducing since. The net overall reduction in primary enrolments by 2022/23 was projected to be in the order of 25,000 pupils. At post-primary level, demographics are generally continuing on an upward trend.

Nevertheless, at both primary and post-primary level there are significant variances in available capacity at local and regional level across the country, in both rural and urban areas.

I would also advise the Deputy that where enrolment pressures arise, it may not be as a result of lack of accommodation but may be driven by the following factors:

- Duplication of applications – pupils have applied for a place to a number of schools in the area.

- School of choice – pupils cannot get a place in their preferred school while there are places in other schools in the town/area.

- Some towns/areas have single sex schools and while places are available in the school they are not available to all pupils

- External draw – pupils coming from outside the local area

My Department proactively engages with relevant school authorities to establish the true extent of enrolment pressures. Similar to the process adopted in advance of the current academic year, my Department is engaging with patron bodies to identify particular capacity requirements for the forthcoming years which may necessitate further action to that already in train.

### **School Inspections**

466. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the number of incidental inspections which have taken place in schools in January, February and to date in March 2022. [17682/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** A total of 536 incidental inspections were

conducted by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education in schools from January to 28 March 2022, as follows:

- Primary and Special Schools: January -7 inspections; February -137 inspections; March to date -175 inspections

- Post-primary schools: January - 4 inspections; February - 96 inspections; March to date - 117 inspections.

### **Special Educational Needs**

467. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the estimated cost of increasing the current special needs assistant allocation by 10%. [17683/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government.

The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants are at unprecedented levels.

The State currently spends in excess of 25% of its annual education and training budget (€9.2 Billion) on making additional provision for children with special educational needs.

This represents an increase of over 60% in total expenditure since 2011, at which point €1.247 Billion per annum was provided.

Budget 2022 provides funding for an additional 1,165 SNAs (in 2022) to provide support to children with special educational needs, which will bring the total number of SNAs available for allocation to 19,169 at the end of December 2022.

Provision for 19,169 SNAs as at 31 December 2022 will represent an increase of 81% since 2011 at which time 10,575 were provided.

The pay at entry of a new entrant SNA, inclusive of employer PRSI, is €30,001 so the estimated cost of increasing the current SNA allocation by an additional 10% would be €57,508,916.

### **National Educational Psychological Service**

468. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the number of schools that have requested training on trauma-informed practices in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and the number of schools that received this training from a psychologist to date. [17684/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** NEPS recognises the importance of whole-school, compassionate and trauma-informed approaches in building safe and connected schools and trauma informed practice is part of the normal day to day work of the educational psychologists. Trauma informed approaches may form part of case work or part of the support and development work and NEPS psychologists work to build teacher capacity in this area. NEPS' Support and Development work involves the provision of applied psychology services for teachers and school communities to build and maximise their capacity to respond to the needs of all students and those with particular needs. This includes trauma informed education. These professional learning activities may include the provision of training/formal professional learning opportunities including training in the delivery of evidence-informed approaches and

early intervention, and working with school communities to develop supportive school structures and processes. These activities are not recorded in a format that would allow the precise data sought by the Deputy to be reported.

NEPS psychologists have engaged in extensive national training in the area of trauma in recent years to inform their practice and the development of professional learning opportunities for school staff. In order to have a greater reach to schools, NEPS has developed a series of Wellbeing and Resilience in Schools webinars, exploring the use of whole-school, compassionate and trauma-informed approaches to build safe and connected schools drawing on the existing practice of psychologists in this area.

The “Stress Factor” the first webinar in the series for all school staff will be available to all primary and post primary schools after Easter in collaboration with the Education Centre network. Officials in NEPS and in the I.T section of the Department are working to launch this webinar on the new Learning Management System (LMS) of the Department. Once launched numbers of teachers accessing this professional learning programme will be logged and monitored.

### **Schools Building Projects**

469. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education the estimated amount her Department has spent to date on the major refurbishment works being carried out at a school (details supplied). [17704/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The major new school construction project for the school referred to by the Deputy commenced on site in November 2021. Works are progressing satisfactorily with a contract duration of approximately 26 months.

The contract amount is in excess of €12.4m and expenditure to date is in accordance with the conditions of the contract.

### **Special Educational Needs**

470. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education if she plans to provide for specific levels of qualifications for special needs assistants; and her plans for continuous professional development and upskilling for special needs assistants. [17730/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) play a huge role in helping to ensure the inclusion of pupils with significant care needs in education and in school life. This was acknowledged in the Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme (SNAs) published by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in 2018.

The Review made a number of recommendations regarding SNAs including referencing the training needs of SNAs. In this regard, the NCSE recommended that a new national training programme at Level 5 of the National Qualification Framework be developed for existing SNAs who do not have the requisite level of training and for new SNAs on appointment. The NCSE also recommended that training tailored to the specific complex needs of some students being cared for by SNAs would also be provided.

The policy advice has been considered by the Department. It was decided that priority should be given to the development of a training programme for SNAs who may not have had a

recent opportunity to access a training programme tailored to their role. The new first national training course for SNAs provided by UCD now in place aims to enhance the knowledge, skills and expertise of SNAs whose work is central to the inclusion of students with additional care and complex needs in school life. The programme is fully funded by the Department and delivered at no cost to the SNA.

This is the first national training programme for SNAs employed in schools and is tailored to their needs. As this is the first programme, it is appropriate to take the time to review outcomes which will inform the future approach to ongoing training and professional development of SNAs. Part of that consideration will include accreditation.

Raising the minimum qualification for appointment as a special needs assistant has been referred to the Workplace Relations Commission and the Department has been engaging in that process.

The recruitment and appointment of Special Needs Assistants is a matter for the individual school authority and the Department's circular 36/2020 and 51/2019 sets out the current educational requirements for appointment as a Special Needs Assistant (SNA). In addition, the actual requirements for a post will vary depending on the specific needs of the children and the school to which the SNA is to be appointed. The Department does not believe that the existing minimum qualifications has impacted on the calibre of person appointed and it is also the case that people with experience and/or higher qualifications than the minimum are often the successful candidate in competitions held by schools.

However, having considered the claim and, in particular, the period of time since they were set, the Department is open to reviewing the position. The Department is not yet in a position to indicate when that review might take place but is of the view that the forthcoming review of the SNA contract proposed as part of the Building Momentum national pay agreement should be carried out and implemented first.

The Department is satisfied that the approach outlined fully recognises the important place of SNAs in our schools. The forthcoming review of the SNA contract along with the new training programme for SNAs that is now in place will help to enhance the experience of children with special needs in our schools.

### **State Examinations**

471. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the total cost incurred each year by her Department for the running of the leaving certificate helpline in 2020 and in 2021. [17749/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department provided €12,000 in 2020 and €20,000 in 2021 towards the running of the Leaving Certificate Helpline.

### **Schools Building Projects**

472. **Deputy Emer Higgins** asked the Minister for Education the commencement date for phase two of a school development (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17818/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The school to which the deputy refers

received approval for a School Development Phase 2 in May 2020 under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2020. This approval allows for the construction of 10 Mainstream Classrooms (prefab replacement), 3 SET Rooms, 2 Classroom SEN Base, 1 AU WC, 1 Staff Toilet plus ancillary accommodation.

The school authorities submitted a pre-stage 1 report in August 2021 and after its review a meeting between the school authorities, the project's Design Team and Department staff was held in October 2021. An email issued to school authorities following this meeting with outcomes and action points and follow-on work is ongoing between the school and its Design Team.

The project currently lies with the school authorities for progression.

### **State Examinations**

473. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the definition of State Examinations Commission externally moderated, school-based assessment entails in the context of senior cycle reform; if teachers will be required to grade their students; and the details of the State Examinations Commission moderation will entail. [17825/22]

474. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education if an algorithm will be used by the State Examinations Commission to moderate teachers' marking of continuous assessment components in the context of senior cycle reform. [17826/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 473 and 474 together.

As the deputy is aware, on March 29th I announced an ambitious programme of work for a reimagined Senior Cycle of education where the student is at the centre of their Senior Cycle experience. The three tenets of Senior Cycle reform are to:

- Empower students to meet the challenges of the 21st century
- Enrich the student experience and build on what's strong in our current system
- Embed wellbeing and reduce student stress levels

I have asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) together with the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to jointly research and explore how an SEC externally-moderated, teacher-based form of assessment could be possible within the mix of approaches used to assess each subject. This assessment component will have a weighting of 40% of the total marks available.

International research and practice have demonstrated that there is a variety of approaches to the internal and external moderation of teacher-based assessment that warrant in-depth consideration. The NCCA and SEC work in this area will include extensive engagement with teachers and other stakeholders and will rely on the use of network schools to progress this aspect of Senior Cycle development.

In the programme of work ahead we will move to a model that uses other forms of assessment beyond terminal written examinations, over a less concentrated time period, in line with international best practice. It will enable us to maintain the high standards and quality that we need to continue to achieve in our schools to serve our students well. It is vital that the form of assessment we use both reflects excellence in standards and truly enables all students to show-

case their abilities.

*Question 474 answered with Question No. 473.*

### **Educational Reform**

475. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the way that schools will be chosen to act as network schools for the purposes of senior cycle reform; and if schools will be invited on a mandatory or voluntary basis. [17827/22]

476. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education the assurances that will be given to network schools that their students who are taking part in the initial trial of the senior cycle reforms will not be negatively impacted in terms of their grades and access to third-level in comparison to their peers in non-network schools. [17828/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 475 and 476 together.

As the deputy is aware, on March 29th I announced an ambitious programme of work for a reimagined Senior Cycle of education where the student is at the centre of their Senior Cycle experience. The three tenets of Senior Cycle reform are to:

- Empower students to meet the challenges of the 21st century
- Enrich the student experience and build on what's strong in our current system
- Embed wellbeing and reduce student stress levels

Introducing significant change at Senior Cycle needs to be thought through carefully and it is essential to ensure that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), State Examinations Commission (SEC), the Department and schools can work through the changes with all stakeholders over a sustained period of time.

I have requested the NCCA to invite a selection of schools, representative of the different types and sizes of schools across Ireland, to become "network schools". In order to successfully deliver on the vision I have set out, we need to partner with schools to trial, evaluate, learn, adjust and succeed.

Network schools will be given the opportunity to participate at an early stage in revised curriculum and assessment arrangements. These schools will receive support through a variety of forms to enable their participation. The network school approach will allow the curriculum and assessment arrangements to be co-constructed with students and their teachers allowing specific aspects of these proposals to be progressed and evaluated.

It will be important to carefully manage this work so that students in these schools, or in other schools, would not be disadvantaged in any way and this will be an important consideration during the delivery phase of the reforms I have announced.

*Question No. 476 answered with Question No. 475.*

### **Special Educational Needs**

477. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Education the expected timeframe

for the implementation of the new front-loaded special needs assistant, SNA, model detailing the delays; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17868/22]

478. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Education the status of the roll-out of the front-loaded allocation model; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17869/22]

479. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Education the steps she is taking to ensure the equal distribution of special needs assistants across the school system, including new and developing schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17870/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 477 to 479, inclusive, together.

In light of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the new Frontloaded Allocation Model for SNAs for students in mainstream classes in primary and post-primary schools was deferred for a further year to the beginning of the 2022/23 school year.

All mainstream schools, regardless of their classification are treated in an equitable and fair way in relation to SNA provision. The criteria for allocations are outlined in Department circulars issued each year

In the case of **New and Developing schools**, the following is the position

- Existing mainstream class (including New and Developing schools) SNA allocations as at 30 April 2021 were maintained and automatically rolled over into the 2021/22 school year.

- SNAs currently in these settings can continue in post for the 2021/22 school year.

- Priority consideration was given by the NCSE to applications for increased support for the 2021/22 school year. In particular, applications from Developing schools were prioritised.

- Where a school's circumstances change during the course of a school year that materially increase the level of care need in a school, the school may apply to the NCSE for a review. Increased enrolments could such a circumstance.

Work is ongoing in terms of the SNA allocation for the school year 2022/2023 and consultation with the education partners will form a key component and details will be announced in the near future.

*Question No. 478 answered with Question No. 477.*

*Question No. 479 answered with Question No. 477.*

### **Departmental Consultations**

480. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education if she has considered a request by an organisation (details supplied) for six exceptional primary school closures per annum to facilitate training following her meeting with this group on 3 November 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17914/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The quality of our teaching profession is a critical factor in sustaining and enhancing the quality of education outcomes. My Department promotes the quality of teaching and learning through the provision of continuing professional development and supports for teachers and principals.



My Department ensures that a range of high-quality models of CPD is provided to teachers and school leaders through its support services, (such as the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT)), the national network of Education Centres and appropriate groups, bodies and institutions who are empowered to design, develop and deliver CPD programmes. It is important also to ensure that valuable teacher student contact time is protected.

Under the terms of the Public Sector Agreement 2010-2014 (The “Croke Park Agreement”) teachers were required to work additional hours (the “Croke Park hours” - 33 Post Primary/36 Primary). A central purpose of these hours is to provide for certain essential activities, including CPD, without reducing tuition time and closing schools. The use and timing of these hours was set out in Circular 0025/2011.

It is the responsibility of school management to identify, agree, and assign the usage of the Croke Park hours based on the needs of their individual school. It is expected there will be consultation at the school level on the use of the hours, but ultimately that is a decision for school management.

The school may consider facilitating the training using their Croke Park Hours in separate blocks, one before the end of this school year and the other early in the 2022/23 school year. This may allow the school to use their Croke Park hours to complete the CPD programme while not impacting on planning and meetings.

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) recognises the importance of whole-school, compassionate and trauma-informed approaches in building safe and connected schools and trauma informed practice is part of the normal day to day work of the educational psychologists. Trauma informed approaches may form part of case work or part of the support and development work and NEPS psychologists work to build teacher capacity in this area. NEPS’ Support and Development work involves the provision of applied psychology services for teachers and school communities to build and maximise their capacity to respond to the needs of all students and those with particular needs. This includes trauma informed education. These professional learning activities may include the provision of training/formal professional learning opportunities including training in the delivery of evidence-informed approaches and early intervention, and working with school communities to develop supportive school structures and processes.

NEPS has developed a series of Wellbeing and Resilience in Schools webinars, exploring the use of whole-school, compassionate and trauma-informed approaches to build safe and connected schools drawing on the existing practice of psychologists in this area. The “Stress Factor” the first webinar in the series for all school staff will be available to all primary and post primary schools after Easter in collaboration with the Education Centre network.

## School Inspections

481. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education when a whole-school evaluation of a school (details supplied), which took place in February 2022, will be made available to the school community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17944/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I can confirm that the in-school phase of the Whole-School Evaluation (WSE-MLL) has been completed in the named school. While it is not possible to give a definitive date for the publication of the report, the remaining stages that have to be completed before publication include the factual verification stage (this is where the

school is given an opportunity to highlight anyfactual inaccuracies in the report) and the school response stage (when the management of the school to is invited to provide a response to the report which will be published along with the final report). The report will be published on the Department's website when these stages are completed.

### **School Enrolments**

482. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 90 of 23 March 2022, if she will provide a list of existing and growing post primary schools in Sallynoggin, Killiney, Dún Laoighre Rathdown and Cherrywood school planning area and their patronage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17945/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** As the Deputy may be aware for school planning purposes, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and utilises a Geographical Information System (GIS) to anticipate school place demand. Information from a range of sources, including Child Benefit data, school enrolment data and information on residential development activity is used for this purpose.

My Department is aware of increasing pressures and demand for additional school places in a number of school planning areas including Dun Laoighre and Sallynooggin\_Killiney\_DLR

However, it is important to note that where enrolment pressures arise, it may not be as a result of lack of accommodation but may be driven by the following factors:

- Duplication of applications – pupils have applied for a place to a number of schools in the area.
- School of choice – pupils can't get a place in their preferred school while there are places in other schools in the town/area.
- Some towns/areas have single sex schools and while places are available in the school they are not available to all pupils.
- External draw – pupils coming from outside the local area.

My Department is working to establish the true extent of any capacity issues through on-going discussions with the relevant school authorities. In that context, similar to the process adopted in advance of the current academic year, my Department is engaging with patron bodies, including patrons of schools in Dun Laoighre and Sallynooggin\_Killiney\_DLR to identify particular capacity requirements for the forthcoming years which may necessitate further action to that already in train.

Under Project Ireland 2040, my Department continues to make progress to increase the infrastructural capacity in the schools sector, in order to meet demographic and other demands. It is expected that the enrolment pressures in certain areas will reduce in the short-term as such planned additional capacity comes on stream and as demographic demand moves past its peak.

The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed under Project Ireland 2040. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, including accommodation for pupils with special educational needs, if required, for schools where an additional enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. The current status of both large-scale projects and projects under the Additional Accommodation scheme being delivered under Project Ireland 2040, including projects

in the area in question, may be viewed on my Department's website at, [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) and this information is updated regularly. In addition, a list of large-scale projects completed from 2010 to date may also be viewed on the website.

The list of post primary schools in the Dun Laoighre and Sallynooggin\_Killiney\_DLR school planning areas are as follows:

Dun Laoighre

- 60050E Oatlands College Christian Brothers
- 60081P Rockford Manor Secondary School CEIST
- 60130C Loreto Abbey Secondary School ETB
- 60180R Christian Brothers College Christian Brothers
- 81001I Newpark Comprehensive School Church Of Ireland

Sallynooggin\_Killiney\_DLR

- 60090Q Rathdown School – Patron Christian Brothers
- 60092U Clonkeen College Patron -ERST
- 60240J Loreto College Foxrock – Patron ETB
- 60260P St Joseph Of Cluny Secondary School Le Chéile Trust
- 60262T St Laurence College Le Chéile Trust
- 91310E Cabinteely Community School ETB
- 91330K Holy Child Community School Le Chéile Trust

The following schools have been approved for capital funding in respect additional capacity:

- 60050E Oatlands College Christian Brothers. A project is ongoing for 2 x 15m<sup>2</sup> resource rooms.

- 91310E Cabinteely Community School ETB. A project is ongoing for 2 classroom SEN Base.

- 60262T St Laurence College Le Chéile Trust. A new project has been approved for 3 Classroom SEN Base, 1 Music Room, 1 Engineering room and prep area and the conversion of existing 100m<sup>2</sup> ASD room to Textiles room.

The planned establishment of a new post-primary school in 2021 to serve the Sallynoggin\_Killiney\_DLR/Cherrywood school planning area was announced in 2018. Further analysis has since been conducted on the necessity for the establishment of a new school in this planning area, taking into account a number of factors, including the pace of delivery of the expected additional residential development in the school planning areas, associated enrolments and the capacity in existing schools in the areas. My Department is satisfied that demand in the Sallynoggin\_Killiney\_DLR/Cherrywood school planning area can be accommodated at present by the existing and growing schools in this area. As a result, the establishment of the planned new school has been deferred.

## School Management

483. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education the number of appeals made to her Department under section 29 of the Education Act 1998 in 2020 and 2021, respectively; the number of these appeals that were upheld and the number that were denied in these respective years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17979/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the table hereunder.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq483-5-03-2022\_en.xlsx">Appeals</a>]

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 provided that the outcome for appeals lodged prior to 12th November 2020 to be upheld, upheld in part or not upheld.

Section 7 of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 which commenced from 12th November 2020 provides for a section 29 Appeals hearing committee to allow, disallow or refuse to determine an appeal.

In all appeals it is open to the appellant to withdraw their appeal prior to the hearing, should they so wish.

## Special Educational Needs

484. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education the primary and secondary special schools recognised by her Department in counties Cork and Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17980/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Special schools funded by my Department are classified as primary national schools and are intended to cater for children and young persons with special educational needs from the age of 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

A list of all special schools in the country, including those in the counties referenced by the Deputy, are available on the NCSE website at the following link: [ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NCSE-Teaching-SNA-Allocation-Special-Schools-20.21-12.06.2020.1.pdf](https://www.ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NCSE-Teaching-SNA-Allocation-Special-Schools-20.21-12.06.2020.1.pdf)

## Special Educational Needs

485. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Education the number of schools that provided July provision for the past five years, by county; and the number of schools that propose to facilitate July provision in 2022, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17981/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The purpose of the July Provision Scheme was to provide an extended school year for children with a severe or profound general learning disability or children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The scheme was developed to reduce potential regression in learning associated with these specific categories of special education needs over the summer holidays. With regard to the range of years referred to by the Deputy, Special schools and schools with special classes were permitted to run the school-based programme over the years 2017-2020 inclusive.

In 2020 a significantly expanded summer programme was established as a response to COVID-19 with the eligibility criteria widened to include approximately 9,000 additional children with complex needs.

The programme aims were to ensure, in so far as possible, that these children could reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers. As part of this expansion, the Department's existing Literacy and Numeracy camps for DEIS Primary Band 1 schools was included in the Summer Programme and extended to all DEIS Primary schools. Furthermore, DEIS post-primary schools were given the option of running an inclusion programme for the first time.

In 2021, due to the ongoing pandemic, the government announced a further expanded to the Summer Programme. Under this expansion, students with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage had access to an enhanced summer programme of education. The total funding available to provide the programme was €40 million, which was a 100% increase on the allocation for summer provision in 2020. The range of programmes on offer built on the success of the expanded programmes that ran in 2020 and incorporated feedback from education stakeholders. For the first time, all primary schools were given the opportunity to run a 2-3 week inclusion programme, an expansion to all post-primary schools that had been previously only been available in DEIS post-primary schools in 2020. In addition, enhanced supports provided included measures to reduce the administrative burden, provision of funding to schools towards preparation and overseeing of the programmes, earlier payment to school staff and provision to recruit newly qualified teachers to work on the programme.

My Department is currently at an advanced stage of planning for the 2022 summer programme. Details of the programme will published as soon as possible.

Due to the different structures of July Provision and the Summer Programme, the information as requested by the Deputy is broken down to cover the years 2017-2020 and 2021 for the primary and post primary programmes, as well as a separate breakdown of the DEIS Literacy and Numeracy/Campai Samhraidh over the period 2017-2021.

#### 1. 2017-2020

##### 1a Schools offering the Special Class and Special School Programme

County	2017	2018	2019	2020
Carlow	2	4	3	5
Cavan	6	7	7	7
Clare	6	7	6	7
Cork	26	26	27	31
Donegal	9	9	8	8
Dublin	41	44	38	49
Galway	20	21	22	19
Kerry	6	6	7	9
Kildare	17	20	17	14
Kilkenny	3	2	3	6
Laois	6	7	6	9
Limerick	4	8	8	10
Longford	3	3	3	4

Questions - Written Answers

County	2017	2018	2019	2020
Louth	4	3	4	3
Mayo	4	4	5	2
Meath	6	7	8	5
Monaghan	3	4	4	4
Offaly	8	10	10	12
Roscommon	3	4	4	2
Sligo	4	4	3	3
Tipperary	10	12	10	12
Waterford	5	5	6	4
Westmeath	7	7	7	8
Wexford	13	14	14	15
Wicklow	3	1	2	6
Yearly Totals	219	239	232	254

**1b 2020 – DEIS Post Primary Schools offering the Inclusion Programme**

County	Number of Schools
Carlow	1
Clare	13
Cork	8
Donegal	23
Dublin	2
Galway	5
Kerry	3
Kildare	1
Kilkenny	1
Laois	2
Leitrim	1
Limerick	2
Longford	1
Mayo	2
Meath	1
Offaly	1
Roscommon	2
Sligo	3
Total	72

2. 2021

**2a. Expanded Primary Programme 2021**

Note: Some schools ran the Special School and Special Class Programme, as well as the Inclusion Programme

County	Schools ran Primary Inclusion Programme and Special School and Special Class Programme	Schools ran Primary Inclusion Programme	Schools ran Special Class and Special School Programme
Carlow	5	1	2
Cavan	2	8	4
Clare	2	7	8
Cork	25	26	21
Donegal	3	11	7
Dublin	31	28	50
Galway	7	23	19
Kerry	8	16	7
Kildare	9	11	11
Kilkenny	5	10	8
Laois	7	6	3
Leitrim	0	3	2
Limerick	7	9	9
Longford	3	2	1
Louth	4	7	1
Mayo	3	8	6
Meath	6	10	4
Monaghan	1	6	4
Offaly	9	5	7
Roscommon	1	6	4
Sligo	0	2	4
Tipperary	1	14	10
Waterford	2	5	5
Westmeath	4	6	9
Wexford	9	11	7
Wicklow	2	7	8
TOTALS	156	248	221

### 2b. Post-Primary Schools offering Inclusion Programme in 2021

County	Number of Schools
Carlow	1
Cavan	1
Clare	9
Cork	8
Donegal	26
Dublin	8
Galway	6
Kerry	2
Kildare	2
Laois	1
Leitrim	2

Questions - Written Answers

County	Number of Schools
Limerick	3
Longford	3
Louth	2
Mayo	5
Meath	2
Monaghan	2
Offaly	4
Roscommon	3
Sligo	5
Tipperary	4
Total	99

3. Number of Literacy and Numeracy Camps (English and Gaeilge) run in DEIS Primary Schools 2017-2021

Note: Commencing in 2021, schools were permitted to run 2 camps

**English**

County	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Carlow	0	0	0	3	5
Cavan	2	3	2	2	2
Clare	1	0	1	1	2
Cork	3	4	5	14	19
Donegal	0	0	0	7	11
Dublin	22	19	21	70	66
Galway	2	2	2	7	10
Kerry	0	0	0	4	5
Kildare	0	0	0	1	2
Kilkenny	0	0	0	5	3
Laois	0	0	1	2	4
Leitrim	0	0	0	3	2
Limerick	3	3	3	7	7
Longford	1	3	2	8	8
Louth	3	2	3	7	9
Mayo	0	0	0	4	5
Meath	0	0	0	2	1
Monaghan	0	0	0	1	3
Offaly	0	0	0	5	7
Roscommon	0	0	0	6	3
Sligo	1	1	0	1	2
Tipperary	0	0	1	6	8
Waterford	3	4	1	6	7
Westmeath	0	0	0	3	2
Wexford	1	1	0	6	6
Wicklow	0	0	0	3	2



County	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Totals	42	42	42	184	201

### Gaeilge

County	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cavan	1	1	1	1	1
Clare	1	1	1	0	1
Cork	3	2	5	7	6
Donegal	0	0	0	2	2
Dublin	17	18	16	9	12
Galway	1	0	1	1	3
Kerry	0	0	0	1	2
Laois	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick	2	0	0	0	0
Longford	1	3	3	4	3
Louth	2	1	1	1	1
Mayo	0	0	0	2	2
Monaghan	0	0	0	1	1
Sligo	0	0	0	0	0
Tipperary	0	0	0	0	0
Waterford	3	4	2	1	2
Wexford	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	31	30	30	30	37

### International Protection

486. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education the number of children of school going age that are awaiting access to the education system, three months after their international protection application has been made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17998/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) works with all local providers on an ongoing basis to ensure that, as far as possible, children are enrolled in school within 12 weeks of seeking international protection in Ireland.

As part of the process in place to ensure this, TESS receives information on families with children of school-going age in different locations who have applied for international protection. This is provided by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS), which is a division of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). There is an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) from TESS assigned to work with the IPAS team. TESS plays a key role, including identifying school places through linking with local schools, working with IPAS NGOs and parents to support applications to the Department of Social Protection for emergency needs payments, organising school transport where necessary and working collaboratively across all departments and agencies to identify and remove all barriers to school attendance.

### Qualifications Recognition

487. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education the way she intends to fast-track the recognition of Ukrainian teacher qualifications in an efficient and speedy manner; if she has identified institutions that have already initiated this process with the Teaching Council; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18057/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Teaching Council is the professional standards body for the teaching profession, which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching in Ireland, serving a current register of 113,000 professionally qualified teachers. Under Irish law, it is a requirement for teachers to register with the Teaching Council in order to be paid from State funds.

Where Ukrainian teachers provide evidence of being a qualified teacher in their home country, they can apply to be admitted to the register of teachers. The Teaching Council is currently developing processes to make reasonable accommodations in order to support the registration and vetting of Ukrainian teachers who have been granted Temporary Protection under the EU Temporary Protection Directive. This information will be published on the Teaching Council's website in the coming days.

Ukrainian teachers who wish to apply for registration should email [ukrainianteachers@teachingcouncil.ie](mailto:ukrainianteachers@teachingcouncil.ie)

### **School Transport**

488. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education if she will urgently review school transport contracts held by private contractors in view of the unprecedented rise in fuel costs; and if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a large number of contractors are considering leaving routes as it is not cost effective for them to continue a service due to current costs. [18066/22]

**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 121,400 children, including over 15,500 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 €289m in 2021.

The purpose of the 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.

Bus Éireann is obliged to tender all works, goods and services to be provided by external suppliers in line with national and EU procurement legislation and this includes services provided by contractors under the School Transport Scheme. Compliant tenders are evaluated against published award criteria. Successful tenderers are awarded a contract for up to five years.

The Department of Education is considering in consultation with other relevant departments and Bus Éireann the implications that increasing fuel costs may have on the provision of school transport services. The Department is also very aware of the potential impact of the current situation unfolding in Ukraine which is impacting fuel prices further.

Government has announced a reduction in excise on fuel will result in a decrease in the cost of fuel. The reduction of 20 cent per litre on petrol and 15 cent per litre on diesel will be in place until 31 August at an estimated cost of €320m. This is a national measure aimed at easing

the financial burden on contractors and families at this time.

### **Special Educational Needs**

489. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education if a response will issue to concerns raised by the principal of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18085/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I am aware of the concerns raised by the school.

Ensuring that pupils adequately supported in education is a priority for this Government.

I want to reassure you that the aim of the frontloading allocation model is not to exclude anyone from getting the supports that they need. The model applies to pupils with special educational needs enrolled in mainstream classes only and provides many advantages for both the school and the pupils. A diagnosis of a disability is not required in order to access additional teaching support. This approach is pupil centered and schools are expected to ensure that the pupils with the greatest level of need receive the most support. A school can seek a review of its SET or SNA allocation where it considers that the allocation is not sufficient to meet its needs. The Special Education Teaching (SET) allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile. This has been in place since 2017. Under the allocation model, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support based on their school profile.

The frontloading of SNA allocations for children with special educational needs is now also under consideration. The provision of an SNA allocation must take account the level of care need in each school. A core recommendation of the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) Review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme concerned a change in the way that SNAs are allocated to mainstream classes in both primary and post primary schools and called for the greater proportion of SNAs in these classes to be allocated on the basis of an educational profile of each school before the commencement of the school year in a similar manner to the allocation of special education teachers (SETs). Planning for this is currently underway.

As in the case of SETs, the frontloaded allocation model is intended to ensure that SNA posts are in schools and available immediately to students upon their arrival, reducing delays in accessing support.

SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

An announcement will be made very soon with regards the allocations for 2022/23.

I have secured a record budget for special education this year and a big increase in core SEN supports. It includes the following: 1,165 NEW special needs assistants, bringing the overall total to over 19000 next year; Almost a 1000 new teachers in special education, across mainstream schools, special classes, and special schools; 269 new special classes were opened this year with plans for 300 more next year.

More children with special educational needs are being supported in school than ever before.

### **Special Educational Needs**

490. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education if a response will issue to concerns raised by the principal of a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18086/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I am aware of the concerns raised by the school.

Ensuring that pupils adequately supported in education is a priority for this Government.

I want to reassure you that the aim of the frontloading allocation model is not to exclude anyone from getting the supports that they need. The model applies to pupils enrolled in mainstream classes only and provides many advantages for both the school and the pupils. A diagnosis of a disability is not required in order to access additional teaching support. This approach is pupil centered and schools are expected to ensure that the pupils with the greatest level of need receive the most support. A school can seek a review of its SET or SNA allocation where it considers that the allocation is not sufficient to meet its needs. The Special Education Teaching (SET) allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile. This has been in place since 2017.

Under the allocation model, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support based on their school profile.

The frontloading of SNA allocations for children with special educational needs is now also under consideration. The provision of an SNA allocation must take account the level of care need in each school. A core recommendation of the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) Review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme concerned a change in the way that SNAs are allocated to mainstream classes in both primary and post primary schools and called for the greater proportion of SNAs in these classes to be allocated on the basis of an educational profile of each school before the commencement of the school year in a similar manner to the allocation of special education teachers (SETs). Planning for this is currently underway.

As in the case of SETs, the frontloaded allocation model is intended to ensure that SNA posts are in schools and available immediately to students upon their arrival, reducing delays in accessing support.

SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

An announcement will be made very soon with regards the allocations for 2022/23.

I have secured a record budget for special education this year and a big increase in core SEN supports. It includes the following: 1,165 NEW special needs assistants, bringing the overall total to over 19000 next year; Almost a 1000 new teachers in special education, across mainstream schools, special classes, and special schools; 269 new special classes were opened this year with plans for 300 more next year.

More children with special educational needs are being supported in school than ever before.

### **State Examinations**

491. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Education her views on a policy matter raised by a person (details supplied) regarding the proposed scheduling changes to the leaving

certificate practical music examination and the implications for students and teachers; her plans to engage with affected teachers and their representatives regarding this proposed change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18157/22]

492. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education if a response will issue to concerns raised by a teacher (details supplied) in respect of the senior cycle reform; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18159/22]

499. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Education if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the leaving certificate orals and music practical exams will permanently take place in the first week of the Easter holidays. [18269/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 491, 492 and 499 together.

As the Deputy is aware, on 29 March I announced an ambitious programme of work for a reimagined Senior Cycle of education where the student is at the centre of their Senior Cycle experience. The three tenets of Senior Cycle reform are to:

- Empower students to meet the challenges of the 21st century
- Enrich the student experience and build on what's strong in our current system
- Embed wellbeing and reduce student stress levels

The reforms I announced will include initiatives to spread the assessment load for students and do so in a way that enhances student wellbeing. In future years, I want to see language Oral examinations and the Music practical performance taking place during the first week of the Easter break of 6th year, in similar fashion to the Easter 2022 arrangements I announced last December. I have asked the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to advise me on the implementation of these changes on a permanent basis following an evaluation of the arrangements in 2022 by the SEC.

In 2022, as in 2021, the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations and the Music Practical Performance are scheduled to take place outside school time during the Easter period. This protects the school year and educational provision to students, reduces disruption, minimises substitution requirements and therefore eases current teacher supply challenges in this area.

These arrangements can also be managed at school level to manage any undue burden on individual students who may be taking Irish, more than one Modern Foreign Language and Music.

*Question No. 492 answered with Question No. 491.*

### **Flexible Work Practices**

493. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18162/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** Phased return to a physical attendance in the workplace commenced for staff of my department following the easing of Government restrictions on 21 January and staff are currently attending the office for two days per week and working remotely for the remaining days.

Following the recent publication of the Blended Working Policy Framework for the Civil Service by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, TD, my department is developing its own blended working policy based on the overarching framework, tailored for our department's requirements. I anticipate that the policy will be completed by the end of quarter 2 of this year. This policy will ensure that staff members will have increased certainty and flexibility, where possible, around their working arrangements while ensuring that the business needs are met to ensure the continued delivery of high quality services.

### **Schools Building Projects**

494. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education the current status of a primary school building project for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18201/22]

**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) which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

A Brief Change request had been approved in principle by my Department and a Brief Change report was submitted by the school and its Design Team, which is currently with the Department for review and approval.

Due to proposals from the Local Authority to alter the road and access layouts at the school site, and the recent increase in Brief to 16 classrooms, a new Planning Application will be required.

When planning permission has been secured and work on necessary revisions to the Stage 2(b) documentation has been completed a revised Stage 2(b) report will be submitted to my Department for review.

Upon receipt and review of this revised report my Department will be in contact with the school regarding the further progression of the project.

### **Schools Building Projects**

495. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education the current status of a school building project for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18202/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy will be delivered under my Departments ADAPT Programme, which uses the services of a professional Project Manager to co-ordinate and drive the Design Team to achieve the best possible timeframe to progress this project through the early stages of Architectural Planning.

The tender process to appoint a Project Manager is nearing completion.

Upon appointment, the Project Manager will put in train the appointment of a Design Team.

My Department will keep the School Authority informed of further developments in relation to these appointments.

## Educational Disadvantage

496. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education when the appeals process for DEIS status will commence; if the details of this process will be made available to schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18226/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I recently announced that from next September the DEIS programme will be extended to an additional 310 schools. 37 schools will also benefit from additional supports following reclassification. Schools were identified for inclusion in the programme through the refined DEIS identification model which is an objective, statistics based model. Schools were not required to apply for inclusion in the DEIS programme and the model has been applied fairly and equally to all schools.

My Department is committed to ensuring that all schools are treated equally and fairly in the manner in which they have been identified for inclusion in the DEIS programme. Schools who were not satisfied with the outcome following the application of the DEIS identification model to their school enrolment data will now have the opportunity to have that outcome reviewed.

Circular 0019/2022 outlining the details of this appeals process was published recently by my Department and is available at [www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/](http://www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/).

My Department notified all schools of the appeals process on 30th March 2022. Schools have until 5pm on Friday April 29th to submit an appeal.

## School Staff

497. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education if the service of school secretaries will be acknowledged under the public sector pay scales when transferring to another State agency given that some secretaries who worked directly for a board of management are given no acknowledgement of service when working in other State jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18230/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The main elements of the package offered to school secretaries include, in recognition of the invaluable work they carry out, moving their pay rates to a scale which is aligned with the Clerical Officer Grade III pay scale on a pro rata basis according to a secretary's current working pattern. However, it is important to recognise that the majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools receive assistance to provide for these staff under grant schemes, and that where a school employs a staff member to support those functions those staff are employees of individual schools and responsibility for terms of employment rests with the school.

It is also important to recognise that whilst grant-funded secretaries will be placed on a centralised payroll for administrative purposes, they will continue to be employed by their individual schools, which will maintain responsibility for their terms of employment, in compliance with the agreement and are not public servants. There are circulars issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and other public bodies regarding the starting pay of people appointed to public service organisations and decisions on the matter would be for the public body concerned on a case by case basis.

## School Transport

498. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education if her Department has engaged with contractors who provide school bus transport on behalf of her Department on the current challenges that they face in view of the dramatic increase in fuel costs that now accrue, which in certain circumstances put the ability to provide services is now in doubt; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18258/22]

**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 121,400 children, including over 15,500 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 €289m in 2021.

The purpose of the 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.

Bus Éireann is obliged to tender all works, goods and services to be provided by external suppliers in line with national and EU procurement legislation and this includes services provided by contractors under the School Transport Scheme. Compliant tenders are evaluated against published award criteria. Successful tenderers are awarded a contract for up to five years.

The Department of Education is considering in consultation with other relevant departments and Bus Éireann the implications that increasing fuel costs may have on the provision of school transport services. The Department is also very aware of the potential impact of the current situation unfolding in Ukraine which is impacting fuel prices further.

Government has announced a reduction in excise on fuel will result in a decrease in the cost of fuel. The reduction of 20 cent per litre on petrol and 15 cent per litre on diesel will be in place until 31 August at an estimated cost of €320m. This is a national measure aimed at easing the financial burden on contractors and families at this time.

*Question No. 499 answered with Question No. 491.*

### **Schools Building Projects**

500. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Education the status of a school extension and funding approval for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18276/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no current record of receiving an application for additional accommodation from the school in question.

The purpose of my Department's Additional School Accommodation (or ASA) scheme is to ensure that essential mainstream classroom accommodation and accommodation for pupils with special education needs is available to cater for pupils enrolled each year, where the need cannot be met by the school's existing accommodation.

At primary level, this situation generally arises to cater for a school's accommodation requirements where an additional teaching post has been sanctioned by Teacher Allocation Section, or the requirement for a new class for pupils with special education needs has been identified by the NCSE, and all available alternative accommodation within the school is already



being used for classroom purposes.

The main focus of resources over the last decade and for the coming period is on provision of additional capacity to cater for increasing demographics particularly at post-primary level and for special education needs provision. The Deputy will appreciate that the immediate priority of my Department is providing new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place.

However, the latter stage of the National Development Plan will see an increasing focus on the upgrade and refurbishment of the existing school stock and under which the ancillary accommodation needs of primary schools will also be considered. My Department has contacted the school in question in this context.

### **Special Educational Needs**

501. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Education the work she is undertaking to ensure that children with additional needs who attend a school (details supplied) have adequate supports for the coming school year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18282/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The provision of education for children with special needs is an ongoing priority for Government. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are at unprecedented levels.

Very significant levels of financial provision are made to ensure that children with special educational needs can be provided with an education appropriate to their needs.

The State currently spends in excess of 25% of its annual education and training budget (€9.2 Billion) on making additional provision for children with special educational needs.

This represents an increase of over 60% in total expenditure since 2011, at which point €1.247 Billion per annum was provided.

Since 2011, the number of special classes in mainstream schools has increased by almost 386% from 548 to 2,118 for the 2021/2022 school year. Of these 1,524 special classes are in primary schools.

Budget 2022 announced details of €9.2 billion in funding for education and includes funding for an additional 1,165 SNAs (in 2022) to provide support to children with special educational needs, which will bring the total number of SNAs to 19,169 at the end of December 2022. This represents an increase of 81% in the number of SNAs provided since 2011 at which point 10,575 SNAs were available.

The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource. The deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management of the school. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the

care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated.

There are now over 13,600 Special Education Teachers allocated to mainstream primary and post primary schools.

This represents an increase of 40% in the total number of special education teachers allocated to schools since 2011, at which time 9,740 teachers were allocated.

Budget 2022 provides for the creation 980 new teaching posts in special education. This new investment is required to meet the needs of students with special educational needs enrolled in mainstream classes; students to be enrolled in new special classes and new special school places and the needs of new and developing schools.

The new allocation is broken down as follows:

- 620 of the new posts will provide additional support for children attending mainstream classes including new and expanding schools

- 360 posts will facilitate the opening of 287 new special classes providing over 1,700 new places in 2022 and 140 new special school places

A new model for allocating special education teachers in respect of students with special needs enrolled in mainstream classes was introduced in 2017. The Special Education Teacher allocation process provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile. The profile of each school takes account of enrolments and a number of other factors that are considered to be indicative of the level of need in each school. There is a commitment to update profiles on a regular basis with the last update being for the 2019/20 school.

In addition, there is a provision for schools to seek additionality through the Exceptional Needs Review process if there is a significant change in their level of need in between profile updates.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide. It has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents. NCSE seeks to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special education placements.

Where circumstances change during the course of the 2021/22 school year that materially increase the level of care need in a school to the extent that the school can clearly demonstrate that it cannot be met within the existing SNA allocation, the school may apply to the NCSE for a review. Detailed information on the NCSE exceptional review process is published on the NCSE website, [ncse.ie/for-schools](http://ncse.ie/for-schools).

I have asked the NCSE to engage directly with the school in question.

### **Educational Disadvantage**

502. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Education if she will review the DEIS application of a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if an appeals mechanism is in place for the school management; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18284/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I recently announced that from next September the DEIS programme will be extended to an additional 310 schools. 37 schools will also benefit from additional supports following reclassification. Schools were identified for inclusion in the programme through the refined DEIS identification model which is an objective, statistics based model. Schools were not required to apply for inclusion in the DEIS programme and the model has been applied fairly and equally to all schools.

My Department is committed to ensuring that all schools are treated equally and fairly in the manner in which they have been identified for inclusion in the DEIS programme. Schools who were not satisfied with the outcome following the application of the DEIS identification model to their school enrolment data will now have the opportunity to have that outcome reviewed.

Circular 0019/2022 outlining the details of this appeals process was published recently by my Department and is available at [www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/](http://www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/).

My Department notified all schools of the appeals process on 30th March 2022. Schools have until 5pm on Friday April 29th to submit an appeal.

### **Educational Disadvantage**

503. **Deputy Steven Matthews** asked the Minister for Education if she will review the DEIS application of a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if an appeals mechanism is in place for the school management; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18285/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I recently announced that from next September the DEIS programme will be extended to an additional 310 schools. 37 schools will also benefit from additional supports following reclassification. Schools were identified for inclusion in the programme through the refined DEIS identification model which is an objective, statistics based model. Schools were not required to apply for inclusion in the DEIS programme and the model has been applied fairly and equally to all schools.

My Department is committed to ensuring that all schools are treated equally and fairly in the manner in which they have been identified for inclusion in the DEIS programme. Schools who were not satisfied with the outcome following the application of the DEIS identification model to their school enrolment data will now have the opportunity to have that outcome reviewed.

Circular 0019/2022 outlining the details of this appeals process was published recently by my Department and is available at [www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/](http://www.gov.ie/en/circular/7e7ca-deis-identification-2022-appeals-process-for-schools/).

My Department notified all schools of the appeals process on 30th March 2022. Schools have until 5pm on Friday April 29th to submit an appeal.

### **Schools Building Projects**

504. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education the current position with regard to the proposed new special school to replace schools (details supplied); the projected timelines on commencement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18289/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The joint building project for the two schools referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's Construction Programme

which is being delivered under the National Development Plan.

This project is currently at an early stage of Architectural Planning, Stage 1 – Assessment of Site, Site Investigations and Initial Sketch Scheme.

The Design Team had recently submitted a Stage 1 Report to my Department.

Upon review, my Department have requested the Design Team to submit a revised Stage 1 submission based on the original brief and schedule of accommodation.

Upon receipt, review and approval, the project can then be progressed to Stage 2(a) – Developed Design, where the design can be developed to a stage where the project is fully cost planned and can be prepared to lodge for statutory approvals.

Until statutory approvals have been granted, it will not be possible to predict a commencement on site date.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

505. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education if additional supports and resources will be made available to assist school principals in the current wave of Covid-19 cases, in which a large number of teachers are absent and self-isolating, which is having a serious impact on school management in keeping the schools open; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18318/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** A number of additional measures have been put in place to enhance substitute cover.

At primary level additional posts have been allocated to substitute teacher supply panels in areas where significant challenges in sourcing substitution continue, bringing the total to 680 posts on 142 panels, covering approximately 2,700 schools.

The supply panels work alongside the existing methods of sourcing substitute teachers, such as *Sub Seeker*, the national substitution portal service operated by the Irish Primary Principals' Network and schools can also make local arrangements to have their own regular substitutes to call on if needed.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) providing professional master of education (PME) programmes have ensured flexibility in programme delivery to enhance the availability of PME students for substitute work. PME students have been advised to register with the Teaching Council and with *Sub Seeker*.

In addition, HEIs providing undergraduate programmes of primary and post-primary initial teacher education have agreed to facilitate the release of 3rd and 4th year student teachers to support schools.

To support this measure the Teaching Council has recently made regulations for the registration of 3rd and 4th years student teachers and is currently developing a system for their registration. Pending registration with the Council, these students are still classified as unregistered persons and would be restricted to working for 5 consecutive days at any one time, as provided for under S.I. 32 of 2014 and relevant Department circulars (the "5-day rule"). However, pending the development of the system to facilitate their registration, I recently made amending regulations exempting 3rd and 4th year students from the '5 day rule' restriction when providing substitute cover. This amendment is strictly time limited, from 15th February 2022 to 30th June

2022. The '5 day rule' remains in place for the employment of all other unregistered persons.

At post-primary level teachers were allowed, if available, to provide up to a maximum of 35 additional teaching hours between 29th November 2021 and 28th February 2022. In order to continue to support schools to source substitution cover this provision has been extended for a further period, allowing up to a maximum of a further 35 additional teaching hours between 1st March 2022 and 31st May 2022.

These measures are in addition to changes made to the career break scheme, to allow teachers on career break to do unlimited substitution, and changes to the job sharing scheme, permitting job sharing teachers to carry out substitute work on the days they are rostered off.

### **State Examinations**

506. **Deputy Johnny Mythen** asked the Minister for Education the rationale for the scheduling of practical music examinations during the Easter holidays; the engagement she had with teachers' unions regarding this decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18338/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your question to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **Teaching Council of Ireland**

507. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Education if information in relation to a person (details supplied) will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18349/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** I wish to advise the Deputy that details of the salary rates, including increment scales, payable to teachers, are set out in my Department Circular 0056/2021.

The relevant salary and increment scales apply where persons have fulfilled the required Teaching Council registration criteria which are applicable to the sector in which they are teaching.

Where persons do not fulfil the required registration criteria, or have Teaching Council registration for a sector other than that in which they are currently teaching, a person who engages in substitute teaching is paid at the flat hourly rate for unqualified teachers and does not progress on the incremental salary scale which applies to qualified and registered teachers.

I can also advise that the criteria for the awarding of incremental credit to registered teachers at second level schools, is set out in my Departments Circulars 0029/2007 and 0029/2010.

Particular conditions apply to the awarding of increment credit for persons who may have been teaching, for a period of time in a different sector, including in the Vocational Educational/ETB Sector.

The Circulars also set out the criteria which apply to the awarding of incremental credit in

relation to teachers who may have previously been on less than whole time contracts, such as fixed term contracts, or casual and non-casual teaching service, including substitution work.

I can advise the Deputy that a member of staff from the Post Primary Payroll Division of my Department has been in contact with the school concerned, in order to request further details in relation to the nature of the this teachers employment in the school, past teaching service, and in relation to their Teaching Council Registration route. This will then determine the correct rate of pay which is applicable for this teacher.

### **Special Educational Needs**

508. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education the reason there are no onsite therapists at the new special school (details supplied) in Dublin 12 given their importance to such a school and that no child in a special school should be without this support given that its lack affects not only the development of the child but can also leave teachers and SNAs in very difficult situations. [18379/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Special schools generally cater for children with the most complex needs. Accordingly, these schools have enhanced staffing levels with greatly reduced pupil/teacher and SNA staffing allocations.

In general, speech and language and occupational therapy supports are provided by the HSE.

On an ongoing basis, special schools also have access to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) advisory support service which advises on children with the most complex needs, including behavioural needs.

Special schools in a start-up situation are targeted for specific support. Care is taken in the planning of these schools and the provision of specialist training and support. A bespoke package of CPD and professional learning for the staff of this new school has taken place with inputs from my Department, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the relevant agencies including the NCSE. This school will also continue to be supported by NEPS.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department and NCSE will continue to prioritise this school for support.

### **Schools Building Projects**

509. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education further to Parliamentary Question No. 799 of 19 January 2021, if the building contractor for the construction of a school (details supplied) has been appointed; if not, when she expects the contractor to be appointed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18382/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The Letter of Intent (LOI) issued on 15th of February 2022 to the preferred tenderer. This allows the preferred bidder to put in place the Bond, Insurances and confirmations of all legal arrangements required under the Contract.

Following receipt of all the necessary documentation, the Department will be in a position to issue the Letter of Acceptance (LOA), which will allow the contractor to mobilise on site.

My Department will advise the Board of Management when the Letter of Acceptance issues.

## State Examinations

510. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Education the date for the leaving certificate 2022 music practical examinations. [18387/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your question to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

## School Funding

511. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Education if additional resources will be made available by her Department for schools that are facing a significant demand for translation services; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is uncertainty in this regard among some schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18405/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** My Department will be supporting schools by providing education resources for schools in Ukrainian which they can then provide to parents. It is not expected that schools will need to translate resources themselves.

Included among the wide array of resources is information in relation to free digital tools, including apps that can assist with text and voice translation. These resources are particularly useful in terms of making school website material, forms and documents accessible to all and for assisting with communication between schools and parents. Further information is available on the website of the Professional Development Service for Teachers: [www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/What%20free%20digital%20tools%20are%20available.pdf](http://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/What%20free%20digital%20tools%20are%20available.pdf).

My Department has also established Regional Education and Language Teams (REALT) to support the needs of children from Ukraine arriving in Ireland. These teams will be hosted by the 16 regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and will be staffed by existing regionally-based education support personnel working closely together to ensure good coordination and alignment of supports for children from Ukraine.

The REALT will support existing services and co-ordinate the following work areas:

- Align current school capacity with the placement of Ukrainian families, as much as possible.

- Identify additional capacity within their geographic areas to prepare for situations where demand may exceed available school capacity, and work with the Department and other organisations as necessary with a view to making this additional capacity available.

- Assist schools and families with accessing information on school places for children from Ukraine and young people who have moved into the area.

- Assist schools and families with accessing resources and supports for additional capacity, wellbeing, language and educational needs.

- Assist with work in the area of staff supply, including where required, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutors who would assist with the English language needs of Ukrainian children, young people and their parents / guardians.

- Liaison with other local co-ordinating structures that may be established to coordinate the delivery of public services for families from Ukraine, including Community Response Fora. Information for parents in Ukrainian and Russian on accessing school places is available on [gov.ie/Ukraine](http://gov.ie/Ukraine).

My Department has also set up a helpline and email address for Principals of schools, details of which have been communicated directly to schools.

### **Departmental Contracts**

512. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education the cost of consultants to her Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if she will provide an outline of the role of each. [18900/22]

**Minister for Education (Deputy Norma Foley):** Information in relation to consultancy expenditure in my Department is compiled annually in respect of the previous year and published online at [www.gov.ie/en/collection/department-of-education-and-skills-expenditure-on-consultancy/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/department-of-education-and-skills-expenditure-on-consultancy/). The data in respect of 2021 is being compiled at present and will be published online as soon as it is available.

### **School Transport**

513. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to provide free public transport for persons with epilepsy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18288/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 1,025,000 customers with direct eligibility. The estimated expenditure on free travel in 2022 is €95 million.

I am aware of the campaign by Epilepsy Ireland and recognise the issues and difficulties that can arise due to a person being diagnosed with epilepsy. I have recently met with representatives of Epilepsy Ireland to discuss their proposal in detail.

Following the meeting I have asked my Department officials to examine the issues raised by Epilepsy Ireland and to explore options to help alleviate these issues. Further meetings will be arranged once this exploratory work has been concluded.

However, it is really important to note that, in general, access to a free travel pass for those aged under 66 is linked to a person being in receipt of certain primary Social Protection payments such as Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Blind Pension and Partial Capacity Benefit. Crucially as many illnesses or physical conditions have an impact across a spectrum from mild to severe, entitlement to these schemes is not provided on the basis of a simple diagnosis but on the basis of the impact of that diagnosis on the individual concerned. In this way resources can be targeted to people with most need. Therefore, while a diagnosis of a particular medical condition will be required to establish if a person may be eligible for certain social welfare schemes, evidence of impact is also required before entitlement to the scheme or the related free travel scheme is established. The sole exception to this general



approach is in respect of people who are blind.

It is also important to note that there are a range of disabilities and medical conditions that can prevent a person from holding a driving licence and to award a free travel pass to a person with any one of these conditions in isolation would immediately result in calls for all people who are not allowed to hold a driving licence because of their medical condition to receive the free travel pass and could result in challenges under the Equal Status Act.

While consideration is always given to any requests to improve or extend eligibility to the free travel scheme, uncoupling the link between receipt of particular social welfare payments and eligibility for the free travel scheme would so fundamentally alter the scheme that it would move it away from being a social welfare measure to being a general transport initiative.

Under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, my Department may award a travel supplement, where the circumstances of the particular case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the individual case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Eligibility**

514. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will undertake a review of public services workers hired prior to April 1995 who are eligible for class-D stamps with a view to granting them status allowing them to receive full social protection payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17419/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Social insurance contributions are made in accordance with the legislation and the employment terms and conditions in force at the time they are made and eligibility for social insurance benefits flow from that.

Civil and public sector employees, recruited prior to 6 April 1995, pay social insurance contributions at modified rates under classes B, C and D. Amongst the class B contributors are permanent and pensionable civil servants and Gardaí, the class C contributors are commissioned army officers and members of the army nursing service and the class D contributors include permanent and pensionable employees in the public service other than those insured at classes B and C. All civil and public servants recruited from 6 April 1995 pay social insurance at the standard class A rate.

Prior to 6 April 1995, civil and public servants did not have access to the full range of social insurance benefits as their terms of employment protected them against the main contingencies of illness and old age, and the risk of unemployment was not considered a factor due to the nature of their employment.

Consequently, such contributors pay less in social insurance contributions in return for fewer social insurance benefits. For example, class D contributors currently pay a contribution at the rate of 0.9% on their weekly earnings up to €1,443 and 4% on weekly earnings over that amount and their employers pay a contribution of 2.35% on all employee earnings. Class D contributors are currently entitled to widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension, guardian's payment (contributory), occupational injuries benefits, parent's benefit and carer's benefit.

In contrast, civil and public servants recruited from 6 April 1995 pay a class A social insurance contribution of 4% on their weekly earnings and their employers pay a contribution of 8.8% where employees' weekly earnings are €410 or less and 11.05% where their employees' weekly earnings exceed €410. Class A contributors have access to the full range of social insurance benefits.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Community Welfare Services

515. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who met with the community welfare officer in person at locations (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17489/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department does not maintain records of the number of persons who meet with the Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) in Intreo Centres and Outreach locations.

The following tables show:

- the number of Basic weekly Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) in payment in December 2019, 2020 and 2021 in the locations concerned.

- the number of SWA supplements (including Rent Supplement, Diet Supplement and Travel Supplement) in payment in December 2019, 2020 and 2021 in the locations concerned and

- the number of Exceptional Needs Payment awarded and paid during 2019, 2020 and 2021 in the locations concerned.

It should be noted that in Quarter 4, 2021, the claimload in Mountmellick was reallocated to CWOs in adjacent areas to maximise efficiencies in claim processing.

The data beneath will give an indication of the level of traffic to the Community Welfare Service in Portlaoise, Rathdowney and Mountmellick in December in the years 2019, 2020 and 2021:

Basic SWA claims in payment			
Location	Dec-19	Dec-20	Dec-21
Portlaoise	303	193	184
Rathdowney	71	54	48
Mountmellick	42	24	1
SWA Supplements claims in payment			
Location	Dec-19	Dec-20	Dec-21
Portlaoise	148	159	92
Rathdowney	23	31	30
Mountmellick	28	21	1

**Exceptional Needs Payments made**

Year	Portlaoise	Rathdowney	Mountmellick
2019	2,269	432	305
2020	1,650	231	171
2021	1,119	166	98

A person can request an appointment with a Community Welfare Officer (CWO) at my Department's office at Government Buildings, Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise Monday to Friday and at the Social Welfare Branch Office in Rathdowney each Thursday morning. In addition any person who needs to contact or access the CWS can also do so by telephone or email.

It is important to note that as part of my continued commitment to improve the CWS in County Laois and across the country, customers no longer have to meet in person with a CWO to make a claim. Consultations with a CWO are available via phone at our offices and a direct home visit appointment can be arranged depending on the customer's needs. All applications for assistance are dealt with promptly by my officials.

This change is a significant enhancement to the service offered to customers as it means that those who require community welfare assistance no longer need to visit an outreach location or wait to make a claim or wait to access the service. The initiatives that I have put in place continue to ensure that the service is easily accessible and responsive to customer needs, particularly in a time of crisis or emergency.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

**Social Welfare Offices**

516. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the services that are provided to Ukrainian refugees at INTREO offices. [17501/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On 4 March 2022, the Council of the European Union unanimously adopted the implementing decision regarding the Temporary Protection Directive. This means that people arriving from Ukraine under the Temporary Directive have been granted the status to avail of income supports from my Department.

The priority for my Department is the allocation of PPSNs and the provision of immediate financial supports. A fast-track approach in processing these supports has been put in place which includes a simplified decision-making process and quick processing of PPSNs to allow access to public services. People are eligible for financial support initially under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme and will be deemed to have satisfied the Habitual Residence Condition and their means are being assessed as nil. Thereafter arrangements will be made to approve the appropriate primary social welfare payments. We have also arranged for payments such as child benefit to be made within a very short period.

A reception centre has been set up in Dublin Airport where officials from my Department and the Department of Justice are available to meet people fleeing the war in Ukraine. We have also established dedicated Support Centres in Cork Street, Dublin as well as in Cork and Limerick Cities. My Department is working closely with the Department of Justice as well as the International Protection Accommodation Service in these locations and also in Rosslare where services are provided on arrival of each ferry.

PPSN allocation and Income Support is also available through the Intreo Centre and Branch

Office network. People may also avail of Employment Support services through the Intreo Centres.

A dedicated webpage has been published on the Department's website to ensure those arriving from Ukraine are aware of the supports and services available to them. The webpage is entitled 'Social Welfare supports for those arriving from Ukraine under the EU Temporary Protection Directive'.

The information on the webpage is in Plain English and also in the Ukrainian and Russian languages. It also has a list of the all locations of all Intreo Centres and Branch Offices.

### Public Sector Staff

517. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in her Department and in agencies and public bodies within her area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three months, from three to six months, from six to 12 months and for over 12 months, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17606/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The table below sets out the number of staff who are presently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and in its associated agencies and public bodies.

Absent on pay due to suspension: 0-3 months	0
Absent on pay due to suspension: 3-6 months	0
Absent on pay due to suspension: 6-12 months	0
Absent on pay due to suspension: 12+ months	1

The Department, with a staffing cohort of approximately 6,500, manages disciplinary and dispute cases in line with the relevant civil service policies including the Civil Service Disciplinary Code, Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour and the Dignity at Work Policy for the Civil Service.

All cases requiring suspension are monitored and managed centrally by the Department's Human Resources Division, ensuring cases are concluded efficiently whilst providing for the fair and equitable treatment of such cases in accordance with best practice and employment legislation.

Both Citizens Information Board and the Pensions Authority have confirmed their adherence to the same policies and approaches referenced above and both agencies have reported they currently have no employees absent from work due to suspension.

### Social Welfare Eligibility

518. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason that retired public servants in receipt of a widow or widowers pension on the basis of their class D PRSI contributions are entitled to the living alone allowance given that those retired public servants that never married are denied eligibility on the basis that they are not in receipt of a qualifying payment; her views on whether this as an anomaly in the system that discriminates against retired single public servants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17616/22]

520. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason that retired civil servants who are in receipt of a Civil Service pension are not entitled to a living-alone allowance; the reason this is the only group of pensioners not entitled to a living-alone allowance; if she will review the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17750/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 518 and 520 together.

Primary weekly social welfare payments are intended to enable recipients to meet their basic day-to-day income needs. In addition to these primary payments, my Department also provides a range of other payments, both cash and non-cash, on a weekly, monthly, or less frequent basis. These payments are considered secondary in nature.

The Living Alone Increase (LAI) is one of those secondary payments. It is not a scheme or a stand-alone payment in itself, but rather it is a supplement to a primary social protection payment of €22 per week made to people aged 66 years or over, who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and who are living alone. For those aged 66 or over, these payments include State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Non-contributory), Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Contributory) Pension, Widow's/Widower's Pension under the Occupational Injuries Benefit Scheme, Incapacity Supplement under the Occupational Injuries Benefit Scheme and Deserted Wife's Benefit.

Accordingly, there are no circumstances where the Living Alone Increase can be paid to people who are not in receipt of a primary qualifying payment from my Department. Any decision to allow those who are not in receipt of a qualifying payment to receive the Living Alone Increase - and thereby establish it as a scheme - would have budgetary and administrative consequences and would have to be considered in the context of Budget negotiations.

PRSI Class D provides social insurance coverage for permanent and pensionable employees in the public service, other than those who were recruited after 6 April, 1995, doctors and dentists employed in the civil service, Gardaí, commissioned army officers and members of the army nursing service. Public servants recruited on or after 6 April 1995 are liable to pay PRSI contributions at the ordinary Class A contribution.

The contributions payable by an employee at the modified rate of contribution determines the range of benefits and pensions towards which these contributors can build up entitlement. Subject to having the required number of PRSI contributions, employees who paid Class D contributions accrued entitlement to the following payments:

- a) Carer's Benefit
- b) Guardian's Payment Contributory
- c) Occupational Injuries Benefits
- d) Parent's Benefit
- e) Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

519. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress that has been made to date in the determination of an application for the domiciliary care allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17655/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Domiciliary Care Allowance is a monthly payment for parents caring for a child with a severe disability in their own home.

An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 24th March 2022. Applications are processed in date of receipt order. Currently applications received in mid January 2022 are being dealt with. The Deciding Officer will notify the customer in writing as soon as the application has been finalised.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

*Question No. 520 answered with Question No. 518.*

### **Citizens Information Services**

521. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a list of citizen information offices by county; the breakdown of the population serviced by these areas; the way the location of an office is determined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17777/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Citizens Information Board (CIB), is a statutory independent body as set out in the Comhairle Act 2010 which operates under the aegis of my Department. CIB provides funding to 22 companies in order to deliver services on its behalf. This includes eight regional Citizen Information Service (CIS) companies that operate a national network of Citizens Information Centres.

The aim of the eight CIS regional service delivery companies in the country is to deliver a high-quality information, advice and advocacy service to citizens in their respective geographic areas.

Citizens Information Services (CIS) were originally established through community and voluntary groups which determined the location and placement of services across the country.

The CIS Regional Companies in consultation with CIB take into account requirements such as service delivery demand to date, staffing resources available in the region, population demographic and value for money for the exchequer.

Many clients continue to access information through phone and on [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie) and across social media platforms which will also influence service offering across the network.

The following table lists the eight regional CIS company areas broken down by county, population, and office locations which are currently operational.

Region	County	Population (2016 census)	CIS OFFICE LOCATIONS
Dublin South	Dublin South	727,134	Clondalkin CIC
			Crumlin
			Dun Laoghaire CIC
			Dundrum CIC
			Liberties CIC
			Lucan CIC
			Rathmines CIC
			Tallaght CIC
North Connacht and Ulster	Cavan	76,176	Cavan CIC
	Donegal	159,192	Buncrana CIC
			Carndonagh CIC
			Donegal Town CIC
			Dungloe CIC
			Letterkenny CIC
			Milford CIC
	Leitrim	32,044	Carrick-on-Shannon CIC
			Manorhamilton CIC
	Monaghan	61,386	Carrickmacross
			Monaghan CIC
	Sligo	65,535	Sligo CIC
Tubbercurry CIC			
North Dublin	North Dublin	620,225	Balbriggan CIC
			Ballyfermot CIC
			Ballymun CIC
			Blanchardstown CIC
			Cabra CIC
			Dublin City Centre CIC
			Dublin City North West CIC
			Finglas CIC
			Northside CIC
			Skerries CIC
			Swords CIC
			North Leinster
Maynooth CIC			
Naas CIC			
		Newbridge CIC	
Longford	40,873	Longford CIC	
Louth	128,884	Drogheda CIC	
		Dundalk CIC	
Meath	195,044	Ashbourne CIC	

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Region	County	Population (2016 census)	CIS OFFICE LOCATIONS
			Navan CIC
			Trim CIC
	Westmeath	88,770	Athlone CIC
			Mullingar CIC
North Munster	Clare	118,817	Ennis CIC
			Kilrush CIC
			Shannon CIC
	Limerick	194,899	Kilmallock CIC
			Limerick CIC
			Newcastlewest CIC
	Tipperary	159,553	Clonmel CIC
			Nenagh CIC
			Roscrea CIC
			Thurles CIC
			Tipperary CIC
	Waterford	116,176	Dungarvan CIC
			Waterford CIC
South Connacht	Galway	216,350	Clifden CIC
			Galway CIC
			Rosmuc CIC
			Tuam CIC
	Mayo	130,507	Ballina CIC
			Belmullet CIC
			Castlebar CIC
			Claremorris CIC
			Westport CIC
	Roscommon	64,544	Boyle CIC
			Roscommon CIC
South Leinster	Carlow	56,932	Carlow CIC
	Kilkenny	99,232	Kilkenny CIC
	Laois	60,260	Portlaoise CIC
	Offaly	77,961	Birr CIC
			Edenderry CIC
			Tullamore CIC
	Wexford	149,722	Gorey CIC
			Wexford CIC
	Wicklow	142,425	Arklow CIC
			Bray CIC
South Munster	Cork	542,868	Bantry CIC
			Carrigaline CIC
			Cobh CIC
			Cork City Centre CIC



Region	County	Population (2016 census)	CIS OFFICE LOCATIONS
			Hollyhill / Knocknaheeny CIC
			Macroom CIC
			Mayfield CIC
			Youghal CIC
	Kerry	147,707	Caherciveen CIC
			Kenmare CIC
			Killarney CIC
			Tralee CIC

### Social Welfare Code

522. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether participants in the back to work enterprise allowance (details supplied) should have to repay all of their payments on the basis that they did a few days of work on a self-employed basis during the period in which they were being paid the allowance, considering the fact that the operational guidelines clearly state customers are not allowed to enter into paid employment as an employee but do not mention any restriction on doing work on a self-employed basis. [17834/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme offers support for people who are long term unemployed and who are interested in self-employment as a route to entering the labour market. As part of the Governments commitments under the Pathways to Work strategy a budget of €56.4m has been allocated for this scheme in 2022.

The BTWEA scheme aims to assist customers in alleviating risks for a new venture by allowing them to retain a proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment over two years; 100% in year 1 and 75% in year 2. All applications under the scheme require prior approval where the customer must engage with a Case officer/Job Coach of my Department and the assistance of the Local Development Company. During this process and throughout the payment of BTWEA scheme the customer is required to advise the Department of any change in their circumstances, including that of engaging in any form of employment.

Officials in my Department are reviewing the details of the specific case referred to by the Deputy including the determination of the overpayment.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### Social Welfare Benefits

523. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an enhanced illness benefit and jobseeker's allowance increase claim for a couple (details supplied) in Dublin 6; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17887/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** When the person concerned applied for Enhanced Illness Benefit, he was recorded as an adult dependent on his partner's Jobseeker's Allowance claim. An individual cannot receive a payment in their own

right while at the same time being recorded as a dependent on another claim. The overlap of the claims has been addressed and arrears of Enhanced Illness Benefit has issued to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

524. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied). [17952/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Overpayments of social welfare assistance and benefit payments arise as a consequence of decisions made under the relevant sections of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005 (as amended). Customers who have been overpaid social welfare have a liability to refund the overpayment as they have been in receipt of a payment to which they were not entitled. Where an overpayment is raised, the Department makes every effort to recover the amount overpaid. Recovery is sought over a period without imposing undue financial hardship on the customer. The Department will work with the customer and consider personal circumstances in determining a repayment plan.

The Department is currently reviewing the overpayment in this case. A Social Welfare Inspector will be in contact with the customer shortly.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

525. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the disparity between the levels of refusals for the domiciliary care allowance by age group; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that applications for those aged 11 to 16 years have a refusal rate of 43% in 2021 and 35% in 2020 compared to a refusal rate for children aged 0 to 5 years of 21% in 2021 and 9% in 2020 (details supplied); if she will carry out a review of this matter to ensure that those aged 11 to 16 years are not more likely to be refused owing to later assessments and or diagnoses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17983/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Domiciliary care allowance is a monthly payment to the parent/guardian of a child with a disability so severe that the child requires care and attention and/or supervision substantially in excess of another child of the same age. This care and attention must be provided to allow the child to deal with the activities of daily living. The child must be likely to require this level of care and attention for at least 12 months.

Applications for domiciliary care allowance are decided by a deciding officer on a case by case basis, with the decision reflecting the individual merits of each application. The deciding officer will have the benefit of the opinion of one of the Department's medical assessors prior to making their decision.

The medical assessors are all fully qualified medical practitioners who have training/experience in human disability evaluation. The medical assessor's opinion is based on the information furnished as part of the application process. This information includes personal details supplied on the application form by the child's parent / guardian; details of the additional care and attention required by the child as outlined by the parent / guardian and medical details provided by the child's GP or specialist. Any additional information the parent/guardian considers

relevant to the application is also reviewed (this could include consultant's reports, reports from a community health doctor, a copy of the needs assessment carried out by the HSE etc.).

Eligibility is determined primarily by reference to the degree of additional care and attention required by the child rather than to the type of disability involved.

The percentage of any age cohort who are ultimately deemed qualified over any particular period of time will vary due to a number of factors, including the volumes of applications relating to that age group and the ability of the child, as they get older, to better cope with their disability without substantial additional care for another person.

I can confirm that the same assessment criteria is applied to all applications irrespective of the age of child concerned.

### **Personal Public Service Numbers**

526. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average waiting time for a PPS number for international protection applicants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17999/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Officials in my department are currently managing large volumes of applications for PPS Numbers and efforts are made to ensure these applications are processed promptly.

In general, PPS Number applications for international protection applicants are processed within approximately one week of being received where the form has been fully completed and the required supporting documentation has been provided.

My department has in the region of 130 applications for PPS Numbers which require information or documentation in order to finalise the application. Officials are working with on-site partners and IPAS to complete processing these applications.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

527. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of men and women separately who were recipients of the benefit payment for 65-year-olds in 2021; the number of men and women separately aged 65 years who were in receipt of jobseeker's allowance in 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18115/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Benefit Payment for 65 Year Olds is a payment for people aged 65 who have ceased employment or self-employment and who satisfy the pay-related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. It became operational in February 2021. To qualify for Benefit Payment for 65 Year Olds, you must:

- be 65 years of age
- have ceased employment/self-employment
- be resident in the Republic of Ireland
- have sufficient PRSI contributions

Jobseeker's allowance is a means tested payment to people who are unemployed. To qualify for jobseeker's allowance, a person must:

- be fully unemployed, or work three days a week or less
- be available and genuinely seeking work
- be capable of work
- pass a means test
- meet the habitual residence condition

Table 1 below shows the number of males and females in receipt of the Benefit Payment for 65 Year Olds by month in 2021. Table 2 below shows the number of males and females aged 65 in receipt of jobseeker's allowance in 2021 by month.

Table 1: Number of recipients of Benefit Payment for 65 Year Olds in 2021, by month and sex

Month	Male	Female	Total
February	1,016	1,074	2,090
March	1,161	1,273	2,434
April	1,222	1,430	2,652
May	1,329	1,538	2,867
June	1,392	1,627	3,019
July	1,441	1,720	3,161
August	1,534	1,822	3,356
September	1,588	1,932	3,520
October	1,684	2,011	3,695
November	1,786	2,090	3,876
December	1,767	2,063	3,830

Table 2: Number of recipients of jobseeker's allowance aged 65 by month in 2021, by month and sex

Month	Male	Female	Total
January	1,390	687	2,077
February	1,394	694	2,088
March	1,365	708	2,073
April	1,344	711	2,055
May	1,318	722	2,040
June	1,313	737	2,050
July	1,282	744	2,026
August	1,278	707	1,985
September	1,262	714	1,976
October	1,269	710	1,979
November	1,247	701	1,948
December	1,273	738	2,011

### Social Welfare Benefits

528. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of households with an older person aged 70 plus in receipt of the household benefits package in 2021; the number of households with an older person aged 70 plus not in receipt of the household benefits package in 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18116/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Household Benefits package comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66, who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments. Only one Household Benefits package is payable per household.

At the end of 2021, the Household Benefits package was paid to some 480,000 recipients, of which some 330,000 were aged 70 or over. These households could include other persons over 70 years of age. It is also possible that there may be persons residing in a household who are over 70 years of age where the recipient of the Household Benefits package is under age 70.

My Department does not maintain a record of the number of households nationally, with a person aged over 70, who are not in receipt of the Household Benefits package.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

529. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18173/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Civil Service Departments and Offices have been working in line with Government Covid-19 guidance, which provides for home working to continue where possible.

As an essential service, staff in my Department have continued, throughout the pandemic, to work both on site and remotely to deliver services to our customers.

The number of staff who are working remotely at any one time across all business areas of the Department is approximately 3,300 or 50% of the total staffing number and has remained relatively constant throughout the pandemic, as part of temporary working arrangements put in place by local business areas.

The Government has confirmed its support of blended working in the Civil Service and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has developed an overarching Blended Working Policy Framework to support consistency of implementation of blended working across the Civil Service. In conjunction with this Framework, an application process is being developed to allow staff to apply for blended working into the future.

Following on from the publication of the Framework, my Department will develop and publish its own Blended Working Policy. As part of this policy implementation, subject to public health advice, an application process will be made available to facilitate staff applying for a range of blended working arrangements in accordance with the new policy and to plan for longer term blended working arrangements for staff, in line with principles defined as part of the agreed Central Framework.

## **Registration Certificate**

530. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has received a report from the HSE in respect of the backlog in making appointments for marriage notification which have to take place three months in advance; and if she plans to modify the legal obligation or make other changes to tackle this serious problem. [18203/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The requirement to notify any registrar of an intention to marry is set out in section 46 of the Civil Registration Act 2004, as amended. The notification must be served not less than three months prior to the planned date of marriage. An exemption to this requirement applies where the couple have been granted a court order that allows them to serve notice within the three months.

My Department has not received a report from the HSE on backlogs in the notifications for marriages. The Deputy will be aware of the significant impact on the number of marriages that were able to take place in 2020 and 2021 due to the imposition of public health restrictions to contain the Covid-19 pandemic with many couples postponing marriage to a later date.

I am advised that the HSE is working to increase capacity to deal with the current level of demand from couples to serve notice of an intention to marry and also to complete the other necessary legal requirements prior to a marriage proceeding. The demand for civil marriage ceremonies which are performed by HSE marriage registrars has also increased significantly in 2022.

I have no immediate plans to amend the three month requirement as this is not considered a remedy to the current level of demand, which is a combination of marriages postponed over the course of the past two years and the general demand for marriages in any year.

I will bring the Deputy's concern to the attention of the HSE and ask that the General Register Office continue its engagements to identify if changes in operations can be implemented within the current legal framework.

I trust that this information is of benefit to the Deputy.

## **Social Welfare Offices**

531. **Deputy Johnny Guirke** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 283 of 24 March 2022, if a definite undertaking can be given to ensure that the Castlepollard Westmeath branch office of her Department will remain open providing the full range of face-to-face services as at present into the foreseeable future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18227/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department currently has 58 Branch Offices at various locations throughout the country. Each contracted Branch Office is operated and managed under a contract for services, by a Branch Manager who is required to act as an agent for my Department in the area served by the office. Branch Office Managers operate on a contract for service and are independent contractors.

The contract for the delivery of Branch Office services in Castlepollard was due to expire on the 8th of February 2023. However, the Branch Manager has very recently informed the Department of his intention to retire.

The continued provision of Social Welfare services to Castlepollard customers has been pri-

oritised, both in accessing supports online and in-person. This includes the Community Welfare Service (CWS) and Employment Services. The Department will ensure that an efficient and quality public service which properly reflects customer needs is provided for all our customers in the Castlepollard area.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

### **Gender Recognition**

532. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of and position regarding providing the option to include non-binary as a gender option in the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18238/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Programme for Government - Our Shared Future, contains a number of actions with respect to gender recognition. My Department is engaged in progressing these actions. This work is ongoing across Government Departments and public bodies on evaluating the impact of changes required to ensure recognition of non-binary people. To this end, all Departments and public bodies have been asked to progress positive actions to give effect to:

- promoting the use and acceptance of correct pronouns;
- improving the design of official forms and documentation to permit the use of a third gender option, or no gender at all, where it is possible to do so.

The Deputy will appreciate that some of the work being undertaken may result in proposals to amend the Gender Recognition Act 2015 which will be considered by Government in due course.

I trust this information will be of benefit to the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Code**

533. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the benefit payment for 65-year-olds is means tested; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18246/22]

534. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a type of person (details supplied) would qualify for the benefit payment for 65-year-olds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18247/22]

535. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a type of person (details supplied) would qualify for the benefit payment for 65-year-olds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18248/22]

536. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a type of person (details supplied) would qualify for the benefit payment for 65-year-olds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18249/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 533 to 536, inclusive, together.

The Benefit Payment for 65 Year Olds was introduced on 25th January 2021, in line with the Programme for Government commitment, to provide a benefit payment for people who are

65 and who retire at age 65 but do not qualify for a State pension until they reach pension age of 66. Those who qualify for the payment are not required to sign on, partake in any activation measures or be available for and genuinely seeking work which is generally the case for recipients of jobseeker payments.

The benefit payment, which is not means tested, is provided under the Jobseeker's Benefit and Jobseeker's Benefit (Self-Employed) social insurance schemes in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 as amended.

One of the qualifying conditions for Benefit Payment for 65 year Olds is that a person must no longer be engaged in employment or self-employment. However, customers may continue to work in subsidiary employment while in receipt of Benefit Payment for 65 Year Olds, provided that the remuneration or profit from the occupation does not exceed €7,500 per annum or €144 on a weekly basis. Subsidiary employment is defined as work that could have been done while a person was in full-time employment and outside their normal working hours. Where a person has more than 117 contributions in the 3 years prior to becoming unemployed there is no income limit applied.

A person with investment income subject to PRSI Class K over €7,500 per year would not be eligible to any benefit payment from my Department.

Class S Self-employed contributors pay PRSI on a wide variety of self-employment income. These contributions help to ensure that individuals qualify for social welfare benefits, including pensions. The qualifying conditions for Jobseekers Benefit (Self-Employed) include the requirement that a person has completely ceased self-employment. For that reason, individuals who continue to pay Class S PRSI on a variety of income sources would not satisfy the conditions for Benefit Payment for 65 year olds as they are not regarded as having ceased self-employment; they continue to pay Class S PRSI and are to be regarded as being in insurable self-employment.

A person with distributions from an Annual Retirement Fund of over €7,500 per year would not qualify for the Benefit Payment for 65 year olds as they would be deemed to be in insurable employment.

Any person aged 65 who does not qualify for the benefit payment may apply for the means tested Jobseekers Allowance. The maximum rate of payment is also aligned with the weekly rate of payment for the Benefit Payment for 65 year olds, which is €208 and increased allowances are paid for qualifying adult and child dependents. A person can also be engaged in limited employment and may still qualify for a jobseeker's allowance payment subject to satisfying the scheme conditionality.

The issue regarding Class S PRSI contributions arising solely from personal pensions has been raised with my Department and the matter is under consideration.

I hope that this clarifies the position at this time.

*Question No. 534 answered with Question No. 533.*

*Question No. 535 answered with Question No. 533.*

*Question No. 536 answered with Question No. 533.*

## **Social Welfare Eligibility**



537. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) will be approved for the back to work enterprise allowance scheme. [18290/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is a support to qualifying customers wishing to take that first step into self-employment. It assists in alleviating the risks involved with a new venture and provides an element of financial security along with business mentoring and supports.

Following an initial assessment meeting with a Case Officer and agreement that the customer is eligible for BTWEA and that the business proposal is suitable, applicants are requested to meet with the Local Development Company (LDC) as soon as possible to develop a business plan.

Decisions on entitlement can only be made following receipt of the completed application form, business plan and a recommendation from the LDC by the Case Officer.

The person concerned submitted an application for the Back To Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme (BTWEA) to Killarney Intreo Centre.

This application has been forwarded by the Case Officer to South Kerry Development Partnership (SKDP) to assist the person in the development of a business plan.

When this has been completed, SKDP will return the application for BTWEA and the supporting business plan to the Case Officer. The Case Officer will then contact the person concerned with a view to progressing the application on the recommendation from the SKDP.

I am informed that the Case Officer hopes to have feedback from the Enterprise Officer in SKDP early next week.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Code**

538. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a scenario (details supplied) will be reviewed; if clarity will be provided in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18310/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care. An increased payment can be made where full-time care and attention is being provided to two people.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses for a maximum of 18.5 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

Any arrangements with regard to the hours worked are a matter between an individual and their employer. This Department has no role or function in this regard.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

## **Social Welfare Benefits**

539. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there is differentiation between types of fuel allowance recipients, such as those receiving the fuel allowance payment as part of community employment or Tús schemes; if all recipients fall under the national fuel allowance; if she will provide information on recent changes as to the way fuel allowance recipients are categorised in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18313/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Fuel Allowance is a payment of €33.00 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €924 each year) from October to April, which is supporting up to an estimated 400,000 households in 2022, at an estimated cost of €366 million in 2022. 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.

A person who is in receipt of the Fuel Allowance payment who moves to a community employment or TUS scheme may retain their Fuel allowance payment while participating on these schemes subject to continuing to satisfy all relevant qualifying conditions.

My Department does not differentiate between the cohort of people referred to by the Deputy and other claimants of the Fuel Allowance scheme. They are all considered recipients of the Fuel Allowance payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Social Welfare Code**

540. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Social Protection if consideration has been given to assessing income from pensions for the fuel allowance based on net income rather than gross income (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18326/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Fuel Allowance is a payment of €33.00 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €924 each year) from October to April, which is supporting up to an estimated 400,000 households in 2022, at an estimated cost of €366 million in 2022. 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.

To receive the fuel allowance payment an applicant must be in receipt of a qualifying payment, satisfy a means test and the household composition test. This ensures that the fuel allowance payment goes to those who are more vulnerable to fuel poverty including those reliant on social protection payments for longer periods and those who are unlikely to have additional resources of their own.

In Budget 2022 and with immediate effect the Government increased the weekly means threshold for the fuel allowance scheme by €20 to €120 above the appropriate rate of Contributory State Pension representing a 20% increase and enabling more people to qualify for this support.

Fuel Allowance operates as part of an overall system of social protection supports which provides assistance payments based on a system of means testing. The means test ensures that the recipient has a verifiable income need and that resources are targeted to those who need

them most.

By its nature, the means test takes account of the income a person or couple has in terms of cash, property - other than the family home - and capital. It does not take account of a person's expenditure commitments or income tax circumstances.

For most social assistance payments, deductions from gross income are permitted in the case of PRSI, union dues, superannuation (pension contributions) and travel expenses.

If net rather than gross income was assessed for Fuel Allowance, it would mean that changes in tax rates or tax reliefs could change the claimant's entitlement. In addition, to deduct outgoings such as mortgage or rent payments would significantly increase the complexity of the means assessment. It would also have significant budgetary implications and would give rise to inconsistencies in how means tests are applied across schemes.

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.

### **Employment Support Services**

541. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 489 of 29 March 2022, the names and number of meetings held with the companies referred to in the reply as other organisations that were considering entering the Irish market. [18344/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** To clarify for the Deputy, officials from my Department have engaged extensively with interested parties in advance of the current procurement process for employment support services. As I have previously advised there have been over 140 engagements with the community sector including consultation on its views on how services can best be constructed to deliver quality services to the Department's customers.

This included visits to every Local Employment Service and Job Club contractor in late 2019. The Department has engaged with their representatives, heard their concerns regarding the provision of services, their concerns regarding being able to make competitive bids for services and their views on the overall procurement process. Many of the issues raised by the Irish Local Development Network concerning the structure of services have been addressed in the overall design of the services being procured. There have been 15 formal meetings at official level with the Irish Local Development Network since 2019 on the procurement of employment services.

My officials have engaged with and met the trade union organisation SIPTU to hear their concerns regarding the interests of their members who are employed in the community sector and whose employers are contractors to my Department. Officials have had formal meetings with SIPTU specific to the ongoing restructuring of services on 4 occasions since 2019.

In contrast, at the request of organisations who sought to introduce themselves to the Department, my officials had introductory meetings with Maximus on 9th Dec 2021, Capita on 24th Sept 2021 and FedCap on 11th May 2021.

## **Social Welfare Schemes**

542. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there is a scheme in place to help persons on social welfare who suffer from gluten-related dietary restrictions with the cost of coeliac friendly foods; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18386/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Diet supplement, administered under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, is payable to qualifying persons, in receipt of the supplement prior to February 2014, who have been prescribed a special diet as a result of a specified medical condition. There are currently approximately 1,500 people in receipt of diet supplement at a cost of €0.75 million in 2021.

A review of the costs of healthy eating and specialised diets by the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute was commissioned by my Department during 2013. The research showed that the average costs across all of the retail outlets of the diets supplemented under the scheme could be met from within one-third of the minimum personal rate of social welfare payment, i.e. the Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate, which was then paid at €186 per week (and is currently paid at €206 per week). The diet supplement scheme was discontinued for new applicants from 1 February 2014 on the basis of this evidence.

Recipients continue to receive the diet supplement at their existing rate of payment for as long as they continue to have an entitlement to the scheme or until their circumstances change. This measure ensured that nobody was immediately worse off by the closure of the scheme.

In cases of particular hardship, officials continue to have the legislative power to award a supplementary welfare allowance payment in cases of exceptional need.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Departmental Contracts**

543. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of consultants to her Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and she will provide an outline of the role of each. [18895/22]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The procurement of external consultancy services is essential to support my Department in providing high quality service to the public in a cost effective and efficient manner. Consultants are engaged for a fixed period following procurement exercises conducted in accordance with Department procedures that are compliant with EU and national legislation and with guidelines set down by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. All consultancy related payments in my Department are made from the consultancy budget (A2(vii) subhead).

A breakdown of annual expenditure on consultancy and IT external service provision, and a list of purchase orders for €20,000 and above, is available on my Department's website at gov.ie - Department of Social Protection Policy on Procurement ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

Below are the costs and description for Consultancy in 2020, and the provisional costs for 2021 and 2022 to date.

-	2022	
BearingPoint Ireland Ltd	€21,123	Consultancy Support in the setting up of PUP Scheme Area and in establishing the Central Jobseeker Processing Unit
Hyperion Systems Ltd	€4,732	SAFE - Expert Advice
Crowe Advisory Limited	€2,706	Financial and Economic Services
	2021	
BearingPoint Ireland Ltd	€122,508	Consultancy Support in the setting up of PUP Scheme Area and in establishing the Central Jobseeker Processing Unit
Mazars	€58,733	Government Banking Services implementation
Institute for Employment Studies	€57,518	Design, development and procurement of future contracted public employment services
The Economic and Social Research Institute	€49,315	Poverty and Social Inclusion Research Programme 2020-2023
BearingPoint Ireland Ltd	€47,145	Customer Contact Strategy Implementation
Ernst & Young Business Advisory Services	€42,143	Outsourced IS internal audit expertise
KPMG	€30,062	Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA)
Crowe Advisory Limited	€26,445	Financial and Economic Services
Project Botticelli Limited	€25,830	Migration of Analytics Platform
Hyperion Systems Ltd	€23,408	SAFE - Expert Advice
Ruth A Fitzgerald	€16,680	Transposition of the IORP II Directive
KPMG	€12,100	Actuarial Peer Review services
	2020	
Institute for Employment Studies	€123,318	Design, development and procurement of future contracted public employment services

-	2022	
Hyperion Systems Ltd	€80,773	SAFE - Expert Advice (Consult Hyperion)
Ernst & Young	€69,198	Outsourced IS internal audit expertise
ESRI	€62,713	Measurement and Analysis of Household Income and Living Conditions (2016-2018)
Crowleys DFK	€40,313	Accounting Services
KPMG	€22,775	Data Protection Impact Assessments
Crowe Advisory Limited	€12,705	Financial and Economic Services
KPMG	€10,086	Update of Actuarial Review of the SIF (2015) - 2020
Ruth A Fitzgerald	€1,820	Transposition of the IORP II Directive
Paul Cunningham	€1,495	HRC Guidelines Review

### International Protection

544. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the status of IPAS in Cork for those persons arriving from Ukraine; and if there is a point of contact for persons to secure or offer accommodation. [17426/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** To date more than 10,000 of those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine who have arrived in Ireland have been referred to the International Protection Accommodations Service (IPAS) for accommodation.

In light of the continued significant numbers of people coming in to the State, and the potentially substantial numbers that may arrive, my Department is contracting all forms of accommodation, including in Cork.

A dedicated team in my Department is focused on the provision of accommodation to Ukrainian refugees.

We have also established a dedicated team at the City West Convention Centre that meets new arrivals from Ukraine. Alongside this, we are participating in hubs in Cork and Limerick cities, led by the Department of Social Protection to support new arrivals. Wexford County Council is supporting my Department in maintaining a presence at Rosslare Port. We have specifically prepared reception areas and they include designated spaces for children and adults and quiet spaces.

Deputy, please see below figures detailing total arrivals to Ireland (Ukrainians and 3rd country nationals) as of 30 March:

Entry point	Dublin Airport	Dublin Port	Cork Airport	Rosslare Port	Shannon Airport	Other Ports/Airports	TOTAL
Arrivals	12,798	276	370	1,222	599	29	15,294

It is not possible to provide a county breakdown as the situation is constantly changing as numbers are increasing rapidly and as accommodation is often short-term in nature.

### Refugee Resettlement Programme

545. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on establishing online supports (details supplied) or similar supports for those Ukrainian refugees who lack transport or childcare to attend supports in person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17497/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** As this query speaks to multiple support services across various Departments in relation to an online platform, I would suggest that you direct your question to the Department of an Taoiseach which has a co-ordinating role in relation to the ongoing Ukraine situation.

My Department is responsible for the provision of emergency accommodation. Over 10,000 people have already been accommodated by my Department so far.

### Refugee Resettlement Programme

546. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the rental accommodation supports that will be made available to Ukrainian refugees who require own door accommodation as opposed to congregated settings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17498/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The provision of rental accommodation supports are matters for my colleagues, the Minister for Social Protection and the Minister for Housing.

### Refugee Resettlement Programme

547. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the account which is being made of refugees in non-IPAS sourced accommodation; the efforts that are being made to assess the implications this may have on demand for schools and other services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17499/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** As this query relates to implications on school demands and other services I would suggest that you make contact with my colleague, the Minister for Education. in relation to this matter.

### Refugee Resettlement Programme

548. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth his views on establishing a one stop shop type service by county for Ukrainian refugees who have completed the processes currently available at the reception hubs. [17500/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Community fora are being established in each local authority area, chaired by each local authority, as the means of coordinating support from public bodies, community groups and volunteers to support Ukrainian refugees in each county. Their role will be to coordinate the identification of refugee needs and to link them to key services in each local authority area.

### **Public Sector Staff**

549. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to 12 and over 12 months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17593/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** There are no staff from my Department absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes. My officials have asked the State Agencies under my remit to respond to you directly on the matter.

### **Direct Provision System**

550. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the number of persons currently residing in direct provision who have been granted asylum and refugee status; the longest time period that a person has remained living in a direct provision centre after they had been granted asylum and refugee status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17621/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The number of persons with some form of status residing in International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) accommodation at end February 2022 was 2,265.

There are currently seven households that have been granted some form of status currently residing in IPAS accommodation over four years. The longest household with status is six years and four months.

Whilst we cannot comment specifically on individual cases, some households require a greater level of support transitioning into the community with regard to their medical, welfare and legal requirements to facilitate their move on to appropriate accommodation.

IPAS has a dedicated team who work together with the assistance of Peter McVerry Trust (PMVT)/DePaul Ireland to support and assist those with status to progress on from IPAS accommodation into the community.

### **Child Protection**



551. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if the case of a person (details supplied) has been brought to his attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17622/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** As the Deputy will appreciate, matters relating to private family law do not fall within the remit of my Department and are a matter for the Minister for Justice.

The Courts are, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their statutory functions and the conduct of any family law case is a matter for the presiding judge. The Courts Service has a dedicated email address for the provision of information to members of the Houses of the Oireachtas: oireachtasenquiries@courts.ie

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the statutory body with responsibility for child protection and welfare services. Tusla has no function in monitoring or enforcing court ordered access visits.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

552. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the arrangements for childcare and play areas in congregated settings that are located outside town centres for those Ukrainian refugees who require same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17640/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department has developed a comprehensive action plan to respond to the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) needs of Ukrainian children and their families.

Key actions include:

- Facilitating access to my Department’s funding schemes – the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) and the National Childcare Scheme (NCS)

- Identifying ELC places available locally and nationally for Ukrainian children

- Proactively engaging with ELC services to explore the scope for any expansion in ELC capacity - with applications to Tusla to increase capacity in ELC services fast tracked, where possible.

- Providing an “ELC matching service” to link Ukrainian children to ELC services.

- Providing information and a host of supports to ELC services to help them meet the needs of Ukrainian children and their families, including training on trauma-informed practice and guidance on how ELC services can best support children and families in the context of the conflict in Ukraine.

- Providing information, supports and practical resources to Ukrainian families to support children’s early learning and opportunities for play, including information and Parent and Toddler Groups, designated play areas in temporary accommodation and links to wider supports for early learning, including the network of local libraries.

- Providing stay and play sessions within hotel or group accommodation facilities.

To support the implementation of this action plan, my Department has engaged with the

Early Learning and Childcare Stakeholder Forum and is mobilising a range of organisations, including Pobal, Better Start, City/County Childcare Committees (CCC), Tusla and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations. My Department is also engaging with the Department of Education to ensure our approach is aligned, where appropriate, to the approach taken in schools.

CCC are asked to provide play activities through stay and play sessions to Ukrainian children and families within any hotel or group accommodation facilities within their CCC area. My Department will allocate a budget to each CCC dependent on the number of accommodation sites in order to purchase play materials/resources to support this work. Supports are also available from Better Start Quality Development Specialists if need arises in any CCC area.

Latest data from Pobal shows there are an estimated 39,000 vacant ELC places across the country to meet the ELC needs of Ukrainian children and their families. This capacity may not be available in all areas where these children and families are accommodated however and places available may not meet specific needs, for example ELC places for young children. CCC are currently proactively engaging with services in relation to capacity and together with my Department will work to resolve specific capacity issues, as they arise.

### Early Childhood Care and Education

553. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he can advise on matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in relation to rural preschools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17839/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Core Funding is a new funding stream for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) services introduced in Budget 2022 and informed by the work of the Expert Group to develop a new funding model for ELC and SAC, outlined in *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*.

Core Funding is a payment to providers designed to support quality, sustainability, and enhanced public management, with associated conditions in relation to fee control and cost transparency, incorporating funding for administration and to support the employment of graduate staff. Core Funding aims to offer better financial sustainability to providers in return for a cultural shift to a partnership relationship between providers and the State that reflects the public good dimension of ELC and SAC.

On 7th March I announced the rates and values for the Core Funding, and launched the online Ready Reckoner tool. The Ready Reckoner is accessible to all and is designed to give an idea of what services can expect to receive based on their characteristics. It also allows different scenarios of provision to be tested. This will show the benefits of applying for Core Funding when it is possible to do so.

Where providers are experiencing difficulties completing the Ready Reckoner, I would encourage them to engage with their local City/County Childcare Committee (CCC) who can provide support.

The majority of Core Funding (i.e. €183 million of the €221 million) will be distributed based on a service’s capacity - opening hours, opening weeks and the age group of children for whom services are provided as well as number of places available. This €183 million includes allocations for improvements in staff pay and conditions (€138 million), for administrative

staff/time (€25 million), and a contribution to non-staff overhead costs (€20 million). The rationale for distributing Core Funding based on capacity is that capacity encompasses the primary characteristics that determine the service's costs of delivery. Structuring Core Funding primarily based on capacity will support sustainability and stability for services, since they will have an allocation each year that will not fluctuate in line with children's attendance.

In addition to the €183 million allocated on the basis of capacity, a further €38 million is allocated to contribute to support graduates to be Lead Educators across ELC and to support graduates as Managers in ELC or combined ELC and SAC services. Heretofore funding has only been available in respect of graduate Room Leaders in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme.

Services whose provision is led by a graduate will receive this Graduate Premium, on top of their other funding. The Graduate Lead Educator Premium in Core Funding is paid as a top up on the number of hours of provision that is led by a graduate with a relevant qualification and three years' experience. The Graduate Manager Premium is paid as a top up on the number of hours of operation of a service whose manager is a graduate with a relevant qualification. An ELC Graduate Manager who also works as a Lead Educator can only attract one graduate premium.

Core Funding will address some of the existing disparities in funding levels across ECCE and non-ECCE provision, providing funding proportionate to the age ratio of children being cared for and supporting the employment of graduate Lead Educators across ELC provision. While Core Funding will operate in addition to and alongside ECCE (standard capitation), AIM, CCSP and NCS, it replaces ECCE higher capitation and incorporates funding previously allocated to the discretionary Programme Support Payments (PSP), with an increased allocation, from September 2022.

The significant majority of ELC and SAC services will see substantial increases in income through Core Funding. It is important to state that no service will lose out because of Core Funding.

My Department has issued a funding guarantee to providers. All services will receive at least the same level of funding in Core Funding as they received from higher capitation and PSP in the 2021/22 programme year, assuming the numbers of children, graduate staff and type of service offered remains the same

Services for whom the Funding Guarantee will apply and those who will see just small increases from Core Funding are ECCE services in receipt of higher capitation for large groups of children and with high occupancy levels. Such services are currently in receipt of the highest levels of public funding relative to the staffing levels required for operating those types of services, €110-€120 per hour of service provided, substantially in excess of the average staffing costs for this type of provision.

The level of investment being made available for Core Funding is an acknowledgement that high quality ELC and SAC costs more than the current income to the sector and that this additional investment is best allocated by linking the quantum of funding to services with their underlying costs of delivery.

This is the start of a multi-annual investment plan and is part of Government's commitment to realising the *First 5* target of investment of approximately €1 billion by 2028. *First 5* and Core Funding recognise that the workforce is at the heart of high-quality ELC. Strong international evidence shows that children achieve better outcomes when staff are well qualified. *First 5* seeks to continue to build an appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce,

and includes a commitment to achieve a graduate-led workforce by 2028. Core Funding introduces a strategic way of funding the sector and begins to implement the recommendations of the Expert Group to develop a new funding model.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

554. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth when the application forms for redress will be sent to survivors of Mother and Baby homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17937/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I am acutely aware of the sense of urgency surrounding the establishment of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and I am focused on delivering the Scheme as soon as possible. Last week, I secured Government approval for the draft Heads of Bill for the Payment Scheme and for the referral of these draft Heads of Bill to the Office of Parliamentary Council for drafting. I have sought priority drafting of the Bill to ensure that it can be introduced to the Houses of the Oireachtas as soon as possible. I have also referred the draft Heads of Bill to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for pre-legislative scrutiny, again requesting their assistance in meeting the urgent need to deliver this Scheme for survivors as soon as possible.

Once the legislation has been passed by the Oireachtas and the Executive Office to deliver the Scheme has been established, the Scheme will be open for applications. I hope that this will be possible by the end of 2022.

### **International Protection**

555. **Deputy Joe O’Brien** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the breakdown including by gender and nationality of the number of single persons who have entered the International Protection Process in 2022, presenting with a date of birth which would make them under 18 years of age at the time their case was opened but are living in International Protection Accommodation Services accommodation and noted as not being unaccompanied minors. [17947/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** As of February 2022, 1,347 children were living in International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) accommodation under the care of their parents who were seeking international protection. There are no unaccompanied minors in IPAS accommodation.

### **Childcare Services**

556. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he will consider increasing the subsidy under the national childcare scheme in recognition of the increase in crèche fees due to increased running costs for crèches to support parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18028/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** The package of measures announced in Budget 2022, which will be implemented throughout the course of 2022, is designed to ensure that fees to parents do not increase and that the full affordability benefits of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) are felt without being

absorbed in fee increases.

The NCS comprises two types of subsidies:

- A **universal subsidy** is payable for children between the ages of 24 weeks and 36 months (or until the child qualifies for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme if later) who are availing of childcare services from an approved childcare service provider. The universal subsidy is not means-tested and is available to all qualifying families of any income level.

- An **income-related subsidy** is payable for children from 24 weeks to 15 years of age who are availing of childcare services from an approved childcare service provider. The level of subsidy is determined by the family's assessable income (i.e. gross income minus tax, PRSI and other deductibles and minus any applicable multiple child discount).

As part of Budget 2022, I announced two changes to the NCS which will result in more parents getting more subsidised hours of early learning and childcare in Tulsa registered services.

- The universal subsidy will be made available to all families with children under 15 years of age.

- There will be a change in the practice of deducting hours spent in pre-school or school from the entitlement to income-related subsidised NCS hours. This means that the full awarded subsidised NCS hours will be available regardless of whether children are in pre-school or school.

In addition, a new Core Funding stream will be introduced for ELC and SAC services to support improved quality, affordability, and sustainability. Core Funding will require a commitment not to increase fees to parents from the September 2021 rates. This means that parents will not be faced with fee increases, and the full affordability effects of the NCS and ECCE Pre-school Programme, will be felt by parents.

Providers who do increase their fees will be required to revert to September 2021 levels on or before September 2022 in order to be eligible for the new Core Funding stream.

## Youth Services

557. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the funding streams that are available for Foróige clubs to acquire their own premises to operate out of; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18033/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** The annual capital budget available to the Youth Affairs Unit of the Department is approximately €3 million and this funding is utilised to meet the capital needs of all national youth organisations, youth services and youth clubs which are in receipt of youth funding from the Youth Affairs Unit.

This limited annual capital funding is distributed among over 30 national youth organisations, over 250 funded UBU Your Place Your Space youth services and over 1,500 youth clubs which are funded by the Youth Affairs Unit. The funding is made available in the form of small grants for the purchase of essential equipment or small scale minor works. In view of the overall limited capital funding available, grant funding is not available for any major refurbishments, construction projects, or purchases of buildings or land.

## **Parental Leave**

558. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if a person takes parental leave for one child in the form of two six-week blocks can they take the other 14 weeks or is this time lost (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18103/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Family leaves are an important tool for working families to balance their working lives with the needs of their families and the current entitlements for parents in Ireland includes a range of options, both paid and unpaid.

Under the Parental Leave Act 1998 (as amended), an employee who is a relevant parent in respect of a child under the age 12 is entitled to 26 weeks unpaid parental leave for each child. Where a child has a disability or long-term illness, the entitlement can continue until the child is 16. A relevant parent is a parent, an adoptive parent, or a person acting in ‘loco parentis’.

An employee must give their employer written notice of their intention to take parental leave at least six weeks in advance of taking the leave and a confirmation document setting out the details of the leave should be signed by the employee and employer at least four weeks in advance of the commencement of the leave.

Under the legislation, the leave can be taken as one continuous period of leave or in 2 separate periods of not less than 6 weeks each. With the agreement of the employer, the leave may also be taken in the form of working days or hours.

Where a dispute arises in relation to the entitlements of an employee under the Parental Leave Act, a complaint can be made to the Workplace Relations Commission.

## **Flexible Work Practices**

559. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18184/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Following Public Health advice staff in my department were supported to work remotely since March 2020. Further to the revised Public Health advice staff are currently attending the office at least 2 days per week.

A central policy framework for Blended Working in the Civil Service was launched on 31 March 2022. This framework will inform my Department’s blended working policy which is currently being drafted. It is expected that the blended working policy will be in place in Q2 2022.

## **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

560. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if there are plans to allocate or increase resources to community organisations in an area (details supplied) that are currently delivering services and supports and those who wish to deliver services and supports to persons in the community who have fled from

Ukraine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18211/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** To date more than 10,000 of those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine who have arrived in Ireland have been referred to the International Protection Accommodations Service (IPAS) for accommodation.

In light of the continued significant numbers of people coming into the State, and the potentially substantial numbers that may arrive, my Department is contracting all forms of accommodation.

The Government is committed to delivering a whole of Government, humanitarian response to people fleeing the war in Ukraine and seeking protection in Ireland. Community response fora are being established in all local authority areas, chaired by local authorities, to coordinate the provision of supports to Ukrainian refugees.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

561. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the supports that are being provided in an area (details supplied) by his Department to persons in the community who have fled from Ukraine; if this will include holistic supports to children and young persons who may need specialist supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18212/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** To date more than 10,000 of those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine who have arrived in Ireland have been referred to the International Protection Accommodations Service (IPAS) for accommodation.

The Government is committed to delivering a whole of Government, humanitarian response to people fleeing the war in Ukraine and seeking protection in Ireland.

My Department is liaising with all relevant departments and agencies to ensure that there is joined up support for refugees from Ukraine who need it in communities across the country. This includes the provision of supports to children and young people, including in relation to childcare and access to education.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

562. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the measures that will be undertaken to integrate children, young persons, young adults and families who have fled from Ukraine into communities in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18213/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I wish to advise the Deputy that I am not in a position to comment on these matters which are more appropriate for the attention of my Cabinet colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

### **Child and Family Agency**

563. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if he and-or Tusla are in possession of the records of children born to parents in St. Ita's Hospital, Dublin who were subsequently adopted; and if so, the location in which these records are stored. [18293/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** As the subject matter of the Deputy's question relates to an operational matter I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and the Adoption Authority of Ireland, for a direct reply.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

564. **Deputy Brid Smith** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if a home (details supplied) is included in the mother and baby homes redress scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18319/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** The Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme will provide financial payments and a form of enhanced medical card for people who spent time as mothers or children in Mother and Baby or County Home Institutions.

It is recognised that there are people who suffered stigma, trauma and abuse in other institutions, and outside of institutions also. However, the institutions covered by the Scheme are those identified by the Commission of Investigation as having a main function of providing sheltered and supervised ante and post-natal facilities to single mothers and their children. Westbank Orphanage is, therefore, not included in the Scheme as it does not meet those criteria.

### **Youth Work Projects**

565. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth the total number of persons employed as youth workers under the Your Place Your Space scheme, by county and by ETB area, in tabular form. [18390/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O'Gorman):** My Department does not collate the information requested by the Deputy.

Funding provided under the *UBU Your Place Your Space* scheme does not directly fund youth worker posts/salaries. Rather, it is allocated on an organisational basis on a 'provision of service' basis to meet the identified local needs of the youth population in an area.

The *UBU Your Place Your Space* scheme is targeted towards disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable young people. The recruitment and employment of staff including youth workers is a matter for the youth organisations and services themselves.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

566. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if a database or other such resource is available on a localised level to assist in the identification of housing availability for Ukrainian refugees; if his attention has been drawn to schools seeking housing for children in emergency accommodation due to the lack of a local



resource on housing availability and his efforts to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18402/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** My Department is focused on providing emergency accommodation to people fleeing Ukraine where requested. Almost 10,000 people have been provided with accommodation by IPAS to date.

IPAS has contracted over 5,000 hotel rooms, with additional capacity also being pursued through hotels, guest houses and B&Bs, accommodation pledged by the general public, religious properties, and local authority facilities.

More than 20,000 people have also pledged accommodation through the Irish Red Cross. My Department has begun to utilise this accommodation, focusing initially on vacant homes and this process will continue.

My Department is working closely with the local authorities on present accommodation needs. Longer term accommodation needs require input for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and these discussions are taking place.

Engagement is also taking place with officials in other Government Departments including the Department of Education of provision of services to those fleeing Ukraine.

Work is underway in my Department to develop data system that will track accommodation being provided by IPAS. Discussions are also taking place across Government on a data solution that will map locations of those fleeing Ukraine to services including schools.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

567. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if a structure is being put in place to ensure that services such as the HSE medical card services are notified of the presentation of Ukrainian refugees at their offices in order that preparations can be made to deal with their needs such as ensuring adequate numbers of staff are available and the presence of translators can be arranged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18403/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** I wish to advise the Deputy that I am not in a position to comment on these matters which are more appropriate for the attention of my Cabinet colleague, the Minister for Health.

### **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

568. **Deputy Martin Browne** asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth if consideration is being given to provide publicly funded translation services to assist agencies dealing with Ukrainian refugees given the high costs that are being encountered by Tusla and other organisations that acquire the services of private providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18404/22]

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Deputy Roderic O’Gorman):** Since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, my Department continues to work as part of the whole-of-Government response to meet the immediate accommodation needs of

those fleeing the conflict. It is reviewing how best to provide translation services to Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection but has not yet concluded its assessment in this regard.

### Education and Training Boards

569. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of training companies that have been engaged by the Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board as a result of the new round of tendering for the delivery of training packages; the names of the successful companies; the number that have the competency to deliver training in Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18105/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins):** The Office of Government Procurement ran a competition in 2021 for a multi supplier Framework Agreement and Services Contracts for the provision of contracted Further Education and Training Services in Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The successful companies under the Galway Roscommon ETB Lot are: *Eden Computer Training Limited – trading as Eden Training; Chevron College Limited; FRS Training, Irish Times Training and partners; Klangley Investments (Cork) Limited, trading as Impact Training and KT Business Skills Limited.* These companies are responsible for the delivery of training through Irish, should this be required from them.

While GRETB has held introductory meetings with all contractors, drawdown contracts for training programmes have yet to be issued to any successful companies through the new framework. No services have been procured through Irish to date under these frameworks.

### Further and Higher Education

570. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will intervene in the case of a person (details supplied) regarding a SUSI grant issue. [18384/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** For student grant purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students.

A student may be assessed as an independent student (i.e. assessed without reference to parental income and address) if he/she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved course, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous 1st October. Otherwise, he/she would be assessed as a dependent student, i.e. assessed with reference to parental income and address.

A student's status for grant purposes is defined at their first point of entry to an approved further or higher education course or at their point of re-entry to an approved course following a break in studies of at least three years, and continues to apply for the duration of their studies.

However, there are points at which a student may reclassify from a dependent student to an independent student. These are where he/she:

- Progresses from further education to higher education.

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- Is returning following a 3 year break in studies.
- Is returning as a “second chance” student after a five year break in studies.

The decision on eligibility for student grant applications is a matter for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

Applicants who do not meet the criteria to be assessed as an independent student for grant purposes, or who cannot supply the necessary documentation to establish independent living for the required period, may still apply to SUSI to have their grant eligibility assessed as a dependent student. The relevant information, including details of parental income, would be required by SUSI to determine grant eligibility as a dependent student.

With regard to the specific application, I have been advised by my officials that the student has exhausted the appeals process. His appeal was heard by the independent Student Grant Appeals Board on 25 January 2022 and the outcome was issued directly to him.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

### **Further and Higher Education**

571. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the date that the 2022-2023 round of SUSI funding will open. [17429/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** SUSI’s online application process for renewal student grant applications for the 2022/23 academic year opened on 10th March, 2022. New applications will be accepted by SUSI from April 28th, 2022.

As part of Budget 2022, I have secured an additional €15m to enhance the existing financial supports under the Student Grant Scheme for implementation in 2022.

For the academic year 2022/23 this will mean:-

- An increase to all student grant maintenance payments, including the special rate of grant, of €200 per year which will benefit all students entitled to receive a maintenance Grant. There are currently circa 62,000 SUSI grant recipients receiving maintenance support.

- The income threshold to qualify for the standard rate of student grant has been increased by €1,000.

- The qualifying distance criterion for students to qualify for the non-adjacent rate of grant has been reduced from 45km to 30km, effective from the start of the 2022/23 academic year.

I have prioritised these changes for the 2022/23 academic year and they will benefit thousands of students building on the improvements that have already been made for postgraduate students through this year’s student grant scheme. These improvements to the student grant scheme have been a priority for me since taking up my Ministerial appointment.

## **Further and Higher Education**

572. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of undergraduate places to be available in 2022-2023 across health and social care disciplines, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17435/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** 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 and social care workforce. My officials are currently engaging with the Higher Education Authority and representatives from the higher education sector on the provision of additional places for the coming academic year. It is the intention that there will be a focus on areas such as healthcare and social work where there is a need for more skilled graduates. Work is well underway on this, and the places created will be sustainable and aligned with medium term planning. A final number has not been agreed for 2022/23 and as such I am not in a position to provide this as requested by the Deputy in tabular form.

In the longer term, 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 officials are actively engaging with the Department of Health on determining the longer term skills needs of the healthcare services, and the role which the further and higher education sector can play in meeting those skills needs. I will ensure that there is continued engagement with all stakeholders to ensure that we deliver graduates with the skills necessary to support our healthcare system and support the strategic workforce planning by the health sector.

## **Further and Higher Education**

573. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the manner in which additional clinical training places are arranged and co-ordinated to create capacity for additional clinical placements in health and social care disciplines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17436/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The provision of clinical placements is a matter arranged by individual HEIs and the HSE and other healthcare providers. My Department does not have a direct role in the provision of placements.

From a nursing and midwifery perspective, there are Local Joint Working Groups (LJWGs) in place across the country aligned to each HEI/University and the associated healthcare partner area. These LJWGs provide the governance for the undergraduate nursing and midwifery training and are composed of representatives from both HEIs/Universities and health service. The LJWGs meet regularly throughout the year and include discussions/negotiations on capacity to increase student intake. If agreement is reached between the partners to increase the intake, the information is submitted to the Higher Education Authority. The HEA and my Department will link with the DoH regarding the proposed increase in student intake. The Department of Health will subsequently liaise with the HSE in relation to required additional supports such as Clinical Placement Co-ordinators. In parallel, exercises are ongoing at LJWG level to source and develop new clinical sites to further enhance the capacity to accommodate additional students.

In the recently published report of the Expert Review Body on Nursing and Midwifery (2022), it is recognised that the projected increase in nursing and midwifery student numbers will require planning in relation to academic, clinical staffing and placements resources.

In relation to the Health and Social Care Professions, the HSE is required to facilitate practice education under *Section 7 (4)* the Health Act 2004.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and related issues, the HSE has identified critical shortages in practice placements for Health and Social Care Professional students. The focus of the HSE is on supporting practice placement for the domestic supply.

The Health and Social Care Professional education programmes report significant challenges in securing sufficient practice placements for Health and Social Care Professional entry to practice programmes, without which Health and Social Care Professional students cannot complete their programmes, graduate and join the workforce.

The HSE is working with key stakeholders to identify potential solutions and the resources required to address issues relating to sufficient supply of practice placements for Health and Social Care Professionals. The priority of the HSE is to work with the Higher Education Institutes to enable the placements required for the progression of students through their educational programmes and to enable completion, graduation, and registration of the final year students to ensure timely supply of health and Social Care Professionals into the workforce.

My officials are actively engaging with the Department of Health on determining the medium and long term skills needs of the healthcare services, and the role which the further and higher education sector can play in meeting those skills needs. Capacity for additional placements will form part of this conversation, and where additional places in health and social care disciplines are created it will be ensured that corresponding placements are made available. I will ensure that there is continued engagement with all stakeholders to ensure that we deliver graduates with the skills necessary to support our healthcare system and support the strategic workforce planning by the health and social care sector.

### **Further and Higher Education**

574. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of a 1% increase in medical students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17437/22]

575. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of a 1% increase in nursing and midwifery students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17438/22]

576. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of a 1% increase in speech and language therapy students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17439/22]

577. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of a 1% increase in occupational therapy students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17440/22]

578. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the estimated cost of a 1% increase in psychology students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17441/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 574 to 578, inclusive, together.

The costs incurred by a Higher Education Institution in increasing student places on a particular course can vary depending on a variety of factors including the type of course and the individual circumstances of the relevant Higher Education Institution. It is therefore not possible to definitively calculate the costs sought.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has provided the below estimates, based on 2020/21 full-time enrolments (excluding Non-EU fee paying students), to provide the Deputy with an indication of the potential costs associated with increased places in the courses queried:

- 1% increase in full-time undergraduate medical students has an estimated cost of c.€936,000 - €982,000.

- 1% increase in full-time undergraduate nursing and midwifery students has an estimated cost of c. €710,000 - €745,000

- 1% increase in full-time undergraduate speech and language therapy students has an estimated cost of c.€35,000 - €37,000.

- 1% increase in full-time undergraduate occupational therapy students has an estimated cost of c.€39,000 - €41,000

- 1% increase in full-time undergraduate psychology (UG Honours Degrees) students has an estimated cost of c.€133,000 - €139,000

- 1% increase in full-time postgraduate psychology students has an estimated cost of c.€23,000 – €24,000.

Please note the above estimates exclude any additional costings which may be met by other agencies or departments and that a 1% increase in student numbers may equate to a very small number of additional student places on some of the programmes highlighted.

*Question No. 575 answered with Question No. 574.*

*Question No. 576 answered with Question No. 574.*

*Question No. 577 answered with Question No. 574.*

*Question No. 578 answered with Question No. 574.*

### **Further and Higher Education**

579. **Deputy Ged Nash** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if his Department plans to undertake a review of the pay and conditions and roles and responsibilities of personal assistants who work in the further education sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17557/22]

586. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will address concerns raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) in respect of pay scales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18252/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, In-**

**novation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 579 and 586 together.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) provides funding to higher and further education institutions for the delivery of key services and supports for students with disabilities. It aims to support the personal, educational and professional development of the participating students. While historically administered by the Higher Education Authority, responsibility for the Fund in the further education and training sector transferred to SOLAS during 2020. SOLAS provides FSD funding to the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) who manage the funding allocations to PLC further education providers for services and accommodations required to support students with disabilities. Funding can be used to provide a range of supports and accommodations including non-medical helpers such as personal assistants and notetakers.

Need assessments determine the supports and accommodations requested for students and the individual ETB/ further education college is responsible for decisions on the most appropriate support to meet the needs of the student, in accordance with the guidelines issued by SOLAS.

As noted in the SOLAS Guidelines, where an ETB or further education college employs personnel to deliver supports to individual students, responsibility for the terms of employment rests with the individual ETB/ further education college.

### Public Sector Staff

580. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to 12 and over 12 months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17600/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** There are no staff at my Department absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes.

Contact details for State Bodies within the scope of the Deputy's question are set out in the attached document should the Deputy wish to contact them with this query.

Contact E-Mail Addresses for State Bodies under the Remit of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science		
Name of Body	Dedicated Email address for the Members of the Oireachtas	Designated Official Responsible for assisting Oireachtas Members
Higher Education Authority	Oireachtas@hea.ie	Padraic Mellett*
Irish Research Council( Note 1)	Oireachtas@research.ie	Padraic Mellett*
Grangegorman Development Agency	Communications@ggda.ie	nora.rahill@ggda.ie
SOLAS	oireachtasinfo@solas.ie	Maria Walsh maria.walsh@solas.ie
Skillnets Ltd	oireachtas@skillnets.com	t.donnery@skillnets.com

Quality and Qualifications Ireland	ceo@qqi.ie	ceo@qqi.ie
Léargas – The Exchange Bureau	oireachtas@leargas.ie	fbroughan@leargas.ie
Science Foundation Ireland	ciara.cotter@sfi.ie	Ciara Cotter

Note 1 – In regard to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Irish Research Council (IRC) as the IRC operates under the auspices of the HEA. Mr Mellett will address Oireachtas queries for both the HEA and IRC. Please use Oireachtas@hea.ie and Oireachtas@research.ie respectively to contact Mr Mellett.

### Education and Training Provision

581. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he has received correspondence from a person (details supplied); if he has considered actions to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17699/22]

589. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science when two students (details supplied) who were studying in Ukraine will be able to continue their medical studies here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18268/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 581 and 589 together.

I can confirm my Department has received correspondence from the person(s) detailed and my officials have already been in contact with them regarding continuing their studies in Ireland.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, my Department has received a very large volume of enquiries, from Irish students who were studying in Ukraine, from Ukrainian and students from third countries studying in Ukraine, and from those making representations of their behalf. My officials are dealing with this correspondence as it comes into the Department and are actively engaging with these students, updating them as recently as last week as soon as further information on progress becomes available.

Recently, officials from my Department met with the Deans of the Medical Schools and as a result, the Deans are now undertaking an assessment of the programmes in the medical schools in Ukraine. A key element of this process will be to align the Irish students' Ukrainian programme with the Irish system of medical and dentistry education, along with other issues arising regarding accreditation by the professional bodies. This exercise will then enable us to see how best we can facilitate these students in continuing with their studies in Ireland.

As recently advised by my officials, this process may take up to two weeks, and at that stage, all persons will be contacted.

### Apprenticeship Programmes

582. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the occupations that are included under the definition of



craft apprenticeship. [18026/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The further development and mainstreaming of apprenticeship through the creation of a single unified apprenticeship system, as articulated in the ‘*Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025*’, has a key role to play in meeting Ireland’s skills needs in a manner which presents a valued proposition for apprentices and employers alike.

There are currently 64 apprenticeship programmes on offer: 25 craft programmes and 39 programmes introduced since 2016.

A list of craft apprenticeships currently available and occupations that apprentices qualify as are attached in tabular form.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq582-05-04-22\_en.xlsx">Apprenticeships</a>]

Further information is available on *Apprenticeship.ie*.

### Further and Higher Education

583. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if a person who is on a stamp 4 and is the dependant of a naturalised Irish citizen can avail of SUSI grant assistance. [18031/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The nationality requirements for the Student Grant Scheme are set out in Section 14 of the Student Support Act 2011 and Regulation 5 of the Student Support Regulations 2022. The candidate’s nationality or immigration status in the State determines whether or not she or he meets the nationality requirement outlined in the Act and Regulations, and would be therefore eligible to qualify for a student grant.

The decision on eligibility for student grant applications is a matter for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). The onus is on the grant applicant to provide the necessary documentary evidence as requested by the grant awarding authority.

Permission to remain in the State on the basis of a Stamp 4 Visa, of itself, does not meet the nationality requirements of the Student Grant Scheme 2022, however a dependent child of a person who has acquired Irish Citizenship by naturalization, residing in the State is a qualifying category for student grant purposes.

Article 32 of the Student Grant Scheme 2022 provides for a review of eligibility for the award of a grant in the event of a change of circumstances in the academic year. This includes a change in relation to a student’s nationality or immigration status. Where a student acquires Irish citizenship by naturalisation, or is granted one of the permission to remain criterion provided for in the Act or Regulations during the course of their studies, she or he may apply to SUSI to have their application re-assessed.

In instances where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe. Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via *www.studentgrantappeals.ie*

## **Education and Training Boards**

584. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science when outstanding claims for incremental credits will be finalised for a person (details supplied) considering that this matter has been ongoing for some time; the progress that has been made since the matter was last queried; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18160/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Niall Collins):** As previously advised, Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) forwarded the incremental credit application for the person concerned to the Department of Education for review in accordance with the relevant Circulars agreed under the auspices of the Teachers' Conciliation Council. That Department sought additional information regarding the person's employment history and has advised that on receipt of this information, it will finalise this application and issue a decision letter to LMETB.

## **Flexible Work Practices**

585. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18167/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** Phased return to a physical attendance in the workplace commenced for staff of my department following the easing of Government restrictions on 21 January and staff are currently attending the office for two days per week and working remotely for the remaining days.

Following the publication last week of the Blended Working Policy Framework for the Civil Service by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, TD, my department is developing its own blended working policy based on the overarching framework, tailored for our department's requirements. We anticipate that the policy be completed by the end of quarter 2 of this year. This policy will ensure that staff members will have increased certainty and flexibility, where possible, around their working arrangements while ensuring that the business needs are met.

*Question No. 586 answered with Question No. 579.*

## **Further and Higher Education**

587. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science when the new national access plan for higher education 2022-26 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18253/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am happy to report that work on finalising the next National Access Plan (NAP) is at an advanced stage.

Colleagues will soon be preparing a memo for Government with the intention of publishing the new Plan in the coming months.

## Further and Higher Education

588. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science if he will include care leavers as a priority cohort in the next National Access Plan for Higher Education 2022-2026. [18254/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am happy to report that work on the development of the new National Access Plan is at an advanced stage.

Following an extensive consultation process, over 122 submissions were received and reviewed from a wide range of stakeholders. It has been suggested in some of the submissions received that people in care and care leavers should be included as a priority group in the next Plan.

The Plan seeks to target vulnerable students or students who have experienced disadvantage and therefore face challenges in accessing higher education and experience belonging in higher education. The consultation process highlighted the importance of recognising and naming additional ‘priority groups’ in the NAP. I can say that all submissions received have been carefully considered in the development of the National Access Plan.

Colleagues are currently preparing a memo for Government with the intention of publishing the new Plan in the coming months.

*Question No. 589 answered with Question No. 581.*

## Departmental Contracts

590. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18889/22]

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science came into existence in 2020. Prior to the department’s establishment the information was managed and published by the Department of Education and is available at [www.gov.ie/en/collection/department-of-education-and-skills-expenditure-on-consultancy/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/department-of-education-and-skills-expenditure-on-consultancy/).

The data in respect of 2021 is being compiled as part of the Appropriation Account and will be published online as soon as it is available at [www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science/](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science/).

## Departmental Data

591. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Justice further to Parliamentary Question No. 332 of 22 March 2022, the number of applications for the undocumented migrants scheme that have been received to date; the number that have been approved to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18378/22]

625. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice the number of applications for the undocumented migrants scheme that have been received to date; the number that have been ap-

proved to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18294/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 591 and 625 together.

The main scheme for the Regularisation of Long Term Undocumented Migrants opened for applications on 31 January 2022. The separate strand for international protection applicants who have been in the asylum process for a minimum of two years opened a week later on 7 February 2022.

There has been a very positive level of engagement with the scheme since it opened, with approximately 5,000 applications made to date to the two strands.

My Department committed to making the online application process as simple and as straightforward as possible and because of this is now in a position to issue the first positive decisions just two months in. Around 250 positive decisions have issued under the two strands in recent days and processing of all other applications remains ongoing. Permission letters have started to arrive in homes across the country with life changing news for those receiving them and their families. I want to congratulate everyone who has received a letter and to thank them for trusting us and coming forward to regularise their position in the State. This is just the start and we will see more decisions and permissions issuing in the coming weeks.

It is very important that people who are eligible do not miss out on the opportunity to apply to this scheme. To build on the early momentum and continue raising awareness of the scheme, my Department will run a targeted communications campaign in the coming weeks to reach out to migrant communities likely to benefit from the scheme to encourage them to consider applying.

My Department is also continuing to engage with the NGO community and other stakeholders who have played and will continue to play a key role in building confidence in the scheme among the more vulnerable members of those migrant communities. I hope seeing these first positive decisions issuing will encourage more people to apply for what is truly a once-in-a-generation opportunity to regularise their status in the State.

I encourage all undocumented migrants who are eligible to apply for the main scheme to do so before the closing date of 31 July 2022. Applications can be made online at: [inisonline.jahs.ie](http://inisonline.jahs.ie). Further details regarding the qualifying criteria, the required documentation, and how to apply for the scheme are available on my Department's immigration website at: [www.irishimmigration.ie/regularisation-of-long-term-undocumented-migrant-scheme](http://www.irishimmigration.ie/regularisation-of-long-term-undocumented-migrant-scheme). The International Protection Office of my Department has written to approximately 4,000 potentially eligible applicants inviting them to apply. Over 1,300 people from this cohort have applied so far. This strand of the scheme is open for applications until 7 August 2022. Further information can be found on the website of the IPO at: [www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/whatsnew](http://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/whatsnew).

### **Online Safety**

592. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Justice the legislation under which certain websites are required to have age gate verification. [17512/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Under the provisions set out in Article 8 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), countries within the EU are directed to set a minimum age at which online service providers, including social media companies, can rely on a child's consent to process their personal information data. This is an EU wide instrument

and Member States, including Ireland, cannot deviate from its provisions.

Under Section 31(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018, the age of a child specified for the purposes of Article 8 is 16 years of age. This means that if an organisation is relying on consent as the legal basis (justification) for processing a child's personal data and the child is under 16 years of age, then consent must be given or authorised by the child's parents or guardians.

Additionally, Section 32(1)(b) of the 2018 Act outlines that the Data Protection Commission shall encourage the drawing up of codes of conduct intended to contribute to the proper application of the Data Protection Regulation with regard to the manner in which the consent of the holders of parental responsibility over a child is to be obtained for the purposes of Article 8.

My Department continues to monitor the impact of the implementation of GDPR, the impact of any possible future regulatory changes across Europe as well as any changes within industry, in conjunction with the Data Protection Commission, to ensure that the Commission continues to have the resources required to fulfil its important, statutory obligations.

### Legislative Measures

593. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Justice the status of the progression of the criminal justice (community sanctions) Bill 2014. [17571/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Non-custodial penalties, particularly supervised community sanctions, play a significant and important role in addressing criminality, reducing reoffending and providing a degree of protection to the public. This is supported by Central Statistics Office figures on recidivism.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014 seeks to update the Probation of Offenders Act 1907.

The aim of the new Bill is to provide a modern statement of the law governing community sanctions, and the role of the Probation Service in the criminal justice system. It will facilitate the effective and efficient use of community sanctions by the courts, and will ensure that the courts have a wide range of appropriate options for dealing with persons who have committed minor offences.

The legislation also takes account of the interests of victims of crime by making it a statutory requirement for the courts to have regard to the interests of victims when making decisions about community sanctions.

Justice Plan 2022 commits that the policy review of the General Scheme of the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014 will be completed in the second quarter of this year. Once this review is complete, it is envisaged that it will be published and a revised General Scheme of Bill agreed in the third quarter of this year with the aim of publishing the Bill in the final quarter of 2022.

### Legislative Reviews

594. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Justice when the planned review of the Criminal Justice (Community Service) (Amendment) Act 2011 will take place. [17575/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Non-custodial penalties, particularly su-

pervised community sanctions, play a significant and important role in addressing criminality, reducing reoffending and providing a degree of protection to the public. This is supported by Central Statistics Office figures on recidivism.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government 2020 contains a broad range of policies and proposals that represent a coherent approach to enhancing and sustaining a more just and safe society with a specific commitment to review policy options for prison and penal reform.

In September 2020, I established a high level working group including the Head of Criminal Justice Policy, the Director-General of the Irish Prison Service and the Director of the Probation Service to take forward the Government's commitment to review policy options for prison and penal reform.

The review is considering commitments and on-going developments across the justice sector and beyond, including those outlined in a number of relevant strategies. The completion of the review of the Community Service (Amendment) Act 2011 and the use of short custodial sentences forms part of the high level group's ongoing work to review policy options for prison and penal reform.

In line with Justice Plan 2022, I intend to publish the Action Plan for Penal Reform in the coming weeks.

### **Prison Service**

**595. Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Justice if she will carry out a review of single cell accommodation across the prison estate before the end of 2022. [17576/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the number of people in custody varies over time. The Irish Prison Service carries out cell occupancy census at regular intervals and the data from the latest published cell occupancy census carried out by the Service indicates that 54% of prisoners in custody are accommodated in single cell accommodation.

The provision of single cell accommodation for all prisoners is not currently feasible due to the existing capacity within the prison estate, and current levels of committals.

The Deputy may be aware that there are approximately 3,300 usable cells in the estate with approximately 3,980 people in custody at any point in time.

The Deputy may also wish to note that some prisoners are accommodated in multi-occupancy cells for reasons other than capacity and some prisoners, at committal stage, indicate a preference to share a cell with another person who may be known to them.

It is important to note that all prisoners are assessed by prison management on committal with regard to their suitability for sharing a cell.

I can also advise the Deputy that Government continues to invest in the capital development of the prison estate. Later this year, the reopening of the Training in Mountjoy unit will provide an additional 96 spaces. The opening of new male accommodation in Limerick in late 2022 will result in an additional 90 prisoner cell spaces being available and the completion of a new standalone female prison currently underway in Limerick prison will provide 40 new female cell spaces later this year.

The need to ensure the continued availability of modern prison facilities with adequate capacity will be central to the development of the new Irish Prison Service Capital Strategy 2023, against the background of the work underway as part of the Programme for Government commitment to develop policies and proposals to review policy options for prison and penal reform, including the effective and appropriate use of non-custodial sanctions.

### **Prison Service**

596. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Justice if she will request the Irish Prison Service to carry out a review of all mental health supports available to persons in prison with a view to identifying the areas in which increased resourcing is needed. [17577/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Addressing the mental health challenges of those interacting with the Criminal Justice System is a major challenge and while there are no easy fixes, the Government is determined to make sure that the right help and support is available for those who need it.

As the Deputy may be aware, considerable progress has been made on the Programme for Government commitment to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those imprisoned, and primary care support on release.

Last April, I, together with the Minister for Health and Ministers of State Frank Feighan and Mary Butler, established a High Level Taskforce to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of persons interacting with the criminal justice system. The Taskforce is independently chaired by former Minister of State Kathleen Lynch.

The Taskforce already had nine plenary meetings and has established three subgroups on diversion, capacity issues in the Prison Service and National Forensic Mental Health Services, and community issues, including care after release.

Each of the subgroups comprises of relevant experts, chaired by high ranking officials from the criminal justice sector, with the health leads represented and contributing to all. Each of these groups have met on at least ten occasions.

The Taskforce has engaged with a large number of relevant bodies and civil society actors, including meeting with the Mental Health Commission on 2 December 2021 and, more recently, with the Chairperson of the National Prison Visiting Committees Chairpersons Group and with the Inspector of Prisons.

The Taskforce has also received presentations from relevant stakeholders including the Mental Health Commission, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons, the Irish Penal Reform Trust and Crowe Consulting on the comprehensive Health Needs Assessment embarked on by the Prison Service.

The Taskforce submitted its interim report to myself and my colleague the Minister for Health on 22 November 2021. I also met the group before Christmas to get an update on their work.

I am advised that the work of the Taskforce is continuing apace with the aim of finalising a report, including a high level implementation plan assigning responsibility and timelines for the implementation of its recommendations, early in Quarter 2.

In addition to the work of the Task Force, this commitment is reflected in the provision of

over €2 million in additional funding for the Prison Service to improve mental health services under Budget 2022. This includes just over €1 million for psychologists and specialist mental health nurses in prisons who can work with prisoners to address mental health issues for all categories of offender.

Decisions regarding placement of these additional psychologists are currently being considered and will be based on the mental health needs and overall psychologist-to-prisoner ratio across the estate. To this end, it is intended to recruit additional psychologists throughout 2022.

In addition, I understand that this year, the Prison Service intends to increase the mental health qualifications and skills within the Service's nursing workforce through recruitment, training and development.

The Prison Service continues to work to enhance and improve its level of medical service delivery to prisoners. The Service has embarked on a comprehensive Health Needs Assessment (HNA) to examine the broad range of health care services that are provided across the entire prison estate. This includes the provision of mental health services and the possible recruitment of specialist mental health nurses will be considered in the context of the outcome of the HNA when finalised.

### **Public Sector Staff**

597. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in her Department and in agencies and public bodies within her area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to 12 and over 12 months, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17603/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** It has not been possible to collate the information requested in the time allowed. I will respond directly to the Deputy when the information is to hand.

### **Immigration Policy**

598. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice the exemptions that are in place for parents with residency in Ireland in relation to re-entering the country with a minor; if the minor is exempt from the need to have a re-entry visa in cases in which the parents who are travelling with a minor have a visa; if so, the length of time for which this measure will be in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17664/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I have suspended the re-entry visa programme for minors under the age of 16 years currently residing in Ireland until 31 May 2022.

This is in line with the temporary extension of immigration permissions that I announced in December that permits people who held a valid permission to be in the State in March 2020 to remain until 31 May 2022, even if their Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card has expired and they are awaiting a new one. Renewal is on the same basis as the existing permission and the same conditions will continue to apply.

The suspension of the re-entry programme for minors under 16 years of age provides that any visa required non-EEA national parent with an in-date IRP card may re-enter the State with their dependent Irish resident minor children until 31 May 2022 and can rely on the notice pub-



lished on my Department's immigration website when travelling, which is available at:

[www.irishimmigration.ie/registering-your-immigration-permission/how-to-register-your-immigration-permission-for-the-first-time/application-for-re-entry-visas-for-minors-under-16/](http://www.irishimmigration.ie/registering-your-immigration-permission/how-to-register-your-immigration-permission-for-the-first-time/application-for-re-entry-visas-for-minors-under-16/)

Any person is free to travel from the State regardless of whether their IRP card is in date or is expired. Adult customers who plan to travel abroad after 15 January 2022 and are returning before 31 May 2022 with their Irish resident minor children should apply to renew their immigration permission and receive a new IRP card prior to leaving the State. Otherwise, they must secure a re-entry visa in Ireland before travelling or in an overseas visa office before returning to the State.

### International Protection

599. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice the number of persons presenting with a date of birth which would make them under 18 years of age at the time their case was opened who entered the international protection process in 2020 and 2021 respectively but were noted as not being unaccompanied minors; if she will provide a breakdown by nationality; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17675/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Provided that they are not an Irish citizen, a dependent child under 18 years of age will be deemed to be included in the application of whichever parent presents to the International Protection Office (IPO) of my Department with the child. This presumption applies whether or not the child was present in the State at the time the parent's application was made.

Therefore, if a parent makes an application for international protection, they will be deemed to have also made an application on behalf of their dependent child who is not an Irish citizen and

- at the time of the making of the application, is present in the State and is under 18 years of age, or

- is born in the State while their parent is an applicant, or

- who is under 18 years of age and enters the State (Ireland) while their parent is an applicant.

If a parent is applying for international protection and has dependent children, they must bring them with them to the IPO Office when applying, or as soon as possible thereafter if a child is born after the parent has made an application for international protection, or if they arrive in the State after their application is made.

The table below provides the number of applications made on behalf of dependent minors in 2020 and 2021 by nationality.

Nationality	2020*	2021*
Afghanistan	10	27
Albania	24	30
Algeria	5	11
Angola	5	5
Armenia	0	5

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Nationality	2020*	2021*
Bahrain	5	0
Bangladesh	10	17
Bolivia	5	5
Botswana	0	12
Brazil	16	9
Burkina Faso	0	5
Burundi	5	0
Cameroon	5	5
China (Including Hong Kong)	5	5
Congo, The Democratic Republic Of The	17	10
Egypt	5	0
El Salvador	5	9
Eritrea	0	5
Ethiopia	0	7
Georgia	15	46
Ghana	5	5
Guatemala	5	0
Guinea	5	5
India	5	6
Iraq	0	8
Israel	0	5
Jordan	5	5
Kenya	5	5
Korea, Republic Of (South Korea)	5	0
Kosovo / UNSCR 1244	5	5
Kuwait	0	5
Lebanon	5	0
Lesotho	5	5
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	5	5
Malawi	8	5
Mauritius	5	5
Mongolia	0	5
Morocco	5	5
Nepal	0	5
Nicaragua	5	6
Nigeria	66	181
Pakistan	15	16
Palestinian Territory, Occupied	5	5
Philippines	5	0
Russian Federation	5	0

Nationality	2020*	2021*
Sierra Leone	5	5
Somalia	12	27
South Africa	28	39
Sudan	5	5
Swaziland	5	5
Syrian Arab Republic	12	16
Togo	5	5
Turkey	0	5
Uganda	0	5
Ukraine	0	5
United States Of America	5	5
Venezuela	5	5
Viet Nam	5	5
Yemen	0	5
Zambia	0	5
Zimbabwe	24	60
Total	330	616

\*Where the number of applications for individual countries is low (less than 6), a breakdown by country is not provided. This is for reasons of confidentiality, as provided for under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015.

### An Garda Síochána

600. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if a new contract for the provision of new Garda roads policing motorcycles will be put out to tender during quarter 2 of 2022. [17717/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy will be aware, under Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 (as amended), the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and administration of Garda business. This includes all operational policing decisions regarding needs of the Garda fleet. As Minister, I have no role in these matters.

Budget 2022 provides €12m for investment in the Garda fleet, which means more high visibility policing in our towns and cities. This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that Garda vehicles are purchased under contracts tendered by the Office of Government Procurement, including cars, vans, motorcycles and 4x4's etc. An Garda Síochána are utilising a current contract in place for 2022 for procurement of vehicles and there is no requirement for a tender to be issued for Garda roads policing motorcycles during 2022.

For the Deputy's information, in the interest of transparency An Garda Síochána publish monthly reports detailing the breakdown of the Garda fleet by vehicle type and District. These reports can be viewed at the following link:

[www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/finance-services/finance-fleet-management](http://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/finance-services/finance-fleet-management).

html

## Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence

601. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the number of cases that the Kildare Protective Services Unit has dealt with in 2021 and to date in 2022, in tabular form. [17718/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I would like to assure the Deputy that both Commissioner Harris and I are committed to combatting all forms of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and to ensuring that An Garda Síochána is resourced to provide support to victims of this terrible crime.

As I am sure the Deputy is aware, the national roll out of Divisional Protective Service Units (DPSUs) was an action under Supporting a Victim's Journey, and it has now been completed. The Kildare DPSU referenced by the Deputy commenced operations in September 2020. There is now a Divisional Protective Services Unit (DPSU) established in every Garda division across the country. This ensures that vulnerable victims of crimes, such as domestic abuse and sexual violence, presenting to Gardaí are met with a consistently high standard of specialist, sensitive, professional and expert assistance. This specialisation ensures that when victims of domestic and sexual violence present to Gardaí, at perhaps their most vulnerable moment, they are met with professional and expert assistance. Under Budget 2022, an additional €1m is being provided to AGS to refurbish and upgrade the Divisional Protective Service Units. This commitment will allow us to better support and protect vulnerable victims.

In addition, the Divisional Victim Service Offices (DVSO) and front line Gardaí are also resources available to respond to domestic violence and support victims.

I was recently in contact with the Garda authorities to seek information on matters related to domestic violence training for the Service, both for those officers attached to DPSUs and to members generally. I thought it might also be useful to share that information in this reply as I know this is an area the Deputy is deeply invested in.

I am informed that significant investment in training for addressing instances of domestic violence and supporting victims has, and is, being made. I am advised that in 2021, An Garda Síochána devised mandatory online training for its personnel in the area of Domestic Abuse. This is a comprehensive training package consisting of instructor led videos presented by subject matter experts from the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB). It also includes periodic knowledge checks and supporting materials. Furthermore, live webinar virtual classroom sessions in relation to the Domestic Abuse Risk Evaluation Training is currently being rolled out to Garda personnel on a phased basis, hosted by subject matter experts from GNPSB. A separate online course, which consists of instructor led demonstration videos on the correct use of PULSE in dealing with Domestic Violence Orders has also been launched. In addition, new content has been included on the Foundation Training Programme with a view to enhancing the learning for Garda Probationers during the course of their training. While those assigned to the DPSU already receive specialist training, a review of this is currently underway and with a view to redeveloping the DPSU training to ensure an even more customised, fit-for-purpose and victim-centric training course is delivered to all DPSU members from Detective Garda to Detective Inspector. To this end GNPSB have completed a nationwide canvass with a view to determining training needs and it has been established that there are 392 members of Garda, Sergeant and Inspector rank attached to Divisional Protective Services Units nationwide. Training was delivered in 5 individual modules titled as follows: 1. Sexual Crime; 2.

Online Child Exploitation;3. Domestic Abuse;4. Human Trafficking and Victims;5. Court Process. The initial position in respect of the DPSU training requirement, is that anyone who has not completed all five modules of this training will be required to undertake the new training programme that will be ready for delivery by Q2, 2022. The proposed training programme is expected to enhance the skills of DPSU members, to ensure that each one can carry out the full range of specialist tasks frequently necessitated within their roles.

On foot of the Deputy's question, I contacted An Garda Síochána to seek the specific information sought on the number of cases that the Kildare Protective Services Unit has dealt with in 2021 and to date in 2022. That information is presented in the table below:

Type	Jan to Dec. 2021 (12 month period)	Jan 2022 to 30 March 2022 (3 month period to present)
DPSU Investigation	171	45
Total	171	45

### An Garda Síochána

602. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the number of full-time forensic speech analysts employed by An Garda Síochána. [17719/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I have sought the information requested by the Deputy from the Garda authorities, however, the information was not available in time. I will write to the Deputy once the information is to hand.

### An Garda Síochána

603. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if all Garda members attached to community policing units have been issued with state-of-the-art frontline mobile devices. [17720/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible by law for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána, which includes the allocation and distribution of resources. As Minister, I have no role in the matter.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that a total of 4875 mobility devices have been issued to frontline personnel in An Garda Síochána, with 550 devices issued directly by the National Community Engagement Bureau to community policing members.

I am informed that the mobility devices have been rolled out nationally to community policing personnel as well as roads policing, Juvenile Liaison Officers and Family Liaison Officers. I am advised that the Garda Mobility Programme is continuing across the organisation with the ultimate aim to provide all frontline members with mobility devices. The planned delivery of the Mobility Programme will continue throughout 2022.

### An Garda Síochána

604. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the capital funding allocated to the Garda small capital works budget in 2020, 2021 and 2022, in tabular form. [17721/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy will be aware, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

The resources provided by the Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation of over €2 billion in Budget 2022 in funding. Budget 2022 also includes provision for a capital budget of €147 million for An Garda Síochána's ICT and Building Programme and ongoing investment in the organisation's transport fleet. This is a significant increase on the €116.5 million provided last year.

The Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is addressing deficiencies in the Garda estate and providing fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff as well as the public interacting with them. The programme is based on agreed Garda priorities and includes substantial works at over 30 locations nationwide as well as other works such as cell refurbishment at over 100 locations.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Capital Refurbishment Subhead in the Garda Vote refers to Small Capital Projects with a value between €75,000 to €2,500,000. These projects are works to Garda Stations and premises across the Estate. The works are managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation, and funded by An Garda Síochána.

I am advised by An Garda Síochána that the table below shows the Capital Refurbishment expenditure for 2020 and 2021, and the budget for 2022.

-	2020 Actual Expenditure	2021 Actual Expenditure	2022 Budget
	€'000	€'000	€'000
Capital Refurbishment	9,461	10,921	11,000

A new Garda Building and Refurbishment programme 2022-2030 is currently being developed by An Garda Síochána in conjunction with OPW and officials from my Department.

### Mental Health Policy

605. **Deputy Patrick Costello** asked the Minister for Justice further to Parliamentary Question No. 1319 of 19 January 2022, if she will provide an update specifically on the establishment of the task force which she had expected in early 2022. [17794/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Addressing the mental health challenges of those interacting with the criminal justice system is a major challenge and while there are no easy fixes, this Government is determined to make sure that the right help and support is available for those that need it.

As the Deputy may be aware, considerable progress has been made on the Programme for Government commitment to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those imprisoned, and primary care support on release.

Last April, together with with the Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly and Ministers of State Frank Feighan and Mary Butler, I established a High Level Taskforce to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of persons interacting with the criminal justice system. The

Taskforce is independently chaired by former Minister of State Kathleen Lynch.

The Taskforce already had nine plenary meetings and has established three subgroups on diversion, capacity issues in the Prison Service and National Forensic Mental Health Services, and community issues, including care after release.

Each of the subgroups comprises of relevant experts, chaired by high ranking officials from the criminal justice sector, with the health leads represented and contributing to all. Each of these groups have met on at least ten occasions.

The Taskforce has engaged with a large number of relevant bodies and civil society actors, including meeting with the Mental Health Commission on 2 December 2021 and, more recently, met with the Chairperson of the National Prison Visiting Committees Chairpersons Group and with the Inspector of Prisons.

The Taskforce has also received presentations from relevant stakeholders including the Mental Health Commission, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons, the Irish Penal Reform Trust and Crowe Consulting on the comprehensive Health Needs Assessment embarked on by the Prison Service.

The Taskforce submitted its interim report to myself and my colleague the Minister for Health on 22 November 2021. I also met the group before Christmas to get an update on their work.

I am advised that the work of the Taskforce is continuing apace and the aim is to finalise a report, including a high level implementation plan assigning responsibility and timelines for its recommendations, in early Quarter 2.

### **An Garda Síochána**

606. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice if extra resources have been provided to the Garda vetting unit of An Garda Síochána in 2022; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17902/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I have sought the information requested by the Deputy from the Garda authorities, however, the information was not available in time. I will write to the Deputy once the information is to hand.

### **An Garda Síochána**

607. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice the current turnaround time for an average Garda vetting application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17903/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I have sought the information requested by the Deputy from the Garda authorities, however, the information was not available in time. I will write to the Deputy once the information is to hand.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

608. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice when an application for permission to remain in the State by a person (details supplied) will be processed given that the

application was submitted in July 2020; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17956/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The application for naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, continues to be processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision in due course. My officials have recently written to the applicant advising them of the current status of their application.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. However, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

In addition, the combined impact of the 2019 High Court judgment in the Jones case and the necessary health restrictions arising from the pandemic, has unfortunately resulted in the processing time for standard applications increasing.

However, my Department is taking a number of steps to speed up the processing of applications and a number of digitisation measures have also 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.

In 2021, my Department issued 11,512 citizenship decisions, which is the highest number of decisions made since 2015, and reflects positively the significant changes undertaken to date. Additional staff have also been assigned to the citizenship team.

## **Prison Service**

609. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if she will publish the Inspector of Prisons' Report into the Dóchas Centre. [17962/22]

610. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the number of reports by the Inspector of Prisons that relate to the Dóchas Centre that have not been published to date; and if she will provide the rationale for not publishing same. [17963/22]

631. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice if she intends to publish the report of the Chief Inspector of Prisons on the Dóchas Centre submitted to her on 15 February 2022 and carried out under section 3(2) of the Prisons Act ; the reason for the delay in publishing the report; the actions she intends taking on foot of the receipt of the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18348/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 609, 610 and 631 together.

The Office of the Inspector of Prisons was established under the Prisons Act 2007 and is independent in how it carries out its functions. The Inspector's key role is to carry out regular



inspections of prisons.

There are currently 3 reports submitted to me by the Inspector of Prisons which relate to Mountjoy Women's Prison (Dóchas Centre) and which have not yet been published.

The Inspector of Prisons' three day monitoring report of the Dóchas Centre was received in my office in August 2020.

The Inspector was also asked to carry out an investigation into matters arising in the Dóchas Centre, under section 31(2) of the Prisons Act. As the Deputy will be aware it was always my intention to consider both of these reports together.

The Inspector submitted the section 31(2) investigation report to me on the 15 February 2022 and it is currently being examined by my officials. Based on legal advice received by my Department, it is not proposed to publish this report at this time.

In addition, as the Deputy will be aware, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to monitor the situation within prisons for prisoners and staff, the Inspector suspended her 2021 general inspection programme and instead embarked on a COVID-19 focused inspection schedule, designed to provide a human rights-based assessment of the response of the Irish Prison Service to the pandemic. Eight of these reports were published during 2021. The final set of the thematic reports dealing with the following prisons: Loughan House Open Centre; Midlands; Castlerea; and Mountjoy Women's (Dóchas Centre), have been submitted to my Department and will be published shortly.

*Question No. 610 answered with Question No. 609.*

### **Prison Service**

611. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if the Inspector of Prisons has highlighted any issues of concern regarding the Irish Prison Service or officials in her Department into their ability to carry their function in respect of their reporting. [17964/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Office of the Inspector of Prisons was established under the Prisons Act 2007 and is independent in how it carries out its functions. The Inspector's key role is to carry out regular inspections of prisons.

As the Deputy may be aware, Section 31 of the Prisons Act 2007 provides that the Inspector of Prisons can at any time enter any prison or any part of a prison, request and obtain from the Governor a copy of any books, records, other documents kept in the prison.

Governors, prison officers, other persons employed in prisons and prisoners are required by law, in as far as reasonably practicable, to comply with any request for information from the Inspector as they perform their functions.

The Prison Service actively encourages prisoners at all times to engage with the independent bodies making inspections of prisons including the Inspector of Prison, the Prison Visiting Committees and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhumane Treatment. To assist prisoners in this regard, the Prison Service provides prisoners with information on these bodies via the Prisoner Information Booklet.

In 2021, in response to the pandemic, and the need to monitor the situation within prisons for prisoners and staff, the Inspector of Prisons suspended her planned 2021 general inspection programme and instead embarked on a Covid-19 focused inspection schedule, designed to pro-

vide a human rights-based assessment of the response of the Prison Service to the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic the Prison Service continued to facilitate access to prisons and prisoners for those organisations with a statutory role such as the Office of the Inspector of Prisons to ensure continued oversight during the pandemic.

In general terms, in instances where, following an inspection, issues are raised by the Inspector, these are considered by the Prison Service and the corresponding responses from the Prison Service are set out in the Inspector's reports or associated documentation upon publication.

As the Deputy will appreciate, I am keen to ensure the Inspector of Prisons is adequately resourced and to this end, there was an increase in the 2021 budget for the Inspector of Prisons of just over €0.75m, bringing the total 2021 allocation to €1.954m and this has been further increased in the 2022 Budget where the Inspector's resources increased by a further €0.4m bringing the total allocation to €2.35m.

I can further advise the Deputy that upon her retirement in February the then Inspector of Prisons wrote to me to formally tender her resignation and to outline challenges she faced in carrying out her duties during her tenure. I intend to engage further with the new Inspector upon appointment on these matters, and with the Prison Service itself, in the context of ongoing work to develop the independent prisons oversight and inspection function.

### **International Protection**

**612. Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice the number of international protection applicants awaiting the issuance of a temporary residence certificate in card form and not the paper document; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17996/22]

**613. Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice the number of persons awaiting a preliminary interview further to section 13 of the International Protection Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17997/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 612 and 613 together.

The overall objective of my Department is to have recommendations made on international protection applications as soon as possible. This ensures that those who are found to be in need of protection from the State can receive it quickly and begin rebuilding their lives here with a sense of safety and security.

For the sake of clarity, I should firstly explain that anyone who wishes to make an application for international protection must proactively do so on their own behalf and on behalf of any of their minor family members. If they apply initially at their port of entry to the State they will still need to make a formal application at the Dublin offices of the International Protection Office (IPO) of my Department. There is no need to make an appointment. Everyone completes their preliminary interview under Section 13 of the International Protection Act 2015 on the day they first attend the IPO offices. Therefore, there are no applicants waiting for a preliminary interview. Applicants will generally receive the Temporary Residence Certificate on the same day they complete their application if there is no language barrier and if the number of applications the IPO received on that given day is not excessively high.

If an interpreter is required to assist them or for other reasons beyond the control of the IPO, the applicant may need to be called back to complete their application. The call back appoint-

ment is usually arranged quickly, unless there is a difficulty with sourcing an interpreter for the required language.

In recent months, the number of people claiming international protection has increased significantly with approximately 1,041 new applications received in the month of March alone. This has unfortunately impacted the IPO's ability to complete an application and issue TRC cards on the same day to applicants. There are currently approximately 1,200 applicants who need to return to complete their applications.

The IPO is identifying what practical efficiencies can be made to the process and is putting in place measures to ensure that the normal service is resumed as quickly as possible for the benefit of applicants.

*Question No. 613 answered with Question No. 612.*

### **International Protection**

614. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice the way that information on the different vocations of Ukrainian citizens arriving in Ireland will be collated and made available to various sectors that wish to help in fast-tracking mutual qualification recognition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18074/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I can advise the Deputy that, as Minister for Justice, I do not have responsibility for the issue of mutual qualification recognition. The Deputy may wish to raise this matter directly with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Science and Innovation.

There is a coordinated whole-of-Government response to support people arriving in Ireland who have fled the violence in Ukraine. Government Departments and services are working together to implement Ireland's commitments under the EU Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC), which has been activated for the first time to grant temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine. The Directive has legal effect under Section 60 of the International Protection Act 2015. Those eligible for Temporary Protection (granted initially for one year, but renewable) will have immediate access to the labour market, social welfare, accommodation and other State supports as necessary. A whole-of-Government response is being mobilised to implement the practical arrangements to give effect to these commitments.

My Department is primarily responsible for issuing temporary protection documents to those who are eligible. As of 4 April 2022, more than 18,600 people that have arrived in Ireland and my Department has issued more than 15,600 temporary protection permission letters.

Beneficiaries are being provided with their permission letter on arrival at Dublin Airport in the 'one-stop-shop' established by my Department for that purpose, to ensure early access to all necessary supports. Arrangements have also been put in place to provide permission letters to those who arrived at Dublin Airport prior to 9 March (when permission letters started to issue) and to those who have arrived at other ports of entry to the State.

I can assure the Deputy that my Government colleagues and I will continue to work with our EU counterparts on any further EU-wide measures that might be needed to assist those fleeing Ukraine.

### **Immigration Status**

615. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice if matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) will be examined. [18111/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** A stamp 1 immigration permission is granted to a non-EEA national based on their employment permit having first been granted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). Their immigration permission is therefore linked to their employment permit.

Any non-EEA national with an employment permit, who has ceased to be in employment, for any reason, must advise the Employment Permits Unit of DETE and Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division in my Department of the change in their circumstances.

The person concerned can write to my Department by post or email at the contact details below to request the permission letter. Upon examination of the request, my Department will, if necessary, issue a temporary permission to remain in the State, which would allow the person concerned to seek a further employment permit. However, they will not be able to start a new employment without first having been issued with an updated work permit from DETE.

Email: [Unit2ResidenceDivision@justice.ie](mailto:Unit2ResidenceDivision@justice.ie)

Postal Address:

Residence Unit 2Immigration Service DeliveryDepartment of Justice13-14 Burgh Quay-Dublin 2 D02 XK70Ireland

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

### **Immigration Status**

616. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice if matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) will be examined. [18112/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** A Stamp 3 immigration permission allows the holder to stay in Ireland for a specified period, subject to conditions, and is reckonable as residence when applying for citizenship by naturalisation. It is renewable, subject to the conditions for the permission being met, one of which is that the holder cannot work or engage in any business, trade or profession.

In order for a non-EEA national on a Stamp 3 immigration permission to be allowed to work in the State they must apply for and be granted an employment permit by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). A prospective employer must first obtain an employment permit in respect of them.

Should they be successful in securing the appropriate employment permit from DETE, they will then be able to register on a Stamp 1 immigration permission with their local registration office.

Further information relating to employment permits can be found at: [www.enterprise.gov.ie](http://www.enterprise.gov.ie).

It may also be open to the person concerned to request a change to their immigration status. Further information can be found on my Department's immigration website at: [www.irishimmigration.ie/my-situation-has-changed-since-i-arrived-in-ireland/](http://www.irishimmigration.ie/my-situation-has-changed-since-i-arrived-in-ireland/).

### Visa Applications

617. **Deputy Cian O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice if she will provide an update on visa applications by persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18139/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The applicants referred to by the Deputy created an on-line Short Stay Visit visa application on 24 January 2022. The supporting documentation and fee waivers were received on 26 January 2021 in the Ankara Visa Office where the application is currently awaiting comprehensive examination.

The current processing time for applications of this type received in the Ankara Visa Office is 16 weeks. Applicants can keep up-to-date with processing times by checking the following webpage; which is updated weekly: [www.dfa.ie/irish-embassy/turkey/visas/visas-for-ireland-weekly-decisions-report/](http://www.dfa.ie/irish-embassy/turkey/visas/visas-for-ireland-weekly-decisions-report/).

It is open to the applicants to request the return of their passports while they are awaiting a decision on the processing of their visa applications.

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

### Flexible Work Practices

618. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18170/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Deputy may be aware that a central policy framework for Blended Working in the Civil Service has recently been finalised in conjunction with employee representatives, and published on Thursday 31 March.

This framework will inform the development of organisation level blended working policies tailored to the specific requirements of each Department/Office, whilst ensuring a consistency of approach across key policy areas.

The Blended Working Framework sets out a number of core principles to apply to blended working across the Civil Service. Key to all this is the duty of Departments to deliver a quality service to Government, the Oireachtas and the public with flexibility and agility. There is recognition also of a need to create opportunities for people to balance their working and personal lives more effectively where possible.

My Department has commenced work on developing its own blended working policy and arrangements, which take into account our specific business needs and requirements, while

remaining grounded in the Civil Service Framework. Blended working implementation and arrangements are expected to commence by end June 2022.

### **International Protection**

619. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice if there is provision to allow persons (details supplied) to travel to Ireland; and if not, if advice will be provided in relation to the case. [18189/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The EU Temporary Protection Directive has been activated in response to the Ukraine crisis. Ireland participates in this measure, which has been given legal effect under Section 60 of the International Protection Act 2015.

Those eligible for Temporary Protection (granted initially for one year on a renewable basis) will have immediate access to the labour market, social welfare, accommodation and other State supports as necessary.

Under the Council Implementing Decision (EU 2022/382), those who have fled Ukraine can avail of a temporary protection to reside in Ireland if they meet one of the following criteria:

- a) They are a Ukrainian national who was residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022;
- b) They are a national of a third country (other than Ukraine) or a stateless person who would have benefited from international protection (for example: Refugee status) or an equivalent national protection status in Ukraine and were residing there before 24 February 2022;
- c) They are a family member of persons covered by a) and b), where their family already existed in Ukraine, prior to 24 February.

Family members include a spouse or partner, unmarried minor children of either of them, and their other close dependent family relatives who have been living with them as part of the family unit.

Temporary protection also applies to people who were residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 with a permanent Ukrainian residence permit, who cannot safely return to their country of origin.

Assistance will also be provided to people who were legally residing in Ukraine without a permanent residence permit to return to their home country, if it is safe for them to do so.

As the Deputy may be aware, on 25 February I announced the immediate lifting of visa requirements for Ukrainian citizens travelling to Ireland. However, people who are from a country that is visa-required, such as Nigeria, will still need to apply for a visa to travel to the State. Anyone who wishes to make a visa application must do so online at: [www.visas.inis.gov.ie/avats/OnlineHome.aspx](http://www.visas.inis.gov.ie/avats/OnlineHome.aspx).

### **Family Reunification**

620. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice if a person (details supplied) can reunite with their family who live in Dublin 15; and if not, if advice will be provided in relation to the case. [18190/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The EU Temporary Protection Directive

has been activated in response to the Ukraine crisis. Ireland participates in this measure, which has been given legal effect under Section 60 of the International Protection Act 2015.

Those eligible for Temporary Protection (granted initially for one year on a renewable basis) will have immediate access to the labour market, social welfare, accommodation and other State supports as necessary.

Under the Council Implementing Decision (EU 2022/382), those who have fled Ukraine can avail of a temporary protection to reside in Ireland if they meet one of the following criteria:

- a) They are a Ukrainian national who was residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022;
- b) They are a national of a third country (other than Ukraine) or a stateless person who would have benefited from international protection (for example: Refugee status) or an equivalent national protection status in Ukraine and were residing there before 24 February 2022;
- c) They are a family member of persons covered by a) and b), where their family already existed in Ukraine, prior to 24 February.

Family members include a spouse or partner, unmarried minor children of either of them, and their other close dependent family relatives who have been living with them as part of the family unit.

Temporary protection also applies to people who were residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 with a permanent Ukrainian residence permit, who cannot safely return to their country of origin.

As the Deputy may be aware, on 25 February I announced the immediate lifting of visa requirements for Ukrainian citizens travelling to Ireland. However, people who are from a country that is visa-required, such as Nigeria, will still need to apply for a visa to travel to the State.

Anyone who wishes to make a visa application must do so online at: [www.visas.inis.gov.ie/avats/OnlineHome.aspx](http://www.visas.inis.gov.ie/avats/OnlineHome.aspx).

## **Court Procedures**

621. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice if consideration will be given to compiling and making publicly available online victim impact statements delivered by victims and their families after convictions in the Circuit Court and Central Criminal Court; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18204/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions. This includes the provision of information on the courts system.

As the Deputy may be aware, Section 5 of the Criminal Justice Act, 1993 allows for a victim impact statement (VIS) as part of Court proceedings to assist the Court to determine the sentence to impose. These statements form part of the Court record and it would be a matter for the Court to direct if such statements should be published.

While there are currently no plans to amend the legislation in this area, I can assure the Deputy that our legislation is continually kept under review and I will consider any changes necessary to ensure it remains effective, proportionate and fully compliant with due process and

the Constitution.

### Visa Applications

622. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice when a decision will be made in relation to an application for a visa in respect of a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in making a decision on this application; if her attention has been drawn to the need for the processing of this visa application to be finalised given the applicant has secured an atypical working employment permit and is required to take up employment urgently; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18228/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the application for the person referred to was granted on 29 March 2022. The Visa Sticker was issued on 30 March 2022.

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

### Asylum Applications

623. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice if she will investigate the request for asylum for Belarussian citizens (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18256/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I can advise the Deputy that in accordance with the provisions of the International Protection Act 2015, applications for international protection cannot be made from outside the State.

The International Protection Office of my Department is responsible for examining all international protection applications received from persons in the State. Each application is assessed individually on its merits. The circumstances of each 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).

As the Deputy may be aware, on 25 February I announced the immediate lifting of visa requirements for Ukrainian citizens travelling to Ireland. However, people who are from a country that is visa-required, such as Belarus, will still need to apply for a visa to travel to the State. Anyone who wishes to make a visa application must do so online at: [www.visas.inis.gov.ie/avats/OnlineHome.aspx](http://www.visas.inis.gov.ie/avats/OnlineHome.aspx).

### An Garda Síochána

624. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice if she has been informed by the Garda Commissioner in accordance with section 41 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 regarding a letter sent to them by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18279/22]



**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I can confirm to the Deputy that, in relation to the matter raised, I have not received any correspondence from the Garda Commissioner under Section 41 of the Act.

*Question No. 625 answered with Question No. 591.*

### **Overseas Study Placements**

626. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice the number of overseas students who are on a stamp 2 visa currently in Ireland; if consideration has been given to making these visas more flexible to enable students to work for more than 20 hours per week outside the Christmas and June to September periods given that many of these students are struggling to pay rent and many of their employers are struggling to secure sufficient staff; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18295/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** There are currently 33,230 non-EEA students registered with an active Stamp 2 permission in the State.

My Department has responsibility for immigration-related matters, including the entry and residence conditions of non-EEA students, who are granted a Stamp 2 immigration permission, and continually consults and engages with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, among other key sectoral stakeholders, in this area.

A student's primary purpose for being in the State is to study. All applicants for permission to study in Ireland must show that they have sufficient funds to support their stay in Ireland without recourse to public funds, or the reliance on casual employment.

However, since April 2001, non-EEA students with an immigration Stamp 2 permission, and who are enrolled on courses with education providers listed on the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) including English language courses, have been afforded the opportunity to work.

This allows them to take up casual employment to supplement their income while studying in Ireland. During term time, non-EEA students can work up to 20 hours per week and during normal college holiday periods they can work on a full time basis up to 40 hours per week.

The conditions attaching to all immigration permissions are kept under ongoing review by my Department with all relevant stakeholders. Any changes to the work entitlements of non-EEA students would be a policy decision for the wider stakeholder group.

### **Residency Permits**

627. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice the correct procedure to be followed by a person (details supplied) to secure long-term residency who has been in Ireland for 12 years; when they will be eligible to apply for citizenship; the body or organisation which currently updates their status every couple of months at a costly amount; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18312/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The person referred to by the Deputy lodged a review application in respect of their EU Treaty Rights application decision on 2 August 2017. This application was examined in detail and a decision was made to uphold the deci-

sion to refuse their EU Treaty Rights application on 3 March 2021. The reasons for the refusal are outlined in the refusal letter.

The person concerned is currently in permission, on Stamp 1 conditions, (without the requirement to obtain an employment permit), for a period of six months until 20 May 2022. This person's case will be examined in advance of the expiry date of that permission by the Repatriation Division of my Department, to see if it falls within the parameters of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling in the Chenchooliah case.

As the Deputy may be aware, the ECJ's ruling in that case requires a new process to be developed in this State to deal with the cases of third country nationals who may have been deemed to come within the scope of the EU Free Movement Directive but for whom the circumstances which allowed them to remain in the State no longer apply. The required process is still being developed and will be finalised in the coming months.

The person can contact the Repatriation Division of my Department in advance of the expiry date of their current permission directly at: *repataadmin@justice.ie*.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility (*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.

### **Visa Applications**

**628. Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice the position regarding a visa application by a person (details supplied) in County Cork;; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18323/22]

**629. Deputy James O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice the position regarding a visa application by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18324/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 628 and 629 together.

The applicants referred to by the Deputy created on-line Join Family (non-EEA national) visa applications on 10 June 2021. The supporting documentation and relevant fees were received on 2 July 2021 in the Ankara Visa Office where they are currently awaiting comprehensive examination. The applicants will be notified in writing as soon as a decision has been reached.

Processing of family reunification visa applications, such as these, may take up to 12 months to determine from date the documentation is received in the relevant Visa Office. The Visa Office endeavours to have applications of this nature processed earlier than this, however, this is not always possible. In order to be fair to all applicants, applications are processed in order by date received. 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.

*Question No. 629 answered with Question No. 628.*

### **Traffic Fines**

630. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice the total number of fines issued for cars parking illegally on footpaths in Mullingar and Athlone, County Westmeath in each of the past three months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18341/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible by law for the management and administration of An Garda Síochána, which includes operational policing matters such as the issuing of fines. As Minister, I have no responsibility for these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that it is not possible to provide a response as the number of fines issued for cars parking illegally on footpaths in Mullingar and Athlone, County Westmeath, in each of the past three months is fewer than 10.

*Question No. 631 answered with Question No. 610.*

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

632. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Justice if she will provide a breakdown of funding awarded to local authorities, communities and groups under the CCTV community grant scheme; the amount awarded to each successful applicant in each year since 2020; if a review on the eligibility criteria of this scheme was carried out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18371/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Since 2017, my Department has administered a grant aid scheme supporting groups wishing to establish a community-based CCTV system in their area. Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities nationwide, can apply for grant aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

The CCTV grant scheme was extended in 2019 to cover not only new CCTV systems but to also provide funding for the extension or upgrade of existing CCTV systems which are incomplete or obsolete. Applicants may now also seek a once-off grant of up to €5,000 for minor maintenance costs. Support and assistance for those running CCTV schemes is available by contacting: [fundsadmin-comm-based-cctv@justice.ie](mailto:fundsadmin-comm-based-cctv@justice.ie).

Community-based CCTV is governed by Section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,
- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller, and
- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of how they are funded.

These key legal requirements have not changed since 2006.

To date, 35 schemes have been approved for funding to a total of €948,649.16. Since 2020, 12 schemes have been approved to a value of €192,021.32.

The breakdown of the amount awarded to each successful applicant since 2020 is as follows.

Local Authority	Area	Grant Amount Approved	Date
Monaghan CoCo	Monaghan Town	€25,000.00	30 June 2020
Laois CoCo	Woodenbridge	€9,020.00	14 January 2020
Louth CoCo	Rathmullen	€19,758.35	01 May 2020
Louth CoCo	Moneymore	€19,758.35	01 May 2020
Laois CoCo	Borris in Ossory	€10,107.62	12 March 2020
Kilkenny CoCo	Urlingford	€15,500.00	04 September 2020
Kerry CoCo	Killarney Outer	€15,627.00	02 February 2021
Kerry CoCo	Killarney Town Centre	€20,100.00	02 February 2021
Kerry CoCo	Ballyspillane	€12,150.00	02 February 2021
Longford CoCo	Longford Town	€20,000.00	06 April 2021
Wicklow CoCo	Blessington Town Centre	€20,000.00	28 April 2021
Carlow CoCo	Develop Tullow	€5,000.00	13 August 2021

The Deputy may be aware that the Data Protection Commission have carried out an in-depth, independent review of community CCTV schemes. My Department is incorporating amendments into the Garda Síochána (Digital Recordings) Bill to address these findings.

The General Scheme of the Garda Síochána (Digital Recording) Bill 2021 was approved by the Government and published on 29 April 2021. The General Scheme was sent to the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for formal drafting, and drafting is continuing. The General Scheme was also submitted to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Committee's report was received in December 2021 and is currently being examined by my officials. It is my intention to publish the Bill in May 2022 and to complete its passage through the Oireachtas later this year.

This Bill will provide statutory underpinning for Garda overt recording, which will include CCTV authorised in local communities by the Garda Commissioner. It is planned to have a further review of the terms and conditions of the current scheme to bring it into line with the proposals in this new legislation and in keeping with the commitment in the Programme for Government. It is expected the Bill will be enacted in 2022.

## Youth Services

633. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice the total number of persons employed as youth justice workers in Garda youth diversion projects in Ireland in tabular form by county and or appropriate geographical area. [18391/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice (Deputy James Browne):** As the Deputy will be aware, Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) are community based organisations that operate as a vital support to the statutory Garda Youth Diversion Programme. There are currently

105 YDPs across the State, which are funded through my Department.

Under the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-27, the intention is to further develop this service so that it is available to every child in the State who could benefit from it, through an ongoing expansion of existing services and the foundation of new projects where necessary.

The Strategy commits to the broadening and deepening of services provided by YDPs and acknowledges the importance of Early Intervention and Family Support programmes for children at risk, as well as access to appropriate Education, Training and Youth Services.

Budget 2022 includes an additional allocation of €6.7 million for Youth Justice services, which includes provision for the broadening of YDP services.

The attached table provides a breakdown of the number of youth justice workers by Youth Diversion Project, further broken down by Garda Division and District. The figures provided are on a Full Time Equivalent basis.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-06\_pq633-05042022\_en.xlsx">Youth Justice Workers</a>].

### Departmental Contracts

634. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice the cost of consultants to her Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if she will provide an outline of the role of each. [18892/22]

**Minister for Justice (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in tabular format below:

Consultancy Service	Description	2020 Costs (€)	2021 Costs (€)	2022 Costs (€)
Accenture Limited	Business analysis services	131,532	72,936	-
Acrux Consulting LTD	HR Services	-	-	67
Arcline LTD	Records management services	-	13,395	-
Bid and Tender Management Services	Procurement review reports	-	70,258	-
Bob Semple	Risk management consulting services	-	6,089	-
Byrne Wallace	Protected Disclosures policy review	8,723	15,026	-

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Consultancy Service	Description	2020 Costs (€)	2021 Costs (€)	2022 Costs (€)
Connect The Dots Events Limited	NDIS Public Consultation (2020) Strategic plan preparation (2021)	16,544	9,978	-
CVG Procurement Services LTD	Procurement Consultant	20,831	8,185	-
Data Privacy Solutions	Gap analysis	4,428	-	-
Deirdre Fullerton	Report for Family Justice Group	-	-	4,305
Deloitte Ireland LLP	Consultancy Services (2021) Governance Review of Abhaile (2022)	-	845	30,689
Denise Charlton and Associates	Consultancy - General	3,152	-	-
DocuSign INC	Consultancy Services - IT	-	-	552
Ellen O'Malley Dunlop	Domestic sexual gender based violence audit	-	19,200	-
EY Business Advisers	IT Consultancy on ICT Strategy	161,237	-	-
EY Business Advisory Services	Review of Immigrant Investor Programme	36,900	18,150	-
EY Chartered Accounts	IBM & HCL Licence Audit 2020 - Regularisation of licensing - ILMT project	48,400	-	-
Foroige	Consultation services, Family Justice Oversight Group	-	1,490	247
Garadin Limited	Data Protection Consultancy	-	9,219	-
Gartner Ireland LTD	Executive Program Leadership Team	182,367	-	-

Consultancy Service	Description	2020 Costs (€)	2021 Costs (€)	2022 Costs (€)
Gauge NI CIC	Customer insights consultancy services	-	24,628	-
Immigrant Council of Ireland	Hate Speech Consultancy	547	-	-
Information Security Assurance Services Limited	IT consultancy services	54,244	40,355	76,678
John Bamber	Oversight & contributions to the development of the YPAR Case Study	3,630	-	-
KOSI Corporation LTD	General Consultancy Service	-	32,137	-
Mary Higgins	Domestic sexual gender based violence audit consultation, research and report preparation	-	19,200	-
Mazars	Project review (change element), GDPR/ Data Protection and ICT specialised audits	13,220	32,411	14,664
Michael Breen	Research consultancy	-	4,500	-
Multi Health Systems INC	Risk assessments consultancy for Youth Diversion projects	-	20,210	-
Niamh A McCullagh	6 Days Forensic Archaeologist	-	-	4,121
Software Pipeline Ireland LTD	IT consultancy services	-	23,616	-

### Disability Services

635. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the reason a child (details supplied) who was assessed as autistic in January 2020 has still not been accepted into a HSE-funded foundation after two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18021/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question concerns service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy, as soon as possible.

### **Public Procurement Contracts**

636. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that a fair and transparent public procurement process was put in place for the appointment of design teams to construct a new emergency department and 100-bed unit at Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18250/22]

**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.

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

637. **Deputy Paul Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the Covid recognition payment will be paid to persons working in private nursing homes throughout the pandemic. [17415/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all healthcare workers for their efforts during this most challenging period.

The Government announced a COVID-19 recognition payment for frontline public sector healthcare workers, to recognise their unique role during the pandemic. The measure will be ring fenced to staff ordinarily onsite in COVID-19 exposed healthcare environments within the period between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021.

This payment will be made to those eligible public sector frontline healthcare staff (inclusive of agency staff working for the HSE) who worked in clinical settings, noting this list is not exhaustive: those Doctors / Nurses / Health Care Assistants / Swabbers / Porters / Cleaners etc. that work in clinical settings. The measure encompasses Health Care Support Assistants (also known as Home Carers / Home Help) employed by or carrying out duties contracted to the HSE.

The measure also encompasses those eligible working on site in long term residential care facilities for people with disabilities (inclusive of those facilities whether HSE or section 39). The measure further extends to those equivalent healthcare workers in private nursing homes and hospices. Arrangements for this sector encompassed by this measure are currently being progressed by the Department of Health.

There are many, many other individuals and organisations in our country who did so much during the pandemic. It is tough to draw a line on this matter, but the Government has based its decision on the exceptional risks which these frontline healthcare workers faced.

The Department of Health appreciates the levels of interest this announcement has generated. We are working together with the HSE to provide additional details on this measure including full eligibility criteria, particulars and terms and conditions that apply. Additionally, the Department and the HSE are currently consulting with health sector trade unions on this matter. This consultation is part of the Department and HSE's objective to finalise the application of this measure fairly.



## Disabilities Assessments

638. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of times an assessment officer has requested an expert nominated by the National Council For Special Education to assist in the carrying out of an assessment of need under section 8(3) of the Disability Act 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17417/22]

**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.

## Covid-19 Pandemic Supports

639. **Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the pandemic recognition payment will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17422/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all healthcare workers for their efforts during this most challenging period.

The Government announced a COVID-19 recognition payment for frontline public sector healthcare workers, to recognise their unique role during the pandemic. The measure will be ring fenced to staff ordinarily onsite in COVID-19 exposed healthcare environments within the period between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021.

This payment will be made to those eligible public sector frontline healthcare staff (inclusive of agency staff working for the HSE) who worked in clinical settings, noting this list is not exhaustive: those Doctors / Nurses / Health Care Assistants / Porters / Cleaners etc. that work in clinical settings. This includes those eligible workers seconded or assigned to the HSE (for example: Defence Forces staff seconded/assigned to HSE testing centres). The measure encompasses Health Care Support Assistants (also known as Home Carers / Home Help) employed by or carrying out duties contracted to the HSE.

The measure also encompasses those eligible working on site in long term residential care facilities for people with disabilities (inclusive of those facilities whether HSE or section 39). The measure further extends to those equivalent healthcare workers in private nursing homes and hospices. Arrangements for this sector encompassed by this measure are currently being progressed by the Department of Health.

The Department and the HSE are currently consulting with health sector trade unions. This consultation is part of the Department and HSE’s objective to finalise the application of this measure fairly. Upon conclusion of consultations with the trade unions, full details of the application process, FAQs and other particulars shall be published by the HSE. It is intended that payments will be instructed in the coming days.

## Civil Registration Service

640. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health if he will increase the resources available to the HSE Civil Registration Service in order that the backlog of marriage registrations can be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17423/22]

**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 Supports**

641. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the pandemic recognition payment be paid to section 39 workers in private nursing homes and private hospices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17424/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all healthcare workers for their efforts during this most challenging period.

The Government announced a COVID-19 recognition payment for frontline public sector healthcare workers, to recognise their unique role during the pandemic. The measure will be ring fenced to staff ordinarily onsite in COVID-19 exposed healthcare environments within the period between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021.

This payment will be made to those eligible public sector frontline healthcare staff (inclusive of agency staff working for the HSE) who worked in clinical settings, noting this list is not exhaustive: those Doctors / Nurses / Health Care Assistants / Porters / Cleaners etc. that work in clinical settings. This includes those eligible workers seconded or assigned to the HSE (for example: Defence Forces staff seconded/assigned to HSE testing centres). The measure encompasses Health Care Support Assistants (also known as Home Carers / Home Help) employed by or carrying out duties contracted to the HSE.

The measure also encompasses those eligible working on site in long term residential care facilities for people with disabilities (inclusive of those facilities whether HSE or section 39). The measure further extends to those equivalent healthcare workers in private nursing homes and hospices.

Arrangements for this sector encompassed by this measure are currently being progressed by the Department of Health.

### **Emergency Departments**

642. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the way in which patients are categorised for emergency department admissions; the way these are prioritised; the effect of this prioritisation in practice; the number of patients admitted under each category in 2019, by hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17432/22]

**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.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

643. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of tenders that were delayed or withdrawn and reissued due to a significant change in expected costs in the past two years, in tabular form; the length of delay in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17433/22]

**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.

### **Vaccination Programme**

644. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the exact date in 2021 that CHO 4 mental health service management staff were offered first dose Covid-19 vaccinations as part of the HSE vaccination roll-out (details supplied) by role in tabular form; if he will provide the exact date in 2021 that CHO4 mental health service heads of discipline were offered first dose Covid-19 vaccinations; if he will provide dates for each head of discipline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17434/22]

**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**

645. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the current training supports for clinical psychologists that are or which he intends to make available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17443/22]

**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.

### **Health Service Executive**

646. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the office or unit in the HSE and in his Department that is ultimately responsible for ensuring reports as required under section 13 of the Disability Act 2005 are completed, received by him and subsequently published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17445/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** The HSE has responsibility for ensuring that Section 13 reports are collated, completed and submitted to the Department of Health. The HSE will provide information on the details of their office responsible for same directly to the Deputy.

Within my Department, Disabilities Services Unit has oversight of the HSE for the provision of health and personal social services for people with a disability. The HSE has prepared and presented Section 13 Annual Reports for the years 2007 to 2014 to the Department of Health and is currently working on Reports for the years 2015-2020 to bring records up to date. It is intended that these reports will be completed by year end.

The HSE acknowledges that the current management information system is no longer fit for purpose. It is committed to the development of a new integrated Management Information System for children's disability services, with work ongoing on the development and roll out of the new system. This will facilitate the HSE to provide a wide range of bespoke reports on activity in the children's disability services area.

### **Health Service Executive**

647. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of requests made in written format or recorded in minutes or notes of meetings in relation to which he or any of his predecessors requested reports to be submitted to them under section 13 of the Disability Act 2005 from 2014 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17446/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** The information as requested by the Deputy is not collated by the Department and, in that context, it is not possible to provide same.

### **Health Service Executive**

648. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total legal, consultancy and professional fees paid by the HSE in each of the years 2015 to 2021, by fee or cost type; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17447/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have referred this to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

649. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total capital funding provided to each level 4 hospital between 2015 to 2021, by hospital and year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17448/22]

**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.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

650. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of patients over the age of 75 who have waited over 12 months on an outpatient waiting list from 2010 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17449/22]

651. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of patients over the age of 75 who have waited over six months on an in-patient waiting list from 2010 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17450/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 650 and 651 together.

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) has provided the attached document which outlines the number of patients over 75 years of age who were on the IPDC waiting list 0-6 months and over 6 months and the number waiting 0-12 months and over 12 months on the OPD waiting list. The data is provided in respect of the end of December each year from 2014 to 2021. In relation to the particular query raised, it should be noted that 2014 is the earliest publication date of waiting list figures.

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The NTPF has also provided the mean and median waiting times for patients over 75 who were on the waiting list at the end of December each year from 2014-2021. In relation to mean and median waiting times, the NTPF have advised my Department that the health system does not collect the data necessary to calculate average wait times as the time to treatment of patients who have already received their care is not collected. As a result the mean and media waiting times are based on the information available for the patients on the waiting list at a particular point in time.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq651-05-04-22\_en.xlsx">Patient Waiting Lists</a>]

*Question No. 651 answered with Question No. 650.*

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

652. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of patients over the age of 75 who have waited over six months on a diagnostic waiting list from 2010 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17451/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The HSE advises that a pilot project commenced in 2016 by the HSE Acute Hospitals Division to progress the collection of national radiology waiting list data. The project has been supported by the Radiology Clinical Care Programme and has involved key stakeholders across the system including the National Integrated Medical Imaging System (NIMIS) Team, Hospital Groups, and the support of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) for data collection and data management expertise

The NTPF has advised my Department that they do not currently record the personal data of any of the patients on the Diagnostics waiting list as the purpose of this aggregate data is to provide a National Level overview of the number of patients waiting for modalities of CT, MR and US. This report is not intended to be used for the active management of hospital diagnostics waiting lists- local reports and mechanisms should continue to be used for the management of diagnostics waiting lists at hospital level.

For this reason, the NTPF is not able to identify whether patients on the Diagnostics waiting list are over or under 75 years of age.

### **Primary Care Services**

653. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of patients over the age of 75 who have waited over six months on a community waiting list from 2010 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17452/22]

*Awaiting reply from Department.*

### **Hospital Facilities**

654. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds funded by the HSE across acute and community care by category (details supplied) and bed type in tabular form; if they are public or private; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17453/22]

**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.

### **Healthcare Policy**

655. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the full establishment and operation of regional health areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17454/22]

656. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the six geographical areas identified and agreed regarding the establishment of regional health areas; if he expects those geographical boundaries to change; the hospitals which will fall into each geographically aligned area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17455/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 655 and 656 together.

I refer the Deputy to documentation published on my Department's website in July 2019 ([www.gov.ie/en/publication/4eda4-slaintecare-regional-health-areas-rhas/#geographies-of-the-regional-health-areas](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4eda4-slaintecare-regional-health-areas-rhas/#geographies-of-the-regional-health-areas)). This was published on foot of the Government decision approving the geographies for the six regional health areas (RHAs). It details the geographies of the six regional health areas, including the hospitals, Community Healthcare Organisations and Local Health Offices contained within each.

The RHA boundaries were decided following detailed population and health infrastructure analyses of patient service usage patterns across the country. This analysis examined patient flows to establish the extent to which hospitals in a given region are serving patients who live in that region. The regions are designed to be as self-contained as possible across the country. Available infrastructure and population demographics were considered extensively when they were being developed. There is no plan at this time to re-examine the boundaries as we have no indication that infrastructure or demographics have changed significantly in a way since then that would require a re-assessment.

The scale of change required to regionalise our health service is significant. It will require careful and comprehensive design, planning, and implementation to achieve the objectives and benefits of Regional Health Areas while maintaining and improving the delivery of health services through the transition process. A detailed implementation plan will be finalised in 2022. The transition to RHAs will take place throughout 2023. It is expected that RHAs will be fully operational by Q1 2024.

*Question No. 656 answered with Question No. 655.*

### **Dental Services**

657. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made in addressing difficulties with the dental treatment services scheme; the changes to the scheme that will be put in place; if this will involve more of a focus on preventative treatment for medical card patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17456/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) is available to medical card holders aged 16 and over. I recognise that the DTSS, which dates from the 1990s, needs to be reviewed and aligned with best international evidence and

practice, and legislation, as outlined in Smile agus Sláinte, the National Oral Health Policy. Regrettably, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the roll-out of the Policy to be delayed and the proposed review of the DTSS contract to be deferred. Work on a substantive review of the DTSS Contract will commence by the end of Q2, 2022.

I have also acknowledged immediate issues of concern with the Scheme, which I am addressing as a matter of priority. Officials from my Department and from the HSE have held three rounds of discussions with the Irish Dental Association, the most recent on 2nd March when my Department and the HSE presented proposals to invest additional resources in the Dental Treatment Services Scheme.

I have now given approval for significant fee increases to be paid to contracted dentists across a number of items, including the Dental Examination and Fillings. I have also approved the reintroduction of Scale and Polish for medical card patients on the DTSS. These new measures are designed to address access problems for patients, and address dentist's concerns about the viability of the DTSS, while aligning the DTSS more closely with the Dental Treatment Benefits Scheme, which is widely operated by private dentists for PRSI patients.

These measures should amount to an additional investment this year of about €26 million over what was spent on the Scheme in 2021. My Department and the HSE will work together to quickly implement the changes to the Scheme for the benefit of patients.

### **Emergency Departments**

658. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons aged 75 plus and under 75 who were waiting greater than 24 hours at an emergency department for each year from 2010 to date by month; the total number of each; the sum of both for each month and for each year, in tabular form; the total number waiting greater than 24 hours for admission via an emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17457/22]

**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.

### **Healthcare Policy**

659. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe envisaged for removing private healthcare from public hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17458/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The removal of private practice from public hospitals is a core principle of Sláintecare, ensuring that public healthcare facilities are used for public patients only. The priority for Government at this time is the introduction of the new Consultant Contract, a crucial element of removing private practice from public hospitals.

### **Healthcare Policy**

660. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to underpin Sláintecare on a statutory basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17459/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Sláintecare Implementation Strat-

egy & Action Plan 2021-2023 was approved by Government in May 2021. A mid-year progress report was published in September 2021 and an end-of-year Progress Report is expected to be published in the near future. Any legislation required as part of these work programmes are considered and progressed in due course. For example, legislation was enacted to facilitate the establishment of a new HSE board as part of the Sláintecare reform.

The Government is committed to Sláintecare reform and to ensuring every patient receives the right care, in the right place and at the right time. €1.235 billion was allocated to ‘pure’ Sláintecare initiatives in Budget 2021 enabling and supporting major milestones in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023 to be reached and funding is continuing at historically levels in Budget 2022.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

661. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he has set waiting list reduction targets specifically for each hospital group and each hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17460/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The 2022 Waiting List Action Plan (WLAP), which I launched on 25 February 2022, details 45 actions to reduce and reform waiting lists.

Our immediate priority under the plan is to deliver additional activity and thereby reduce the number of people waiting, with a particular focus on long waiters. Some €263m, of the €350m fund made available via the 2022 WLAP, has been allocated to the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) this year to source additional outpatient (OPD), endoscopy (GI Scopes), diagnostics and inpatient daycase (IPDC) activity to achieve this.

A substantial piece of work with Hospital Groups and CHI to identify the specialties and indeed procedures to target is nearing completion. In the meantime, the HSE and NTPF are collaborating to procure as much additional activity as possible using existing arrangements.

The HSE will continue to prioritise the delivery of care based on robust clinical guidance. Ongoing monitoring will take place to identify evidence of unmet historical, clinically urgent demand. To the extent that these demands are displacing non-urgent waiting list activity, further efforts will be made to secure additional capacity.

The 2022 Waiting List Action Plan will also progress work towards the achievement of intermediate waiting time targets this year, as set out in the 2022 National Service Plan (98% of all patients on active waiting list will wait less than 18 months for their first Outpatients appointment and less than 12 months for their procedure).

The 2022 Plan also focuses on 15 high volume inpatient day case procedures, including cataracts and hip and knee replacements, so that every person waiting over 6 months for one of these procedures, and who is clinically ready, will receive an offer of treatment via the NTPF.

### **Hospital Charges**

662. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the detail of all income received or generated by each hospital from 2015 to date by hospital and income stream in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17461/22]



**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.

### Healthcare Policy

663. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the detail of his plans to put Sláintecare maximum wait times on a statutory basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17462/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The 2022 waiting list action plan, which I launched on the 25th of February, allocates €350 million to the HSE and NTPF to reduce waiting lists by 18% this year which will bring the number of people waiting to their lowest point in five years. Projections for 2022 show that over 1.5 million patients will be added to active waiting lists this year. Many people stayed away from the health service during the pandemic and, as these people come forward for treatment it will place huge additional demand on health services. Under the Waiting List Action Plan, the Department HSE and NTPF will deliver urgent additional capacity to treat 1.7 million people as well as investing in longer term reforms to bring sustained reductions in waiting lists.

In addition to reducing waiting list volumes and implementing reforms, the 2022 Plan will also progress work towards achieving maximum waiting time targets. The 2017 all-party Oireachtas Sláintecare Report recognises the need to reduce waiting times for scheduled care services, especially for those with urgent and complex care needs. The Sláintecare Report sets out the following recommended maximum waiting time targets for acute scheduled care to be achieved in the long-term that have been adopted as Government targets: no patient should wait longer than 10 weeks for outpatients/assessments; 12 weeks for inpatients / day cases; and 10 days for diagnostics.

However, given the historically long waiting times for scheduled care and the impact of the pandemic, the numbers of people now waiting for treatment and diagnostics far exceed these stated targets. The 2022 Plan will progress practical work towards the achievement of these maximum waiting targets through a phased approach and the delivery of intermediate targets this year, while also seeking to improve and increase capacity and productivity to deliver an immediate and medium-term reduction in waiting list numbers. The 2022 Waiting List Action Plan will progress intermediate waiting time targets this year, as set out in the 2022 National Service Plan of: by end-December 2022, 98% of all patients on our waiting list will wait less than 18 months for their first outpatients appointment (OPD) and 12 months for their procedure (IPDC and GI scopes). The Plan also focuses on 15 high volume inpatient day case procedures, including cataracts and hip and knee replacements, so that every person waiting over 6 months for one of these procedures, and who is clinically ready will receive an offer of treatment via the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF).

In total, the 2022 Plan details 45 actions to reduce and reform waiting lists. One of these actions is to develop and agree a multi-annual waiting list reduction plan to support the achievement of the Government maximum wait time targets. As part of this action consideration will be given to decisions relating to codifying such targets in legislation to complement the practical work already underway via other actions in the Plan to achieve these targets.

### Public Sector Pay

664. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed

by his Department and-or the HSE whose earned income exceeds €100,000; the number who earned income in excess of amounts (details supplied) for each of the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17463/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In respect of the HSE's employees and those of the Section 38 agencies, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

In respect of staff of my own Department, a breakdown of the number of staff who earned income in excess of €100,000 for each of the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, is set out in tabular form below in line with the bands set out in details supplied with the Deputy's question.

The amounts reported reflect gross pay before any statutory or voluntary deductions.

2018	
Band	No of employees
€100,000 to €120,000	4
€120,001 to €130,000	1
€130,001 to €140,000	2
€140,001 to €150,000	1
€150,001 to €160,000	1
€160,001 to €170,000	0
€170,001 to €180,000	3
€180,001 to €190,000	1
€190,001 to €200,000	0
€200,001 to €210,000	0
€210,001 to €220,000	0
€220,001 to €230,000	0
€230,001 to €240,000	0
€240,001 to €250,000	0
Total number who earned in excess of €100,000 in 2018	13
Department of Health Total Headcount for 2018	498
2019	
Band	No of employees
€100,000 to €120,000	11
€120,001 to €130,000	0
€130,001 to €140,000	3
€140,001 to €150,000	1
€150,001 to €160,000	2
€160,001 to €170,000	0
€170,001 to €180,000	4
€180,001 to €190,000	0
€190,001 to €200,000	1
€200,001 to €210,000	0
€210,001 to €220,000	0
€220,001 to €230,000	0

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€230,001 to €240,000	0
€240,001 to €250,000	0
Total number who earned in excess of €100,000 in 2019	22
Department of Health Total Headcount for 2019	547

2020	
Band	No of employees
€100,000 to €120,000	16
€120,001 to €130,000	3
€130,001 to €140,000	1
€140,001 to €150,000	3
€150,001 to €160,000	2
€160,001 to €170,000	0
€170,001 to €180,000	0
€180,001 to €190,000	3
€190,001 to €200,000	1
€200,001 to €210,000	0
€210,001 to €220,000	0
€220,001 to €230,000	0
€230,001 to €240,000	0
€240,001 to €250,000	0
Total number who earned in excess of €100,000 in 2020	30
Department of Health Total Headcount for 2020	595

2021	
Band	No of employees
€100,000 to €120,000	27
€120,001 to €130,000	5
€130,001 to €140,000	0
€140,001 to €150,000	0
€150,001 to €160,000	1
€160,001 to €170,000	2
€170,001 to €180,000	2
€180,001 to €190,000	2
€190,001 to €200,000	0
€200,001 to €210,000	0
€210,001 to €220,000	0
€220,001 to €230,000	0
€230,001 to €240,000	0
€240,001 to €250,000	0
€250,001 to €260,000	1

2021	
Band	No of employees
Total number who earned in excess of €100,000 in 2021	40
Department of Health Total Headcount for 2021	691

### Disabilities Assessments

665. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the persons in the grade of the individual within the HSE who is responsible for submitting reports to him under section 13 of the Disability Act 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17465/22]

666. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the preliminary team assessments carried out under the current standard operating procedure for assessments of need for children with a disability are currently lawful, if they are still in use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17466/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 665 and 666 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. 666 answered with Question No. 665.*

### Disabilities Assessments

667. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of children who had a preliminary teams assessment following the introduction of the latest standard operating procedure for children with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17467/22]

668. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of children who had a preliminary teams assessment and in which a health need was identified following the introduction of the latest standard operating procedure for children with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17468/22]

669. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of children who had a preliminary teams assessment and in which an education need was identified following the introduction of the latest standard operating procedure for children with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17469/22]

670. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of children who had a preliminary teams assessment and in which the nature and extent of a disability was established following the introduction of the latest standard operating procedure for children with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17470/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 667 to 670, 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. 668 answered with Question No. 667.*

*Question No. 669 answered with Question No. 667.*

*Question No. 670 answered with Question No. 667.*

### **Health Services Staff**

671. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of staff employed by the HSE whose basic pay was in excess of amounts (details supplied) for each of the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17471/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff**

672. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of staff employed by the HSE to whom allowances were paid in excess of amounts (details supplied) for each of the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17472/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff**

673. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of staff employed by the HSE to whom overtime was paid in excess of amounts (details supplied) for each of the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17473/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff**

674. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total number of staff employed by the HSE to whom on-call payments were paid in excess of amounts (details supplied) for each of the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17474/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff**

675. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if travel expenses incurred by a HSE employee in the course of their duties will be reimbursed without further delay (details supplied). [17477/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to this matter.

### **Health Services**

676. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults accessing speech and language therapy services in CHO 7; the number of adults awaiting assessment for the services; the number of adults who have had an assessment and are on waiting lists to access services; and the average wait time for assessment and post-assessment access. [17478/22]

**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**

677. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Minister for Health if a list of CAMHS staff employed for the Clondalkin area will be provided; the roles of each; the number of vacancies that exist in each role; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17488/22]

**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 Strategies**

678. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health if a review has been conducted of the 2015-2020 Sexual Health Strategy; and, if so, when this review will be published. [17507/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan):** The National Sexual Health Strategy, 2015-2020, was launched in October 2015. It takes a life course approach, acknowledging the importance of developing a healthy attitude to sexuality in young people and of building on that foundation for positive sexual health and wellbeing into adulthood and older age.

Current priority deliverables under the Strategy are HIV prevention, including the continued expansion of a Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) programme, which commenced in late 2019, and the HIV Fast Track Cities programme, involving Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway.

Other key areas of work include expanding access to contraception, free of charge; expanding sexually transmitted infection (STI) services, progressing a population survey on sexual health and improving sexual health education, training and resources, including in schools, higher and further education.

A review of the Strategy began in 2021, having been postponed as a result of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Focus group meetings were held with key stakeholders, including

clinical and public health staff, the Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme team, those working in the STI clinics, the education sector, the Department of Health and Women's Health Taskforce, the research and academic sector and organisations representing the LGBTI+ community.

The detailed feedback from these meetings has been collated and will inform the future direction of the next iteration of the strategy. Commissioning an external review of the Strategy has been approved and will progress through standard procurement processes, which will commence shortly. It is envisaged that the procurement process will conclude by July, with the Review to take 3-4 months once commenced. When complete, the Report will be published on the Healthy Ireland website. Results will, in turn, inform future policy direction.

### **Mental Health Services**

679. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Health if a group (details supplied) will be included as eligible to receive counselling from the HSE following the 2016 report from the United Nations on safe and child-sensitive counselling which recommended that these services be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17515/22]

**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 Staff**

680. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours worked by HSE staff, by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17516/22]

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

### **Hospital Staff**

681. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours worked by staff in each of the hospitals in the RCSI Hospital Group by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17517/22]

**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**

682. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours

worked by staff in each of the hospitals in the Saolta Hospital Group by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17518/22]

**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**

683. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours worked by staff in each of the hospitals in the Ireland East Hospital Group by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17519/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Staff**

684. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours worked by staff in each of the hospitals in the South/SouthWest Hospital Group by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17520/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Staff**

685. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours worked by staff in each of the hospitals in the UL Hospital Group by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17521/22]

**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**

686. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours worked by staff in each of the hospitals in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17522/22]



**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**

687. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of overtime hours worked by staff in each of the hospitals in Children’s Health Ireland by staff category, for example, medical and dental, and grade, for example, consultant, from 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, on an annual basis, in tabular form; the number of persons to whom the overtime hours refer in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17523/22]

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

### **Nursing Homes**

688. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the Housing for All plan for an amended fair deal scheme to remove disincentives for sale and rental of vacant properties. [17551/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** Actions 19.7 and 19.8 within the Government’s Housing for All strategy are relevant in this matter. The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Amendment) Act 2021, which was signed into law on 22 July 2021, and commenced on 20th October, introduces further safeguards in the NHSS to further protect the viability and sustainability of family farms and businesses. It also includes an amendment in relation to applying the 3-year cap to the proceeds of sale of a house while a resident is in long-term care, which removes a disincentive for scheme participants against selling properties that might otherwise remain vacant. This addresses the first relevant commitment in the Housing for All Strategy (action 19.7).

My Department is actively collaborating with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and other Departments in the development of a mechanism in relation to the rental of vacant properties “in a way that is targeted, equitable, evidence-based and provides appropriate safeguards for vulnerable older people”, as committed to in Housing for All action 19.8. Complex policy questions are currently being resolved in order to meet these criteria and mitigate the high risks and costs associated with unintended consequences, with a view to introducing legislation as soon as possible once this is complete. I expect to be in a position to bring legislation forward in the coming months.

The NHSS is a complex €1.4 billion Scheme that relies on €350m of contributions from over 22,000 residents. It is important to ensure that the costs, benefits, and unintended consequences of any policy changes are fully understood and resolved before they are put in place. There is no existing exemption of rental or similar income from assessment within the Nursing Homes Support Scheme and due care needs to be taken to ensure that any future changes are appropriate to protect and meet the needs of residents while also making provision for those in need of housing.

### **National Children’s Hospital**

689. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when his Department will be in

a position to publish the final and total cost of expenditure for the National Children's Hospital. [17567/22]

**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, the Outpatient and Urgent Care Centre at Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, and the Outpatient and Emergency Care Centre at Tallaght University Hospital.

In 2018, 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 satellite centres, equipment for the three sites, and the construction of the carpark and retail spaces. The capital budget has not yet been depleted but there will be additional costs associated with delays and to date, €963.75m of the €1.433bn budget has been drawn down for works on the project across the three sites.

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 some, 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.

Additional costs in relation to the integration and transfer of the services of the three children's hospitals to the new sites brings the total programme cost to €1.73bn. This includes investment in ICT, a new Electronic Health Record system and the Children's Hospital Integration Programme (the merging of three paediatric hospitals) including commissioning.

Brexit, the pandemic and recent geopolitical developments have severely impacted supply chains and NCH project is not immune to these external challenges. Every effort is being taken to mitigate the risks but these externalities beyond the control of the contractor and the NPHDB make speculation and more definitive forecasting unwise.

### **National Maternity Hospital**

690. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of the expenditure on the list of completed works and work in progress on the enabling works for the National Maternity Hospital to date, in tabular form. [17568/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Government is committed to the development of the new National Maternity Hospital (NMH) planned for the St Vincent's University Hospital Campus at Elm Park, as set out in the Programme for Government: Our Shared Future.

Enabling works were undertaken to prepare the site of the new NMH and de-risk the campus in advance of the construction works for the new hospital. These works comprise carpark extension and relocating some SVUH departments currently on the proposed site of the new NMH, such as the pharmacy, and diverting utilities services to other locations on the SVUH campus.

In 2018 Government noted the intention to progress the awarding of the contract for a replacement pharmacy and carpark extension, as key enablers of the main development.

This first phase of work commenced on the site in February 2019 - the pharmacy and multi-storey car park extension were completed in 2021 and both are fully operational.

A breakdown of the expenditure to date is detailed in the table below.

Enabling works	Spend to date (incl. VAT)
Replacement of pharmacy and an extension to the multi-storey car park	€28.9m
Aspergillus protection and prevention works	€22.3m
Enabling works / site preparation works	
Junction upgrades to the entrances at Nutley Lane and Merrion Road in line with Planning Condition	
Demolition works	
Infrastructural works, including diversions of life critical mechanical and electrical systems supporting the adult hospital	
Total	€51.2m

### Dental Services

691. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied); if additional extractions will be offered through the PRSI scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17570/22]

**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.

### Public Sector Staff

692. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17601/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Under the provisions of the Civil Service Disciplinary Code an individual can be placed off duty with pay as a protective measure. This protective measure is not a sanction, disciplinary action or indication of any wrongdoing, but rather a measure designed to facilitate the proper conduct of an investigation. Currently, in my Department one person has been placed off duty with pay for less than 3 months.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in respect of the staff of the public health service. The information has been requested from the Non-Commercial State Agencies, and once collated will be provide to the Deputy by way of a letter.

### Medical Cards

693. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider expanding the income thresholds for persons over 70 years of age to access the GMS medical card scheme given increases in the cost of living; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17623/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Eligibility for a Medical Card is primarily based on a financial assessment which is conducted by the HSE in accordance with the

Health Act 1970 (as amended). The HSE assesses each medical card application on a qualifying financial threshold. This is the amount of money that an individual can earn a week and still qualify for a card. It is specific to the individual's own financial circumstances.

Persons aged 70 or older are assessed under the over 70s medical card income thresholds which are based on gross income. It should be noted that in November 2020, the weekly gross medical card income thresholds for those aged 70 and over were increased to €550 per week for a single person and €1050 for a couple. This increase ensures that a greater proportion of those aged 70 and over now qualify for a medical card.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the current medical card income thresholds are kept under regular review and any changes are considered in the context of Government policy, the annual budgetary estimates process and other issues which may be relevant.

### **Health Services**

694. **Deputy Cormac Devlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient drug and alcohol treatment detox beds that were available by CHO in each of the years 2016 to 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17624/22]

**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 Staff**

695. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost to increase basic specialist training posts by 1%; the number of posts this would result in; the additional workforce requirements incurred by same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17642/22]

**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**

696. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost to increase higher specialist training posts by 1%; the number of posts this would result in; the additional workforce requirements incurred by same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17643/22]

**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.

### **General Practitioner Services**

697. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost to increase

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general practice specialist training posts by 1%; the number of posts this would result in; the additional workforce requirements incurred by same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17644/22]

**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**

698. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of registrars in situ who are undergoing higher specialist training; the number who are not, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17645/22]

**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**

699. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of senior house officers in situ who are undergoing higher specialist training; the number who are not, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17646/22]

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

### **Hospital Staff**

700. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the purpose of the senior registrar post; the number of persons in this post who are undergoing or have undergone higher specialist training; the number of persons in this post who are ineligible for higher specialist training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17647/22]

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

### **Medical Qualifications**

701. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the eligibility requirements to become a registrar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17648/22]

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

### **Medical Qualifications**

702. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the eligibility requirements to

become a specialist registrar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17649/22]

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

### **Medical Qualifications**

703. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the eligibility requirements to become a senior registrar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17650/22]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

704. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the purpose and composition of the staff category, other medical; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17651/22]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

705. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if a breakdown will be provided of the specialty and working locations of in situ consultants in dentistry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17652/22]

**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.

### **Disability Services**

706. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for occupational therapy through the child disability network team in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17657/22]

**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**

707. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17661/22]

**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 Appointments Status

708. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17662/22]

**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.

## General Practitioner Services

709. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to help with the lack of general practitioner facilities in Ballyduff, County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17672/22]

**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.

## Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

710. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which the site for the health centre in Leap, County Cork was purchased; the value of HSE investment in the site, including construction costs, fitting and associated works, in tabular form; the total expenditure on this location, including legal and other fees since purchase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17674/22]

**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.

## Healthcare Policy

711. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Health if his attention been drawn to the lack of mention of hyperemesis gravidarum or a commitment to tackling the prohibitive cost of treatment in the Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023; if this is an oversight; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17680/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I fully appreciate that hyperemesis, or severe sickness during pregnancy, is a debilitating condition for some women, and I am anxious that our health service should support women with this condition in every way possible.

The Women's Health Action Plan, published March 2022, provides the framework to address this and a range of other issues that impact women's health in a responsive way as the issues arise.

Hyperemesis gravidarum is an issue which impacts women in pregnancy and therefore falls within the auspices of our work to support maternal health and healthcare which is a core component of the Women's Health Action Plan. While all issues impacting women's health in Ireland are not enumerated in detail in the Women's Health Action Plan, I can confirm that the HSE and my Department are working with pace to improve the supports available to women with this condition.

In relation to the cost and availability of medications needed in some cases of the treatment of Hyperemesis Gravidarum, important work in this area has commenced in the HSE and officials are engaged with the HSE to progress this work in line with the Ministers request for urgent consideration of this matter. This is a key first step in considering options which can better support women suffering with hyperemesis in Ireland.

The Medicines Management Programme (MMP) has submitted a clinical review and the HSE are now considering if there are potential reimbursement options based on the MMPs recommendations. I am hopeful that the HSE can achieve a positive outcome and my Department and the HSE are continuing to work closely together on this issue.

Improving women's health outcomes is a key priority for me and this Government. We made a strong commitment to Promoting Women's Health in the Programme for Government and are fully committed to the development and improvement of Women's Health services and to working with women and girls to improve their health across the whole life cycle. The Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023 is the first step to these important improvements. It is important to note that the Women's Health Action Plan is the first of its kind in Ireland. This plan starts and ends by listening to the women of Ireland. The life cycle of this first plan is of an 18-month duration, is ongoing and will respond to issues as they arise and developing consistently over its life course. The Women's Health Action Plan sets forward a wide range of positive initiatives to support women's health, including maternal health, and provides a framework for further prioritisation as issues and needs arise. It does not enumerate every issue that impact a woman's health but instead spotlights certain issues raised by women in the course of 2019 and 2020 and sets out a framework for regular review to ensure a responsiveness to women on the issues they want to see addressed is embedded in how the plan is implemented.

It is also supported by significant funding in Budget 2022, for example:

- An investment of almost €9 million additional funding to ensure continued implementation of the National Maternity Strategy into 2022 and beyond, building on the significant investment in 2021,

- Funding which will allow us to continue improvements in our gynaecology services by establishing a further 6 ambulatory gynaecology "see and treat" clinics, bringing the total to 20 clinics nationally.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

712. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for surgery in the Regional Hospital, Tullamore. [17686/22]

**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**

713. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 716 of 8 March 2022, if the information and statistics requested will be provided, that is, the number of children under the age of 18 currently waiting to be seen by child disability and autism services in County Wexford; the length of time that each child is on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17688/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As these are service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

714. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value of the leasehold; the cost to the HSE; the cost of legal or site works associated with the site since the leasehold was secured, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17689/22]

727. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE, including legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for which; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17732/22]

728. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold; cost to the HSE including legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for which; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and associated or ancillary costs, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17733/22]

729. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold; cost to the HSE including legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for which; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and associated or ancillary costs, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17734/22]

734. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE; the legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition,

legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17740/22]

735. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE; the legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17741/22]

736. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE; the legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17742/22]

737. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE; the legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17743/22]

770. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured in tabular form; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17789/22]

771. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured in tabular form; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17790/22]

772. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured in tabular form; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17791/22]

773. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was

secured in tabular form; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17792/22]

774. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured in tabular form; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17793/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 714, 727 to 729, inclusive, 734 to 737, inclusive, and 770 to 774, inclusive, together.

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.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

715. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if it was procured as a freehold or a leasehold site, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date; the legal costs, site works and other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or the latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17690/22]

738. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a leasehold on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE; the legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17744/22]

739. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since initially; if the site was freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or the latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17751/22]

740. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if the site was freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other

associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17752/22]

741. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if the site was freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17753/22]

742. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if the site was freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17754/22]

743. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if the site was freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17755/22]

744. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17756/22]

745. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17757/22]

746. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site in-

curred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17758/22]

747. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17759/22]

748. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site and the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17760/22]

749. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date , including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17762/22]

750. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date , including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17763/22]

751. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date , including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17764/22]

752. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for same; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since initially procured; if freehold or leasehold,

if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17765/22]

**753. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17766/22]

**754. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17767/22]

**755. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17768/22]

**756. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17769/22]

**757. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17770/22]

**758. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of

securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17771/22]

759. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17772/22]

760. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17773/22]

761. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17774/22]

762. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17775/22]

763. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which freehold tenure was secured on a site (details supplied); if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the cost to the HSE of securing the site; the uses of the site since it was initially procured; if freehold or leasehold, if there was a period of leasehold preceding the freehold tenure; the associated costs with the site incurred by the HSE to date, including legal costs, site works and any other associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; the value of the site or latest valuation and cost at which it was procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17776/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 715 and 738 to 763, inclusive, together.

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 these matters.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

716. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a site was purchased (details supplied); the value of the site at purchase; the latest valuation for the site; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose for which; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17691/22]

**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.

### **Hospice Services**

717. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health when the €3 million of funding for the development of hospices in Drogheda, County Cavan and the midlands for palliative and end of life care will be allocated. [17696/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In December 2021, I announced a once off allocation of €10million for palliative and end-of-life services. Of the €10 million, €3 million will be equally distributed to progress the development of hospices in Drogheda, Cavan and the Midlands which are currently in the planning stages. An allocation of €1 million for each of these hospice developments will fund architectural plans, planning costs and some initial groundworks as appropriate.

The HSE National Lead for Palliative Care and the respective CHO Heads of Primary Care are working in partnership with the eight local fundraising and philanthropic organisations in the Midlands and North East to progress these developments.

Funding has been released to the CHOs 1 & 8 and will be available for drawdown by the respective organisations as and when required.

### **Health Services Staff**

718. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health if there has been additional funding provided for the appointment of an additional two epilepsy nurse specialists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17697/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I am answering on the assumption that the Deputy is referring to advanced nurse specialist (ANP) positions recommended by the HSE in a report on its Valproate Response Project in 2019. The HSE has recently submitted an application to my Department to fund these positions; this application is being considered by officials within the Department.

### **Health Services**



719. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Health if he has had correspondence with an organisation (details supplied) on its proposal for the increase of physiotherapy services; if he plans to act on the proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17700/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** I can confirm that correspondence was received from MS Ireland to the Minister for Health regarding proposals related to physiotherapy services. This correspondence is currently under consideration by officials in my Department and a response will issue in due course.

### **Hospital Services**

720. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the public hospitals that carry out neuropsychological assessment, in tabular form; and the number of persons on the waiting list for such assessment, by hospital. [17706/22]

**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**

721. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the extra staffing, by job title, that will be required for the national intellectual disability memory service in Tallaght University Hospital. [17707/22]

**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**

722. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of times the HSE has advertised for the post of consultant paediatric vascular surgeon since January 2020. [17708/22]

**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**

723. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent staff, by job title, in the frail intervention therapy teams at Beaumont Hospital; and the number of vacancies, by job title, on the team. [17709/22]

**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**

724. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time senior psychologist posts allocated to CHO area 7 in 2021 and to date in 2022, in tabular form. [17710/22]

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

### **Medical Cards**

725. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he will waive the requirement to have a general practitioner sign a medical card form for Ukrainian refugees in view of the fact that many general practitioners are not taking on new medical card applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17728/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** It is a priority for the Department and the HSE to ensure that Ukrainian refugees are provided with appropriate health and social care services.

Ukrainians refugees will be able to access health care services from the HSE including Covid-19 vaccinations, GPs, community care and hospital or emergency care. As well as services for children's health, mental health, disabilities, maternity care, and older people.

A simplified and streamlined medical card application process for Ukrainians granted temporary protection status is in operation.

For Ukrainian refugees in emergency accommodation, the HSE has put in place a GP framework which ensures provision of specific GP services and access to prescriptions. In addition, Safety Net are providing GP clinics to facilities located in Dublin and out of hours services are accessible. A Community Healthcare response has also been mobilised to meet immediate health and support needs.

In conjunction with the National Women's and Infant Health Programme, a specific urgent referral service at the Rotunda Hospital for pregnant women near term (> 32 weeks) or those who require urgent access is in place. The senior midwife can refer to any maternity unit nationally.

The Inclusion Health Service at CHI Temple Street is being reoriented to assist with the Ukrainian situation.

In collaboration with National Cancer Control programme (NCCP) and the Irish Cancer Society (ICS), a Ukrainian cancer information page on the how to access services is live ([www.cancer.ie/ukraine](http://www.cancer.ie/ukraine)). The ICS will be appointing a Ukrainian Cancer Coordinator with which Acute Operations will work in close collaboration.

### **Mental Health Services**

726. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided for mental health and addiction services linked to homeless service provision provided by his Department, by year and project, from 2016 to date, in tabular form. [17731/22]

**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.

*Question No. 727 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 728 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 729 answered with Question No. 714.*

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

**730. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a licence agreement on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17735/22]

**731. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a licence agreement on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17736/22]

**732. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a licence agreement on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17737/22]

**733. Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a licence agreement on a building (details supplied) was secured; the value and terms of the leasehold and cost to the HSE including any legal or site works costs associated with the site since the leasehold was secured; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the length of vacancy; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17738/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 730 to 733, inclusive, together.

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.

*Question No. 731 answered with Question No. 730.*

*Question No. 732 answered with Question No. 730.*

*Question No. 733 answered with Question No. 730.*

*Question No. 734 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 735 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 736 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 737 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 738 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 739 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 740 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 741 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 742 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 743 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 744 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 745 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 746 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 747 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 748 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 749 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Question No. 750 answered with Question No. 715.*

*Questions Nos. 751 to 763, inclusive, answered with Question No. 715.*

### **State Properties**

764. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a site was acquired by the HSE (details supplied); the cost of the site on acquisition; the latest valuation; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17778/22]

765. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a site was acquired by the HSE (details supplied); the cost of the site on acquisition; the latest valuation; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17779/22]

766. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a site was acquired by the HSE (details supplied); the cost of the site on acquisition; the latest valuation; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site

works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17780/22]

767. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a site was acquired by the HSE (details supplied); the cost of the site on acquisition; the latest valuation; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17781/22]

768. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a site was acquired by the HSE (details supplied); the cost of the site on acquisition; the latest valuation; if the HSE intends to develop the site; if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works and any associated or ancillary costs in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17782/22]

769. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the date on which a site was acquired by the HSE (details supplied); the cost of the site on acquisition and latest valuation; if the HSE intends to develop the site and if so, when and the purpose; the purpose of retention; the costs incurred by the HSE to date related to the site including acquisition, legal fees, site works, and any associated or ancillary costs, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17783/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 764, 765, 766, 767, 768 and 769 together.

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.

*Question No. 765 answered with Question No. 764.*

*Question No. 766 answered with Question No. 764.*

*Question No. 767 answered with Question No. 764.*

*Question No. 768 answered with Question No. 764.*

*Question No. 769 answered with Question No. 764.*

*Question No. 770 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 771 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 772 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 773 answered with Question No. 714.*

*Question No. 774 answered with Question No. 714.*

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

775. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be arranged at Beaumont Hospital for a person (details supplied). [17796/22]

**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 Staff**

776. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in RCSI Hospital Group; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17798/22]

**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**

777. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in Saolta Hospital Group; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17799/22]

**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**

778. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in Ireland East Hospital Group; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17800/22]

**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**

779. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in South/South West Hospital Group; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17801/22]

**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**

780. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in UL Hospital Group; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17802/22]

**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**

781. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in Dublin Midlands Hospital Group; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17803/22]

**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**

782. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in Children's Health Ireland; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17804/22]

**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**

783. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO1; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17809/22]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

784. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO2; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17810/22]

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

**Health Services Staff**

785. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO3; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17811/22]

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

**Health Services Staff**

786. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO4; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17812/22]

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

**Health Services Staff**

787. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO5; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17813/22]

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

**Health Services Staff**

788. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO6; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17814/22]

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

**Health Services Staff**

789. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO7; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17815/22]

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



### Health Services Staff

790. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO8; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17816/22]

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

### Health Services Staff

791. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post at a hospital in CHO9; the location and specialty of the post in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17817/22]

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

### Health Service Executive

792. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that in a case in which a Parliamentary Question is asked which seeks information across the public health service and which is then referred to the HSE, that the reply is wholly sufficient by providing information sought which is available at hospital, hospital group or CHO-level or otherwise held by a body such as a public voluntary hospital but not centrally reported, which is relevant to answering the question; if he will ensure that this information is sought by the HSE in preparing a response for the question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17819/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Ensuring the accuracy of responses to Parliamentary Questions is a priority for me, my Department and for the HSE. To this end, I and my Department work closely with the HSE to ensure that all Parliamentary Questions are responded to properly and that all appropriate information is included in the response to any given Parliamentary Question.

Where it is not possible to provide a wholly sufficient response within the standard timeframe, either my Department or the HSE, as appropriate, will notify the relevant TD's office of this and identify a revised timeframe for the provision of the response. Please be advised that the sourcing of relevant information from third parties may give rise to such an eventuality.

My Department has brought your particular concern, regarding information which may be relevant to a given Parliamentary Question but which is not centrally reported, to the attention of the HSE, and will engage with them on this matter.

If there are specific response(s) to Parliamentary Questions with which you were not satisfied, or which did not contain the required level of detail, officials in my Department are available to engage with your office and the HSE to address this matter and come to a resolution.

### Covid-19 Pandemic

793. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when the pandemic recognition payment will be paid to frontline healthcare workers; the eligibility and other details and terms and conditions of the payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17821/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all healthcare workers for their efforts during this most challenging period.

The Government announced a COVID-19 recognition payment for frontline public sector healthcare workers, to recognise their unique role during the pandemic. The measure will be ring fenced to staff ordinarily onsite in COVID-19 exposed healthcare environments within the period between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021.

This payment will be made to those eligible public sector frontline healthcare staff (inclusive of agency staff working for the HSE) who worked in clinical settings, noting this list is not exhaustive: those Doctors / Nurses / Health Care Assistants / Porters / Cleaners etc. that work in clinical settings. This includes those eligible workers seconded or assigned to the HSE (for example: Defence Forces staff seconded/assigned to HSE testing centres). The measure encompasses Health Care Support Assistants (also known as Home Carers / Home Help) employed by or carrying out duties contracted to the HSE.

The measure also encompasses those eligible working on site in long term residential care facilities for people with disabilities (inclusive of those facilities whether HSE or section 39). The measure further extends to those equivalent healthcare workers in private nursing homes and hospices. Arrangements for this sector encompassed by this measure are currently being progressed by the Department of Health.

The Department and the HSE are currently consulting with health sector trade unions. This consultation is part of the Department and HSE's objective to finalise the application of this measure fairly. Upon conclusion of consultations with the trade unions, full details of the application process, FAQs and other particulars shall be published by the HSE. It is intended that payments will be instructed in the coming days.

### **Health Services Staff**

794. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions since 2013 to date on which there was no applicant for a hospital consultant post which was recruited via the Public Appointments Service; the location and speciality of the post, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17822/22]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

795. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the share of consultant posts filled via the Public Appointments Service recruitment compared to the share of consultant posts filled by local direct recruitment; the share otherwise filled; the method by which they were filled in each of the years since 2015 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17823/22]

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

## Nursing Homes

796. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health if he has been informed of the planned closure of a nursing home (details supplied); if he has made an intervention to prevent the closure; if he is satisfied that in the event of such as closure that alternative accommodation can be sourced for the residents of this home in the Clones area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17824/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** The decision to close the nursing home referred to by the Deputy was made by the private provider. The HSE has advised my Department that the residents are all being relocated and accommodated in another private nursing home outside Monaghan town that is owned by the same provider.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

797. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions on which the panel announced in January 2022 related to the pandemic recognition payment have met; the dates on which they met; the membership of the panel; if the panel will address disputes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17829/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all healthcare workers for their efforts during this most challenging period.

The Government announced a COVID-19 recognition payment for frontline public sector healthcare workers, to recognise their unique role during the pandemic. The measure will be ring fenced to staff ordinarily onsite in COVID-19 exposed healthcare environments within the period between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021.

The Department of Health appreciates the levels of interest this announcement has generated. We are working together with the HSE to provide additional details on this measure including full eligibility criteria, particulars and terms and conditions that apply. Additionally, the Department and the HSE are currently consulting with health sector trade unions on this matter.

This consultation is part of the Department and HSE's objective to finalise the application of this measure fairly.

Upon conclusion of consultations with the trade unions, full details of the application process, FAQs and other particulars shall be published by the HSE. Noting that the details will be finalised once this consultation has concluded, it would be inappropriate to comment any further at this point.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

798. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the way he intends to manage disputes relating to the payment or non-payment of the pandemic recognition payment; the body or panel which will adjudicate on such matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17830/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all healthcare workers for their efforts during this most challenging period.

The Government announced a COVID-19 recognition payment for frontline public sector

healthcare workers, to recognise their unique role during the pandemic. The measure will be ring fenced to staff ordinarily onsite in COVID-19 exposed healthcare environments within the period between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021.

The Department of Health appreciates the levels of interest this announcement has generated. We are working together with the HSE to provide additional details on this measure including full eligibility criteria, particulars and terms and conditions that apply. Additionally, the Department and the HSE are currently consulting with health sector trade unions on this matter.

This consultation is part of the Department and HSE's objective to finalise the application of this measure fairly.

Upon conclusion of consultations with the trade unions, full details of the application process, FAQs and other particulars shall be published by the HSE. Noting that the details will be finalised once this consultation has concluded, it would be inappropriate to comment any further at this point.

### **Health Services Staff**

799. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary who was employed as a Covid-19 vaccinator did not have their employment contract extended; when they will be paid their final wages, bank holiday entitlements and holiday pay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17837/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

800. **Deputy Pa Daly** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will issue for a person (details supplied). [17850/22]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products**

801. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the delivery of paxlovid in view of its availability in other European Union countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17884/22]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products**

802. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to media reports (details supplied) of difficulties for patients accessing sotrovimab; the steps he is taking to address shortcomings in the treatment pathway; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [17885/22]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products**

803. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans, if any, for a communications campaign in respect of accessing Covid-19 antiviral treatments; the steps he has taken to ensure patients are aware of the pathways to treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17886/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is an operational matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly as soon as possible.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

804. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of times he communicates with the Chief Medical Officer on matters related to Covid-19 since the disbandment of NPHE; the form of communication for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17908/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Deputy is advised that an appropriate COVID-19 monitoring structure is currently under consideration.

My Department, through the Office of the Chief Medical Officer, together with colleagues in the HSE and the National Virus Reference Laboratory, continues to monitor the epidemiological profile of COVID-19 carefully.

The Office of the Chief Medication Officer continues to keep me apprised of the situation and provide advice. In the interests of transparency, my Department has published recent briefings provided to me by the Chief Medical Officer:

gov.ie ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

### **Irish Blood Transfusion Service**

805. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the rationale for not implementing a recommendation to remove oral sex as a reason for differing gay men, bisexual men, transgender men and men who have sex with men from blood donation as recommended by the Social Behaviours Review Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17935/22]

806. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to introduce an individualised risk assessment for blood donation; the timescale for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17936/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 805 and 806 together.

The remit of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) is to provide a safe, reliable and robust blood service to the Irish health system. A major objective of the IBTS is to ensure that

it always has the necessary programmes and procedures in place to protect both the recipients and the donors of blood and blood products.

Following a review of existing donor deferral policy by an independent expert group last year, the IBTS announced a range of changes to their existing deferral policies, including those concerning Men who have Sex with Men (MSM).

The objective of these policy changes is to move towards an individual assessment process for donors, making blood donation more inclusive. As a prerequisite to this, the existing paper-based Health and Lifestyle Questionnaire (HLQ) will be replaced with an electronic Self-Assessment Health History (SAHH) questionnaire.

The IBTS announced that the first phase of these policy changes to began on March 28th of this year. This initial phase reduced the existing 12-month deferral period for MSM to 4 months. This next phase involving the replacement of the HLQ with the SAHH is expected to take place in Q3 of this year, with the individual assessment system to follow later in the year once the SAHH is established.

The IBTS has advised that the 4 month deferral period is an interim measure to be kept in place until the Individualised Donor Risk Assessment can be carried out on all donors. The IBTS has determined that oral sex between MSM is one of a number of sexual behaviours which will be taken into consideration in this assessment, and that this approach was previously taken by the UK Blood Services with the introduction of the FAIR system of individual assessment.

### **Disability Services**

807. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he has further information for a group (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17995/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** On November 3rd 2021, I met with the Kildare Branch of Down Syndrome Ireland to discuss a number of their programmes for adults with disabilities, including a programme called Latch On, and a horticultural training programme, and the funding of these programmes. My colleague the Minister of State with responsibility for Skills and Further Education also attended this meeting.

Day services for adults with a disability are developed in line with the New Directions policy. The ambitious change envisaged by New Directions is strongly linked to the implementation of the policy of mainstreaming that was a core part of the National Disability Strategy and is now a core part of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The purpose of mainstreaming is to move from segregation to inclusion, by ensuring that persons with disabilities can take their place in mainstream society, that mainstream public services include people with disabilities and that mainstream public policies take into consideration their impact on people with disabilities. In terms of service provision, mainstreaming means that services for people with disabilities should be the responsibility of whichever Government department has responsibility for such services in general.

The New Directions approach to adult day services embodies the policy of mainstreaming, and supports service users to access mainstream public services such as further education and training, rather than this type of content being part of the day service itself.

Improved access to mainstream services is essential to let adults with disabilities participate

fully as members of communities, and access to further education is key to enabling people to continue to learn throughout their lives.

The twelve supports outlined by New Directions include support to access a number of services that are the remit of several government departments and agencies, including the Department for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), Solas, and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

I am continuing to engage with the HSE on this matter. I have also arranged for my officials to contact Minister Collins' office at DFHERIS to send on all information Kildare Down Syndrome Ireland had provided to me at the meeting, for appropriate attention within his Department as DFHERIS' 'Adult Literacy for Life' 10 year adult literacy strategy, as it may also be possible to progress programmes such as Latch On as part of this Strategy's work.

### **Health Service Executive**

808. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans for Baggot Street Hospital; if the HSE still intends to sell the site and lease it back for a primary care centre; if he will commit to retaining the site in public ownership and to the full utilisation of the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18000/22]

**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.

### **Disability Diagnoses**

809. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if, at any point prior to the commencement of the assessment of need standard operating procedure in 2020, he, the Secretary General or any assistant or deputy secretary in his Department approved or otherwise had sight of the HSE standard operating procedure for assessments of need; the office or officer in his Department with responsibility for clearing such a policy from the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18001/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** I wish to advise the Deputy that as an operational matter, the Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need was developed by the HSE as service providers and the agency with clinical expertise on the issue, and was subject to a consultation process, an independent clinical review, a legal review by way of Senior Counsel opinion as well as an IR process.

The purpose of the Standard Operating Procedure was to introduce consistency in standards and approach to service delivery across the county in addition to providing timely access to assessment in accordance with the timelines set out in the Disability Act (2005). This approach helps to reduce geographical variation and ensure that children and young people have the same access to high quality community services regardless of where they live in the country.

The HSE process involved appropriate engagement with senior officials from the Department of Health Disability Services Unit and subsequently the Minister was advised in January 2020 that the HSE was to introduce a revised standard operating procedure for the Assessment of Need Process and that the purpose of this procedure was to ensure children with disabilities and their families, access appropriate assessment and intervention as quickly as possible.

## **Hospital Appointments Status**

810. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for their hip operation in Galway University Hospital taking into account the exceptional circumstances in this case and the severity of their condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18075/22]

**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 Staff**

811. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider additional remuneration packages for consultants in order to entice them to move to more peripheral regions in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18058/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I and my officials are conscious that different geographical locations within the health service experience different recruitment challenges in relation to filling consultant posts.

Consultants' pay and terms and conditions are currently the subject of engagement between my officials, the HSE, and the representative bodies for hospital consultants, over the proposed Sláintecare Consultant Contract. As this process has not concluded, it would not be appropriate to make public details about the talks at this time, save to say that I remain committed to introducing a new contract as soon as practicable and that recruitment is an issue to be considered in the process.

## **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

812. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health the capital investment proposals at Letterkenny University Hospital in order to enlarge the footprint to support new and increased services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18059/22]

**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.

## **Departmental Reviews**

813. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 669 of 29 March 2022, if he will publish the review the HSE conducted of the Revised Model of Care for Termination of Pregnancy at the request of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18060/22]



**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** There is ongoing engagement between the Department of Health and the HSE to monitor service provision, facilitate the smooth-running of the service and resolve any issues that may arise. However, with restrictions eased, the Department is currently reviewing whether remote consultation as part of a blended approach to termination of pregnancy care should be continued post the COVID-19 public health emergency period.

At the request of the Department, the HSE conducted a review of the Revised Model of Care for Termination of Pregnancy. The findings of this review are currently being examined as part of a deliberative process. The consideration of appropriate next steps will form part of this process.

### **Health Services**

814. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken to develop a care pathway for persons diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome; his plans to recruit specialists or specialist multidisciplinary teams to deal with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18061/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this PQ relates to service and staffing matters, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply.

### **Health Services Staff**

815. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the types of contracts offered and taken up to consultants in public health medicine in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18067/22]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

816. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the staff grade level breakdown of the additional 255 staff allocated to public health; the number of posts filled and remaining to be filled in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18068/22]

**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.

### **Health Services Staff**

817. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of doctors that have registered with the Medical Council for the first time in each year since and including 2014, in tabular form; the number of doctors that qualified in Ireland; the number that qualified outside of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18069/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy will be aware the Medi-

cal Council is the independent statutory body which regulates medical practitioners in Ireland. Its primary purpose is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence among doctors. One of the Council's key responsibilities is the registration of medical practitioners. Doctors register in one of five Divisions of the register, depending on the training they have completed, or are currently undertaking, and this should be commensurate with their status within the workforce. The Medical Council's register is a valid and complete list of doctors who are permitted under Irish law to practice medicine in the State and therefore is a comprehensive source of medical workforce intelligence.

The table below sets out the number of doctors registered for the first time by the Medical Council each year from 2014 to 2021 according to the location in which they obtained their Basic Medical Qualification (BMQ).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Irish BMQ	1,087	799	895	908	771	827	1,021	888	7,196
Inter-national BMQ	871	1,777	1,819	1,685	1,419	1,454	1,017	1,717	11,759
Total No. First Registered	1,958	2,576	2,714	2,593	2,190	2,281	2,038	2,605	18,955

#### Health Services Staff

818. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of new medical interns who were taken on in each year since and including 2014, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18070/22]

**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.

#### Health Services Staff

819. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of non-consultant hospital doctors by grade level who were recruited in each year since and including 2014, in tabular form; the number in each cohort who were undergoing basic or higher specialist training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18071/22]

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

#### Health Services Staff

820. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultants estimated to be required for a consultant provided health service by 2030; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [18072/22]

**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.

### Departmental Reports

821. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the expert review bodies established by his Department since 2016; the name of the reports published by each body; the expert review bodies currently standing or planned to be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18073/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The information requested by the Deputy is not immediately available. I will survey the Department and the collated replies will be prepared into a full response to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Health Strategies

822. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the date of each of the initial meetings of the strategic implementation groups developed for the next phase of the National Drugs Strategy. [18076/22]

823. **Deputy Thomas Gould** asked the Minister for Health the membership of each of the strategic implementation groups developed for the next phase of the National Drugs Strategy by group in tabular form. [18077/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 822 and 823 together.

Strategic implementation groups (SIGs) are being established to support the implementation of the strategic priorities for 2021-2025 under the national drugs strategy, Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery. These priorities strengthen the health-led approach, reflect commitments in the Programme for Government and align with the EU drugs strategy and action plan 2021-2025.

The new structures will reflect the partnership approach and give a stronger voice to civil society by broadening and deepening the involvement of community and voluntary groups in the implementation of the strategy.

Each group has an independent chair and a membership comprised of representatives from Government departments and agencies, drug and alcohol taskforces and civil society. The Department is finalising the membership of each group, including representatives of civil society, following a call for expressions of interest. Once the membership is finalised, the chairs of each group will convene the first meeting.

I am committed to the partnership approach and a stronger voice to civil society organisations in developing national policy.

*Question No. 823 answered with Question No. 822.*

**Primary Care Services**

824. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the postgraduate training post intake in general practice in each of the years 2011 to 2021 and to date in 2022, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18088/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** GP training is in the main four years in duration. Those undertaking GP training through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) pathway in Medicine & Emergency medicine complete training in 3 years. Those undertaking the RPL Paediatric pathway complete in 3 years 8 months.

The intake to GP training has increased from 157 in 2011 to 258 places available in 2022, this is expected to increase by 10% each year to reach target of 350 intake by 2026.

Details of the number of annual intake of trainees on to the GP training programme, in each of the years 2011 to 2022, are set out in the schedule below:

Year	Intake into GP Training
2011	157
2012	156
2013	157
2014	157
2015	159
2016	172
2017	170
2018	194
2019	193
2020	208
2021	233
2022	258*

\*Expected intake in July 2022

**Primary Care Services**

825. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners that successfully completed their postgraduate specialist training in each of the years 2011 to 2021; the number expected in 2022; the breakdown of the graduating cohorts by the year they commenced specialist training; the locations in which graduates took longer, for whatever reason, than four years to complete specialist training in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18089/22]

876. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners who successfully completed their postgraduate specialist training in each of the years 2011 to 2021, in tabular form; the number expected in 2022; the breakdown of the graduating cohorts by the year they commenced specialist training; the number of occasions on which graduates took longer than four years to complete specialist training or in which training was completed in three years through recognition of prior learning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18307/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 825

and 876 together.

GP training is in the main four years in duration. Those undertaking GP training through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) pathway in Medicine & Emergency medicine complete training in 3 years. Those undertaking the RPL Paediatric pathway complete in 3 years 8 months.

Details of the number of GP trainees that successfully completed their postgraduate specialist training in each of the years 2011 to 2021, are set out in the schedule below:

Year Commenced Training:

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq825-5-4-22\_en.docx ">Year of Graduation</a>]

Currently there are 212 trainees in Year 4, however not all will graduate due to maternity/sick leave, and they will need to gain all parts of the MICGP exams. It is not possible to accurately predict how many trainees will graduate as there are two exam sittings that will affect this number. However, the ICGP estimate between 160 to 180 will graduate in November 2022.

416 trainees took more than 4 years to complete training, in the following locations:

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq825a-5-04-22\_en.docx ">Years in Training</a>]

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is relatively new in GP training. There have been 10 RPL trainees who have graduated already: 1 in 2021; 5 in 2020; and 4 in 2019 (the first RPL graduates). Since then, the number undertaking training through then RPL pathway has increased. Below is a breakdown of RPL trainees currently in training, by scheme. RPLs are counted in the Year 1 intake, so effectively they skip year 2, directly into Year 3; hence our system does not consider any RPLs in Year 2.

RPL TRAIN- EES 2021/22	TRAINING YEAR	-	-	-
TRAINING SCHEME	1	3	4	Per Scheme
BALL- INASLOE			1	1
CORK	4	5	3	12
HSE DUB MID LEIN	2	2	1	5
MID LEIN- STER	2	2	1	5
MID-WEST (UL)	3	1	1	5
NORTH DUB- LIN TP	3	2		5
NORTH EAST- ERN	2		2	4
RCSI	3	1	3	7
SLIGO	1	1		2
SOUTH EAST	2			2

RPL TRAIN- EES 2021/22	TRAINING YEAR	-	-	-
SOUTH WEST	1	1		2
TCD	6	2	1	9
WESTERN	4	1	1	6
Per Training Year	33	18	14	65

### Care Services

826. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 325 of 3 March 2022, the way identifying relocation arrangements for unnamed residents of a centre (details supplied) constitutes an ethical breach of confidentiality given that relocation options for other service users have been provided; the message that was conveyed to residents of the centre regarding the future of that service by HSE management when the residents were relocated to another centre; the plans that the HSE has for the use of the centre in 2022 and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18090/22]

**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 Service Executive

827. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health the names of any HSE managers that declared a conflict of interest in respect of procurement or rent of property by the HSE in each of the years 2016 to 2021; the details of the procedure within the HSE for declaring such a conflict of interests and responding to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18091/22]

**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.

### Care Services

828. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health the reason that the residents of a centre (details supplied) were chosen to move to another centre for infection and control purposes during the pandemic while residents of wards in St. Stephen's Hospital were not moved and continued to share dorm-style rooms with up to three other residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18092/22]

**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

829. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE is renting any community mental health residences aside from a centre (details supplied); if so, the details of the costs of rent and any associated costs; the duration of the rental arrangement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18093/22]

**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**

830. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health the reason more funding has been provided for adapting a Carrigaline property that has not had planning permission for use as a mental health residence since it was purchased by the HSE in January 2019 than has been invested over a ten-year period in a centre (details supplied) which has capacity for almost twice the single-room occupancy level of the Carrigaline property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18096/22]

**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.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

831. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details as to when a new cardiovascular health strategy will be published for Ireland; if he acknowledges that there is an urgent need for a new cardiovascular health strategy for the Irish health system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18099/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The cardiovascular policy, “Changing Cardiovascular Health 2010-2019”, built on the first national cardiovascular health strategy, entitled “Building Healthier Hearts” (Department of Health 1999). The reorganisation of care was reflected in the national cardiovascular strategy in 2010 which proposed the centralisation of cardiovascular services in order to maximise access, expertise and population coverage which formed part of the consideration of the current National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services.

The National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services with specific terms of reference is cognisant of recommendations in the Changing Cardiovascular Health 2010 – 2019.

The National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services commenced in January 2018 with Professor Phillip Nolan as Chair of the Steering Group. This Review aims to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service. This aligns with the Sláintecare reform programme. The National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services is a key enabler for future policy and its recommendations will inform the future provision of services.

While substantial progress has been made on the Review, the COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted on the progress of the review, as the Chair has played a key role in the national COVID-19 response, both as a member of the NPHE and Chair of the Irish Epidemiological Modelling Advisory Group. Work is now underway to progress the Review to completion over

the coming months.

The Steering Group most recently met on 24/01/2022 and the next meeting is to be scheduled in April 2022. The Steering Group is currently working on the development of the proposed recommendations of the draft Report. The implementation process for the National Cardiac Services Review is also being developed as part of the process to finalise the Report.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

832. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting lists across the State for a hysterectomy; the number of persons that have been waiting for the surgery for more than two years; and the action being taken by his Department to ensure waiting times for the surgery are significantly reduced. [18104/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** It is recognised that waiting times for scheduled appointments and procedures have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. While significant work continues to positively impact on waiting times and improve pathways to elective care, acute hospitals have been impacted by operational challenges arising from surges in cases related to the Omicron variants.

The HSE has confirmed to the Department that patient safety remains at the centre of all hospital activity and elective care scheduling. To ensure services are provided in a safe, clinically-aligned and prioritised way, hospitals are following HSE clinical guidelines and protocols.

The Department of Health continues to work with the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to identify ways to improve access to care, including through increased use of private hospitals, funding weekend and evening work in public hospitals, funding “see and treat” services, providing virtual clinics, and increasing capacity in the public hospital system.

The 2022 Waiting List Action Plan, which was launched on the 25th of February, allocates €350 million to the HSE and NTPF to reduce waiting lists. Under this plan the Department, HSE, and NTPF will deliver urgent additional capacity for the treatment of patients, as well as investing in longer term reforms to bring sustained reductions in waiting lists. Gynaecology waiting lists are a priority area of focus of this plan.

The plan builds on the successes of the short-term 2021 plan that ran from September to December last year. The 2021 plan was developed by the Department of Health, the HSE and the NTPF and was driven and overseen by a senior governance group co-chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Health and the CEO of the HSE and met fortnightly.

This rigorous level of governance and scrutiny of waiting lists has continued into this year with the oversight group evolving into the Waiting List Task Force. The Task Force will meet regularly to drive progress of the 2022 plan.

This is the first stage of an ambitious multi-annual waiting list programme, which is currently under development in the Department of Health. Between them, these plans will work to support short, medium, and long term initiatives to reduce waiting times and provide the activity needed in years to come.

Waiting list reductions and maximum waiting time targets apply to all acute hospital scheduled care active waiting lists. The HSE is engaged with hospital groups in a process to focus on specialties and procedures towards which the waiting list fund needs to be specifically directed to ensure the targets are achieved by year end.



5 April 2022

In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, the attached document, provided to my Department by the National Treatment Purchase Fund, outlines the number of patients waiting for a hysterectomy at the end of February 2022.

IPDC Hysterectomy Waiting List as at 24/02/2022

Sum of Count		Column Labels	
Row Labels	0-24 Mths	24+ Mths	Grand Total
IPDC Hysterectomy Waits	464	58	522
Grand Total	464	58	522

### Dental Services

833. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that are on the waiting list in County Galway for dental care; the length of time they have been waiting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18106/22]

**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

834. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health the number of residents currently living in a centre (details supplied) that were originally residents in another centre. [18108/22]

**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

835. **Deputy Neasa Hourigan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 128 of 9 February 2022, if he will provide further details on the older person residential beds referred to in the response namely the number of those beds and the number of residents in a centre (details supplied) who will be transferring to the property in Carrigaline, County Cork; the location in which the remaining residents of the centre will be accommodated into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18109/22]

**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

836. **Deputy Gary Gannon** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the publication of the action plan following the publication of the Disability Capacity Review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18117/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** Following publication of the Disability Capacity Review, a Working Group was set up to develop an Action Plan for Disability Services for the period 2022-2025. This Group, whose membership consisted of senior officials from the Departments of DCEDIY, Social Protection, Housing, Further and Higher Education, Health, and the Health Service Executive, has now completed its work and the draft Action Plan is currently being finalised for approval.

### **Disability Services**

837. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the number of family forums that are planned to be established as part of progressing disability services in each CHO; the number of family forums which have been established in each CHO; the number of persons on each of the established family forums; the means by which persons can join family forums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18119/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question relates to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Disability Services**

838. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to recruit occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and psychologists for children's disability network teams. [18120/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question relates to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services**

839. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 669 of 1 March 2022, the reason a local interview was used as the method of recruitment to a senior psychologist adult mental health post in St. Stephen's Hospital, Glanmire and the Fermoy home-based crisis team in March 2017 instead of the relevant national recruitment panel; the reason the relevant national recruitment panel was later used in October 2017 when the same post was at that stage vacated and again advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18121/22]

840. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 666 of 1 March 2022, the way in which mental health psychologists in County Cork were informed of opportunities to transfer into posts outside of the nationally agreed recruitment process for the years 2014, 2016 and 2017, given that personal development planning meetings were not scheduled by HSE management for those years; if written records exist to show that these opportunities to transfer into posts were conveyed equally to mental health psychologists in County Cork in years in which such personal development planning meetings were scheduled; the reason it is, as per the response supplied, it was not possible for the HSE to comment on individual cases in which a reassignment of a staff member has been facilitated given that such reassignments are public appointments to posts that would have been open to competition

among eligible candidates had the opportunities of being advertised to the nationally agreed recruitment panel process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18122/22]

841. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 666 of 1 March 2022, the number of HSE psychologists in CHO4 that expressed an interest in writing in availing of opportunities to transfer into posts for each of the years 2014 to 2021; the number of HSE psychologists in CHO4 that were facilitated in each of these years to transfer into posts that were not first advertised to eligible candidates on the relevant national recruitment panel; if he will identify the HSE managers who decided on these public appointments by transfer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18123/22]

842. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of appointments to permanent contract senior psychologist posts in the adult mental health services in County Cork between August 2017 and January 2021 that took place through unadvertised transfers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18124/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 839, 840, 841 and 842 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

*Question No. 840 answered with Question No. 839.*

*Question No. 841 answered with Question No. 839.*

*Question No. 842 answered with Question No. 839.*

### **Health Strategies**

843. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the progress or otherwise in the implementation of the Neurorehabilitation Strategy 2019-2021; the number and dates of all meetings of the implementation group held to date; the current status of this strategy; if he will take steps to refocus his officials on this important strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18128/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** I have referred this question to the HSE to provide an answer regarding the number and dates of meetings of the Neurorehabilitation Strategy Implementation Group. The Programme for Government – ‘Our Shared Future’ - includes a commitment for advancing neuro-rehabilitation services in the community. The Health Service Executive is leading on the implementation framework in respect of the recommendations of the National Policy and Strategy for the provision of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland 2011-2015. The Neuro-Rehabilitation Strategy Implementation Framework (IF) was launched in February 2019.

The overarching aim of the Strategy is the development of neuro-rehabilitation services to improve patient outcomes by providing safe, high quality, person-centred neuro-rehabilitation at the lowest appropriate level of complexity. This must be integrated across the care pathway, and provided as close to home as possible or in specialist centres where necessary. These services are to be configured into population based managed clinical rehabilitation networks (MCRNs).

Funding was approved to support the introduction of a managed clinical rehabilitation net-

work demonstrator project. The focus of the demonstrator project is the development of post-acute and community neuro-rehabilitation services across CHO 6 & 7. In terms of service provision, this is where the gap is most evident in terms of demonstrating a Network model.

Disability Services Community Healthcare area 6 are currently working on the recruitment process, capital funding for the service has already been received and the location for the Community Neurorehabilitation Team (CNRT) has been identified. Disability Services Community Healthcare area 7 are working with Primary Care to identify the location & governance for the Community Neurorehabilitation Team in this area.

There has been tangible progress with the focus and trajectory of the MCRN in the development of the post-acute and community neurorehabilitation teams and services. The implementation of a 10 bedded neurorehabilitation unit in Peamount has improved timely and early access to post-acute specialist rehabilitation services for patients with complex disability including those neurological complications associated with severe COVID infection from the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. These new beds introduce some 3,500 additional specialist rehab bed days per annum into the system and are expected to reduce the NRH waiting list by over 30%, and take direct referrals from AMNCH, SJH, SVUH, Beaumont & the Mater for patients with neurological conditions.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

844. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the procedure with regard to check-ups on newborn babies when they return home; if this is a matter for the general practitioner or the public health nurse; the timescale for such check-ups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18129/22]

**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.

### **Disability Services**

845. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with Down syndrome in counties Longford and Westmeath that are currently waiting on speech and language therapy; and the length of waiting time by provision centre in tabular form. [18130/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question relates to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Disability Services**

846. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with Down syndrome in counties Longford and Westmeath that are currently attending speech and language therapies. [18131/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question relates to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Disability Services**

847. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with Down syndrome in counties Longford and Westmeath who's in-person speech and language therapy session was delivered via online or telephone in 2019, 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022. [18132/22]

**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.

### **Disability Services**

848. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be seen in person for speech and language therapy. [18133/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question relates to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Health Services**

849. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken to develop care pathway for persons diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome; his plans to recruit specialists or specialist multidisciplinary teams to deal with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18134/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this PQ relates to service and staffing matters it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply.

### **Health Services**

850. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the action that has been taken to ensure that the shortage of neurology nurse specialists in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital is addressed given that this hospital is the main neurology centre for persons in counties Longford and Westmeath; and the engagement he has had with an association (details supplied) in relation to its campaign for 100 extra neurology nurse specialists across Ireland which includes eight extra nurses for the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital. [18135/22]

**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**

851. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health the format of the nationwide compliance and proscripting audit of CAMHS teams; the timeframe for completion of the audit; if this audit will include the inspection of case files; if staff and parents will be consulted as part of the audit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18151/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** At my request and as an additional action beyond the recommendations of the Maskey Report, there will be an independently led prescribing audit for each of the CAMHS teams. This will include a review of prescribing for all diagnoses and medications and will be based on an audit of case files. This has been agreed following discussions with the HSE. I have asked the HSE to complete the audit as soon as possible and I have asked them for an implementation plan.

Alongside this, the HSE will expedite the development of clinical standards for prescribing practice in children with and without psychosis. Once these standards have been developed and implemented, an annual audit will be carried out to measure compliance against these standards (in line with recommendations in the Maskey Report).

One of Dr Maskey's recommendations is that children and their families should be invited to be part of the governance structure of the CAMHS service. HSE are working to implement that recommendation and would also welcome the opportunity to meet with a representative group in the near future. HSE have reached out to the new representative group with a view to meeting them at an early date. Separately, the HSE is commissioning qualitative research to identify the experiences of children, young people and their families using CAMHS nationwide.

This is on top of the audit of compliance with CAMHS operating guidelines and the separate and independent review being conducted by the Mental Health Commission.

I met with representatives of the Kerry CAMHS Family Support Group at the beginning of March. The HSE will continue to meet as appropriate families or representatives at local level to keep them informed of developments. I will continue to liaise closely with the HSE to ensure that the above initiatives are progressed as quickly as possible.

### **Home Care Packages**

852. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health if HSE homecare staff and staff working for companies providing homecare that are contracted by the HSE are fully equipped with personal protective equipment which will enable them to continue providing a service in cases in which a person with complex care needs or their family carer have tested positive for Covid-19; his views on whether such a service should continue to be provided when the staff are fully equipped with personal protective equipment; if the same work criteria are applied to HSE homecare staff and staff working for companies providing homecare that are contracted by the HSE as is applied to HSE hospital staff with regard to the provision of services to persons who have contracted Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18152/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** As this is an operational matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **Medicinal Products**

853. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Health the criteria for which atropine 0.01% eye drops prescribed for myopia to limit the risk of damage to eyes and potentially detached retinas is not on licence and therefore not covered by the drug payment scheme (details supplied). [18179/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply

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of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

854. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18168/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, and the Minister of State with responsibility for Public Procurement and eGovernment at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Ossian Smyth, published the Civil Service Blended Working Policy Framework on the 31st of March 2022.

In line with the Framework, the Department has commenced the development of its Blended Working Policy for completion before the end of Q2 2022. In the interim, there is a requirement for staff to be in attendance on site for a minimum of two days per week.

In line with the Government campaign - #MakingRemoteWork – I am supportive of facilitating all reasonable and practical applications for blended working, while ensuring the continued effective and efficient delivery of the Department’s business.

### **Abortion Services**

855. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health when the three-year review of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 will be complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18191/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 was signed into law on 20 December 2018 and commenced on 1 January 2019. Under section 7 of the Act, a review of the operation of the Act must be initiated within three years of the commencement of the Act, i.e., before January 2022.

As I stated previously, the review 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. Independent research commissioned to inform the service user and service provider strands will form key elements of the review.

A final report will be submitted to me for consideration in late 2022, before being laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### **Medicinal Products**

856. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered restricting the over-the-counter sale of codeine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18195/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Codeine is a mild to moderate opioid (narcotic) analgesic which, due to its potential for misuse, is a controlled drug under the Misuse of Drugs legislation.

As an analgesic, codeine is most often used in combination with other analgesics such as paracetamol or ibuprofen and is currently authorised in Ireland in such non-prescription products for pain relief. It is also available in single ingredient, non-prescription products, as a cough suppressant. These authorised products are available without a prescription through retail pharmacy businesses (pharmacies) only.

The Pharmacy Act 2007 and the Regulation of Retail Pharmacy Businesses Regulations 2008 require that all medicines supplied through a pharmacy must be supplied by or under the personal supervision of a pharmacist and that all non-prescription medicines supplied must be the subject of appropriate counselling.

The Pharmacy regulator, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) issued guidance to pharmacists on the safe supply of non-prescription products containing codeine in 2010. This Guidance was updated in 2015, in 2017 and again in October 2019. The Guidance covers the requirements set out above and in addition contains further restrictions which apply to the supply of codeine containing medicinal products.

These restrictions include a requirement that codeine containing medicinal products are not available to the public for self-selection and should only be supplied when a pharmacist deems such a supply to be necessary and only when a non-opioid analgesic, e.g. paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen, has not proven sufficient to relieve the patient's symptoms. The Guidance also states that medicines containing codeine should be used for the shortest time possible and for no longer than three days without medical supervision. Pharmacists must also ensure that patients are advised of the importance of adhering to the recommended dosage and duration of use as well as the risks associated with overdose and or/prolonged use. Patients should also be counselled in respect of potential adverse reactions or side effects.

The full Guidance document, along with information on current legislative requirements, is available on the PSI website: [thepsi.ie/Libraries/Folder\\_Pharmacy\\_Practice\\_Guidance/01\\_3\\_Safe\\_supply\\_of\\_Codeine\\_to\\_patients.sflb.ashx](https://thepsi.ie/Libraries/Folder_Pharmacy_Practice_Guidance/01_3_Safe_supply_of_Codeine_to_patients.sflb.ashx).

My Department is committed to working with relevant stakeholders in fully considering any policy changes that may be required regarding the regulation of codeine containing medicinal products.

Any potential change to the prescription requirements for codeine containing medicinal products must be supported by sufficient evidence. Based on available evidence, we will consider taking any necessary further steps to support the safe and effective use of these medicines.

## **Mental Health Services**

**857. Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the number on waiting lists to access CAMHS in counties Sligo and Leitrim, respectively in each of the years 2015 to 2021, in tabular form; the waiting times involved to access these appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18197/22]

**858. Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the number on waiting lists to access CAMHS nationally by county in each of the years 2015 to 2021, in tabular form; the waiting times involved to access these appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18198/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 857 and 858 together.



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As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

*Question No. 858 answered with Question No. 857.*

### **Health Services Staff**

859. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the positions allocated and filled in counties Sligo and Leitrim in respect of speech and language therapy, social work, physiotherapy and occupational therapy in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18199/22]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

860. **Deputy Marian Harkin** asked the Minister for Health the positions allocated and filled on a national basis in respect of speech and language therapy, social work, physiotherapy and occupational therapy by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18200/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** 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**

861. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if an orthodontic appointment will be expedited for a child (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18209/22]

**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**

862. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will next advertise a tender for the transport of patients for appointments and dialysis in the north County Tipperary area of the HSE Mid-West region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18214/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is an operational matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly as soon as possible.

### **Health Services**

863. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if in relation to planning for a cancer centre and radiology oncology units in County Galway for the west and north-west, the services currently provided and planned to be provided at Altnagelvin have been factored

in; if the HSE intends to develop services in County Galway for the entire west and north-west including County Donegal; if it is envisaged that patients in County Donegal will continue to avail of appropriate services which are already available at Altnagelvin; the manner in which all-island planning is applied to this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18215/22]

**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 Service Executive**

864. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18216/22]

**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.

### **Nursing Homes**

865. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when arrears for nursing home care from 31 January to 29 March will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18221/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler):** As this is an operational matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### **General Register Office**

866. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a registration of birth will be complete in the case of a person (details supplied) whose parents have made a number of attempts to do same with no success; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18222/22]

**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**

867. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a serious incident that occurred on the evening of 29 March 2022, when a person under psychiatric care residing in a HSE managed facility (details supplied), tried to force their way into the home of a terrified widow in their 80's living on their own; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that the widow's family have reported this person to HSE management on a number of occasions over the past several months for trespassing on the family property; the reason that no steps have been taken by HSE management to address these incidents and protect the vulnerable older person in question; the supervision that is in place for such persons in receipt of psychiatric care in such facilities; the specific steps that will now be taken to protect

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the HSE resident and the vulnerable older person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18225/22]

**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**

868. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to reports that sotrovimab is less effective against the BA.2 subvariant of Covid-19; the engagements he has had with the European Medicines Agency and the manufacturer regarding this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18231/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Department of Health continues to monitor the evidence relating to prevention and treatment options for COVID-19, as it has done throughout the pandemic, in order to protect and optimise outcomes for the Irish population, particularly those at high risk of severe disease. As part of this process, there is regular communication with relevant agencies including, but not limited to, the European Medicines Agency, the Health Products Regulatory Authority, and drug manufacturers, in addition to an ongoing review of the evidence-base supporting current and potential therapeutics.

Sotrovimab has demonstrated strong results in reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death in people with mild to moderate COVID-19 infection who are at high risk of developing severe disease, and in Ireland this medication has provided protection to such individuals since January of this year.

The Department is closely monitoring emerging data in relation to Sotrovimab efficacy against all variants, including the BA.2 subvariant, and both in vitro and in vivo efficacy data, as well as any potential changes, including dosing changes, that may be advised.

The recent publication of the WHO's third strategic preparedness, readiness and response plan, available at [www.who.int/publications/m/item/strategic-preparedness-readiness-and-response-plan-to-end-the-global-covid-19-emergency-in-2022](http://www.who.int/publications/m/item/strategic-preparedness-readiness-and-response-plan-to-end-the-global-covid-19-emergency-in-2022) highlights the expected continued evolution of the virus and the likelihood of new variants, to which we must be able to rapidly respond to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected.

All individuals are strongly encouraged to attend for vaccination, including those that are eligible for a fourth booster dose.

### **Health Strategies**

869. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he plans to include a patient representative on the new national public health emergency team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18232/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Deputy is advised that an appropriate COVID-19 monitoring structure is currently under consideration.

### **Health Services**

870. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position of a person (details supplied) on a waiting list for a long-term stay bed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18251/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Health Services Staff**

871. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Health the number of reporting radiographer positions currently operating in each CHO region; the plans for further recruitment for this position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18278/22]

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

### **Ambulance Service**

872. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the waiting times for ambulance services for Tallaght University Hospital (details supplied); and if an outline of the plan by his Department to tackle this crisis will be provided. [18281/22]

**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**

873. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the senior clinical psychologist with the HSE in County Donegal will be retiring in April 2022; the steps that have been taken to replace the person in this position; if the position has been advertised; the stage of the recruitment process for this or another psychologist position in County Donegal; the persons or persons who will take over while a replacement is being sought; the number of psychologists who will then be based in County Donegal after this retirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18287/22]

**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.

### **Patient Files**

874. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if patient records were retained from persons that were in St. Ita's Hospital, Dublin; and if so, the current storage location of these records. [18291/22]

**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.

## Patient Files

875. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if patient records were retained for persons that died in St. Brendan's Hospital, Dublin; and if so, the current storage location of these records. [18292/22]

**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.

*Question No. 876 answered with Question No. 825.*

## Medicinal Products

877. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve access to and the affordability of oestrogen; if supplies will be secured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18311/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Unfortunately, medicine shortages have become increasingly prevalent worldwide over the past decade and are a feature of modern health systems around the world. There are many reasons for such shortages including shortages of raw materials, manufacturing difficulties, logistical/transport issues or product recalls due to potential quality defects.

Medicines shortages can therefore originate at any point in the supply chain and can involve and impact on many different stakeholders. Accordingly, medicines shortages require a multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder response to ensure patient safety, continuity of care and protection of public health. Ireland has a multi-stakeholder medicines shortages framework in place, coordinated by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), to prevent, wherever possible, and manage medicine shortages when they occur.

The HPRA is aware of the current challenges regarding the intermittent supply of some hormone replacement therapies (HRT). The HPRA has had regular and ongoing engagement with suppliers in this regard. The companies that place the products on the market have indicated that the current supply difficulties are due to a significantly increased demand for these medicines in Ireland in recent years. To illustrate, the supply of one range of HRT patches has increased by between 77% and 117%, for the three most-used strengths, compared to 2020. In addition, based on demand in recent months, the company expects a similar increase in the demand for all strengths during 2022. This would mean that the usage of this patch in Ireland would be approximately 4.5-7.5 times higher in 2022 (depending on the strength) compared to 2019.

Regarding the HRT patches, the suppliers have confirmed that they have increased the planned supply of HRT patches to Ireland during 2022 in response to this increased demand. In the case of one brand (Evorel/Evorel Conti), the supply of HRT patches has resumed. For another brand (Estradot), some strengths are available currently and, based on manufacturing availability, the re-supply of the full range is expected to be in July. With respect to the gels, Divigel was received by the wholesaler on 25th March and has been released for sale this week. An alternative gel product (Oestrogen) has recently gone short and is expected to resume supply in April. In the interim, the company is working to find solutions to the immediate supply issues.

The current supply situation has arisen due to significant increases in demand for HRT

medicines and is not linked to regulatory matters. However, the HPRA continues to review available options within our regulatory remit to facilitate increased supply where at all possible. In particular, the HPRA has advised the companies that we are open to providing accelerated regulatory approval to supply a product originally intended for other markets if available. We are awaiting further information from the companies in this regard.

The HPRA publishes a medicinal product shortages list on its website, with the reason for the shortage, the expected dates for the return of supply and in some cases, such as HRT shortages, the HSE's clinical guidance on the management of patient treatment in response to medicine shortages. The information is made available to assist healthcare professionals in managing medicine shortages when they do arise and reduce their impact on patients. The information relating to shortages on the HPRA website is dynamic and changes depending on the current information the HPRA has to hand, including removal from the list when a shortage has been resolved.

The HPRA will continue to liaise with suppliers of HRT medicines over the coming weeks with a view to securing updates and commitments regarding the restoration of normal supplies for patients as soon as possible.

With regards to affordability, at present GPs provide consultations without charge to women who have a medical card or GP visit card. Approved prescribed drugs and medicines (including approved HRT), are available free to medical card holders, subject to the statutory prescription charge.

### **Medical Cards**

878. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18317/22]

**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.

### **Disability Services**

879. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the way in which successive Ministers in his Department have complied with the requirements of sections 31 and 32 of the Disability Act 2005 in each of the past five years; and the way in which they have complied with section 31(2) of the Act. [18332/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** To meet its obligations under the Disability Act, the Department of Health issued its initial sectoral plan in 2006, and a revised follow-up one year later, followed by a three year review in 2009.

On foot of legal advice received by Department of Justice, coordinated action on disability has since been pursued via the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) and its predecessor plans rather than through the statutory route. The Sectoral Plan provisions of the Disability Act are restated in the transfer of functions legislation with provision for Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to prepare a sectoral plan.

People with disabilities and their representatives, including Disabled Persons Organisations as defined in the UNCRPD, are consulted regularly through a variety of standing mechanisms, such as the Department of Health Consultative Committee, the HSE's Disability Consultative

Fora and the Disability Stakeholders. Departmental Consultative Committees and the monitoring and collaborative role of the Disability Stakeholder Group are now embedded into the architecture of the NDIS across a range of departments, but originate in the sectoral plan requirements of the Disability Act. There are also standalone consultation events such as the Department of Justice consultation conducted prior to the adoption of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy. The Department of Health also recently conducted a public consultation to inform the Disability Action Plan 2022-2025.

### Medical Cards

880. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the consultative structures that exist within the HSE or his Department in relation to policy on medical cards and operation of the scheme; if recipients or representative groups of recipients or other stakeholders are routinely consulted on the operation of the medical card and general practitioner visit card schemes; the way in which this is carried out; the frequency with which this is carried out; the plans there are to establish dedicated consultation structures with relevant stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18333/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a Medical Card/General Practitioner Visit Card is determined by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Regarding the operation of this Scheme, I wish to assure the Deputy that officials in my Department engage with relevant stakeholders and representatives as part of its continued effort to provide for an effective and efficient scheme in accordance with the legislative framework provided for under the Act.

As this question also requests relevant information relating to the medical and GP Visit Card Scheme operated by the HSE, it has also been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### Medical Cards

881. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the circumstances under which a general practitioner may and may not charge respectively, a medical card holder who requests a letter to be written on their behalf for a health reason; the information or guidance that is available to medical card holders on the definition of appropriate charging in this respect; and the system that is in place to protect medical card holders against inappropriate charging. [18334/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The HSE reimburses GPs for services provided under the GMS contract to medical and GP visit card holders. Under the terms of the GMS contract, a medical certificate may be furnished to a person the medical practitioner has examined in relation to any illness noticed during the examination which is reasonably required.

Section 11 of the GMS contract stipulates that fees in respect of certain medical certificates which may be required, for example, “under the Social Welfare Acts or for the purposes of insurance or assurance policies or for the issue of driving licences” are not covered by the contract. Any fees charged by GPs for services provided outside the terms of the GMS contract are a matter of private contract between the GP and their patient.

Section 10.8.4 of the Under 6 contract stipulates that in providing the services, the Medical Practitioner shall furnish in relation to child patients whom he/she has examined and for

whom he/she is providing services, a certificate in relation to any illness noticed during the examination which is reasonably required by the child patient's parent(s)/guardian(s). Certain other certificates, such as insurance or assurance policies, school attendance notes/certificates are not covered by this contract. The scope of services under this contract does not include all services provided by General Practitioners. The following non-exhaustive list is indicative of some of the work which is not covered by the contract: passport / identity reports / letters, crèche reports, utilities reports / letters, insurance medicals / reports, school attendance notes / certificates, sports medicals / reports, medico-legal reports, drug kardexes for state or private institutions, certificates / letters in support of applications for services under the Social Welfare Acts, certain TUSLA related work such as pre-placement medical examinations / reports, fostering and adoption reports.

If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office. The local management, upon being notified of potential inappropriate charging of GMS patients, carry out an investigation into each complaint and will, where appropriate, arrange for a refund of charges incorrectly applied by the GP.

### **Health Services**

882. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish details of the business case for the redesign of the logo of the CHO1 area of the HSE; the reason this was deemed necessary; the company that was retained to carry out this work; the amount it was paid specifically for this work; his views on whether expenditure on such items can be justified given the immense challenges facing the health service at this time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18336/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As the question relates to an operational matter, I am forwarding the PQ to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Health Services**

883. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the regulation requirements of private care contractors contracted by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18342/22]

**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 directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Social Welfare Code**

884. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if there is a scheme in place to help persons on social welfare who suffer from gluten-related dietary restrictions with the cost of coeliac friendly foods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18385/22]



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**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Therefore, I have asked the HSE to respond to the deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### Disability Services

885. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the publication of the action plan on the Disability Capacity Review which was due in December 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18395/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** Following publication of the Disability Capacity Review, a Working Group was set up to develop an Action Plan for Disability Services for the period 2022-2025. This Group, whose membership consisted of senior officials from the Departments of DCEDIY, Social Protection, Housing, Further and Higher Education, Health, and the Health Service Executive, has now completed its work and the draft Action Plan is currently being finalised for approval.

### Health Services

886. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the existing level of respite in County Cavan; if it is intended to provide separate centres for children and adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18396/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question relates to a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

### Health Services

887. **Deputy Pauline Tully** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the existing level of respite in County Monaghan; if it is intended to provide separate centres for children and adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18397/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Anne Rabbitte):** As this question relates to service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

### Health Services Staff

888. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on physician associates; his engagements with other Departments and stakeholders regarding training physician associates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18408/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** As the Deputy will be aware, physician associates are healthcare professionals qualified to practice in collaboration with, and under the supervision of, medical doctors.

In 2015 the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland commenced a pilot in Beaumont Hospital, with the recruitment of four qualified physician associates into four specialty surgical units – colorectal, orthopaedic, breast, and vascular – under the supervision of four surgeons in those settings.

Due to the limitation of the pilot being confined to surgical units, and to the fact that for the second year there were just two physician associates involved, it was not possible for the Department to make an informed, evidence based national level determination, regarding the establishment of the grade at that time.

Having sufficient capacity in the health workforce and the appropriate configuration of staff and skill-mix are integral to the delivery of safe and timely health services. The Department is supportive of any initiative which ensures that sufficient professionals are trained, attracted, and retained in the areas where healthcare need is anticipated.

Since the completion of the pilot in Beaumont Hospital, no follow up business case or request to establish the physician associate grade, on a permanent basis, has been received from the HSE by the Department.

### **Vaccination Programme**

889. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the National Immunisation Advisory Committee to complete its evaluation on the clinical effectiveness of providing the HPV vaccine to girls and boys in secondary school who were eligible to receive HPV vaccine in first year but who did not receive it and women up to the age of 25 years of age who have left secondary school and who did not receive the vaccine when eligible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18410/22]

890. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when he expects HIQA to complete its cost-effectiveness assessment of providing the HPV vaccine to girls and boys in secondary school who were eligible to receive HPV vaccine in first year but who did not receive it and women up to the age of 25 years who have left secondary school and who did not receive the vaccine when eligible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18411/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 889 and 890 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. 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.

As you are aware, my Department is awaiting guidance from NIAC in relation to the clinical effectiveness of providing the HPV vaccine to:

- girls and boys in secondary school who were eligible to receive HPV vaccine in 1st year but who did not receive it; and
- women up to the age of 25 years who have left secondary school and who did not receive the vaccine when eligible.

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Since 2020, NIAC's has been significantly engaged in the evaluation of COVID-19 vaccines and making recommendations on their use in respect of the population living in Ireland. This work is ongoing in the context of the requirement to consider booster vaccination programmes. Other workstreams under the remit of NIAC include the HPV vaccination programme. I am advised that NIAC hopes to make a recommendation on the HPV mop-up programme as soon as possible.

If NIAC concludes that there is sufficient evidence to support the provision of HPV vaccine to one or more of the groups set out above, HIQA will undertake a cost-effectiveness assessment on that basis.

*Question No. 890 answered with Question No. 889.*

### **Departmental Contracts**

891. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18890/22]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Stephen Donnelly):** The Department's total expenditure in the A7 subhead consultancy for the years requested since 2020 is as per the tables attached. Descriptions of the projects are alongside the spend on same. It is the policy in my Department only to engage the services of external consultants where highly specialised skills are not available within the Department and, in particular, when such an approach is felt to be more appropriate and cost-effective.

The attached tables outline the total amount spent on external consultants from 2020 to date. While some contacts are negotiated on the basis of a daily and hourly rate, others are paid a fee on the basis of reaching a number of milestones during the process and in some case producing a report

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq891-05-04-22\_en.docx ">A7 Subhead</a>]

### **Fishing Industry**

892. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the quota of Irish fishing vessels in Irish territorial waters under the Common Fisheries Policy. [17502/22]

893. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the quota of Irish fishing vessels in the territorial waters of other European Union member states under the Common Fisheries Policy by European Union member state in tabular form. [17503/22]

894. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the quota of fishing vessels from European Union member states in Irish territorial waters under the Common Fisheries Policy by European Union member state and species in tabular form. [17504/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 892, 893 and 894 together.

Under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), EU fishing fleets are given equal access to EU waters and fishing grounds subject to allocated fish quotas. There are derogations to this access rule, including restrictions on access to Member States' coastal waters.

In Ireland's case, other than Northern Irish vessels under Voisinage Agreement, no EU Member State or Third Country has access to our 0-6 nautical miles zone. Foreign fishing vessels are excluded from the 6-12 nautical miles zone on our North-west Coast, from Lough Foyle to Eris Head, and along the South-west Coast between Mizen Head and Sybil Point. France, the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium have access for specific species in various areas of the 6-12 nautical mile zone along Ireland's West, East and South coasts. Ireland does not have access to any other Member States' 6-12 nautical mile zones.

Last year, the European Commission published a proposal to rollover, for another ten years, the provisions relating to the restrictions on access to Member States' 6-12 nautical miles zones, as set out in the CFP Regulation (Regulation (EU) No. 1380/2013). I am seeking an extension of the 6 and 12 nautical miles zones out to 12 and 20 miles, respectively. I believe that there is a strong case to be made to increase the protections for Ireland's fishing fleets in these waters, particularly against the background of Brexit.

Quotas for the various stocks are allocated for management areas - that is, an ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Seas) area or a part thereof - and not Member States' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). Generally, most stock areas straddle more than one EEZ area. These stock areas can include Member States' EEZs, third countries' EEZs and international waters.

For example, the Total allowable Catch (TAC) area for the Hake Stock is ICES Areas 6 and 7 which stretches from the north of Scotland south to the north coast of Brittany, and into the English Channel. This area includes parts of the UK EEZ, the Irish EEZ, part of the French EEZ and some international waters. Ireland's quota may be fished in any part of this area. Ireland's main Mackerel quota covers ICES Areas 6 and 7 stretching from north of Scotland to the north coast of Brittany and the full quota may be fished in UK waters of the northern North Sea. The access to the northern North Sea is economically important for our fleet.

The share allocation of stocks between Member States was established as a principle of the first CFP in 1983 and was based on the average catch of each Member State over a period of reference years (track record). The only exception to this relates to the Hague Preferences, based on a special recognition agreement of the underdeveloped nature of the Irish fleet and the heavy control responsibility on us when Ireland joined the EU. The share out of TACs set in more recent years has also been mainly based on track record, the most recent of these of importance to Ireland has been boarfish.

The details of the stocks for which Ireland and other Member States have quota in the relevant management areas are set out in the TAC and Quota Regulation each year.

*Question No. 893 answered with Question No. 892.*

*Question No. 894 answered with Question No. 892.*

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

895. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the value of payments under the Common Agricultural Policy; the number of recipients of payments under the Common Agricultural Policy in each of the years 2015 to 2021 and to date in

2022, in tabular form. [17505/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The information requested by the Deputy is attached in tabular form, as requested.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq895-05-04-22\_en.xlsx">CAP Funding</a>]

### Forestry Sector

896. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of ash dieback RUS applications received by his Department; the number which have been approved; the number of such files that remain to be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17558/22]

898. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the area of ash applied for under the reconstitution and underplanting scheme; the area approved; the area remaining to be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17560/22]

899. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number and area of ash dieback reconstitution and underplanting scheme applications that his Department approved in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17561/22]

900. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number and area of ash dieback reconstitution and underplanting scheme applications that his Department received in 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17562/22]

901. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of ash dieback reconstitution and underplanting scheme approvals that his Department expects to approve in 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17563/22]

929. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the dates his Department received the ash dieback RUS applications that remain unapproved by month in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17844/22]

930. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the area of ash dieback RUS approvals his Department expects to approve in 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17845/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 896, 898, 899, 900, 901, 929 and 930 together.

I will refer the Deputy to his Dáil question number 860 of 29th March, that since the first finding of ash dieback disease in Ireland, my Department has provided support totalling over €7 million to owners of ash plantations impacted by disease through the Reconstitution Scheme (Ash Dieback) (introduced in 2013) and more recently the Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS – Ash dieback) introduced in July 2020.

Applications for RUS are received regularly, and decisions are issued as the assessment of the applications are completed.

The table below shows the total applications received, approved and on hand, including the area, since the commencement of the Scheme up to and including 1 April, 2022.

Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (Ash Dieback)	Total	Hectares
Applications received	592	2, 391
Decisions issued	189	619
Awaiting decision	403	1, 772

A total of 155 applications were decided in 2021 for a total of 492ha. A total of 389 applications were received in 2021, covering 1,628 ha.

The table below shows the breakdown of the applications on hand and the year in which that application was made.

Year received	Number awaiting decision	Hectares
2020	103	428
2021	298	1,341
2022	2	3

Thus, number awaiting a decision is 403 for 1,772 ha

As the Deputy is aware the Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 was published earlier this year and deals with projected licensing output and approvals for support schemes and may be found here [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - Forestry policy and strategy ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)).

A key target of the plan is to refocus on the delivery on approvals from the Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS) (Ash Dieback). However, the 2022 Plan does not include an annual target as many RUS applications are screened in for Appropriate Assessment and are referred to ecology. Of these, any that propose replacing the ash crop with conifer species currently require planning permission.

My Department continues to engage with the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), who are very supportive of the objective of removing the planning permission requirement for these files.

### Forestry Sector

897. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total area of ash plantations potentially infected with ash dieback in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17559/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The damage caused by ash dieback disease is rapidly increasing in Europe and Ireland. It is likely in the coming years to have a catastrophic impact on ash wherever it occurs in the Irish landscape, including in hedgerows and in the wider natural environment.

The total area of grant aided ash is approximately 15,000 hectares. To date approximately 2,000 hectares of this grant aided ash has been cleared under the Departments schemes. The National Forest Inventory (2017), a sample inventory, concluded that in total there was 25,000 hectares of ash (+/- 5,000 hectares).

Such is the presence of the disease, all ash forests in Ireland at this point can be deemed potentially infected by ash dieback to a greater or lesser degree.

5 April 2022

*Question No. 898 answered with Question No. 896.*

*Question No. 899 answered with Question No. 896.*

*Question No. 900 answered with Question No. 896.*

*Question No. 901 answered with Question No. 896.*

### **Forestry Sector**

902. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when his Department intends to integrate data on hen harrier winter roosts (details supplied) into databases in order to inform licensing decisions that are compliant with Irish and European Union environmental law; the reason for the delay in doing so to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17565/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Department recognises its responsibilities regarding the conservation of Hen Harrier, and is fully engaged in the development of the Threat Response Plan, led by the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage.

We are supplied a High Likelihood of Nesting Areas (HLNAs) GIS layer from the NPWS, in order to underpin the application of its procedures developed to avoid disruption to breeding Hen Harrier within designated SPAs, arising from certain forestry operations. This GIS layer has in recent years incorporated data from the Hen Harrier EIP Project and its partner, the Golden Eagle Trust, subject to data confidentiality. The HLNA layer is fully integrated into iFORIS and the QGIS system used by Ecologists involved in assessing applications. This HLNA layer does not include information regarding Hen Harrier winter roosts.

The Department does not have data concerning the Hen Harrier winter roosting sites. On a case-by-case basis, where it becomes aware of the presence of a roost site, through referral responses from NPWS, submissions from third parties or other means, the Department attaches appropriate conditions to the licence and / or grant approval, if issued.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

903. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a farmer qualifies for support under the targeted intervention package for the tillage sector recently announced (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17588/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the Targeted Intervention Package. This package seeks to incentivise the planting of additional tillage crops for this coming planting season through the Tillage Incentive Scheme. It is proposed to encourage farmers to grow more eligible tillage crops in 2022 versus 2021.

Eligible crops include the cereal crops barley, wheat, oats, rye, oilseed rape, maize, and beet. A payment of €400 per hectare is proposed. The proposed budget for the Scheme is €10 million and is aimed at encouraging an additional 25,000 hectares of the eligible tillage crops.

Specifically in relation to the Deputy's question, I can confirm that under sown cereals are eligible under the scheme. However, farmers must establish the cereal, for example if barley is

sown, as the primary crop and must be maintained to a good commercial standard. It is expected that the eligible crops are managed correctly in terms of crop establishment, nutrition, weed and disease control etc. In summary, once the eligible cereal crop is established and maintained properly grass seed may be under sown.

### Public Sector Staff

904. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff who are presently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in his Department and in agencies and public bodies within his area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17592/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The *Civil Service Disciplinary Code* provides that pending the outcome of an investigation under the auspices of that Code, management may take whatever protective measures it deems necessary including placing a civil servant off duty with pay in accordance with the provisions of the *Civil Service Regulation Act 1956*, pending the conclusion of the disciplinary process.

The decision to place an officer off duty with pay is not taken lightly and occurs only after full consideration of its necessity pending a full investigation of the conduct that resulted in its being considered. However, it should be noted that such a measure is not a disciplinary action, nor is it an indication of wrongdoing.

In the Department, one officer is currently off duty with pay and has been so in excess of twelve months.

As absence from duty is an operational matter for the state bodies under the aegis of my Department, I have asked each to provide the data directly to the Deputy within 10 working days.

### Pigmeat Sector

905. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the pig stability fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17610/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Department is currently reviewing the proposal referred to in the Deputy's question, and is engaging with stakeholders in this context, and on the situation in the pig sector in general.

Our pig farmers have always been remarkably resilient but I am acutely aware of the unprecedented challenges that Irish pig farmers are facing at present. The continued development of the pigmeat sector is a priority for me given the pivotal role the industry plays in the national economic context. It is the third largest agri-food sector, and supports approximately 8,000 rural jobs.

Last month, I announced the Pig Exceptional Payment Scheme (PEPS), with a fund of up to €7 million, for commercial pig farmers. This is an urgent, short-term response to assist producers that would be viable but for the extreme current circumstances, and allow space for a more medium-term adjustment to market signals.

This scheme is a once off, exchequer funded scheme open to commercial pig undertakings



which had produced more than 200 pigs in the period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021 inclusive. This includes pigs sent to slaughter, exported or sold commercially from a breeding herd.

The scheme was notified to the European Commission under the agriculture de minimis rules, which provide for a maximum payment per undertaking of €20,000.

Applications for the PEPS closed on 20 March 2022. The first payments to pig farmers under this scheme began to issue on 25 March. All information on the scheme can be found on my Department's website.

This scheme is part of a wider package of measures to support the pigmeat sector, including intensified efforts by Bord Bia to promote quality assured Irish pigmeat in the domestic and export markets with dedicated media advertising campaigns underway nationally, as well as EU-funded pigmeat promotion programmes running in key export markets.

Teagasc has also intensified its dedicated, ongoing advisory supports being provided to pig farmers and is actively engaging with pig farmers to explore the options potentially available to them.

There is also support for access to finance through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), particularly the Brexit Impact Loan Scheme and the COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme. Both of these SBCI finance products, which are part-financed by my Department, can be used for working capital and include features which will assist the current financial needs of pig farmers.

Furthermore, my Department continues to engage at EU level to ensure a joined-up EU approach to the challenges arising from Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, including through the European Food Security Crisis preparedness response Mechanism (EFSCM). Last week the Commission announced the adoption of exceptional support measures across the agriculture sector, along with a communication on Food Security. In addition, the Commission in view of the particularly difficult situation in the pig meat sector has opened a new private storage aid scheme to assist in stabilising the sector.

We are currently examining the detailed requirements and conditionality attached to the exceptional aid allocation to Ireland of €15.8 million in EU funding, and considering how it might be used to support the Irish agricultural sector.

*Question No. 906 answered with Question No. 907.*

## **Forestry Sector**

907. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the implementation of monitoring measures (details supplied) from the Forestry Programmes Natura Impact Statement; if he will provide a copy of the relevant monitoring reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17613/22]

906. **Deputy Jennifer Whitmore** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the implementation of the mitigation measures outlined within the Forestry Programmes Natura Impact Statement (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17612/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I pro-

pose to take Questions Nos. 907 and 906 together.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's (DAFM) approach to protecting European sites has evolved significantly since the publication of the Natura Impact Statement (NIS) for the Forestry programme 2014 – 2020. The Appropriate Assessment procedures and subsequent mitigation measures in place today go beyond those envisaged in the NIS published at the end of 2014.

Policy documents such as '*Environmental Requirements for Afforestation*' and '*Standards for Felling and Reforestation*' published in 2016 and 2019 respectively underpin my Department's approach to protecting European sites, giving a baseline of good practice helping to ensure that the conservation status of qualifying interests will not be adversely affected by the forestry operations being proposed. Publication of '*Forests & Water Achieving Objectives under Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021*', and '*AA Procedure Guidance Note & iFORIS SOP for DAFM Forestry Inspectors (2019)*' are other important documents that help the Department protect European sites.

Geographic Information Systems (GISs) and associated technologies play a major role today in how my Department ensures that European Sites are protected when forestry operations are being carried out. This allows for all proposed projects to be assessed in terms of their proximity to European sites and their associated species and habitats. For example, Hydrological connectivity is assessed at individual site level and this assessment is aided by using the latest EPA GIS data which includes sub catchment data and rivers.

DAFM's mitigations in relation to the Hen harrier are based on a protocol agreed with the NPWS. Datasets identifying High Likelihood Nesting Areas are regularly updated by the NPWS and the Department is able to immediately update its QGIS systems to ensure that the appropriate measures are applied to the latest data on breeding Hen harriers in SPAs designated for Hen Harriers. Ecologists assessing files have access to this dedicated Ecological QGIS system. Other datasets available in the QGIS system include the Semi-natural grassland survey layer, non-designated hen harrier areas and curlew breeding buffer layer. OSI's prime 2 water body dataset was also added to the Departments GIS system within the last 12 months.

The Department's data requirements for both statutory and non-statutory designated sites are subject to continuous review and improvement. This includes NPWS data which is updated regularly. Almost 90 amendments have been made to datasets used by my Department since the Forestry Programmes NIS was published in 2014.

The Department has also strengthened its staff resource in the field of ecology, with a strong emphasis on Appropriate Assessment since the NIS was published. Currently, there are 36 ecologists employed by the Department where only one ecologist was employed by the Department when the Forestry programme NIS was written. There are over 40 Forestry Inspectors. In 2018, the Forestry Inspectors and all Registered Foresters received Annex 1 habitat training, and further Habitat training is planned.

The SEA environmental report concluded that with the adoption of the listed mitigation measures it was anticipated that none of the effects identified as adverse in the detailed matrix assessment will be of greater than negligible significance and ensure that, even without adoption of enhancement measures, the overall effect of the Forestry Programme is strongly positive. In keeping with the SEA obligations, my Department undertakes monitoring in relation to the implementation of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 in relation to all sites and not just those designated as European sites. This monitoring is carried out *inter alia* in order to be able to identify at an early stage any unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.

The monitoring programme is ongoing and includes the use of information collated in relation to projects approved under the programme. In this regard significant data is available on the Departments website including the Forestry Division Monthly reports detailing information about afforestation, roads, woodland Improvement and Reconstitution and Underplanting of woodlands schemes. Species composition is provided in the Forest Statistics Ireland annual publication also available on the Departments website. The Department's forest licence viewer provides access to view the location of public and private forests as well as proposed forests and proposed roads.

The Department also monitor information provided by other sources, i.e. from other existing monitoring and reporting arrangements arising from EU legislation other than the SEA Directive and from national legislation or policies, and which can be indirectly used for purpose of monitoring for significant environmental effects arising from the implementation of the programme. Also, the reports required under Article 17 of the habitats Directive on 'The status of EU protected habitats and species in Ireland' and the implementation of the measures taken under the Habitats Directive are reported upon to the European Commission every six years. The latest report was published in 2019 and recognises "the improved consideration of the type and location of planting".

The EPA is the national competent authority for the Water Framework Directive and associated implementing Regulations. The national Water Framework Directive monitoring programme for Ireland for the period 2019-2021, undertaken by the EPA is comprised of 3,169 surface and groundwater bodies. My Department is listed as a relevant public authority under the First Schedule of the S.I. and the Forestry Inspectorate, accordingly, actively engage with the EPA. The EPA waterbodies and High-Status Objective Waterbodies layers are provided to the Forestry Inspectorate by the EPA, and form part of the consideration of licence assessments. The most up to date layer on WFD status and pressures was provided to the DAFM Forestry Division as soon as it became available on 28th February this year, and is being added to the IFORIS system where it will be a central part of the licence assessment process. In addition, the Forestry Inspectorate participate on several working groups and committees established under the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland, including the National Technical Implementation Group, the Blue Dot Programme and all five Regional Operational Committees. The Department's Forestry Division is a participant of the largescale Waters of Life Integrated Project.

## Forestry Sector

908. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of private sector and Coillte felling licences, respectively that have been issued on a weekly basis to date in 2022, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17636/22]

909. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of private sector forest and Coillte forest road licences, respectively that have been issued on a weekly basis to date in 2022, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17637/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 908 and 909 together.

The Department issued 2,877 felling licences last year which represented more than 8 million cubic metres of timber. This was the highest ever output licensed in volume terms in a single year.

This year, in the Forestry Licencing Plan, we have committed to increasing our output to 3,360 felling licences. These are broken down between 1,530 Coillte felling licences which will be the same as their 2021 figure and 1,830 private felling licences which will represent a 36% increase on 2021.

Regarding road licences the number issued in 2021 was 671 in respect of 264 kilometres which is double the target in the Climate Action Plan 2021. In the 2022 Plan, we have committed to 820 road licences to be issued. This is a 27% increase on the number of road licences issued in 2021.

Along with Minister of State Pippa Hackett, who has overall responsibility for the sector, we intend to deliver on these commitments. All details are outlined in our Licensing Plan, found at [www.gov.ie/en/publication/forestry-policy-and-strategy/#forestry-licensing-plan-2022](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/forestry-policy-and-strategy/#forestry-licensing-plan-2022)

The table below shows licences issued to 25 March, 2022

-	Licences Issued (25 Mar)
Forest Roads	182
Tree Felling	866
Total	1,048

The table below shows the weekly breakdown during 2022 of private felling and roads along with Coillte felling and roads.

Week ending	Private Fell	Coillte Fell	Private Road	Coillte Road
07/01/2022	16	0	7	5
14/01/2022	51	28	7	11
21/01/2022	45	50	10	20
28/01/2022	26	51	11	4
04/02/2022	35	50	5	8
11/02/2022	35	51	1	8
18/02/2022	33	51	1	2
25/02/2022	29	50	5	3
04/03/2022	16	50	13	6
11/03/2022	29	50	12	1
18/03/2022	16	30	7	4
25/03/2022	25	50	16	15
Total	356	511	95	87

Output on private felling licences is 85% on target for this stage of the year while output on roads is 95% on target.

*Question No. 909 answered with Question No. 908.*

### Forestry Sector

910. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications for private felling licences that remain to be approved by his Department which were received in each of the years 2018 to 2021 and to date in 2022, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17658/22]

911. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications for Coillte felling licences that remain to be approved by his Department which were received in each of the years 2018 to 2021 and to date in 2022, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17659/22]

912. **Deputy Verona Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of private sector tree felling licences that his Department need to process on a weekly basis from now until the end of December 2022 to ensure that all applications currently lodged with his Department are approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17660/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 910, 911 and 912 together.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has, through Project Woodland, established a definition of the backlog, which is any licence application on hand for over 120 days.

As the table below shows as of the 25th March 2022, there are 836 Coillte felling files with the Department more than 120 days, while there are 1,481 private felling applications with my Department for more than 120 days.

	Total to 25 March 2022	<=120 days	=121 days-6 mths	7-12 months	>=13 months
Private Felling	1,882	401	265	407	809
Coillte Felling	836	0	314	0	522

Using this 120 days as the definition of the backlog, the backlog of applications has reduced by 29% since the end of August 2021, which is a significant reduction in the number of applications awaiting decision.

Below is an annual breakdown of felling licence applications between private and Coillte felling.

	Private felling	Coillte felling
2017	1	0
2018	40	0
2019	288	2
2020	341	0
2021	905	834
To 25/03/2022	307	0
Total	1,882	836

Our plans for licence issue in 2022 are contained in the Forestry Licensing Plan with a target of 5,250 licences issues, which is a year-on-year increase of 30%. This includes an increase of 36% in private felling licences to 1,830, while Coillte felling licences at 1,530 will maintain the levels they achieved in 2021. The Licensing Plan 2022 may be found here [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)). Under the Plan priority will be given to applications pre-dating 2021 and we have committed to dealing with all felling licence applications pre-dating 2021 by the end of the second quarter this year.

*Question No. 911 answered with Question No. 910.*

*Question No. 912 answered with Question No. 910.*

## Archaeological Sites

913. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason that ancient raths also known as ringforts or fairy forts will not be considered as areas for nature under the new iteration of the Common Agricultural Policy despite their eminent suitability for nature preservation; the examination that was conducted into the potential impact of this decision on the survival of the remaining raths given the intensified destruction that has already wiped out half of the 60,000 raths in the past few decades; and if he has discussed, or will discuss the matter with the Minister of State with special responsibility for Heritage and Electoral Reform, the Minister of State with special responsibility for Land Use and Biodiversity or with the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media given the importance of raths to heritage, land use, biodiversity, tourism and culture with a view to reconsidering this decision. [17676/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** National Monuments which include raths or ringforts are eligible under the current CAP and it is proposed that they will continue to remain **eligible** in the new CAP starting from 2023.

Within Cross Compliance, there are certain Landscape features which are designated under the current GAEC (Good Agricultural and Environment Condition) 7 – “Retention of Landscape Features & Designated Habitats and Controlling Invasive Species”. Since 2015, all archaeological sites and monuments have been included and therefore are protected and cannot be removed. These features are also eligible for payment under the various area based schemes operated by my Department.

This is specifically covered in the 2022 Basic Payment Scheme Terms and Conditions and also was covered in the Explanatory Handbook for Cross Compliance issued to all farmers.

Within Ireland’s CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) which was submitted to the European Commission on 31 December 2021, archaeological features, are included as eligible features for payment purposes and while the CSP is subject to European Commission approval, it is expected that these features will continue to be eligible.

Archaeological features are exceptionally important features in our landscape and I recognise their significance and hence they have been protected within the current CAP and will continue to be in the new CAP.

## Horticulture Sector

914. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure the survival of growers such as in the case of a company (details supplied) given the impact of increases in fuel costs. [17687/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I am acutely aware of the difficulties being faced by many sectors across the agriculture industry due to the increase in input costs including rising energy costs.

The horticulture sector has been negatively affected by the increase in the cost of energy, in particular, the heated glasshouse sector producing highwire crops such as cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers. I made a recent visit to a few of the affected growers to hear first-hand the challenges being faced.

In fact, I met with the growers referenced by the Deputy in the past fortnight. They are

brave, ambitious and committed businesspeople. We must ensure that we support farmers and growers like them to ensure that we have viable domestic horticulture sector.

I raised concerns in relation to the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on agri-food supply chains at the extraordinary informal meeting of European Union Agriculture Ministers held on 2nd March and at the AgriFish Council on 21st March. At these meetings I underlined the need to maintain and keep a very close eye on supply chains and to ensure an effective and functioning Single Market and to be ready to consider any measures that may help to alleviate the difficulties caused.

The Commission has already announced a number of support measures, including the introduction of private storage aid for the pigmeat sector, a new exceptional aid support package making available a fund of €500 million for affected sectors, increased payment advances in 2022 and a new temporary State Aid framework.

I'm taking a proactive approach to this situation in order to support our farm families and their businesses through this time of considerable challenge.

### **Rural Schemes**

915. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the Leader Programme 2023 to 2027; the amount of investment that will be available to provide funding in rural environment and support change mitigation initiatives and the high-level ambitions of Leader 2023-2027 as outlined in the draft Common Agriculture Policy strategic plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17692/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Department of Rural and Community Development has delegated responsibility for the LEADER programme on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The LEADER programme will continue to be a key component of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) from 2023, and I am committed to ensuring that the programme continues to play a central role in delivering on the Government's vision for rural Ireland as set out in Our Rural Future. Indeed, the widespread public consultation undertaken by the Department of Rural and Community Development in the preparation of Our Rural Future clearly highlighted the vital role that LEADER continues to play.

Indicative themes for support include economic development and job creation, rural infrastructure and social inclusion, sustainable development, and climate mitigation and adaptation. Officials from both Departments have engaged frequently, and with the European Commission, on the structure and design of the new LEADER programme.

An allocation of €180 million has been made to the LEADER Programme for the 2023-2027 period as part of the new CAP Strategic Plan. In conjunction with the funding of €70 million for the LEADER Transitional Programme over the 2021-2022 period, this allocation will result in total funding of €250 million being made available for LEADER over the seven years to 2027. This maintains the level of funding provided over the 2014-2020 programming period.

### **Official Engagements**

916. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has spoken with his counterpart in the United States of America in the past 12 months.

[17705/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** In the last 12 months, I held a bilateral meeting with United States Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack as well as engaging in other communications with Secretary Vilsack.

Our bilateral focussed on trade issues, a discussion on Brexit and the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol as well as other issues relating to Irish and US agriculture policies.

Later this month, I will lead a Bord Bia trade mission to the United States where I am scheduled to have a meeting with Secretary Vilsack.

### Forestry Sector

917. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average length of time it took to process the Coillte felling licences issued by his Department since 1 January 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17745/22]

918. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average length of time it took to process the private felling licences issued by his Department since 1 January 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17746/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 917 and 918 together.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine publishes extensive information on forestry licence and other forestry-related statistics on its website, including the weekly Forestry Dashboard available here [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - Forest Statistics and Mapping ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)).

The Forestry Licensing Plan for 2022 envisages a 36% increase in private tree felling licences at 1,830 while Coillte output will remain at the same level as 2021 at 1,530. It is worth noting that Coillte supply 75% of product to the sawmills.

The average length of time for Coillte felling licences to be issued during January, February and March 2022 is 11 months and for Private felling is 18 Months. The DAFM licensing plan commits to remove all (private) felling licences predating 2021 by end of the second quarter, as well as reducing the turnaround time for (private) license applications, this is being achieved through reassigning staff who have been working on Coillte felling files to processing private felling licence files, along with the recent recruitment of additional ecologist resources.

Along with Minister of State Pippa Hackett, who has overall responsibility for the sector, my priority this year is to deliver on the ambition outlined in the Licencing Plan. This will have the effect of reducing the backlog and the time taken

*Question No. 918 answered with Question No. 917.*

### Forestry Sector

919. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of Coillte felling licences issued out of the total number felling licences issued since 1 January 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17747/22]

928. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine



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the reason that his Department is consistently processing more Coillte felling licences than private sector felling licences each week since 1 January 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17808/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 919 and 928 together.

Along with Minister of State Pippa Hackett, who has overall responsibility for the sector, it is my aim to deliver a licensing system which meets the needs of all those who apply for forestry licences.

This is regardless of whether that application comes from a private individual who wishes to plant trees, a forest owner who wishes to fell their crop, or Coillte who wishes to supply sawmills with product from their estate. Each licence has a value particularly to the rural economy where the timber is harvested, transported and processed.

Since the commencement of 2022 up until the 25 March, 2022 my Department has issued a total number of 867 felling licences of those 59% were Coillte licences. We are 85% on target for private felling licences at this stage of the year, and we are fully committed to delivering the full 1,830 private licences by year end as outlined in the Licensing Plan.

The Department issued 2,877 felling licences last year which represented more than 8 million cubic metres of timber. This was the highest ever output licensed in volume terms in a single year.

Last year, Coillte received 53% of felling licences and the other 47% going to the private sector. Coillte currently supply around 75% of sawlog to sawmills

Our plans for licence issue in 2022 are contained in the Forestry Licensing Plan with a target of 5,250 licences issues, which is a year-on-year increase of 30%. This includes an increase of 36% in private felling licences to 1,830, while Coillte felling licences at 1,530 will maintain the levels they achieved in 2021. The Licensing Plan 2022 may be found here [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)).

## Forestry Sector

920. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the most recent forecasts by an organisation (details supplied) made for the private sector for 2021, 2022 and 2023, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17748/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** COFORD, an advisory body to my Department, provide a series of round wood production forecasts which are updated approximately every five years. The most recent forecast predicts that the annual potential roundwood supply, will increase from around 4.7 million in 2021 to 7.9 million cubic metres by 2035 on the Island of Ireland, which includes Northern Ireland.

The forecast is available on the COFORD website [www.coford.ie](http://www.coford.ie) and provides a range of information on the potential of the national forest estate to produce timber for the time series 2021 to 2040.

I have included below an extract of the relevant figures for Ireland for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Year	Private(Republic of Ireland)000 m3	Coillte(Republic of Ireland)000 m3	Total000 m3
2021	1,476	2,757	4,224
2022	1,742	2,757	4,499
2023	2,385	2,757	5,142

### Horticulture Sector

921. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports that are being considered for fertiliser supply over the summer season considering the finite quantities that are available in the country at present and the present lack of international manufacture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17784/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has led to hikes in input prices and concerns around supply chain disruption.

I met with the main farm organisations and Teagasc on 8th March to discuss the impact on Irish agriculture and supply chains. At that meeting I established the National Fodder and Food Security Committee to prepare an industry response to the emerging crisis in feed, fodder, fertiliser and other inputs, and to develop contingency plans and advice to assist farmers in managing their farm enterprises. This Group continues to meet and I continue to engage closely with the sector as we work together on these significant challenges.

I raised concerns in relation to the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on agri-food supply chains at the extraordinary informal meeting of European Union Agriculture Ministers held on 2nd March and at the AgriFish Council on 21st March. At these meetings I underlined the need to maintain and keep a very close eye on supply chains and to ensure an effective and functioning Single Market and to be ready to consider any measures that may help to alleviate the difficulties caused.

I announced a package of targeted interventions for the tillage sector and a multi-species sward initiative worth over €12 million to support Irish farmers on 22nd March. The package supports the growing of additional tillage and protein crops and the establishment of multi-species swards lowering demand for chemical fertiliser.

The Department continues to actively engage with the fertiliser industry and to monitor supply chains. I'm taking a proactive approach to this situation in order to support our farm families and their businesses through this time of considerable challenge.

### Renewable Energy Generation

922. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the changes that are being proposed to solar panel application grants for farm building roofs; if his attention has been drawn to the problems of securing feedback tariffs from the ESB to ensure a viable regeneration proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17786/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** While overall national energy policy formation is the direct responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), my Department continuously engages with DECC on all energy related matters from an agricultural perspective, as well as a wide

range of industry and other stakeholder groupings.

Minister Eamon Ryan, Minister for Environment, Climate Action and Communications launched the microgeneration support scheme in December 2021. This support scheme provides a range of supports to assist homes and businesses, including farmers to develop renewable generation for self-consumption with the micro-generation enabling framework introduces payments to micro-generators for exported electricity for the first time. This scheme will support the deployment of an expected 380 MW of new micro (50 kW) to support the deployment of rooftop and ground-mounted solar PV.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 recognises the important contribution of microgeneration to the decarbonisation of the energy system and commits to delivering a Microgeneration Policy Framework (see Action 105), led by my ministerial colleague Eamon Ryan. Specifically, this action will address the development and trialling of a streamlined grid connection pathway for installation sizes up to 50Kw. I do believe that farmers can positively contribute to this energy transition and I continue to engage with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Environment, Climate Action and Communication in this regard and on other energy-related matters.

To encourage on-farm renewable technology uptake and usage, grant aid is provided through TAMS in my Department to assist farmers in maximising their contribution to the production of renewable energy through the installation of Solar PV technology along with battery storage on Irish farms. The solar PV systems grant-aided under TAMS include Solar PV Panels and Solar PV Rechargeable Batteries and Solar Panels for water heating under the Pig and Poultry Capital Investment Scheme. Grant aid for solar investments in TAMS is for farm consumption use only.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

923. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers now signed to the new organics scheme; the amount of funding on average that is receivable by participating farmers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17787/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** At present, there are 1,734 participants in the Organic Farming Scheme. The 2022 scheme is currently open to farmers until 8th April. At this point, it is not possible to determine the number of eligible applications that will be received.

However, I am confident that the funding provided this year will be sufficient to allow all eligible applications to be accepted into the Organic Farming Scheme, which will assist in achieving our target of 7.5% of land cover under organic production as outlined in the current Programme for Government.

For 2022, I have secured a budget allocation of €21 million for the Organic Farming Scheme, an increase of €5 million from the previous year. This budget will support the maintenance of the existing contracts and allow for an additional 50,000 hectares of land under conversion.

While it is possible to provide the estimated number of hectares that can be funded, the number of farmers expected to participate in the scheme and their average payment will obviously depend on their enterprise and the size of the farms.. At present, it is difficult to determine the type of enterprises encompassed by these applications as farmers will be continuing to declare their parcels on BPS until the BPS closing date of 15th May 2022.

## **Agriculture Industry**

924. **Deputy Matt Shanahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his understanding of the present activities being undertaken at Waterford Institute of Technology farm research into multi-seed pastureland development; if his attention has been drawn to the five years of pilot schemes ongoing at Waterford Institute of Technology and the results; if he has plans in seeing multi-seed pastureland developed in a bid to reduce nitrogen supplementation for the dairy industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17788/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The attributes of our grasslands are the foundation for the added-value and quality of those foods produced from grazing livestock. The Deputy is right to draw attention to the area of multi-species swards. This is an area that my Department has been funding research in recently to help demonstrate the positive impacts they can have on climate, soil, biodiversity and water quality in pasture-based systems.

In respect of this work, contributions by Waterford Institute of Technology on the project 'LoCAM-Dairy' involving multi-species swards, and which received funding of just under €600,000 from my Department in 2019, is welcomed. The expertise at Waterford Institute of Technology on this project is directed at the environmental sustainability of reseeded grasslands with multi-species swards under no fertiliser inputs and the greenhouse gas emission factors associated with them. This information is essential for input into policy and practice to develop mixed swards in Ireland and contributing to improving the national greenhouse gas inventory.

Multi-species swards will be a key tool for delivering climate action. In this context, I was pleased to be in a position recently to launch 'Multi-Species Sward Measure' which will provide financial support to farmers to sow Multi-Species Swards (MSS). We are targeting the planting of 12,000ha of MSS this year.

We will continue to support the research needed to investigate aspects of multi-species swards in an Irish context and in particular, their role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving soil structure and enhancing biodiversity, while also maintaining the quality of our meat and dairy produce and supporting the viability of farmers.

## **Forestry Sector**

925. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of private sector forest road licences with an attached single consent application that remain to be processed by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17805/22]

926. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the years the applications for forest road licences with single consent applications attached which remain unapproved were received by his Department on an annual basis in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17806/22]

927. **Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of Coillte forest road licences with an attached single consent application that remain to be processed by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17807/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 925, 926 and 927 together.

In February 2020, Section 8 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 was commenced and the Forestry (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2020 (SI No. 39 of 2020), were signed. This legislation made provision for my Department to act as the single consent authority for applications for forest road works licences, where the forest road provides access to a public road (other than a national road) or there is material widening of an existing entrance. Forest owners wishing to carry out such works no longer require a grant of planning from their local authority.

To 30th March 2022, the Department has received a total of 480 forest road works applications under the single consent process. At the moment 217 of those applications are awaiting a decision. Coillte forest road under the single consent process accounts for 33 of those outstanding applications.

The table below shows the years that the applications for forest roads with single consent were received; of these approximately one-third are awaiting further information from the applicant, in order that they may be processed.

Year	Nos.
2018	1
2019	3
2020	71
2021	119
2022	23
Total awaiting decision	217

We issued 671 road licences in 2021 in respect of 264 kilometres which is double the target in the Climate Action Plan 2021. We have committed to issue 820 road licences this year, as outlined in the Forestry Licensing Plan This is a 27% increase on the number of road licences issued in 2021. We are keeping pace with expected output to date this year, with 203 road licences issued to 1st April, 2022.

Details of our Licensing Plan may be found at [www.gov.ie/en/publication/forestry-policy-and-strategy/#forestry-licensing-plan-2022](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/forestry-policy-and-strategy/#forestry-licensing-plan-2022)

*Question No. 926 answered with Question No. 925.*

*Question No. 927 answered with Question No. 925.*

*Question No. 928 answered with Question No. 919.*

*Question No. 929 answered with Question No. 896.*

*Question No. 930 answered with Question No. 896.*

### **Forestry Sector**

931. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the date the Secretary General of his Department committed to the Joint Oireachtas Committee to engage with his counterpart in the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications with regard to the issue of planning permission for the conversion to conifers from dead

and dying ash; the progress to date and the expected date such talks will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17846/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Forestry Licensing Plan 2022 was published earlier this year and deals with projected licensing output and approvals for support schemes.

A key target of the plan is to refocus on the Reconstitution and Underplanting Scheme (RUS) (Ash Dieback). The scheme provides 100% grant aid to landowners to clear their ash crop, replant with an alternate species and manage their forest until successfully established. Many RUS applications are screened in for Appropriate Assessment and are referred to ecology. Of these, any that propose replacing the ash crop with conifer species currently require planning permission.

On 14th September last, the Secretary General of my Department committed to engaging with his counterpart on the matter. This direct engagement has taken place and the Department officials are continuing to engage with the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), to explore the possibility of removing the planning permission requirement for applications that require planning permission, subject to compliance with existing EU laws and regulations. There has been positive engagement, these deliberations are ongoing and any changes in planning process will require legislative amendment.

### **Forestry Sector**

932. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that ash plantations infected by ash dieback are now starting to rot and present a serious health and safety issue in their removal. [17847/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The damage caused by ash dieback disease is rapidly increasing across the full natural range of ash in Europe and here in Ireland. The disease is likely in the coming years to have a catastrophic impact on ash wherever it occurs in the Irish landscape, including in hedgerows and in the wider natural environment. Forestry contractors are well aware of the risks in felling trees and the precautions required and their health and safety responsibilities when working or managing others who work in forests.

There will be additionally inevitable health and safety aspects associated with diseased trees, especially on roadways. The Department has last year issued 'A Guide for landowners to managing Roadside Trees'.

This excellent publication produced by the Department with the Tree Council of Ireland outlines specific issues related to health and safety in tree work and gives practical guidance to those working with chainsaws taking out hazardous trees.

The HSA also provided an information note on this subject, 'Chainsaw Safety Training Advice Information Sheet (2015)'.

### **Forestry Sector**

933. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department process in tandem private sector tree felling licences and forest road licences that are applied for by applicants for the same site; and if he will make a statement on the mat-

ter. [17873/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The felling and forest road licence application system involves two separate licensing processes.

Felling licences may be applied for up to 10 years and road licences for up to three years and it is often the case that they are not applied for at the same time.

If the Department receives these applications at the same time, for the same site, they will be dealt with by the same District Inspector and it is reasonable that in organising their workload they would be dealt with in tandem; there could of course be different issues with each application, and requests for further information, which could mean that they are processed at a different pace.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

934. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason that a person (details supplied) is having difficulty with their current Beef Data and Genomics Programme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17882/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The person named recorded a sire as “unknown” in his records submitted to ICBF as part of the 2021 scheme. As a result of this, a query was raised and the person named did not receive his Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) payment for 2021 because it was deemed the scheme requirements has not been met, specifically in relation to the use of a stock bull.

However in light of new information received from the person named, the Department has re-examined the case and will now make arrangements regarding his 2021 payment. The person named will be informed of this decision in writing.

### **Forestry Sector**

935. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the reason for tree felling of mature trees in Barnaslingan Wood; the percentage of trees that are being removed; when a clean-up of the debris is intended which is currently seriously detracting from a well-used beauty spot and way marked walks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17913/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** Coillte is a private limited company established under the Forestry Act 1988 and is operationally independent from my Department. I have referred the matter to Coillte for direct follow-up with the Deputy.

### **Pigmeat Sector**

936. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether the package of supports recently announced for the pig sector is insufficient; if he will increase the support package to €100 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17955/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Department is currently reviewing the proposal referred to in the Deputy's question, and is engaging with stakeholders in this context, and on the situation in the pig sector in general.

Our pig farmers have always been remarkably resilient but I am acutely aware of the unprecedented challenges that Irish pig farmers are facing at present. The continued development of the pigmeat sector is a priority for me given the pivotal role the industry plays in the national economic context. It is the third largest agri-food sector, and supports approximately 8,000 rural jobs.

Last month, I announced the Pig Exceptional Payment Scheme (PEPS), with a fund of up to €7 million, for commercial pig farmers. This is an urgent, short-term response to assist producers that would be viable but for the extreme current circumstances, and allow space for a more medium-term adjustment to market signals.

This scheme is a once off, exchequer funded scheme open to commercial pig undertakings which had produced more than 200 pigs in the period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021 inclusive. This includes pigs sent to slaughter, exported or sold commercially from a breeding herd.

The scheme was notified to the European Commission under the agriculture de minimis rules, which provide for a maximum payment per undertaking of €20,000.

Applications for the PEPS closed on 20 March 2022. The first payments to pig farmers under this scheme began to issue on 25 March. All information on the scheme can be found on my Department's website.

This scheme is part of a wider package of measures to support the pigmeat sector, including intensified efforts by Bord Bia to promote quality assured Irish pigmeat in the domestic and export markets with dedicated media advertising campaigns underway nationally, as well as EU-funded pigmeat promotion programmes running in key export markets.

Teagasc has also intensified its dedicated, ongoing advisory supports being provided to pig farmers and is actively engaging with pig farmers to explore the options potentially available to them.

There is also support for access to finance through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), particularly the Brexit Impact Loan Scheme and the COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme. Both of these SBCI finance products, which are part-financed by my Department, can be used for working capital and include features which will assist the current financial needs of pig farmers.

Furthermore, my Department continues to engage at EU level to ensure a joined-up EU approach to the challenges arising from Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, including through the European Food Security Crisis preparedness response Mechanism (EFSCM). Last week the Commission announced the adoption of exceptional support measures across the agriculture sector, along with a communication on Food Security. In addition, the Commission in view of the particularly difficult situation in the pig meat sector has opened a new private storage aid scheme to assist in stabilising the sector.

We are currently examining the detailed requirements and conditionality attached to the exceptional aid allocation to Ireland of €15.8 million in EU funding, and considering how it might be used to support the Irish agricultural sector.



## Forestry Sector

937. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an organisation (details supplied) has submitted its final report on the review of the legislation and the full examination of the regulatory system for the forestry licencing; if the report has been finalised, if he will provide details of the findings; when he will introduce the recommended changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17973/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The regulatory review of the licensing process is an important initiative which is being carried out by a consultant, Philip Lee and Associates, with legal and environmental expertise under the auspices of Project Woodland. As you may be aware Project Woodland was launched in February 2021 and aims to improve the forestry licensing system as well as developing a shared vision for woodland creation in Ireland.

The regulatory review is assessing the existing statutory framework for the licensing of forestry activities in relation to environmental and public participation obligations in order that practical advice can be provided to the Department on how to work more efficiently within the existing legal framework. The review is also considering the issue of a single consent system and statutory timelines. The draft review was recently presented to the Project Board and the Project Woodland Working Groups and will be presented to the Forestry Policy Group this week.

The regulatory review is expected to be finalised following this stakeholder engagement. Once finalised, the review will be published and the Department will consider all recommendations the consultants have made.

## Harbours and Piers

938. **Deputy Mairéad Farrell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the projected timeline and milestones for the development of the deep-water quay at Ros a Mhíl; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18107/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** Ros an Mhíl Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute. On 1st February, I announced that the Government had approved the Deep Water Quay Project at Ros an Mhíl which will add 200m of quayside and over 70% greater depth to accommodate larger fishing vessels and attract additional landings from both Irish and non-Irish fishing vessels.

On 4th February my Department published a tender for Consultancy Services. Securing this consultancy service is a necessary precursor in line with the public works contract. The tender competition closed on the 10th March and my Department has completed our assessment of tenders. All tenderers were notified on 24th March and the process is currently in the standstill period required under public procurement policy.

The successful Consultant will complete the detailed design, manage the tender process for construction works, supervise the construction works, and in due course handover completed construction works back to my Department.

My Department officials will promptly meet the Consultant after awarding the contract. Until the Consultant's work has been undertaken, the timeline or key milestones for the devel-

opment cannot be specified. However my Department will be working closely with the Consultant to progress the development.

The Fishery Harbour Centres are critical to the seafood industry and how these facilities stimulate economic activity for the surrounding rural coastal communities. The Ros an Mhíl project is further evidence of this Government's commitment to addressing the impacts of Brexit on the sector and to a strong future for Ireland's seafood primary producers.

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

939. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason that raths, fairy forts or ringforts are not being included in CAP 2023. [18113/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** National Monuments which include raths or ringforts are eligible under the current CAP and it is proposed that they will continue to remain **eligible** in the new CAP starting from 2023.

Within Cross Compliance, there are certain Landscape features which are designated under the current GAEC (Good Agricultural and Environment Condition) 7 – “Retention of Landscape Features & Designated Habitats and Controlling Invasive Species”. Since 2015, all archaeological sites and monuments have been included and therefore are protected and cannot be removed. These features are also eligible for payment under the various area based schemes operated by my Department.

There has been no change in this in the new CAP strategic plan.

Within Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) which was submitted to the European Commission on 31 December 2021, archaeological features, are included as eligible features for payment purposes and while the CSP is subject to European Commission approval, it is expected that these features will continue to be eligible.

Archaeological features are exceptionally important features in our landscape and I recognise their significance and hence they have been protected within the current CAP and will continue to be in the new CAP.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

940. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a TB eradication scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18158/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The On Farm Market Valuation scheme is the main method of calculating compensation available to farmers who incur loss as a result of Bovine Tuberculosis. With regards to the herdowner in question, I understand that valuation is complete and a payment in respect of one reactor animal is now been finalised by the Regional Veterinary Office.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

941. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18183/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** A central *Blended Working Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations* was launched by Minister McGrath on 31st March 2022. Based on this central framework, my Department is working on its own blended working policy and intends to make the facility available to its staff as soon as possible but no later than the end of Q2, in line with the timeframe agreed by Government.

The purpose of this Departmental policy will be to facilitate a mix of remote working and attendance in the workplace, within a formalised structure that supports the business needs of the Department. Staff will be entitled to apply for blended working and all applications will be considered bearing in mind the suitability of the applicant and their role for blended working arrangements, as well as the needs of the relevant team and business area.

During the pandemic, approximately half of my Department's staff carried out their duties in their usual workplaces, Ports, Laboratories, on-site inspections etc. Since the formal lifting of the public health measures earlier this year, the remaining staff have been following a structured Return To the Workplace schedule and are carrying out their duties both remotely and from their usual workplace.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

942. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when ANC payments for 2020 and 2021 in respect of a commonage will issue to a farmer (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18196/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The above named applicant applied on a commonage in the townland of Dunloe Upper in Co. Kerry. The lands in question have been under query for a number of years due to issues with regards to the grazing rights on the commonage lands.

Notwithstanding the above, payments have recently issued to the applicant on the lands in question.

However, the Department will, during the course of 2022, complete a full review of all evidence submitted to support claims of grazing rights on all commonages in the townland to ensure clarity for both claimants and their agricultural advisors in the coming years. Where necessary, officials from my Department will be in contact with individual claimants seeking further information.

### **Agriculture Industry**

943. **Deputy Matt Carthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if it has been ensured that all beef processors have the facilities in place to honour the commitment in the 2019 Beef Sector Agreement to provide live weighing in factory lairages when requested to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18237/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I was pleased to publish the report of the Chair of the Beef Taskforce in November last year.

The report clearly sets out that the group satisfied its remit in monitoring and progressing the implementation of the actions agreed by stakeholders in the beef sector agreement of 15th September 2019.

The Taskforce has delivered on its commitments which consisted of a total of 38 actions in two strands, one for the implementation of immediate changes and the second which related to strategic structural reform.

The Beef Taskforce can point to several specific and significant achievements, including:

- The introduction by the industry of new bonuses and increased bonus for the existing in-spec criteria.
- Significant input into the application for PGI status for Irish Grass Fed Beef
- Establishment of a Group to oversee of the development of a suckler brand proposition by Bord Bia, with a budget of up to €6 million.
- Three substantial reports on market transparency which add to the knowledge about the sector.

The Taskforce had a dedicated and diligent independent chair in Michael Dowling and I fully accepted his further recommendation that we need ongoing stakeholder engagement on the key strategic issues facing the sector. Preparations are currently under way to establish this new forum and further details will be announced in due course.

With regard to the action under the beef sector agreement on the provision of lairage weighing on request, at a meeting of the BTF in June 2021, individual processors attended to update on the industry specific actions. They indicated that where lairage weighing is requested by their suppliers they would provide the service, in line with the action under the agreement.

### **Animal Welfare**

944. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if it will be ensured that the European Union rules on the protection of animals during transport are adhered to on all live exports from Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18245/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine only permits animals to be transported in compliance with the EU’s animal welfare legislation.

Ireland has also introduced its own national legislation regulating animal welfare in dedicated livestock vessels, which lays down more stringent controls that go far beyond those in EU law. Furthermore, over the past three years, my Department has introduced extra controls on animal welfare during export by road, such as additional checks to prevent transport of animals during hot weather, an increase in the minimum space allowance for calves in trucks that is more than that specified in EU rules, and a requirement for drivers and attendants to undergo training every three years, rather than ten years as formerly.

Department officials and inspectors monitor compliance through a system of official controls, including advance checks of weather along the proposed journey, and veterinary inspection of lorries, livestock vessels and of all animals before they travel. Journeys must be notified to the Regional Veterinary Office two days in advance, and veterinary certification will only

be provided where the journey complies with all animal transport and animal welfare regulations. This includes a requirement to notify the Regional Veterinary Office of the outcome of the journey once completed, with satellite navigation data from lorries, and the condition of the animals on arrival.

Since the scaling back of COVID-19 restrictions, Department veterinary staff have been accompanying calves on board ferries from Ireland to Cherbourg on a proportion of journeys during the peak spring season for calf export.

The Government supports the live export of animals as it plays an important part in competition in the market-place particularly for cattle. In that context, however, the Government demands the highest standards of animal welfare during transport.

### **Agriculture Industry**

945. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will support a request by an association (details supplied) for a national register of farm and forestry contractors by his Department in association with the Revenue Commissioners; and the engagement he has had with this body on this issue to date. [18315/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** My Department has no legal basis upon which to establish and maintain a register of farm and forestry contractors. However, the sector could decide to self regulate and establish a register of members in its own right.

### **Food Industry**

946. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he and his Department are taking to ensure food supply in Ireland in winter 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18316/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The people of Ireland have shown great solidarity and support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and, on their behalf, the Government will continue to co-ordinate a humanitarian, economic and diplomatic response to the crisis. Ireland is one of the most food secure countries in the world. However, at farm level, the crisis is already impacting on the price of animal feed, fertiliser and fuel. Within the Department, I have established a Rapid Response Team, chaired by the Secretary General, to actively monitor the impacts on agri-food supply chains and to contribute to the whole of Government response to this crisis. I have established the National Fodder and Food Security Committee, led by Teagasc, and tasked it to prepare an industry response to the emerging crisis in feed, fodder, fertiliser and other inputs, and to develop contingency plans and advice to assist farmers in managing their farm enterprises. I have just launched a targeted intervention package for the tillage sector and a multi-species sward initiative, which together are worth over €12 million in support to Irish farmers. The package is aimed at producing more native crops and reducing dependency on imports, and on producing crops with a low demand for chemical fertiliser. An emergency aid scheme for pig farmers of €7 million opened for applications on 7 March. This will provide commercial pig farmers a payment of up to €20,000 each. The first payments to pig farmers under this scheme began to issue on 25 March. The Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) is the key mechanism for ensuring food security throughout Europe. I have been engaged with EU Agriculture Ministers since the beginning of the crisis and on 23rd March the European Commission announced, via the communication “Safeguarding food

security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems”, a range of actions to enhance global food security and to support farmers and consumers in the EU in light of rising food prices and input costs. A €500 million package to support EU farmers most affected includes an allocation of €15.8 million for Ireland, which can be topped up by national funding. I will be examining ways to best mobilise this support as soon as possible, taking account of the detailed requirements and conditionality attached to this exceptional aid provision. I will continue to engage with all our stakeholders and will continue to work across Government, and with our European partners, to respond to this crisis using all of the tools at our disposal. Last year, according to the Economist’s Global Food Security Index, Ireland was ranked first in terms of food security across a range of indicators. While my Department are monitoring the situation closely, all indications suggest that Ireland will continue to be a food secure country.

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

947. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the provisions that are contained in the new CAP programme for Irish rare breeds (details supplied); and if apart from GLAS, which is closed to new entrants, there are schemes available for promoting farmers to keep Irish rare breeds. [18322/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I believe that it is important to ensure the preservation and protection of rare breed farm animals as a genetic resource for future generations and for the benefit of agriculture in general.

The current Rare Breeds measure in my Department’s GLAS Scheme sets out to retain and, where possible, increase populations of specific rare breed animals to ensure their long-term protection and survival. The scheme encourages farmers to register with a relevant breed society and maintain registered purebred stock during the scheme’s lifetime. Payment is made in arrears based on the monthly average livestock units of owned registered animals over the previous recording year. It is envisaged that a grant of similar nature will be included in the new CAP programme.

Similarly, a grant continues to be provided to encourage the maintenance of a number of herds of Kerry Cattle and the creation and maintenance of a sufficient reserve of purebred breeding stock in that regard. The Department also provides a small grant to assist organisations conserve and protect Irish rare breed farm animals.

In addition, the Genetic Resources Grant Aid Scheme (GRGAS) has been in place since 1996. The Scheme has an annual call for projects aimed at supporting the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture. Funding has been provided for a diverse range of projects such as raising awareness and educating the general public in the importance of genetic resources, for participation in internationally recognised research and collaboration with European and other international partners in the field of animal genetic resources. The effects of this grant aid are far reaching and play a vitally important role in fulfilling Ireland’s international obligations in relation to the conservation of animal genetic resources.

I believe these schemes show my commitment towards maintaining rare breeds as an important resource that need to be conserved into the future.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

948. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if

in areas in which there are a lot of rock outcrops and limestone pavement, such as the Aran Islands, the Burren and Connemara and in which it can be shown these rocky outcrops and pavements support important lichens for biodiversity reasons, these lands will be eligible for inclusion in farmed hectareage for the purposes of various farm schemes in the new CAP, including the ANC, basic payment and ecological schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18353/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** Eligibility for the various area-based schemes operated by the Department is governed by EU Regulations. One of the specific pillars of land eligibility is that the land must be an agricultural area, which is defined as either permanent grassland, permanent crops or arable land.

However, within the current CAP there is provision for certain non-agricultural areas to be deemed eligible in limited circumstances. The main example of this would be small areas of scrub or rock within the landscape.

At present, where a parcel of land has less than 10% scrub or rock, no reductions are made from the eligible area. Further rules with regard to how these reductions are managed are set out under *The Reduction Coefficient Procedure* section of the booklet entitled *The Guide Land Eligibility* which was sent to all Basic Payment Scheme applicants and is available at the following link, [assets.gov.ie/120268/2e4c4b6a-62b2-4985-821d-780d2a3ab2b8.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/120268/2e4c4b6a-62b2-4985-821d-780d2a3ab2b8.pdf)

The CAP Strategic Plan was submitted to the European Commission on 31st December 2021 and my Department is currently in discussions with officials from the Commission about the details of land eligibility. One of the specific topics up for discussion is the issue of scattered features such as scrub and rock within parcels and how best to manage and deal with such features.

It is clear that rock and specifically rock in areas such as the Burren and Aran Islands are a critical and integral part of the landscape and will need to be considered carefully in the new CAP.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

949. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision in relation to giving a person (details supplied) a 100% penalty in the Beef Data and Genomics Programme 2021 will be overturned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18392/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The person named has a history of using all Artificial insemination (AI) in his herd. However, he had recorded a sire as 'unknown' in his records submitted as part of the 2021 scheme. As a result, a query was raised and the person named did not receive his Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) payment for 2021 as it was deemed the scheme requirements had not been met.

However, in light of new information received, my Department has re-examined the case and will now make arrangements regarding the 2021 payment. The person named will be informed of this decision in writing.

### **Departmental Contracts**

950. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

cost of consultants to his Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if he will provide an outline of the role of each. [18902/22]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the attached table.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2022-04-05\_pq950-05-04-22\_en.docx ">Cost of Consultants</a>]

### **Community Development Projects**

951. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the resources that are available to improve or maintain community centres for use in providing accommodation to Ukrainian refugees. [18223/22]

952. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding and resources that will be made available to community centres and buildings for continued humanitarian purposes, particularly with regard to a centre (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18224/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 951 and 952 together.

I recently announced the Community Centres Investment Fund. This new capital fund, with a budget of €15m, will support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and refurbishment of existing Community Centres. This is an investment in both rural and urban communities across the country. This fund has not yet opened to applications. Details will be available on [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd) shortly.

My Department also runs a number of smaller capital schemes such as the Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) which provides small grants to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas. Funding is allocated by my Department to each Local Authority area. Further details of the programme can be found on my Department's website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd).

With regard to the Ukrainian crisis, my Department is assisting with the humanitarian response by linking with key stakeholders at community level, providing information, assisting the co-ordination of supports through the community sector, and enabling flexibility in programme delivery to shift focus on the response to those arriving into communities.

Ukrainian arrivals in to the country who are seeking accommodation are being accommodated through the International Protection Accommodation Service. My Department will continue to liaise with them and offer any assistance we can – this is a fluid situation which will require a flexible approach.

The premises referenced by the Deputy is being managed by the local authority. The response to COVID-19 showed what we can achieve by working together: national government, local government, and community, voluntary and local development sectors. My Department is coordinating with all our stakeholders, including Local Development Companies, LCDCs, Volunteer Centres, Community Volunteers, and Public Participation Networks, to maximise the effectiveness of the response.

*Question No. 952 answered with Question No. 951.*



## Community Training Centres

953. **Deputy Duncan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the up-to-date position with regard to a project (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17483/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund provides funding for the development and construction of capital projects in towns and villages and rural areas across Ireland. The Fund has, to date, allocated funding of €278 million for 191 projects across the country worth a total of €376 million.

Calls for applications to the Fund are sought under two categories – Category 1 and Category 2. Category 1 relates to large scale ambitious capital projects with all necessary planning and other consents in place and which are ready to proceed. Category 2 provides funding to enable the development of project proposals suitable for future calls for Category 1 applications.

The Athy Food Hub project was approved for funding of €311,159 under the second call for Category 2 applications to the Fund, which was completed in August 2020. The lead for this project is Kildare County Council. Based on progress reports submitted to my Department by the council, development work on the project has been proceeding well.

In December 2021, I announced the opening of the fourth call for Category 1 applications under the Fund. The closing date for applications is 29th April 2022. A guidance document and application form relating to the call can be accessed on my Department's website.

## Public Sector Staff

954. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of staff who are presently absent from work on full pay due to suspension or workplace disputes in her Department and in agencies and public bodies within her area of responsibility; the number who have been absent from work for up to three, three to six, six to twelve and over twelve months in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17605/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19th July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland.

I set out below the details of staff who are currently absent from work on full pay, due to suspension or workplace disputes, in my Department and in agencies and public bodies within my area of responsibility.

Department/ Agency	Three Months	Three to Six Months	Six to Twelve months	Over Twelve Months	Absence type
DRCD	0	0	0	0	N/A
Charities Regulator	0	0	0	1	Workplace dispute
Water Safety Ireland	0	0	0	0	N/A

Department/ Agency	Three Months	Three to Six Months	Six to Twelve months	Over Twelve Months	Absence type
Western Development Commission	0	0	0	0	N/A
Pobal	0	0	0	0	N/A

### Departmental Schemes

955. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will provide an update on the allocation of local improvement scheme funding for 2022. [17665/22]

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

The purpose of the Community Involvement Scheme (CIS) is to facilitate local community participation in the repair of local roads. The focus of the programme is on the repair of more lightly trafficked public roads which might not be high on the list of a local authority's annual roadwork programme.

Towards the end of 2021, my Department invited local authorities to submit applications for Community Involvement Schemes (CIS) for another two year programme for the period 2022/2023. While community contributions in the range 15% to 30% had been required up to 2021 depending on the mix between works and monies, the contribution rate has been reduced to a minimum of 10% for monetary contributions and 20% for works contribution for the 2022/2023 round of funding.

On 15th February 2022 I announced the regional and local road allocations for 2022 which includes funding of €15.2 million for the CIS. Details of the regional and local road grant allocations and payments to local authorities are outlined in the regional and local road grant booklets which are available in the Oireachtas Library.

### Harbours and Piers

956. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to Parliamentary Question No. 6 of 17 February 2022, the status of the development of Caladh Mór on Inis Meáin; the status of the development of the updated simulation by the National Maritime College of Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17797/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Development of the Caladh Mór Pier on Inis Meáin is included in the National Development Plan. As the Deputy will be aware, Galway County Council are responsible for the development of stage 3 of this project.

As part of the preparatory works, the National Maritime College of Ireland (NMCI) were instructed by Galway County Council to develop a model simulation for the harbour. Galway

County Council are collating the technical specifications of the key vessels that use the harbour and this data will be fed into the simulation. It is hoped that the simulation will be completed, and tested with feedback given, by the end of August.

To feed into this process, additional bathymetric studies are also to be carried out in the harbour to gather further data and it is hoped that these will be completed by the end of April. It is important to note that this timeline is dependent on weather and marine conditions.

Once this work has been completed, Galway County Council will incorporate the findings into a draft business case. Following on from this, my Department will be in a position to evaluate the next steps in the process.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

957. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there are indications of the performance of the recently launched connected hubs app further to the report on the funding for digital hubs under the connected hubs funding stream; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18022/22]

966. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there are early indications of the performance of the recently launched connected hubs app; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18081/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 957 and 966 together.

*Our Rural Future*, Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, recognises the opportunity for rural rejuvenation that remote working presents and commits to establishing a comprehensive and integrated network of remote working hubs over the lifetime of the policy to 2025.

In May last year I launched the National Connected Hubs network - [connectedhubs.ie](https://connectedhubs.ie). There are currently 223 hubs live on the platform with this number rising on an ongoing basis. The network includes a diverse range of hubs, services and facilities, thus facilitating companies of different sizes. The platform offers booking and hub management applications to network members.

In late February this year, I launched the Connected Hubs marketing campaign and mobile phone app. This will help to underpin usage by remote workers across the hub network and ensure that they remain as a viable option for workers across Ireland.

To date, these initiatives have delivered positive results. For example, the visits to [ConnectedHubs.ie](https://connectedhubs.ie) tripled from January to February, with visitors interacting with the website from as far away as the USA. The app has also seen some encouraging traffic. For example, there has been a conversion rate of almost 90% from Android users who searched for the app and decided to download it.

While the marketing campaign and app are still at an early stage, and we will get more comprehensive data in the coming months, those early results are very positive and my officials continue to monitor developments.

To date our focus has been to develop the hub network. With the Connected Hubs marketing campaign now ongoing, the focus has shifted to raising awareness of the network to relevant stakeholders, including SMEs/business owners and new hub users to drive use of this invaluable

able national resource

The establishment of a National Hubs Network is a key commitment in *Our Rural Future* and I am committed to continuing my Department's support for the ongoing development of a comprehensive and integrated network of remote working hubs in recognition of the vital role that they can play in our post-Covid recovery.

*Question No. 958 answered with Question No. 101.*

### **Departmental Funding**

959. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the first funding allocations will be made from the new Community Centres Investment Fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18024/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I recently announced details of a new Community Centres Investment Fund, this capital fund, with a budget of €15m is to support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and refurbishment of existing Community Centres. This is an investment in both rural and urban communities across the Country. The fund will assist with projects such as:

- Energy retrofitting projects that reduce an organisation's carbon footprint;
- Works to address safety concerns, including as a result of fire safety audits;
- Works to improve disability access;
- Works to improve communal facilities such as kitchen and toilet facilities; and
- Essential maintenance.

I expect applications to open shortly. Guidelines and application forms will be available on my Department's website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd). When the assessment of applications is complete later in the year, allocations will be made from the Fund, details of which will be also made available on the same website.

### **Departmental Funding**

960. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if consideration will be given to widening the Community Centres Investment Fund to include a strand specifically for communities to establish a community centre when none currently exists; if her Department has identified the locations that might benefit from this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18025/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Community Centres Investment Fund will support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and development of their existing community centre facilities. This fund is not intended for the construction of new buildings.

However, my Department provides a number of other funding streams which can be used for the improvement and development of Community Centres throughout the country.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) provides funding for the develop-

ment and construction of large scale capital projects in towns and villages and rural areas across Ireland. I announced the fourth call for Category 1 applications in December 2021, with a closing date for applications of 29 April 2022.

Funding for community centre projects may also be available through the LEADER Transitional programme. This covers the period 2021-2022, and came into effect on 1 April 2021 for new project applications. The LEADER programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the county.

### **Rural Schemes**

961. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the way that her Department is supporting research into rural development priorities to ensure effective Government policies, especially for persons in the midlands region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18027/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Our Rural Future, Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021 - 2025, places a strong emphasis on the importance of evidence-informed policy making and, in that regard, recognises the value of research in supporting sustainable rural development. The Policy commits to supporting new research into rural development priorities, including in collaboration with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other research organisations.

To strengthen linkages between policy and academia my Department established the Higher Education and Research Network in 2021 with membership from third level institutions and research organisations across the country. The first meeting took place last October and the Network it will meet again on 5 April.

The Network will feed into the development of more effective rural development policy by sharing information with the Department and other members of the Network on ongoing research taking place on issues of relevance to rural areas and by identifying opportunities for the advancement of the rural development agenda, including through research, teaching and collaboration.

I am delighted to say that following the first meeting of the Network, my Department and the National University of Ireland Galway have agreed to collaborate on a seminar series to support Our Rural Future's objectives regarding advancing higher level research in areas relevant to rural development. The *Rural Voices Series* provides a platform for Irish academics and key rural stakeholders to present their research or rural projects, allows for networking, and facilitates discussions around key rural issues.

*Rural Voices* launched in January of this year and seminars are being held monthly. The topics presented so far in the series have ranged from the *Our Rural Future* policy framework, Northern and Western Regional Assembly Vacancy and Dereliction Analysis, and the potential of rural Social Enterprises as contributors to rural development.

I have also recently announced an exciting new collaboration between my Department and the National University Ireland (NUI) to offer a Government of Ireland-NUI Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Rural Development over two academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24. This fellowship is offered to support post-doctoral research in rural development in general, and specifically research which supports the objectives of the National Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, *Our Rural Future*.

It is intended that the research project will contribute to the evidence basis underpinning national policies relevant to sustainable rural development, and more generally to enhance research, teaching and learning in rural development in the host institution. The closing date for applications is Friday 8 April and we expect to have a candidate in place commencing the next academic term of September 2022.

Finally, my Department is also exploring research on outcomes for children and young people in rural areas, based on the Growing Up in Ireland dataset and other relevant datasets.

My Department is committed to exploring opportunities to build collaborations and enhance the research across all aspects of rural development. Evidence informed policies can lead to better outcomes for all areas, including the midlands region.

Question No. 962 answered with Question No. 104.

Question No. 963 answered with Question No. 112.

Question No. 964 answered with Question No. 101.

### **Broadband Infrastructure**

965. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of free WiFi4EU hotspots around the country by county in tabular form; if more of these are planned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18080/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** WiFi4EU is a European initiative, which is co-funded by my Department and the European Commission. The initiative aims to support the development of wireless broadband by providing a high-quality internet service, free of charge, in public spaces such as main streets, public parks, libraries, museums and other public areas of high footfall.

Under the WiFi4EU scheme, local authorities applied through a competitive process to secure vouchers worth €15,000 each to install Wi-Fi hotspots. Local authorities could apply for up to 4 vouchers each throughout the lifetime of the initiative, and they must install a minimum of 10 access points per voucher. Depending on the location chosen, one or more access point may be required in that location.

In all, local authorities have secured 114 vouchers out of a maximum of 124 vouchers available, which makes Ireland one of the most successful countries to take part in the scheme. 30 of the 31 local authorities secured vouchers under the scheme.

My Department is providing co-funding of up to €15,000 for each voucher secured by the local authorities, effectively doubling the value of the investment. It is estimated that over 1,500 WiFi hotspots could be installed at locations across the country under the WiFi4EU initiative when completed. To date, 967 hotspots are live across 21 Local Authority areas and the county breakdown is attached in tabular form.

The EU granted extensions to local authorities due to Covid restrictions in place during 2020 and 2021 to allow time for local authorities to fully complete their projects. The WiFi4EU scheme will be fully completed by December 2022 when it is expected that the remaining local authorities will have utilised the vouchers granted.

**WiFi4EU Connections by County**

-	County	Live Connections
1.	Carlow	51
2.	Cavan	44
3.	Clare	28
6.	Donegal	60
7.	DCC	108
9.	Fingal	44
10.	Galway City	51
11.	Galway County	26
12.	Kerry	44
16.	Leitrim	51
17.	Limerick	40
18.	Longford	17
20.	Mayo	45
21.	Meath	56
22.	Monaghan	36
23.	Offaly	70
24.	Roscommon	54
25.	Sligo	10
27.	Tipperary	51
28.	Waterford	45
29.	Westmeath	36
	Total	967

*Question No. 966 answered with Question No. 957.*

### **Sustainable Energy Communities**

967. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the engagement her Department has had with other Departments regarding the retrofitting of older homes and buildings in line with the goal of compact development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18082/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Retrofitting homes is a highly labour-intensive sector and can create high-quality, sustainable jobs in local communities throughout the country. It therefore has the capacity to play an important role in the economic growth and development of rural communities.

Retrofitting, particularly of older housing stock commonly found in rural areas, will be a particularly effective way to help reach our ambitious climate targets while also improving wellbeing for those living in retrofitted homes.

The National Rural Development Policy, Our Rural Future, published in March 2021, supports a Just Transition to a climate neutral economy. The policy will maximise our resources and strengths in the Green Economy to support employment opportunities for communities in other areas such as renewable energy, sustainable tourism, the bioeconomy and the circular

economy.

It contains over 150 policy measures for delivery, including a specific measure to retrofit 500,000 homes and install 400,000 heat pumps across the country up to 2030. Delivery of this measure is being led by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and SEAI.

As part of the implementation monitoring process for Our Rural Future my Department produces progress reports on measures contained in the policy, with the first of these published in February. This process has entailed my officials directly engaging with Government Departments in relation to the range of measures contained in the policy. Further reports will be provided on a six-monthly basis.

Our annual work programmes enable new actions to be added over the lifetime of the policy, and my Department is currently liaising with colleagues across Government to finalise the 2022 Work Programme.

### Public Participation Networks

968. **Deputy Colm Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a review is planned of the public participation network system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18083/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** A “root and branch” review of Public Participation Networks (PPNs) structures was conducted in 2021 by an independent contractor to ensure that the structures continue to be fit for purpose and support the ongoing development of PPNs.

The purpose of the review was to assess how the existing structure of the PPNs has facilitated the operation of the network against the overall objectives of the 2014 Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government. It was also required to identify opportunities for further strengthening and enhancing PPN structures.

The research process used in the structural review was highly consultative, with a stakeholder survey, a number of focus groups, and a written submission process all utilised to ensure that stakeholders could have a say in the process. Several hundred people contributed their views to the review process.

This review also fulfills a Programme for Government commitment to ‘*Carry out a comprehensive review of PPNs to ensure that they are fit for purpose for climate action and community development.*’

The final report arising from the review is expected to be published in the coming weeks.

### Ministerial Staff

969. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the salaries and pensions paid out to special advisers to Ministers and Ministers of State in her Department in 2020 and 2021, broken down by Minister in tabular form. [11393/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The salaries and pensions paid out by my Department to special advisers to Ministers and Ministers



of State in 2020 and 2021 are set out in the Table below:

	Year	Salary	Pension
Ministers Advisors	2020	€202,522	€0
	2021	€100,395	€0
Ministers of State Advisors	2020	€0	€0
	2021	€72,329	€0

Please note between 01/01/2020 to 26/06/2020 my Department had two Ministerial advisors and no Minister of State advisors on its payroll.

After the formation of the 33rd Dáil on 27th of June 2020, my Department had one Ministerial advisor on its payroll.

In 2021 my Department had one Ministerial advisor and one Minister of State advisor on its payroll.

### Commissions of Investigation

970. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of commissions of investigation under the remit of her Department currently ongoing in the State; the cost of each commission to date; and the projected costs of each in tabular form. [12559/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I can confirm, that my Department, which was established on 19 July 2017, has not had any commissions of investigation conducted since its establishment.

### Flexible Work Practices

971. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will provide an update on the funding for the connected hubs programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18097/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** *Our Rural Future*, the Government's Rural Development Policy, clearly recognises the transformative effect that remote working can have for employers and employees all across the country.

In recognition of this, my Department continues to invest in the establishment and development of remote work hub facilities through various funding streams.

In May last year I launched the National Connected Hubs network - connectedhubs.ie. There are currently 223 hubs live on the platform, with this number rising on an ongoing basis. This represents significant progress within the first year of the existence of the network.

Details for the onboarded hub facilities can be obtained via the Connected hubs platform - [www.connectedhubs.ie](http://www.connectedhubs.ie)

I recently launched the Connected Hubs mobile app, which allow users to find their nearest hub facility and easily book a desk space using their mobile device. The Connected Hubs

mobile app can be downloaded from the Apple App Store for iOS devices and the Google Play Store for Android.

Last year, I allocated almost €9 million to the 2021 Connected Hubs Fund, which supported over 100 hubs and Broadband Connection Points (BCPs), to add capacity and improve the quality of existing remote working facilities across the state.

In February this year, I launched the 2022 Connected Hubs Call, a €5 million funding stream to further support remote working facilities, including BCPs, throughout the country and add further capacity to the National Hub Network.

The National Hub Network includes a diverse range of hubs, services and facilities, thus facilitating the needs of different employers and employees across Ireland. To date my focus has been on establishing the network and on achieving the initial critical mass. Following strong progress on the establishment phase of the project, my focus has now shifted to the next stage of development.

To this end, my officials have been consulting with hub managers across the country, and with other stakeholders, to better inform the future strategic direction of the National Hub Network and of the connectedhubs.ie platform. I also recently announced the commencement of a major promotional campaign which will serve to raise awareness of the services available on connectedhubs.ie and drive usage of this invaluable national resource.

This shift of focus will help to ensure that the network continues to provide the level of service that employers and employees need and expect.

I am committed to continuing my Department's support for the ongoing development of a comprehensive and integrated network of remote working hubs in recognition of the vital role that they can play in our post-Covid recovery.

### **Departmental Schemes**

972. **Deputy Neale Richmond** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the steps she is taking to expand the walks scheme including into the Dublin mountains; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18098/22]

**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. In addition, my Department's Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) provides funding for the development and enhancement of amenities such as walking trails.

Last September, I announced the 'approval in principle' of 31 new trails to join the Walks Scheme. This fulfills the commitment in the Programme for Government and Our Rural Future to double the number of trails on the Scheme to 80 trails. These trails are being formally brought onto the scheme by Local Development Companies who deliver the Walks Scheme locally and who are developing work plans for each of the individual landholders involved.

The new trails added to the scheme were selected following a call for expressions of interest to join the scheme. I understand that no expressions of interest were received in respect of trails in the Dublin Mountains.

Trails that are eligible for inclusion in the Walks Scheme are those that are registered with Sport Ireland and covered by the Sport Ireland trail insurance policy. For example, I understand that the Dublin Mountains Way is registered with Sport Ireland and may be eligible to apply to the scheme in the future. There may be other routes that are not included on the Sport Ireland register and would not be eligible for the scheme. As such, the position in respect of each trail would have to be assessed on a case by case basis before they could be considered for the scheme.

Once the new trails are fully operational under the Scheme, I will examine the potential for the further expansion of the Scheme. An expression of interest process will be opened for new trails, including those in the Dublin mountains, in advance of any further expansion of the scheme.

### **Departmental Funding**

973. **Deputy Holly Cairns** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding streams that are available to invest in infrastructure to improve access for persons with physical disabilities and mobility impairments to offshore islands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18126/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** It is an objective of this Government to provide the necessary supports for our off-shore islands so that those communities can continue to live, and thrive, on the islands. My Department manages a large suite of transport contracts that provide reliable and affordable mainland connectivity for island residents and visitors.

The development of quayside infrastructure, on the mainland and the islands, to cater for transport services users, including those of reduced mobility, falls under the remit of the local authorities. They are responsible for installing slipways, pontoons and quayside lifts so that users can board and alight from passenger boats in a safe and dignified manner.

My Department does provide funding for these types of developments and I recently increased the allocation for Capital works on the islands from €2.64m in 2021, to €4.64m for 2022.

This increase will enable me to approve an expanded works programme this year, which will include the annual programme for Minor Capital Works on the offshore islands, co-funded by the relevant Local Authorities.

I am very aware of the challenges facing those of reduced mobility when using our subsidised transport services, and my Department is currently engaging with service providers to explore options so that all users of our services can board and alight from a ferry safely with ease.

### **Freedom of Information**

974. **Deputy Sorca Clarke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount collected on an annual basis since the Freedom of Information Act 2014 commenced in respect of fees attached to freedom of information requests submitted to her Department in tabular form.; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18138/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department was established on 19 July 2017, since that date a total of €240 in fees has been

collected by my Department, in respect of one FOI request.

Where requesters may be subject to fees, my Department is active in assisting requesters to refine their requests where possible to ensure that information can be provided without a fee requirement.

In the context of the Freedom of Information publication scheme a log of all non-personal Freedom of Information requests received by my Department is published on a quarterly basis, these are available online at: [www.gov.ie/en/collection/f68256-disclosure-logs/](http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/f68256-disclosure-logs/).

### **Flexible Work Practices**

975. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the current policy with respect to remote working options for staff in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18172/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19th July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland.

My Department welcomes the publication of the “Blended Working Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations” by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on Thursday 31st March 2022. This framework will support regional balance within the civil service workforce and provide flexibility for its workers including those in rural Ireland.

From 4th of April 2022, the majority of staff within my Department are office based, two days per week. More frequent attendance occurs subject to business exigencies. The Department will be putting in place a sub-group to develop and implement its own blended working policy, in line with the published framework, with a view to having it in place and ready for implementation by the end of June 2022.

### **Departmental Funding**

976. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the supports that are available to a social enterprise (details supplied) in Dublin 7. [18220/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Social enterprises are businesses that work primarily to improve the lives of people. Their core objective is to achieve a social, societal, or environmental impact. Like any other business, they pursue their objectives by trading in goods and services on an ongoing basis. However, surpluses generated are re-invested into achieving their core social objectives.

I am aware of the great work that Inner City Enterprise (ICE) does in supporting the development of social enterprises in Dublin’s inner city and providing employment opportunities. Their annual Dublin City Social Enterprise Awards, in partnership with Dublin City Council, is an inspirational event which demonstrates the vibrancy of the sector.

In relation to the specific question, I would advise ICE to seek guidance from their Local Development Company (LDC) and Local Enterprise office (LEO) as to the range of supports, including capital development funding, available.

My Department continues to provide capital supports to social enterprise through the annual €2.3m Dormant Accounts funded Social Enterprise Measure, and I plan to make further announcements on new capital supports in the near future in line with policy commitments. Information about all new schemes will be made available on my Department's website, and will be circulated widely amongst social enterprise stakeholders, networks and support organisations, including Inner City Enterprise.

In 2021, the measure supported 247 social enterprises through the €1m Social Enterprise Capital Grants Scheme, and the €680k Awareness Raising Initiative for Social Enterprise (ARISE) which supported 50 projects. I also provided €400k funding for a pilot Start-up Scheme for Social Enterprise which supported 25 early stage social enterprises, and €160k funding to the Covid-19 Social Enterprise Regeneration Programme, which is providing training and mentoring in strategic planning and income diversification.

My Department also provides significant supports to social enterprise through a number of other programmes including the Community Services Programme (CSP), Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and LEADER.

Apart from funding, my Department also supports the development of social enterprises in other important ways such as providing training and mentoring, increasing awareness of social enterprise, cross Government and international engagement, supporting higher level research and providing guidance into issues such as legal forms for social enterprise.

### Community Development Projects

977. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the Community Centres Investment Fund will be launched; the type of projects that will be eligible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18235/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I recently announced the Community Centres Investment Fund. This new capital fund, with a budget of €15m, will support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and refurbishment of existing Community Centres. This is an investment in both rural and urban communities across the country.

The fund will assist with projects such as:

- Energy retrofitting projects that reduce an organisation's carbon footprint;
- Works to address safety concerns, including as a result of fire safety audits;
- Works to improve disability access;
- Works to improve communal facilities such as kitchen and toilet facilities; and
- Essential maintenance.

Funding will be available under 3 Strands, with grants of between €10k and €300k available:

- **Strand 1:** Small scale projects/improvements to facilities €10,000 - €25,000.
- **Strand 2:** Larger scale projects - €25,001 to €100,000.
- **Strand 3:** Major projects. €100,001 to €300,000.

I expect the fund to be open to applications shortly. Guidelines and application forms will be available on my Department's website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd).

### **Community Development Projects**

978. **Deputy Alan Dillon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if more details on the empowering communities fund will be provided; the areas that are likely to be eligible for funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18236/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** Funding of €2 million was secured to design and implement a new Empowering Communities Programme (ECP) in 2022 aimed at specifically targeting area-based deprivation through a community development approach.

This initiative, in part, stems from a Programme for Government commitment to expand the Dublin North East Inner City model and will be informed by other initiatives such as the Community Development Pilot Programme, the Place-Based Leadership initiative and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme which operates across the country.

The ECP will focus on augmenting the community development efforts within a number of small geographic areas identified as experiencing particular disadvantage. The ECP is currently in development and the detail, including on the areas selected, has not yet been finalised. Further information will be shared once it is available.

### **Departmental Funding**

979. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the full extent of funding allocated to various groups throughout the country under the schemes available through her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18354/22]

980. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which she has received requests for funding from various community-based organisations throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18355/22]

982. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which she and her Department have carried out an examination in respect of urban and or rural areas of social or economic areas of deprivation with a view to meeting the obvious concerns; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18357/22]

984. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which all of the regions have been the subject matter of examination by her Department with a view to addressing issues of deprivation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18359/22]

991. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which her Department continues to examine both urban and rural settings with a view to identifying shortcomings she and her Department may be able to assist with; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18366/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 979, 980, 982, 984 and 991 together.

A vital part of my Department's mission is to support the creation of vibrant and sustainable communities across this country.

The Department provides strategic interventions, funding programmes and supports which target and address issues of social and or economic deprivation in rural and urban communities throughout the country.

In the 2022 Revised Estimates, my Department was allocated €378 million. This funding ensures that we are in a position to further assist communities seeking funding and other supports for important local activities and projects.

The Programme for Government places a strong emphasis on balanced regional development through a range of measures. The Department supports this commitment through targeted investment that supports rural regeneration, facilitates new working opportunities and fosters regional enterprise growth.

We will continue to invest in, and support, communities across the country - through the various schemes such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, LEADER Programme, Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, Local Improvement Scheme, CLÁR Programme, Islands Capital Programme, Community Enhancement Programme, Connected Hubs initiative, Libraries Investment Capital funding, PEACE IV Programme and the PEACE PLUS Programme.

The supports provided by my Department to assist vulnerable communities are more important than ever. Details of funding allocations under specific schemes provided by my Department are available online at [www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-rural-and-community-development/](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-rural-and-community-development/)

Funding of €2 million was secured to design and implement a new Empowering Communities Programme (ECP) in 2022 aimed at specifically targeting area-based deprivation through a community development approach. This initiative, in part, stems from a Programme for Government commitment to expand the Dublin North East Inner City model and will be informed by other initiatives such as the Community Development Pilot Programme, the Place-Based Leadership initiative and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme which operates across the country.

The ECP will focus on augmenting the community development efforts within a number of small geographic areas identified as experiencing particular disadvantage. The ECP is currently at a very early stage of development and the detail, including on the areas selected, has not yet been finalised. Further information will be shared once it is available.

My Department is also responsible for a number of important policies, including the National Policy on Social Enterprise, and Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities which is a 5 Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector 2019-2024. In March 2021 I launched Our Rural Future, a new whole-of-Government rural development policy. The policy which was underpinned by broad consultation, is an ambitious blueprint for the social and economic development of rural Ireland over the next five years. It has the potential to have a transformative effect on rural communities and positive impacts on the lives of people living and working in rural areas. The policy is supported by 150 commitments across Government, which will address the challenges facing communities and deliver new opportunities for people living in rural areas.

All my Department's policies are underpinned by extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including rural and urban stakeholder groups, community groups, young peo-

ple, Government Departments and State Agencies.

This engagement process provides important insights into issues impacting on rural and urban communities and in identifying areas for response which are relevant to the work of my Department. Ongoing dialogue is maintained with rural and urban stakeholders in order to identify and respond to shortcomings and issues impacting on individuals and communities.

I will also continue to collaborate with my Government colleagues and will monitor the issues which impact our urban and rural communities in order to respond to emerging needs.

### Community Development Projects

981. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which she expects to be in a position to further advance the cause of community development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18356/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** In 2019, my Department published *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities - A five year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024*. This Strategy is important in seeking to strengthen the community development, local development and community and voluntary sectors generally. The strategy reaffirms the Government's commitment to supporting the sector, whilst also recognising the reality of finite resources and the need to ensure that available resources are focused on providing effective services.

Co-produced by Government and the Community and Voluntary Sector, the Strategy sets out 11 high-level objectives and associated actions which will empower communities, their representative organisations, and the community and voluntary sector, to inform and shape responses to their needs.

In furtherance of the strategy objectives and the Programme for Government commitment, last year I was pleased to announce the introduction of a €1 million pilot Community Development Programme, promoting an autonomous approach to community work with marginalised communities. It is expected the programme will continue for three years.

During 2022, my Department will continue to deliver a wide range of measures to support community development as a task, a process and a profession, to grow sustainably and to address emerging needs.

This will include, amongst other work, continued implementation of the measures set out in the five year strategy; collaboration with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to equip Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with the required knowledge and skills for the preparation of their Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP); and funding to directly support community development activities – including the support of pilot community development projects.

In January of this year, I attended the induction day of a Place-Based Leadership Development Programme in Darndale. Funded by my Department, this important Programme is being delivered in Darndale and Drogheda, following recommendations in the Nolan and Geiran reports. The Programme is an investment in local leaders to help them address the challenges experienced in those areas.

The Place-Based Leadership Development programme will strengthen the capacity of those



already working hard to improve the quality of community life in Darndale and Drogheda. The programme will encourage and facilitate collaboration that will positively impact the culture of the area. It will build the capacity of new community leaders to empower communities to address the issues they face. This approach will make a lasting impact and bring forward the solutions required.

Place Based Leadership will open up new perspectives and possibilities and provide opportunities for mutual learning that can be built upon and expanded to other communities in Ireland going forward.

My Department has committed to providing financial support to the All Ireland Endorsement Body (AIEB) for the three year period 2020 – 2022 inclusive. AIEB was established in 2010 as an all island body to support and promote quality community work/community development and ensure standards and quality in practice. It seeks to support and promote community development education and training and ensure quality and standards in practice by the:

- Development and delivery of endorsement frameworks for community work qualifications, procedures, and processes for community work education providers.

- Development of standards and support for education and training at all levels.

- Development and maintenance of standards for practitioners, community work organisations, for programmes and policy makers.

- Development and maintenance of appropriate links and exchanges with national and international quality assurance and educational bodies.

I am confident that the funding supports and policies provided by my Department are delivering, and will continue to deliver, tangible benefits for both urban and rural communities, supporting economic development, and enabling the local and community development sectors to continue to provide valuable much needed services and supports to all communities throughout the country.

*Question No. 982 answered with Question No. 979.*

### **Community Development Projects**

983. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which she and her Department continue to have dialogue with urban or rural-based groups with a view to identifying deprivation or concerns which may need her intervention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18358/22]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Joe O'Brien):** My Department is in ongoing contact with local and community groups through the local structures such as Public Participation Network (PPN). The focus of the PPN is to empower and assist groups to participate in local decision making. This facilitates a two way flow of information between the Local Authority and community groups. We also remain in close contact with bodies that represent the local development and community and voluntary sectors.

My Department has a number of programmes that focus on improving the lives of people experiencing disadvantage, for example the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme or SICAP.

SICAP is our country's primary social inclusion intervention. It aims to reduce poverty and

promote social inclusion and equality. It is delivered in both rural and urban areas by Local Development Companies (LDCs) who work with the most disadvantaged and the hardest to reach in communities.

To ensure that funding is adequately targeted, the HP Pobal Deprivation Index is used which identifies the relative levels of affluence or disadvantage across geographic areas, using data from the national census.

*Question No. 984 answered with Question No. 979.*

### **Rural Schemes**

985. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which Leader funding continues to be made available through her Department and or local authorities with a view to addressing salient issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18360/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The LEADER programme is a key intervention implemented by my Department, which will help to underpin the Government's rural development goals as outlined in Our Rural Future.

The LEADER programme is delivered through 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) across rural Ireland. A feature of the LEADER programme is that it is based on a community-led, bottom-up approach to rural development.

The programme includes specific funding themes to support rural economic development, enterprise development and job creation, social inclusion, and rural environment. Community groups and rural-based businesses can apply for funding under these themes. The website of the National Rural Network contains case studies of how LEADER has benefited local communities and businesses. Over 5,000 projects have been approved for in excess of €215 million under these themes since the 2014-2020 LEADER programme became operational.

In line with a commitment in Our Rural Future, I launched the Transitional LEADER Programme which came into effect from 1 April 2021 and will run to the end of 2022. A total of €70 million is being made available over this programming period. €65 million of this budget is available to Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver the programme and approve projects at local level. This allocation covers both core project expenditure and the administration and animation costs of the LAGs.

The Transitional Programme will ensure that LEADER will continue to support and revitalise our communities and make them sustainable and desirable places in which to live and work through co-ordinated approaches that build on the economic strengths and infrastructure of rural areas.

An indicative budget of €180 million is allocated for the LEADER programme for the period 2023-2027. With the €70 million already provided for 2021 and 2022 under the Transitional LEADER Programme, a total of €250 million will be made available for the 2021 - 2027 period, thus maintaining the level of funding provided for the 2014-2020 programming period.

Preparations for the design and delivery of the next LEADER programme from 2023-2027 are underway and my officials are also engaging with stakeholders in this regard. The ongoing engagement and consultation combined with the funding allocation ensures that the LEADER programme from 2023 will continue to support and further develop our rural communities and

businesses.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

986. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if in the pursuit of relocated working conditions, it has been found possible to provide the necessary level of IT including broadband to the various hubs throughout the country in order to ensure insofar as is possible a working environment for those who may find it possible to work from an alternative location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18361/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** *Our Rural Future*, Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, recognises the potential of remote working hubs as key economic assets for our rural towns and villages. Notwithstanding the clear benefits to individuals and families in terms of quality of life indicators, remote working from hubs will also support local economies, reduce carbon emissions and may help to ameliorate the depopulation of certain areas.

Last May I launched the National Connected Hubs network together with the connected-hubs.ie platform. The platform offers a suite of booking and hub management applications to members of the Network. There are currently 223 hubs live on the platform, with this number increasing on an ongoing basis.

My Department continues to fund the establishment and development of remote working hubs under a number of funding streams, including funding 28 projects related to remote working under the 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme which I announced recently.

In February, I also launched the 2022 Connected Hubs Call, a €5 million funding stream to further support remote working facilities (including BCPs) throughout the country and add further capacity to the National Hub Network. My officials are currently evaluating the applications submitted and I expect to announce the successful applicants in the next few weeks.

Details of all these schemes and successful applications are available at [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie).

As co-chair, with Minister of State Smyth, of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, I have a role in driving forward efforts to improve connectivity across the country. Furthermore, delivery of the National Broadband Plan is a key deliverable of *Our Rural Future* and I continue to offer our full support for that vitally important project.

### **Community Development Projects**

987. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which first funding allocations are anticipated from the new community centres investment fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18362/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I recently announced details of a new Community Centres Investment Fund. This capital fund, with a budget of €15m, is to support community groups, particularly in disadvantaged areas, with the upgrade and refurbishment of existing Community Centres. This is an investment in both rural and urban communities across the country. The fund will assist with projects such as:

- Energy retrofitting projects that reduce an organisation's carbon footprint;

- Works to address safety concerns, including as a result of fire safety audits;
- Works to improve disability access;
- Works to improve communal facilities such as kitchen and toilet facilities; and
- Essential maintenance.

I expect applications to open shortly. Guidelines and application forms will be available on my Department's website. When the assessment of applications is complete later in the year, allocations will be made from the Fund, details of which will be also made available on the Department's website.

### Departmental Schemes

988. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which she can encourage the use of the local improvement scheme by various local authorities in which suitable schemes are proposed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18363/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As part of *Our Rural Future*, the Government is committed to ensuring that the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is funded into the future. The LIS supports the improvement of rural roads and laneways that are not normally maintained by local authorities. The scheme makes an important contribution to connectivity in rural Ireland.

The scheme was reintroduced in 2017 following a number of years with no dedicated funding. Since then, my Department has allocated €80 million towards improvement works on over 3,000 non-public roads and lanes. These works have benefited over 13,300 landowners and residents in these rural areas.

The Local Improvement Scheme is demand-led, is typically over subscribed at Local Authority level and the available budget is fully utilised each year.

I launched the 2021 scheme with an initial budget of €10.5 million. I sourced additional funding last year from savings within my Department's vote, effectively doubling investment to bring the total for 2021 to €21 million.

I was pleased, as part of Budget 2022, to announce an increase in the base funding for LIS from €10.5 million to €11 million this year. I have now announced the details of this year's scheme, including the details of the individual allocations to each county this year.

### Departmental Data

989. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications for local improvement schemes from each local authority received by the appropriate Department in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18364/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As part of *Our Rural Future*, the Government is committed to ensuring that the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is funded into the future. The LIS supports the improvement of rural roads and

laneways that are not normally maintained by local authorities. The scheme makes an important contribution to connectivity in rural Ireland.

The scheme was reintroduced in 2017 following a number of years with no dedicated funding. Since then, my Department has allocated €80 million towards improvement works on over 3,000 non-public roads and lanes. These works have benefited over 13,300 landowners and residents in these rural areas.

I launched the 2021 scheme with an initial budget of €10.5 million. I sourced additional funding last year from savings within my Department's vote, effectively doubling investment to bring the total for 2021 to €21 million.

I was pleased, as part of Budget 2022, to announce an increase in the base funding for LIS from €10.5 million to €11 million this year. I have now announced the details of this year's scheme, including the details of the individual allocations to each county this year.

Applications under the scheme are submitted to the relevant Local Authority and are not received directly by my Department. The determination of eligibility and the prioritisation of LIS applications is a matter for each relevant Local Authority based on their funding allocation. Each year, the Local Authority informs my Department of the roads which it has selected for improvements works under the scheme. There were 660 such LIS projects delivered under the 2021 scheme.

### **Departmental Schemes**

990. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which various recreational walk schemes throughout the country continue to be expanded by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18365/22]

**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.

Last September, I announced the 'approval in principle' of 31 new trails to join the Walks Scheme. This fulfills the commitment in the Programme for Government and Our Rural Future to double the number of trails on the Scheme to 80 trails. These trails are being formally brought onto the scheme by Local Development Companies who deliver the Walks Scheme locally and who are developing work plans for each of the individual landholders involved. A full list of the trails are available on my Departments website at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd).

Once the new trails are fully operational under the Scheme, I will examine the potential for the further expansion of the Scheme. An expression of interest process will be opened for new trails in advance of any further expansion of the scheme.

*Question No. 991 answered with Question No. 979.*

### **Flexible Work Practices**

992. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which she and her Department continue to strive for an even spread of de-

velopment, job locations and digital hubs throughout the country in such a way as to ensure the availability of an office setting in areas not previously sufficiently provided for through digital developments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18367/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** *Our Rural Future*, Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, places a central importance on the objective of achieving balanced regional and rural development and maximising economic growth and development in all parts of the country. The Policy contains a wide range of actions across Government which will support this aim. I recently published the first Progress Report for Our Rural Future, which shows the considerable progress that has been made under the Policy to date.

In relation to the specific issue of hubs as referenced by the Deputy, Our Rural Future recognises the potential of remote working hubs as key economic assets for our rural towns and villages. Notwithstanding the clear benefits to individuals and families in terms of quality of life indicators, remote working from hubs will also support local economies, reduce carbon emissions and may arrest or reverse the depopulation of certain areas.

Last May I launched the National Connected Hubs network together with the connected-hubs.ie platform. The platform offers a suite of booking and hub management applications to members of the Network, both hub managers and remote workers. There are currently 223 hubs live on the platform, with this number increasing on an ongoing basis.

Hubs in the National Network may be found in villages, towns and cities across the country and, when the Network is complete, I expect more than 400 hubs to be available via the shared online platform. The location and details of all hubs in the National Hub Network may be found at [www.connectedhubs.ie](http://www.connectedhubs.ie)

In parallel with the National Hubs Network project, my department is also establishing 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) in rural and isolated areas, including a number of off-shore islands. BCPs are publicly accessible facilities that will make onsite internet-enabled services available to their local communities, including remote work and study. The locations of all BCPs, live and planned, may be found at [www.myconnectedcommunity.ie](http://www.myconnectedcommunity.ie)

My Department continues to fund the establishment and development of remote working hubs under a number of funding streams, including funding of €18.5m under the 2021 Town and Village Renewal Scheme. Successful projects included 28 remote working proposals.

Furthermore, in February I launched the 2022 Connected Hubs Call, a €5 million funding stream to further support remote working facilities (including BCPs) throughout the country and add further capacity to the National Hub Network. My officials are currently evaluating the applications submitted and I expect to announce the successful applicants in the next few weeks.

In short, my Department has for the last number of years made a determined effort to ensure, in so far as is reasonably possible, that those wishing to work from a remote or co-working space has the opportunity to do so. The investment in and development of this remote working infrastructure will have tangible impact on the delivery of more balanced regional and rural development.

### Departmental Contracts

993. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development

the cost of consultants to her Department in 2020, 2021 and to date in 2022; and if she will provide an outline of the role of each. [18894/22]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The information requested by the Deputy, on cost of consultants, is laid out in the tables below, by year.

2020	Cost	Outline of role
Review of the Community Services Programme - Indecon	€37,473.99 (This final payment was paid on 27/01/2020, total cost of the Review was €112,422)	Following transfer of responsibility for the Community Services Programme (CSP) from then DEASP to DRCD, it was decided to review the programme to ensure that it more closely aligns with the Department's and Government policy and is better placed to meet community needs. Indecon International Economic Consultants undertook the review of the CSP on behalf of the Department
Comm-IT (South Dublin Volunteer Centre)	€30,000	Public Participation Network database infrastructure (setup, training and technical support services)
Venture International	€15,010	Review of REDZ Scheme which commenced in 2020 and was completed in 2021.
Space Engagers	€6,440	2nd part of fee for Report on the Town Centre Living Initiative Pilot scheme. Total cost of report: €12,880
Acrux Consulting	€12,983.68	External workplace investigation of confidential HR staff case.
Maynooth University	€10,125.05 first payment (The total cost of the review was €20,086, the second payment issued in January 2021)	CLÁR Programme Review - Research Contract Agreement with Maynooth University- to undertake the review of the CLÁR Programme area designations.
MCA Consulting Services Ltd	€27,446.97	Hire of Footfall Monitoring Devices and Data Collection and Report
RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd	€45,260.67	Environmental Assessment training for local authority staff related to telecoms infrastructure. Includes guidance document, training and final report.
Future Analytics	€4,918.65	Digilabs Feasibility Study for the AEC region
Korec (trading as Precise Construction)	€13,085.90	Training for local authority staff in the use of Trimble devices (to map underground telecoms infrastructure)
Social Justice Ireland	€10,000.00	PPN Annual Report 2020 compilation

Questions - Written Answers

2020	Cost	Outline of role
Stephen Rourke	€9,348	Public participation Networks' Secretariat Network – facilitation (establishing network, chairing meetings and developing procedures)
Social Justice Ireland	€21,520	PPN training course
Doonane Construction Services Ltd	€1,476	Cost report on works completed on LEADER Project Claim. (Confidential - not published)
2021	Cost	Outline of role
Review of the Walks Scheme	€66,545	Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) were engaged to undertake an external review of the Walks Scheme to examine the delivery and strategic development of the Scheme.
Review of the Landscape of Philanthropy in Ireland - Indecon	€78,554	The Department of Rural and Community Development identified the development of a National Philanthropy Strategy as part of Goal 4 of the DRCD Statement of Strategy 2021-2023. To assist the development of the proposed National Philanthropy Strategy, Indecon was appointed by the Department to conduct an independent overview examination of the landscape of philanthropic giving in Ireland.
Maynooth University	€9,960.42 (final payment)	CLÁR Programme Review - Research Contract Agreement with Maynooth University. In 2020 the Department engaged NUI Maynooth to undertake a review of the CLÁR Programme area designations.
Mazars	€71,155.50	Structural Review of Public Participation Networks
Venture International	€35,354	Review of REDZ scheme commenced in 2020 and was completed in 2021. Total cost of review was €50,364
MCA Consulting Services Ltd	€26,548.29	Hire of Footfall Monitoring Devices and Data Collection and Report
Islands Transport: Reinstating the PSO status for the air service to the Aran Islands - North Point Aviation Services	€5,842.63	The Department of Rural and Community Development subsidises air, cargo and ferry services to the off-shore Islands. These services provide reliable, affordable year round mainland connectivity for the Island communities. The air service to the Aran Islands is one such service. The PSO status for this route lapsed in 2019 and the Department has engaged professional aviation consultants, Northpoint Aviation Services, in drafting a updated tender document for the new PSO contract. The tender document was published and the new contract will come into effect in June 2022.
Clearwave	€2,890.50	Technical feasibility survey for the Airband TVWS project
Social Justice Ireland	€10,000	PPN Annual Report 2021
Social Justice Ireland	€60,600	PPN training course



2020	Cost	Outline of role
Comm-IT (South Dublin Volunteer Cen- tre)	€30,000	Public Participation Network database infrastructure (setup, training and technical support services)
Stephen Rourke	€14,109	Public Participation Networks' Secretariat Network – facilitation (establishing network, chairing meetings and developing procedures)
2022	Cost	Outline of role
Grant Thornton	€103,960.00 (estimate)	Work started in early January 2022 to support DRCD on the drafting of its new People Strategy and develop- ing and rolling out of a new Leadership programme in DRCD
MCA Consult- ing Services Ltd	€6,590.19	Hire of Footfall Monitoring Devices and Data Collec- tion and Report
Curran Futures	€22,140	Financial expertise for the Western Investment Fund (WIF) element of the Periodic Critical Review (of the Western Development Commission).
Baseline Data Gathering Ex- ercise of Social Enterprise in Ireland.	€101,950	A lack of data relating to social enterprise has impeded efforts to develop policy for the sector and to support and raise awareness of social enterprise in Ireland. The first National Social Enterprise Policy was published in 2019. One of its key actions is to improve data collec- tion relating to the extent of social enterprise in Ireland and the areas in which it operates. Following a rigor- ous procurement process, a consortium led by Amárach Research with Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) and the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN), were awarded the contract by the Department. Following this project we expect to be in a much better position to develop a successor social enterprise policy, and to support the sector with a strong evidence base.
Venture Interna- tional Limited	€21,817	Independent Review of LEADER Delivery Models for the 2014-2020 LEADER ProgrammeThe overall aim of the review exercise is to gauge the effectiveness of the 2014-2020 LEADER programme and explore how the delivery mechanisms for LEADER 2023-2027 programme could be implemented, building upon the partnership approach adopted in the 2014-2020 pro- gramme, while having regard to the PfG Commitments and the locally led partnership approach, together with EU regulatory requirements

