

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN ROGHCHOISTE UM LEANAÍ AGUS GNÓTHAÍ ÓIGE

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

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*Dé Céadaoin, 6 Márta 2019*

*Wednesday, 6 March 2019*

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The Select Committee met at 4.30 p.m.

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### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Lisa Chambers,	Deputy Sean Sherlock,
Deputy Denise Mitchell,	Deputy Katherine Zappone (Minister for Children and Youth Affairs).
Deputy Tom Neville,	
Deputy Anne Rabbitte,	

DEPUTY ALAN FARRELL IN THE CHAIR

## Estimates for Public Service 2019

### Vote 40 - Children and Youth Affairs (Revised)

**Chairman:** I welcome members and viewers who may be watching the proceedings on Oireachtas TV.

On 19 December 2018 the Dáil ordered that the Revised Estimate for Vote 40 - Children and Youth Affairs be referred to the select committee for consideration. After its consideration of the Revised Estimate, the committee will report back to the Dáil. I welcome the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Deputy Zappone, and her officials. I thank her for coming before the committee.

The proposed format is that the committee deal with the Vote on a programme by programme basis. The Minister will give an overview of the Revised Estimate, outlining pressures likely to impact on her Department's expenditure in 2019. The floor will then be opened to members of the committee to ask questions. I ask them to put their specific questions by programme in order to make progress in an orderly and efficient manner.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I remind all attendees to switch off their mobile phones and move them away from microphones as they will interfere with the quality of the recording and broadcast of the proceedings.

Members received a briefing document on the Revised Estimate in advance of the meeting. I invite the Minister to make her opening statement.

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am pleased to discuss my Department's Revised Estimate for 2019 which provides for a taxpayers' investment of €1.5 billion, which represents an increase of just under €107 million, or 8%, on the allocation for 2018, following the Supplementary Estimate in December. As a result, my Department will spend €1.478 billion in current expenditure and €32 million in capital expenditure during 2019. Approximately half of the Vote is targeted towards public services that protect children and provide for their welfare. Another significant portion is provided to continue our journey to build an accessible, affordable and high quality early learning and care system.

In addition to these areas, my Department's Revised Estimate for 2019 contains a provision of almost €63.6 million for youth services. These resources will fund youth services throughout the country, including services for those at risk of disadvantage, and help to address some of the remaining challenges faced by LGBTI+ young people. The allocation for youth services represents an increase in funding of €3.4 million, or just under 6%, on the allocation for 2018.

Other key items of expenditure include €26 million to meet the costs of the Irish Youth Justice Service, including the operational costs of the Oberstown Children Detention Campus; €19 million to meet the operational costs of my Department; €9.5 million for prevention and early intervention programmes which now include the area-based childhood programme and the prevention, partnership and family support programme; €7 million for the intervention programme

for children and young people; €5 million for the Adoption Authority of Ireland; €4 million for the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes; and just under €3 million for the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. The prevention and early intervention programmes are now fully funded by my Department following the completion of the welcome contributions made by Atlantic Philanthropies in previous years.

The select committee will be aware that the single biggest item of expenditure in my Department's Vote is the budget of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I am pleased to confirm that Tusla will receive additional funding of €31 million in 2019, which will bring its overall allocation to €785 million, which represents an increase of 4% on the allocation for 2018. When Tusla was transferred out of the HSE in 2014 to become a statutory agency in its own right, its budget allocation was €609 million. In the five years since its establishment funding has been increased by 29% to its 2019 level of €785 million. In addition, I am making a further €3 million available to it from my Department during 2019 to fund specific developments in the provision of support for family resource centres and to deal with domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. This level of investment underlines my commitment to ensuring Tusla is properly resourced to meet its mission statement in protecting and supporting the most vulnerable children, young people and families. With this level of investment, there is a strong onus on it to deliver on its ambitious business plan for 2019. I will work closely with the new chairperson of Tusla, the interim CEO and his management team to achieve the outcomes we all want to see from this year's investment.

On early learning and care services, the international evidence is clear that investment in children during their early years results in long-term gains for them, their families, the economy and society in general. I am particularly proud of the increased resources being made available in 2019 for childcare services which we now call early learning and care services. I am on record as acknowledging that the radical transformation we want to see in the sector cannot be achieved in one, two or even three budgets. I have always said it will take time to correct decades of under-investment. As members of the committee will recall, I received additional funding in 2018 for childcare services by way of a Supplementary Estimate which brought funding levels to more than €500 million for the first time. The additional €59 million to be provided in 2019 brings funding for early learning and care services to just under €575 million. Children, parents and providers are all set to benefit.

The increased resources will allow me to continue to meet the growing demand for universal and targeted supports and enable me to widen the thresholds under the new affordable childcare scheme that I will introduce later this year. Under the scheme's original policy proposals, income-based subsidies would have been available to all families with a net annual income of up to €47,500. This threshold will now increase by 26% to cover all families with a net annual income of up to €60,000. The scheme's lower income thresholds have also been adjusted, meaning that maximum subsidy rates will be paid to all families with a net annual income of up to €26,000, whereas the previous proposed threshold stood at €22,700. The increased thresholds will mean that thousands of more families will benefit from the scheme once it is launched at the end of the year and see the cost of early learning and care services tangibly reduce, resulting in a real impact.

I am planning the phased regulation of school-age childcare services and have set aside an additional €450,000 for the Tusla early years inspectorate to enable it to begin to register services with effect from 18 February. This will enable school-age childcare services to access the affordable childcare scheme, help to support children's safety and well-being and assist in the

provision of new school-age childcare places, thus improving parental choice and supporting female labour market activation. Our investment in early learning and care services will help to lay the ground for the exciting opportunities presented by the recently published First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families. First 5 will provide every child with a good, strong and equal start and represents a whole-of-government approach, with the objective of streamlining and improving parenting supports provided by a range of Departments and State agencies.

I am pursuing some important legislation as a matter of priority. I recently announced my intention to table some important amendments to the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 which was passed on Second Stage in the Seanad some time ago. We are also finalising the text of a Bill to amend the Children Act 2001 that will form the basis for major reform of the guardian *ad litem* system. I know that the select committee shares my ambition to have these important Bills enacted as soon as possible.

The significant increase in resources in my Department's Vote for 2019 brings great opportunities for the targeted development and improvement of services. I will work closely with Tusla, the early learning and care sector, my Department and all stakeholders across the wide range of services provided to achieve the best possible outcomes and value for money we can achieve. We have made good progress in recent years and I am determined to press ahead with the agenda I have set out.

**Chairman:** I thank the Minister for her opening statement. It is positive when any departmental budget increases year on year is positive. I am sure members will have a number of questions about the various expenditure streams. I propose that we proceed in the way I outlined by approaching each programme separately. We will start with programme A - children and family support programmes.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I hope the Chairman will forgive me if my question does not relate directly to the subhead. The additional increase of 4%, giving a total net increase of 8%, is welcome. My question relates to the sanctioning by Tusla of privately provided services for families such as occupational or speech and language therapy. My understanding is Tusla has put in place a new central procurement process for the provision of these services and that it is managed in Dublin. Will the Minister clarify whether the timeline in the provision of these services and being paid for them is short? I have heard of one case and I am trying to determine whether it is systematic where services have been provided for a family but Tusla is returning to court to seek a determination on whether the services should continue. Not only are there legal costs involved, there is also a delay in making payments for the supply of services such as occupational and speech and language therapy. There is the issue of whether the tendering and procurement process has become overly centralised, leading to people and families living in the regions - I refer to Cork in this instance - being affected by a new structure that has resulted in services not being provided for children. On the subhead, the issue concerns the cost of procurement and the provision of services, the delay in paying the service providers and the fact that Tusla is seeking a court direction on a case by case basis on the continuity of services such as occupational and speech and language therapy. Is the case to which I refer systematic? What are the consequences for service provision for individual children? I seek an insight from the Minister in respect of the legal costs that accrue to Tusla for family services and the family support programme, whether services are being provided in a timely fashion, whether payment to those providing the services is processed efficiently, whether the added legal layer is eating into the Department's overall budget and the necessity of seeking court direction in certain

cases as that aspect is confusing to me. I seek an insight from the Minister and an understanding of the process.

**Chairman:** The issues raised by the Deputy fall under subhead A.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I thank the Deputy. There are at least two layers to his question and he should correct me if I am not being accurate. The first layer regards the question of the costs and the process associated with Tusla possibly challenging certain services being delivered to individual families and going to court in that regard. Is that what the Deputy is asking?

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I must be very careful about the language I use. If I refer to seeking court direction, whether one interprets that as challenging-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Deputy is referring to a court determining whether a family ought to be provided with certain services.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I am referring to a court determining the continuity of those services. A child may have access to certain services but Tusla may intervene and decide to seek a direction from a court in that regard. Such court hearings would involve solicitors' fees having to be paid by both sides. I am seeking to determine whether Tusla is going to court on a case-by-case basis to determine the continuity of services such as the occupational therapy and speech and language therapy interventions I mentioned. If it is, that poses a massive question. I am giving voice to a family of which I am aware. I seek clarity as to whether that is happening in the case of one family or on a systematic basis. I realise the Minister may not be able to provide the answer today but it is something that needs to be clarified.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** On the first layer of the Deputy's question, in some cases the courts require sight of involvement in decisions of that nature. If it is acceptable to the Deputy, I will make inquiries with Tusla on the matters he has raised, particularly in regard to timelines and in terms of individual families.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** Why would-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Is the Deputy referring to a specific case involving a specific family?

**Chairman:** For clarity, are we discussing a service denial?

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I am raising a potential delaying tactic in the provision of a service for a child. I am trying to couch my language but perhaps I ought to be more direct.

**Chairman:** I understand.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I am trying to give the Minister every opportunity to clarify the situation. Allow me to be blunt. If a service is sanctioned for a child but the professional with the requisite skills to provide the service is not paid for that in a timely manner because he or she is a private provider, that is a serious issue for the service in general. If Tusla is now seeking court directions, I question the efficacy of its doing so in respect of interventions for individual families because that places a massive onus on the taxpayer in terms of the legal costs inherent in that process. It is particularly questionable if it has already been determined from professional advice that the child should benefit from very specific services. There is something wrong here and we need to lift the lid on it and get more transparency. The other issue I raised

regards the reason for Tusla centralising all procurement services.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That is another question.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** Yes. Why is there no local agency to fulfil that need with the requisite professionals who are well able to provide the service?

**Chairman:** I am somewhat in the dark. While I think I know where Deputy Sherlock is going and I accept the points he has made, I suspect he may be referring to a live case. For that reason, the Minister ought to exercise caution in how she answers the first part of the Deputy's question, although not the second.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I appreciate the advice of the Chair and the fact that the Deputy is raising this issue at the committee. He stated this is about a process. My officials and I will need to make inquiries to clarify the process, the decisions made and Tusla's role in these cases. If he will allow us to do that and revert to him-----

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I also raised the issue of cost. That is the reason for this meeting.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** He also raised the issue of cost. Ultimately, if the process in question is reasonable and acceptable in terms of Tusla's statutory role, the cost may be justified. I am not saying that is necessarily the case because I am not clear on exactly what is the process and need to make further inquiries in that regard.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** Why would the Child and Family Agency seek to go to court to determine the continuity of a service?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Deputy is referring to a specific case involving a particular child.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** On the law of averages, if that is being done in the case of one child, it is happening systematically. I am asking whether it is happening systematically. I am trying to shed some light on that.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I have offered to revert to the Deputy with a reply in that regard.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I appreciate that.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Deputy's second question relates to Tusla transitioning to a way of engaging with providers of services through bringing in a commissioning process that was not there before. I acknowledge there may be difficult aspects to that transition period. However, the rationale for moving towards the commissioning process is an effort to work with the diversity of providers in certain areas. Particular questions may arise in the case of regionally-based services or in the context of family resource settings. The Deputy is ready to come back in. Does he wish me to continue? Am I in the right territory in terms of what he is asking?

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** My question is simple: is Tusla centralising procurement services for the provision of occupational therapy and speech and language therapy? Must speech and language therapists now tender to provide services?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** As I understand it, that is not the case for individual speech and language therapists. I may need to check that to provide an accurate reply to the Deputy.



**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** The provision of the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, is an in-house service-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** A commissioning process usually relates to organisations or-----

**Chairman:** The Minister's official is writing frantically. The Deputy will receive an answer in due course. We should move on to the next question.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** To be clear, CAMHS is an in-house service with professional staff. From time to time or systematically - again, that must be clarified - it will procure services, but the procurement process seems to be centralised in Dublin. I seek enlightenment from the Minister as to what is the process. If it impacts on the delivery of services to the child, we need closer scrutiny of that and what exactly is the service. If the Minister does not have time to come back to me today on that, I am happy to engage with her or her officials at some future date.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I appreciate the Deputy's questions. I was trying to describe the transition to a new way of doing that. The Deputy is raising more questions in the same territory. What might be most useful would be for Tusla to present to the committee on its general approach to commissioning. The Deputy could raise these questions in that context. I am happy to revert directly to the Deputy following consultation with Tusla. There are lots of dimensions to the question the Deputy is asking and it is not clear to me. That is why I asked the Deputy if he was asking about individual therapists and whether a national agency should-----

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I thought I was clear about that. It comes back to cost. If one is talking about a cost reduction or a cost efficiency in the provision of services and if one is tendering for the provision of services in Cork through a process carried out in Dublin, I am modest enough to say that I do not understand the process. I am not afraid to ask a seemingly stupid question. It is unclear to me whether there is a centralised tendering process. If that is the case, does that have an impact on the provision of services? Does every single provider that is not a statutory provider like CAMHS, for instance, have to tender for the services it provides?

**Chairman:** It would be very helpful to the committee if the Department could issue a note on procurement in that area through the secretariat. It would be very helpful in providing clarity.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I appreciate the Minister's response on bringing Tusla before the committee, but I am asking the Department and the Minister-----

**Chairman:** Indeed, and the Deputy is entitled to a response-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** We can do both or one or the other. There is a little questioning even here.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** The Minister will correct me if I am wrong. Am I wrong? Am I misinterpreting the system? The Minister will tell me if I am.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It is not my understanding that there is a national approach to the tendering or commissioning process for services in Cork. I have not heard of that approach before. That is not to say that it does not happen for certain types of services. What I am saying is-----

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** The Minister needs to be clear with us on whether this happens or not.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I know that. I have just said that this is not my understanding. I have also said-----

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** The question is coming from a genuine place. I raise it because of issues with services that I encounter on the ground. That is why I am asking. I am couching my language. I know I am repeating myself. I do not understand the process, and if somebody could tell me definitively whether there is local autonomy on the provision of services like occupational therapy and speech and language therapy or whether people have to go through procurement-----

**Chairman:** That question has been asked.

**Deputy Sean Sherlock:** I have not had a sufficient answer to that question.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** As the Deputy has said, we will come back to it. There are two very different processes here. Commissioning is carried out for wider services, not for each individual. It also sounds as though the Deputy has an individual query.

**Chairman:** I call on Deputy Mitchell. We are addressing programme A.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** I want to ask the Minister a few questions. I hope I am on the right heading, because I am getting a bit confused.

**Chairman:** I will help the Deputy out.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** There is an increase of €17 million in capital funding for Tusla. Could the Minister outline where this funding is going? I also want to ask about the further €3 million made available to Tusla for the family resource centre programme and for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services. Does the Minister have plans to increase the number of refuge places? Are we looking to increase the target beyond the 160 places we have, considering that the Council of Europe has been quite damning towards Ireland, saying we have far fewer refuge places than would be adequate?

**Chairman:** To clarify, capital spending has been increased to €17 million, not by €17 million. It is actually an increase of just over €3 million.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** Some €3 million is to be allocated to the family resource-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The family resource centre programme accounts for €1.5 million and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services account for a further €1.5 million.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** That is a total of €3 million.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That is the Deputy's second set of questions. Her first questions pertained to the capital programme. In 2019, the capital provision of €17.19 million will be focused on completing the roll-out of the national childcare information system; the roll-out of the first phase of Tusla's ICT strategy; and commencing refurbishments of some front-line service facilities and staff accommodation at a number of locations around the country, several of which I have visited. That will be really welcome in those contexts. There is also a pro-



gramme for some minor capital works. That is the answer to the first question.

On the Deputy's second question, I will address the €1.5 million allocated to the family resource centre programme first. I am working very closely with Tusla to identify the best way to increase the resources of the existing family resource centres with those moneys. I met with Tusla representatives recently to look at its preparations for that and its recommendations on how to do that. Tusla has done a couple of things in that regard. Tusla representatives have visited the existing family resource centres to gather evidence of their needs. Some of those resourcing needs arise from increases in costs just to stand still, such as rent etc. Tusla has also gathered information on the increased costs that would be incurred in developing certain aspects of the family resource centres' work, again according to the evidence of need based on its experience.

Tusla is keen to see the most effective therapeutic supports provided through the family resource centres, as am I. Those are the categories we are examining at present. Tusla will shortly report to me again with an analysis of the costs according to those categories or the resources that are required. We will look across the board, again according to the evidence of need and then will make decisions, hopefully prior to Easter, on what can be offered to the family resource centres. It will not take the form of €10,000 or €50,000 for each one. Our intervention will be based on scale and size as well as their needs. In regard to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services, we are trying to ensure that we are responding appropriately to the Istanbul Convention. One aspect of funding for Tusla has to do with services for children who witness or are impacted by domestic or sexual violence. As the Deputy identified, we are also examining the potential for increasing places or services and the resources this would require. We will analyse the needs of the regions, meet representatives of Tusla and then make decisions on how to use the €1.5 million as soon as possible.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** I thank the Minister for her response. I wish to ask another question about programme A. I left my glasses upstairs, so I ask the committee to bear with me. I refer to the appendix at the back of the document, which outlines the number of open cases with Tusla assessed as needing a social work service. Can the Minister give us a breakdown of this number? Are children who are still waiting to be allocated social workers included in that number? The Minister probably does not have this information to hand but is there a possibility of the committee getting an outline of the type of service referred to here, as well as the number of children who still are waiting for social workers?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The total number of open cases in Tusla assessed as in need of a social work service in 2018 was 24,891. It is expected to be 25,696 in 2019. Is that the specific detail for which the Deputy asked?

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** I appreciate that the Minister does not have all of the information to hand, but if she gave it to us, it would be useful.

**Chairman:** The Minister can provide it through the secretariat.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I will, of course.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** I thank the Minister for her presentation. I pick up on something Deputy Sherlock said. It has to do with legal fees. How much of Tusla's budget is paid out in legal fees? What percentage does it represent annually? While her officials are looking for the information, I will ask another question.

Deputy Mitchell asked about family resource centres. I come from a very good space with family resource centres and compliment the investment in them. Are we seeking to enhance the services provided in family resource centres or expand the centres or are we will invest in staff within them? Some centres have only one or two staff members, whereas technically they need three. Has the Department carried out a review of family resource centres to establish where they work at the optimum level? Is it with two or three staff?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I thank the Deputy for the question and know exactly what she means. She and I have both met the representative bodies for family resource centres. It is particularly because of having listened to them that I have focused investment on existing family resource centres as distinct from adding new ones, as we did last year. The representative bodies and individual family resource centres identified that they there was potentially a need for a full staff member or the equivalent of half a staff member here and there. I was informed that to develop services, centres would like to increase provision for a wider number of children and families. That is why Tusla has gone through a very careful process of meeting those involved in individual family resource centres to see what each centre considers to be necessary in order, first, to stand still having regard to the fact that costs have increased and, second, to meet the additional cost of developing services. We could discuss whether they should move from having one full-time worker to three or from one to one and a half and if that would be a development cost or something required to stand still. That is the granular analysis taking place of family resource centres to determine their individual needs, as distinct from me saying we want to provide money in order that every centre will have the same number of staff.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Is it being done on a region by region basis?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It is being done by meeting those involved in individual family resource centres.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** That is fine. The last time the committee considered the Vote, we discussed historical and retrospective cases with a focus on the setting up of the unit within Tusla. At what stage are we within the unit that is dealing with retrospective cases? Has it been established and is it fully staffed? At what stage of development is it? Has a budget been set aside for it?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I will come back to that question after answering the Deputy's first question on legal costs. In 2018 legal costs were €28.3 million.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Wow. How many firms benefited or does the Minister know?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I do not think I have that information to hand. Certainly, we can get a breakdown of the figure for the Deputy.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Perfect. It is a considerable amount of money.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It is. It includes costs for guardians *ad litem*.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Excluding guardians *ad litem*, how much was paid out in legal fees?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The figure was approximately €7 million for guardians *ad litem*, which leaves approximately €21.3 million.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** It was €21.3 million for various legal cases, leaving aside guard-

ians *ad litem*. When one looks at the pie chart, is there any way to determine to what payments were attributable?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** By the end of 2018, third party counsel fees under the heading of childcare were €599,000. Third party solicitors fees under the same heading were €657,000. The figure for contracted legal services was €11.542 million.

**Chairman:** Can the Minister be more specific about contracted legal services?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** In other words, it is for legal services outside Tusla, not its own internal resources.

**Chairman:** I presume they are tendered for.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Yes. Would the committee like me to continue? I have a sheet that I can provide for it which includes the breakdown.

**Chairman:** That would be helpful.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** My last question was about the historical cases unit.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Deputy was focusing, in particular, on retrospective cases. Work on such cases is ongoing and being monitored by the expert assurance group which was established as a result of HIQA's statutory investigation. I understand the team is working in Dublin north where training is being provided and that the policy will be rolled out nationally. Additional principal social workers will be appointed to regional specialist teams to deal with the backlog of cases, while a revised operational policy to deal with the investigation of allegations under section 3 is due to be signed off on in early March. A national group has been established to ensure consistent implementation of the policy once it is commenced.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** What is the budget for it and how many members are on the team? Just to know the budget would be useful, if the Minister has the information.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I am not sure it is separate. We can come back to the Deputy as I do not know if we have a specific budget line in front of us.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** I thank the Minister.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I appreciate the questions.

**Deputy Tom Neville:** I welcome the movement on the maximum and minimum thresholds. It is movement towards affordable childcare which was raised as a major issue during the last general election campaign. We need to continue that work to develop the economy and facilitate parents who want to go out to work. The first question I would like to ask is related to the recruitment of social workers by Tusla. Will it be done at local level? Are there proposals for it to happen at that level, as opposed to using broader national or central panels?

I hope I am not moving off the point in raising the issue of community childcare services. It has been raised with me in recent months that when community childcare service providers are looking for their subventions, they have to give details of the target commitment for each child set by his or her parents. Throughout the course of the year it may fluctuate. The number of hours a parent originally thought his or her child would spend in the childcare facility might decrease. As a result, the facility's budget decreases. As the service provider tries to react to all

of these situations, there can be knock-on effects in the planning of services for the year. Have solutions been explored by the Minister or the Department? Perhaps there might be a buffer zone to mitigate the fluctuations. A parent may commit to his or her child being in a particular facility for a particular period, but circumstances may change. If parents finish work early, for example, that can have a knock-on effect in the form of fluctuations in the subvention budget. I am not disputing and agree that there is a need to achieve value for money and for transparency and accountability, but we do not want to put community facilities in such a bind that the amount of administrative and forecasting work they have to do renders them unable to do their jobs when there are fluctuations. Have talks taken place and has any thought been given to finding a solution?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I want to be clear on the arena in which the Deputy is raising his question. I know that there are a number of queries and concerns about a particular aspect of the childcare scheme - the need for community service providers under the community childcare subvention scheme to identify the attendance levels of children throughout the year. When they identify whether children are attending for one day, two days or three days, etc., the data are monitored to determine whether they are accurate as time passes. As people know, childcare service providers under the scheme are paid according to the amount of time children spend with the service provider. Is that the area about which the Deputy is speaking?

**Deputy Tom Neville:** Yes. I should mention in the interests of transparency that I am a director in a community childcare service. My decision to raise this matter is in no way linked with that role. I am bringing it up as a general broader issue for the purposes of the committee.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I appreciate that and thank the Deputy. I know that many childcare service providers and public representatives have concerns in that context. The process for the scheme which is one of the most popular involves determining attendance levels and, therefore, the amount per child to be paid in fees to each provider. A snapshot window has been used to identify a period of time of approximately four weeks. The provider is asked to look at each child's attendance during that period. This enables trends to be determined and recorded on the Pobal system. Eventually, Tusla may come along to see whether things are being done as effectively and accurately as possible. A number of instances of non-compliance have emerged during Tusla's work. In other words, there was a difference between the attendance figure identified by the service and included in the system and the number Tusla saw when its staff went to the service. That is what is going on and the response - it is still ongoing - is that my Department and, in particular, Pobal offer to work with the provider to look at the reasons for it. For example, it could have to do with sustainability issues. If it does, there is a programme and resource in place in the Department to deal with it. It works with providers individually and does not necessarily offer money initially. It may offer advice to enable providers to work more accurately. Resources are ultimately made available if needed.

I think the Deputy's question was pointing to what would happen as we moved to the affordable childcare scheme. We are on target for families to sign up their children to the scheme in October 2019, with payments set to begin in November. There will be another process to determine what the payment per provider will be, in accordance with the attendance and time requirements of each child availing of the services of that provider. After initial agreement is reached on what the parent requires, there will be a more general ongoing periodic report from the provider to Pobal setting out the child's attendance, as the provider sees it. I think and hope the process will be relatively straightforward. The ongoing monitoring can almost be described as a form of self-compliance, but I think it is more accurately attuned to the requirements of

children, families and providers. We acknowledge that there has been a challenge and a difficulty in that regard, but supports are provided under the current system. A new system will be put in place as part of the affordable childcare scheme.

The Deputy also asked about the recruitment of social workers. Tusla has its own centrally managed internal recruitment process, known as Tusla Recruit. There are links with regional managers in recruitment. The process is being strengthened through regional developments and special campaigns are being used. They are visiting campuses where young people and mature students are completing their work and recruiting in that way. Tusla communicates regularly with students and partners through the application process. Obviously, they must ultimately also be registered through CORU.

**Deputy Tom Neville:** Okay.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Deputy also asked about the recruitment of social workers. There is a streamlining and formalising of the placement process. We are also looking to increase the numbers of places on social work courses. That might be a more medium-term objective. We have had an initial meeting with higher education settings and related associations at which this issue has been discussed. The Department is facilitating the discussions between Tusla and third level institutions to address the supply of social workers in the medium term.

**Deputy Tom Neville:** I ask the Minister to be mindful of what I have raised, particularly as it affects community facilities. Obviously, many people working in such facilities are doing so in a voluntary capacity. The Minister is also trying to attract newer members to the board. I will continue to work with her on these matters. I am mindful of the new system. I thank the Minister for her answers.

**Chairman:** Before we conclude on programme A with Deputy Lisa Chambers, I want to make a couple of points. I am sure the Minister is aware that the chairman of Tusla, Mr. Rabbitte, was before the joint committee last week. He mentioned the specific matter of broadening social worker recruitment methods, an issue which has been highlighted by Deputy Neville again today. The Minister has referred to her engagement with the Higher Education Authority. How far down that road is she? How long has she been involved in the process? The latter question may be more appropriate.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** There has been an initial meeting with the organisations. I will mention a key aspect that has arisen as a result of it. They have identified that it is relatively straightforward to increase the numbers of places on courses and stated they would welcome an opportunity to do so. It is a little bit more challenging because it is a professional degree and as part of that they are placed in certain settings to support their learning. As they need to find more settings, we are setting up a sub-committee to support the finding of additional placement settings for the social workers and that will continue.

**Chairman:** I wish to ask specifically whether the Higher Education Authority would be able to identify certain courses for students who might be attracted into the sector, given the difficulties that Tusla and the HSE currently have in recruiting social workers and the net loss, albeit small, of social workers to Tusla in 2018.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Is the Chairman asking whether it might be part of this work to do some kind of information or promotion-----

**Chairman:** Exactly.



**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** -----in attracting new students? I think that is a good suggestion and I expected that it would be.

**Chairman:** When one thinks of post-leaving certificate courses, PLCs, and so on, there may be individuals progressing in areas in a complementary industry but who could be attracted. If a second-year student was doing well, for example, in such a course, and realised this was something he or she wished to pursue, he or she might not otherwise look at this avenue. If there was information available to such people, however, they might consider it. Every little helps, as they say.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I believe that suggestion of the Chairman is an excellent insight and we will take note of that. I myself know a number of young people in some of the communities I represent who would love to go into social work because they have been beneficiaries of it.

**Chairman:** I was accosted by a young lady in a shopping centre in Swords only the other day. Why she was watching Pat Rabbitte and the committee I do not know, but she was. It was an area that interested her. The conversation ensued accordingly.

In relation to Oberstown, in 2018, €3.6 million was expended on capital. This year the outlay is €2 million. Can the Minister provide the select committee with a breakdown on what was expended and what is planned to be expended?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** What were the funds expended on, is that the question? I believe I have the exact figures.

**Chairman:** I will continue here.

The other issue with regard to staff is that there was an increase of 110 personnel in Tusla. Can the Minister provide us with a breakdown in this regard? Are they all in one particular area or are they all over the place? Can the Minister provide the committee with such a breakdown? I do not mind waiting for these answers.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Okay.

**Chairman:** Returning to Oberstown, on the current side, again in relation to staff and personnel, security etc, can the Minister outline to the committee the budgetary increases that are being provided to Oberstown for the purposes of staff protection, which as the Minister is aware has been an issue and has come up in recent years? Does the Minister believe there is sufficient funding to provide those additional safeguards for personnel, as to health and safety?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** To begin with the Chairman's question on capital expenditure in Oberstown, is the Chairman asking about 2018 or 2019?

**Chairman:** I refer to €3.6 million for 2018, versus €2 million for 2019. Can the Minister identify-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** On the variance of the capital costs, in the first instance this relates to the timing of demand-led maintenance, which is difficult to predict.

Second, in respect of 2019 itself, there is less of a need now for capital improvements because those have gone on. The capital provision for 2019 will lead to the construction of a fire track on the campus, the demolition of certain buildings that are now obsolete, following the



completion of the capital development on the campus more generally.

**Chairman:** The demolition is welcome news from the Minister, having visited the campus a couple of times.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I know the Chairman has done so.

**Chairman:** I fully appreciate that there have been historic expenditures on upgrades because of, perhaps, foresight issues going back to delivery of the new building, which I witnessed at first hand.

Does Deputy Lisa Chambers wish to come in on programme A?

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** I have two questions. The first is on the pay scales of social care workers and if anything has happened on that front?

The second relates to how much funding was spent on the children and young people's services committee, CYPSC, co-ordinators and on the entire CYPSC programme in 2019?

Finally, has there been an increase in expenditure in administration in 2019 in comparison with 2018? One of the points we have raised previously is that in order to free up more social workers to do social work, they could be given additional administration support to cover the basics like letters, typing, minutes and assisting with meetings.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Deputy also asked about pay scales for whom?

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** Social care workers.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** We will provide that the Deputy; I do not have that exact detail to hand here.

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** No problem.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Does the Deputy's question relate to administrators and effectively, to staff mix?

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** Yes, additional support for social workers.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** There are two aspects to that. The primary aspect is that increasing the number of administrative support workers will free up our social workers to do more of the job they have been trained to do. We may have some figures on increasing administrative staff, certainly for 2018 and I will see if I have them to hand. That is the intention and as that happens, the intensity and disadvantages arising from our inability to recruit as many social workers will reduce. That is the first point.

Second, this point also refers to the importance of the Tusla multi-annual strategic workforce plan, on which the agency has been working for some time now. It will encompass their capability, as well as their capacity planning. They are working on a plan that is rooted in evidence as to how to manage their talent, as well as the types of workers that they require. It has five or six key strategic themes, which include recruitment, retention, organisational design and supply. Consideration also must be given to how these differ across the regions, as well as the kinds of work that are required. It is not finished yet and a number of drafts have gone before the board. In the last while, I appointed a number of board members. I appointed two human resource experts and I expect that bringing such expertise to examine that workforce plan has

meant the board has called for a little more detailed work to be done on the complexity of the plan.

It sounds straightforward and is true that simply bringing in more administrators would help us with the social workers; we all know that. We must look, however, for the optimal mix, how this will work in the different regions and how it will impact the panels Tusla has established. These are all matters that are being dealt with in the workforce plan. When that becomes available, and we expect it will be in the next short period of time-----

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** Just on that point, are social workers themselves being consulted? It may be worthwhile to ask them what their needs are. If one has five or six social workers in the same office, perhaps they will say that if they had one administrator between five or six people, that it might make a huge difference. I am not sure what process-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I will look at that suggestion. I am not exactly sure if they do or do not, but I cannot imagine that they have not. However, the Deputy is right and her suggestion would help significantly.

The kind of agency staff being used is due to not enough social workers being recruited. In the context of the recruiting the number and mix of staff required, supports have recently been put in place recently. For example, the new national computer system has been installed and is allowing for greater efficiency in how social workers work by reducing the amount of time they spend on administration. There have also been improvements in their case management systems. Various reforms relating to the number and mix of staff required are under way.

The process involved in developing the strategic works plan has involved staff, including social workers in terms of determining the supports they need.

The Deputy also inquired about CYPSCs. The funding that is available is €2.4 million. Does that answer the Deputy's specific question?

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** What money has been allocated to CYPSCs for this year?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It is €2.4 million for 2019.

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** How does that compare to 2018? Was there an increase in funding?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I am sure that we have an exact comparison. CYPSCs are an important structure and group of people.

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** Yes. It is a worthwhile project. Many organisations and agencies provide services to young people, and the role of the co-ordinator is to try to tie them together and get better efficiencies and outcomes for young people.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Correct.

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** In terms of the allocation of €2.4 million in resources for 2019-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** To which allocation is the Deputy referring?

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** The allocation of the €2.4 million.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** For CYPSCs. I am sorry.

**Deputy Lisa Chambers:** Is that done on a CYPSC by CYPSC basis? For example, Laois-Offaly has one CYPSC and County Mayo has its own CYPSC. Do they get equal allocations? How does the Department go about allocating funding? Is it based on an area's population of children?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I will look for the answer to that question and revert to the Deputy. It is a good question.

**Chairman:** Has the Minister been provided with the answer to my question on the personnel resources available to Oberstown *vis-à-vis* health and safety, given the historical issues? The other matter I raised related to-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Health and safety.

**Chairman:** -----additional staff. Does the Minister have a breakdown of their numbers?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I do not believe we have that information with us.

**Chairman:** The Minister can find it later.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Generally, we are satisfied that there are resources to meet the health and safety concerns that the Chairman has raised and that have been in the background. I can provide him with more detail in that regard, but we are satisfied from working through the budget with Oberstown that it has what it needs.

**Chairman:** Perhaps the Minister will supply a note to the secretariat on the issues of staffing and allocation. It would be helpful.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I would be happy to do that.

**Chairman:** If members are satisfied with programme A, we will move on to programme B.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** I wish to discuss a few elements of programme B. I welcome much of this, in particular the increases across the board. The intervention programme for children does good work, for example, the book bag pilot scheme. The Minister may not have the information with her, but pilots are referenced. Have those started? Where have they been run? Great work is being done in terms of, for example, the Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programme and the baby boxes, which the Minister-----

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Yes.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** What is the position of these pilot programmes and when can they be rolled out?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Deputy is referring to the category of interventions.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** Subhead B8.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The Big Brother Big Sister programme is not a pilot.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** No.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It has been running with Foróige for a number of years. It

operates in a strong way and provides a number of services. The programme received €792,000 in funding in 2018 and had a target of 500 community-based matches and 2,430 school-based matches. It is a sizeable programme.

The Deputy identified another example, that of the therapy demonstration project, which also involves the Department of Education and the Skills, the National Council for Special Education and the HSE. A great deal of money - €609,000 - has been contributed to a demonstration project for 2019. The intention is for it to demonstrate and evaluate the model at that funding level, the hope being that it will be identified as one of the best ways of providing services, in particular speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, to children in a manner that allows them access when they need it. How such services are offered, or not offered, currently presents a difficulty in that regard. The project involves 75 schools and 75 early learning care services. That is why we are calling it a demonstration as distinct from a pilot. Money has been provided for evaluation in the hope that we can move forward and scale it upwards.

Regarding the baby box and the book bag pilots, approximately €100,000 has been allocated to each of these in 2019 to determine what kind of response there would be. I hope that more significant investment will result from that, but these are new ideas and, as such, this is the best way of proceeding.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** The increase in funding for youth organisations and services is welcome. I do not want to stray into other issues, but what prerequisites or boxes need to be ticked ahead of that funding being allocated? I ask with a mind to safeguarding. When groups make applications, are there certain terms and conditions to which they must adhere? Given that children are involved, child protection is obviously an issue. Does the Department conduct follow ups?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Is the Deputy referring to organisations' compliance with the Children First guidelines and the safeguarding statements?

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Yes. I do not want to stray into something on which there could be a further meeting.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Prerequisites would be integral.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Does the Department carry out an audit on an annual or bi-annual basis to ensure that those boxes are ticked?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** As the Deputy knows, some of the funding programmes and processes are done in partnership with the National Youth Council of Ireland, NYCI. There are a number of funding scheme types. In the context of the NYCI and the partnership that we have with it, those kinds of things are identified and part of its role is to administer some of those aspects for us in terms of monitoring and ensuring that happens. The same applies to the education and training boards, which is why some of the funding for youth services is directed to them.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** It is important for people to understand that because a lot of questions have been asked in recent days.

I must compliment the access and inclusion model, AIM, preschool programme and the wonderful work involved. What way will that programme be developed going forward? Will best practice relating to it be shared with the Department of Education and Skills, for example,

in order that the programme does not finish at six years of age?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Is the Deputy referring to the AIM programme?

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Yes. Is there a conversation taking place on that? We are all very interested in early intervention, which works incredibly well. As Deputy Sherlock stated, when we find something that really works, that benefits children and that enables them to make the progress they need to make, it seems a shame that it would stop when they reach six. Is there a way of continuing that? Perhaps it is a question for the Minister of State at the Department of Health with responsibility for disabilities, Deputy Finian McGrath. Is there a conversation taking place with a view to expanding it?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That is an excellent question-----

**Chairman:** I am sorry to interrupt, but I would like to add to what Deputy Rabbitte has just said. One of the conversations that I have had since taking on the role of Chairman of this committee has been with primary educators on how the ECCE programme and early years education integrates with primary-level education. It is not a dissimilar question to the one posed by Deputy Rabbitte. Is there an ongoing conversation about that and are lessons being learned as the programme evolves?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Yes. The AIM programme and the examination of the evidence there has helped to influence the SNA review in the Department of Education and Skills. There are three elements to this, the first of which is looking at the ways in which the model itself operates in the ECCE programme, from level 1 to level 8. There is a cultural level and it is there for everyone, how to be inclusive in a diverse context, the learning for the children up to the provision of additional supports if one wants to reduce the child, staff ratio because of the complexity of the needs of the child in that particular setting. That is a model, approach and process to supporting children with additional or special needs that is influencing and is there as a possible resource for what goes on then when the child moves into the primary school setting.

The second element, which relates to the question from the Chairman, is the transition from the ECCE programme into primary education. That is also being examined because it is really important. As we continue to ensure that AIM reaches more children and more settings and we increase the resources for the model my expectation, as a former educator, is that there should be less need over time if we succeed in terms of prevention and early intervention. The child should be more able for learning as he or she moves into primary and on to secondary level. That is not to say that if the child still needs it, that the support should not be there. In theory, though, that is what should be happening.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** We should aspire to a situation where the needs assessment is done prior to the child entering the formal education system. The requirement for a needs assessment should be identified before the child leaves the ECCE or preschool setting-----

**Chairman:** Or have started at least----

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Yes. That would be fantastic because it would mean that we have identified the needs and the supports required for the rest of the way through the education system.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I should mention, in response to earlier questions, that there is a cross-departmental group which oversees the implementation of AIM. The model also

considers transition to primary school. Play school and early years specialists do consider that. The Departments of Education and Skills and Health, the HSE and others are involved in the governing of these aspects.

**Chairman:** As I stated at the outset, this is a very positive meeting. The vast majority of Departments are receiving increases in funding. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is no exception and it is using that money to really good effect. However, there are a number of issues, some of which have been identified already with regard to social workers. I am also slightly disappointed by another issue and would like further information on it so that the committee can do a body of work in attempting to support the Minister. I am referring here to the delivery of the ECCE programme and the targets that have been set which have not been met. The target for ECCE was 126,000 but only 106,000 actually entered the system. I would like to understand whether that target was achievable, how it was set and why it was not met.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Which one?

**Chairman:** The target for 2018. The target for 2019 is 109,500 children. It was revised down and approximately 20,000 fewer children participated in the ECCE programme, according to figures supplied for Vote 40 for 2019. I would like to understand why that was the case. Is there a deficiency there in terms of parents making a choice? Is there a difficulty with parents finding a facility nearby into which they can put their child? Is that the problem or is there something else involved of which we are not aware? I ask the Minister to address that issue.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** As members know, the programme is demand led. Currently, some families switch to the community childcare subvention, CCS, programme because it can be a better resource for them. We do not believe there is any major failure in relation to the uptake. As we move to the affordable childcare scheme and as we provide a better and easier way to offer the wraparound services to ECCE, that might influence the way in which we can project what is required as well as, perhaps, an increase in uptake. I do not know but as we move to the future model-----

**Chairman:** It is not a criticism at all.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I do not hear it as a criticism.

**Chairman:** It is a marvellous programme. Both of my children have gone through it.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That is good to hear.

**Chairman:** It is incredibly beneficial to young boys and girls around the country. Of course, it is incredibly beneficial to their parents too. Of the 20,000, did a fair percentage go into CCS, to the Department's knowledge, or is there an element of assumption in that? Is there something within the programme that is not working for parents? The age limit issue was resolved in 2018 and I would have thought that it would have increased the uptake but it did not have that effect.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** This could be worthy of further exploration. The two-year increase, the number of weeks and the changing of the timing as to entry all have an influence but perhaps it is also about looking at what parents who do not avail of the full two years want, depending on the child's school-starting age and whether they want the child to be in ECCE or junior infants. That is one of the interesting questions.



**Chairman:** It is. It is a question I would love to ask both the Minister, Deputy Zappone, and the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy McHugh, in the same room. It is a question I ask every December and January when my office is bombarded with parents saying their child is 35th on the waiting list for the local primary school. When I ask what age the child is and the parent says “four”, I scratch the back of my head and ask when the child will be five. Sometimes, I am told it will be in December, February or March. Other jurisdictions have taken the following step and I do not understand why we have not. We should impose a minimum age for entry into primary school. Educationally, what ECCE provides versus what a primary school can provide with the ratio differences are chalk and cheese. A child of four really benefits from ECCE or being at home rather than being in a primary school environment. It is not necessarily a related question but the Minister’s view would be welcome.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** One of our priorities in 2019 is to carry out a detailed assessment of ECCE’s impact on groups of children with lower than average enrolment and participation rates. It is also intended to undertake a review of ECCE subject to those findings to consider the need to make changes to the programme itself. The issues the Chairman identifies could be considered there.

**Chairman:** It would be helpful to schedule some time at the committee later in the year to discuss the matter, as it is interesting. We might try to slot it into the work programme. In light of what the Minister has said, can the Department produce some figures on the uptake of the scheme, perhaps on a geographic basis? Are there any other measures the Department uses, including socioeconomic or demographic measures? It would be interesting to see that in terms of what is beneficial or not.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** As part of that, is capital funding an issue for some preschool providers who might not have had the space to provide the second ECCE year following the welcome extension of the programme? Has that played a role? I am not suggesting it is a significant role but in certain geographic locations, it has played a part.

**Chairman:** I was moving to capital, but the Deputy has asked a worthy question. The affordable childcare scheme is referenced on page 10 of the Minister’s opening statement. The Minister said she is planning a phased regulation of school-age childcare services and has set aside €450,000 for a Tusla early-years inspectorate. The Minister said she hoped to begin to register services with effect from 18 February 2019. It is a very welcome step.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I thank the Chairman.

**Chairman:** An area the State neglects in the overall context of childcare provision and early-years education is the tremendous service being provided across the State in after-school care services. We must ensure standards are being adhered to and that ratios, which are not set out, are put in place. We need to evaluate that. While €450,000 has been set aside for the regulation of the sector, what will be regulated in the expenditure of that sum?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** We have regulations. I signed new regulations for the school-age sector. My understanding is that the €450,000 is to assist in the administrative process of providing the information to services on what is going on and encouraging them to sign up to those regulations whereby they will then be available to participate in the affordable childcare scheme and receive subsidies.

**Chairman:** It might be difficult for the Minister to recall the following, but one of her of-

officials might be able to support her on it. There was a pilot trial of an after-school care service in County Cork, which a former Chairman of this committee and now Minister of State with responsibility for older people, Deputy Jim Daly, discussed here a couple of years ago. Does the Department have any knowledge of that? It was involved the use of a primary school building after school hours to reduce costs to parents and to provide an environment in which a child could do homework, relax and be supported by teachers or suitably vetted third parties. These are the sorts of schemes that are invaluable to working parents up and down the country. My question relates to the fact that I would like to see the State get involved in pushing patrons in particular on schemes like this given that push-back that has been experienced, believe it or not. My view is that we must do as much as we can in the Oireachtas to support parents getting back into the workplace through work activation schemes, in particular young mothers, which would include the State funding and otherwise supporting those nurturing environments. It is something I ask the Minister to consider. There was a trial run somewhere in County Cork and I am interested to hear if the Minister is aware of it.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** We are not sure about the Cork project but we can see if we can get any information for the Chairman. As part of the ongoing work in 2019 on the after-school service, we are looking at the different types of after-school setting that would be possible or optimum. As to what I hear the Chairman say, I am personally in agreement.

**Chairman:** In my view, they are State assets and they might as well be used.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Exactly.

**Chairman:** I will move on to the affordable childcare scheme. The Minister has proposed to increase the threshold by 26% to €60,000 income per household for targeted supports to be provided for those not in receipt of social welfare, which is very welcome. The entire programme has, regrettably, taken a little longer than anticipated but it will be a tremendous success in providing supports to low and middle-income families who are not being supported through the social welfare system and are therefore not in receipt of other childcare-related supports. I do not want to diminish the importance of it, but €60,000 is very low. I understand that the Department only has so much money and that the State only has so much money, but the knock-on effect of the threshold being €60,000 is that it is lower than the €70,000 household income of a couple where both earn the average industrial wage of €35,000. As such, the benchmark is €70,000 and €60,000 is, I must admit, a bit disappointing. What is the projected increase in expenditure for the Department if the threshold were €70,000? That would allow the committee's members to consider the threshold in discussions we might have with other Ministers.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That would be great. The first thing to note is that when we have this in 2019, it will create the platform from which to easily increase thresholds on either side.

**Chairman:** I am not dismissing the gift horse. I really am not.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I know that. It is the first thing to say. The Chairman will also be aware that the €60,000 represents a net figure. We have calculated that, for some families, that can be representative of a gross income of €100,000.

**Chairman:** I did not realise that it is a net figure.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** How does one get to that €60,000? One of the factors that is

particularly generous in determining the net figure is multiple child deductions. The calculation of a person's net figure is significantly impacted on by having more than one child.

**Chairman:** I understand.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The exact figures are €4,300 to €80,600 in terms of the additional child.

**Chairman:** I accept that it changes the dynamic of the conversation when it is a net figure.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** It is welcome that it is a net figure.

**Chairman:** We would love to be able to do everything. I do not know how many times I have been asked when we are going to provide tax relief for childcare costs.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I appreciate that.

**Chairman:** Every time I am asked, I defer to this programme and the ambition of the Minister and the Department for what we want to achieve.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I thank the Chair and others for their patience.

**Chairman:** I know that it is coming. It is beneficial for us to know that the figure referred to is net because that makes a significant difference.

On the capital expenditure, an issue touched upon by Deputy Rabbitte is supports for childcare providers throughout the State. I would love to be able to tell constituents that we will provide additional supports to increase the number of childcare facilities. The town of Swords is not all that different from Tallaght. Although it is slightly smaller, the issues in the two areas are not that dissimilar. The Minister knows her constituency well, as I know mine. There is a limited number of childcare providers in Swords and parents are limited in their childcare options. Childcare providers with a reputation for quality or in the vicinity of a public park or other services may be oversubscribed. The provision of additional capital supports would have a clear beneficial effect for growing communities such as those in my constituency or the Minister's. Will increased capital expenditure for such services be considered? This falls under subhead B5.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Our information is that there is no indication of a limited capacity for the early childhood care and education, ECCE, programme, for example. There may be limited capacity in certain parts of the Chairman's constituency and we are always open to finding out about such issues. Pobal and the Department are involved in a significant examination of such capacity issues. There is an issue with spaces for zero to three year olds and that is where the capital investment for 2019 is targeted. In addition, there are some capacity issues in regard to after-school care. That is where capital expenditure in 2019 will be focused for school-age care. If the Chairman is aware of more general capacity issues, I ask him to provide us with further detail in order that we can examine them. We do not want there to be any capacity problems for families anywhere.

**Chairman:** I appreciate that. Deputy Mitchell referred to intervention programmes under subhead B8. My colleague, Senator Richmond, has raised the issue of the baby box scheme on many occasions. I only recently became aware of it. It is a great idea, which is being pursued in other European jurisdictions. Is the Department funding that initiative?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Some €100,000 has been set aside for it for 2019.

**Chairman:** Will that cover a full roll-out?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It will not. It is being rolled out on a pilot basis. What does the Chairman want in the baby boxes?

**Chairman:** That is a good question.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Does the Chairman think it is a good idea?

**Chairman:** It is a lovely idea. My children are aged five and seven. It would have been particularly interesting to have received such a baby box on the birth of my seven year old at the start of my trial as a parent. I welcome the initiative and I thank Deputy Mitchell for mentioning it. I have no further questions on subhead B.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** I am pleased there is an increase in funding for the commission of investigation into the mother and baby homes. I do not have a crystal ball. Does the Minister think the increase will be sufficient to ensure the report will be published next year and that there will be no further delays?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** As I indicated in the Dáil and in reply to parliamentary questions, I had serious conversations with the chair of the commission regarding the full-year extension and asked whether we can be guaranteed that we will receive the report in February 2020. I was assured that will be the case. The resources are there; the delay is not about money.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Funding for the programme for peace and reconciliation has increased substantially. Any increase is always welcome. Is there a plan associated with the increase, particularly in light of everything that is going on at the moment? On the previous occasion she appeared before the committee we discussed what she did in Croke Park and what was done in Newry. Are there planned events under that programme or something in the pipeline that she wants to share with us?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That is a good question. The increased allocation of €1.2 million relates to projected expenditure under the Special EU Programmes Body. New projects will become active throughout 2019. The Special EU Programmes Body expects to launch nine PEACE IV projects and I have begun to receive invitations for those.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** That is welcome.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** The four target areas of intervention are shared education, children and young people, shared spaces and services and building positive relations at local level.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** That is very good.

**Chairman:** I welcome the movement by the Department with the assistance of the Attorney General on the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016, which is currently before the Seanad. Will that Bill be passed shortly, which I know is the ambition? Will the additional sums provided to the Adoption Authority of Ireland be sufficient for it to fulfil its role when the Bill is enacted? Will any other State anchors assist in that work?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** There is certainly enough money for 2019. Additional re-

sources may be required under the Estimates process for 2020. That is probably when the measures outlined in the Bill will be rolled out and, at that stage, their impact will be determined. We would support Tusla in that regard as well.

**Chairman:** An additional sum of €200,000 was provided to Scouting Ireland recently for the purposes of procuring a safeguarding specialist. What subhead did that money come from? This was an increase in funding. Is it 2018 or 2019 money? It was allocated in February but it has not been drawn down yet. I ask the Minister to provide more information on that.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It is part of the youth organisations and services money for 2019.

**Chairman:** 2019?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Yes.

**Chairman:** So it is extra money.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** It is within the overall subhead.

**Chairman:** It is not extra money. It is money that has been reallocated-----

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** It is extra for Scouting Ireland.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Exactly.

**Chairman:** It is extra for Scouting Ireland but it is within the Department's envelope.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Yes.

**Chairman:** Members referred earlier to legal fees under programme C. I reiterate that we would like a breakdown of that because it would be beneficial to the members to know where the money is being spent. Tusla officials and the Secretary General of the Department, Dr. Lynch, will be before the Committee of Public Accounts at the end of the month. Dr. Lynch will be delighted to hear that I will be the lead questioner on the expenditure. These are areas on which I will look for further information and it would be helpful if it could be provided before the end of the month so that I can avoid unnecessary questions.

In the context of the increases in expenditure by all Departments, the increases in our population and our static birthrate, the Ombudsman for Children facilitates Tusla and the Department in fulfilling their various statutory obligations. Is there any scope for additional support to be provided to the ombudsman's office to assist it in carrying out its challenging role, in conjunction with Tusla? The amount of being provided to the office is relatively small. I wonder if that office is being resourced sufficiently. This matter has been discussed at the Committee of Public Accounts in the past. Last year, there was a debate on the issue among some Members who are not members of this committee. I ask the Minister for her views on that.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That is an excellent question, grounded in a helpful rationale. The 2018 outturn was €198,000 below allocation. This was due to the office not having a full complement of staff *in situ* for the entire year. Regarding the increase for 2019, it is my understanding that it has been welcomed and accepted as what is required for the year in terms of the capacity of the office growing.

**Chairman:** I wish to go back to legal services briefly, as another question has just occurred



to me. The Minister mentioned €900,000 in the context of subhead C3.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** That is for the Department.

**Chairman:** A lot of that money relates to historic matters. Does the Minister expect that there will be a decrease in the near future in that area?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** We expect that because the provision is largely earmarked to meet the emerging costs relating to legal challenges.

**Chairman:** Does the Department or agencies under its remit have anything to do with any of the inquiries that are ongoing, in terms of funding them?

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** Just the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation

**Chairman:** That is the only one under the Department's remit. The others are under a different Department.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I am sure the Chairman appreciates that by their nature, legal costs are difficult to estimate in advance. That said, we need to prudently plan and to make adequate provision for anticipated legal costs.

**Chairman:** I understand that. That concludes own questions. Do members wish to comment or ask questions on the overall budget for the Department and its agencies?

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** Many reviews are under way, with a view to the production of reports. That costs a lot of money. Given the number of reports produced, one wonders how much of their recommendations get adopted and used. This is only a comment and not a criticism. We spend a lot of money on reports and so on and, at the same time, €1.5 million will be allocated to family resource centres. Money is spent well by the Department and I compliment the team with the Minister today. We must acknowledge the good work that is going on. However, sometimes reports are produced but are not followed through. I like reports to be started and then finished.

**Deputy Katherine Zappone:** I thank the Deputy for her kind words. I am privileged to work with such great officials. In terms of reports, evaluations and analyses, a large part of the responsibility of the Department lies in the early years sector and all of that work directly influences how we move forward on everything we are doing.

On Tusla, it is harder for me to say directly but what we decide on oversight or what we require, supported by my officials, from Tusla, makes a difference in the direction of the reform programme that it is on.

**Deputy Anne Rabbitte:** That is good to hear.

**Chairman:** On behalf of the committee, I thank the Minister and her officials for their attendance this evening. The committee acknowledges the work being done by the Minister and her Department in supporting children and families across the State and welcomes the increase in funding that has been provided for 2019.

## Message to Dáil



6 March 2019

**Chairman:** As we have completed our consideration of the revised Estimate, in accordance with Standing Order 90, the following message will be sent to the Dáil:

The Select Committee on Children and Youth Affairs has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimate for public services for the year ending 31 December 2019: Vote 40 — Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The select committee adjourned at 6.29 p.m. *sine die* .