

Written Answers.

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

Coastal Erosion

14. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he has taken to ensure that Fingal County Council using available funds is acting to prevent further damage to dunes at Portrane, County Dublin. [47150/17]

26. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his strategy for preventing the destruction of homes at risk due to coastal erosion, in particular, in respect of coastal damage at Portrane, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47151/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 14 and 26 together.

I am very aware of the problems that coastal communities face in dealing with the erosion of soft coastline particularly given the severe weather events we have experienced in this country in recent years. I am aware from my recent visit to Donegal the issues associated with erosion of soft coastal defences. I can assure the Deputy that work is being carried out to address the problem at both a strategic level and through the local authorities responding to localised coastal erosion issues.

Coastal erosion is a natural, ongoing process which takes place around the coastline of Ireland. The Irish Coastal Protection Strategy Study (ICPSS) has surveyed and assessed the coastal erosion risk along the entire national coastline and this information is available to all Local Authorities to enable them to develop appropriate plans and strategies for the sustainable management of the coastline in their counties including the identification, prioritisation and, subject to the availability of resources, the implementation of coastal protection works both of a structural and non-structural nature. Details of the ICPSS are available on the Office of Public Works (OPW) website www.opw.ie. Because intervention within a coastal area may cause problems further along the coast, any proposed intervention measures are best developed in conjunction with a formal coastal erosion risk management study which has carefully investigated the problem and explored the full range of possible management options. The OPW is prepared to fund such studies, where warranted, in advance of any proposed erosion management works or measures.

The coastal zone management in the area indicated by the Deputy is a matter for Fingal County Council in the first instance. The Council must assess the problem and, if it is considered that specific measures and works are required, it is open to the Council to apply for funding under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. Any application received will be assessed under the eligibility criteria, which include a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, and having regard to the overall availability of funding.

Fingal County Council applied for and was approved funding of €57,800 under this scheme in 2012 to carry out a Coastal Erosion Risk Management Study from Portrane to Rush. The funding was drawn down in 2013 following completion of the study.

Following the severe storms of Winter 2013/2014 and on foot of submissions made by the local authority, total funding of €200,000 was allocated by the OPW to Fingal County Council under the Government decision S180/20/10/1272 of 11 February 2014 to allocate funding for the repair of damaged coastal protection infrastructure. Part of this funding was for a dunes repair project at Burrow beach, Portrane. I am advised that this project was not proceeded with by the Council at the time and the Council indicated that this would form part of a separate application under the Minor Works scheme.

The OPW is not currently in receipt of an application from Fingal County Council under the Minor Works Scheme for works at Portrane. The OPW will liaise with the Council as appropriate in this regard should an application be received. I understand that the Council is working to identify an appropriate and sustainable solution to the problem at Portrane, with particular reference to environmental considerations, in advance of submitting an application to the OPW for funding to carry out works.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

15. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps that have been taken or need to be taken to change the mandatory retirement age in the public sector; the cost benefit analysis of increasing the mandatory retirement age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46865/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): An Interdepartmental Working Group, chaired by my Department was established in 2016 to examine the issues arising from prevailing retirement ages for workers in both the public and private sectors. This examination was in the context of the current age of entitlement to the State Pension and the scheduled increases to the State Pension age in 2021 and 2028.

The Group, whose Report was agreed by Government in August 2016, considered policy around retirement age in both the public and private sectors, examining implications arising from retirement ages now and in the future. The Group identified a set of framework principles to underpin policy in the area and made a number of recommendations assigned to Government Departments and Employer bodies for follow-up in that regard. A copy of the Report is available online.

In respect of the public service, and on foot of one of the recommendations of the aforementioned Report, my Department, with Public Service employers, was tasked with reviewing the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension. In the context of the review, which is well advanced, meetings were held with employers from all public service sectors, including the civil service, local authority and health sectors, supplemented by further interactions and discussions with the employers. Issues in relation to cost, workforce planning, personnel and Human Resource considerations have been considered in the context of the review.

Future policy in this area will be considered by Government based on proposals which I intend bringing to Government shortly based on the outcome of the review.

Any change in the compulsory retirement ages for public servants would require primary

legislation.

Budget 2018

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the additional expenditure that is being undertaken the end of 2017 and in 2018 to ensure that all measures in budget 2018 are fully equality and gender proofed; the timeframe and targets needed to ensure that budget 2019 is also fully gender and equality proofed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47226/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The approach that is being taken to develop a process of budget and policy proofing, as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights in line with the Programme for Partnership Government commitment, has been set out in a policy paper published by my Department on Budget day. This paper, entitled “Equality Budgeting – Proposed Next Steps in Ireland”, looks at the international experience and best practice in this area, and outlines the pilot approach that will be adopted for the current budgetary cycle.

In line with the international best practice in this area, the intention is to ensure that an equality perspective is integrated throughout the budgetary process. Consequently, expenditure in relation to the process of budget and policy proofing forms part of the overall cost of the budgetary process rather than being assigned a separate allocation.

The pilot cycle of equality budgeting will focus on a number of diverse expenditure programmes already in existence across a range of Departments. The relevant Departments will conduct an assessment of the chosen policy areas with a view to defining high level gender equality objectives and performance indicators for the policies in question. Responsibility for proofing expenditure programmes is a matter for the individual spending Departments in the first instance.

The objectives and indicators that have been selected will be published by my Department in the Revised Estimates Volume in December this year. Progress towards achieving these targets will be reported on in the Public Service Performance Report to be published in 2018.

The pilot programme of equality budgeting will be reviewed following the 2018 budgetary cycle. Learnings from the pilot approach will be used to expand the initiative to other expenditure programmes and equality dimensions for the 2019 budgetary cycle.

Question No. 17 answered with Question No. 7.

Brexit Negotiations

18. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has held discussions with the European Commission regarding the allocation of additional funding for the Border region in view of the particular challenges that will arise following Brexit and the need to improve infrastructure to assist existing businesses to remain competitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47147/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset I would like to be clear about the Government’s appreciation of the important contribution that EU funding has made to the development of the border region and to cross-border cooperation over the last quarter of a century.

As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform I have responsibility for two cross-border programmes with Northern Ireland, namely INTERREG and PEACE. These programmes have a combined value of more than half a billion Euro over the period 2014-2020.

As part of my Department's contingency planning for Brexit, the risks to these programmes – which are 85% funded by the EU – were identified. The Irish Government has been clear about its commitment to the full implementation of the current programmes and to successor programmes post-2020.

In the aftermath of the UK referendum my immediate objective was to ensure that current funding would continue. I was pleased, therefore, that towards the end of last year agreement was reached on a safeguard clause that has enabled funding letters of offers to be issued to programme beneficiaries for both programmes.

Now that that short term objective has been achieved, my medium term objective is to ensure the full and successful implementation of the current programmes out to 2020, during a period in which the UK is expected to leave the EU. My long term objective is to secure funding for successor programmes post-2020.

It was for that reason that in the wake of the UK referendum I proposed to my Northern Ireland counterpart, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, that we jointly write to the Regional Policy Commissioner, Corina Cretu, to underline the importance we attach to the continuation of EU funding.

In December Máirtín and I visited Derry together to see the impact that EU funding is making on the ground.

And in April I raised the impact of Brexit on the two programmes at the meeting of the General Affairs Council devoted to Cohesion Policy in Luxembourg. While in Luxembourg I also took the opportunity to have a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Cretu where I impressed upon her the enormous contribution that EU funding has made to the economic and social development of the region, as well as the vital importance of continuing this funding. I also invited Commissioner Cretu to visit the region to see for herself the impact on the ground.

These two programmes are well regarded in Ireland – North and South – in the UK, and throughout the EU, so I believe the necessary goodwill is there for future funding from the European Union.

Flood Prevention Measures

19. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the contingencies put in place to deal with increased water levels in rivers and waterways; the extra measures that have been established to deal with the upcoming winter months; the amount dedicated towards these contingencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47333/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Responsibility for the overall management and co-ordination to local emergency issues, including flooding events, rests with the Local Authorities. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government leads the national co-ordination during a severe weather event. The OPW supports the National Emergency Co-ordination Group when the group is convened to address an extreme weather event.

The OPW carries out a statutory maintenance programme on 11,500 km of river channel and approximately 730 km of embankments nationally, on arterial drainage schemes completed by

the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995.

The Government has invested €325m in major flood defence schemes since 1995 that are protecting approximately 8,500 properties with an estimated benefit to the country of damages avoided of over €1.5bn. The OPW currently has ten schemes at construction and twenty-six at different stages of design or planning.

The €40m expended by the OPW's Minor Flood Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for 650 small scale local authority projects is providing flood protection to over 6,200 properties.

State Agencies continually monitor and, where possible, control river levels within their areas of responsibility, including on the Shannon. The Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group established in 2016 is trialling the lowering of levels in Lough Allen to complement existing water level protocols in place for Lough Ree. It is also targeting maintenance works along the Shannon. These additional actions can help, in a small way, to manage flood risk.

The OPW's proactive flood risk planning, through the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme is nearing completion. I would hope by the end of this year to seek the approval from the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for the 29 Flood Risk Management Plans developed under the CFRAM process. Thereafter I would hope to announce the proposed structural measures contained within those Plans that will, over the coming years, be taken to detailed design to protect those communities at assessed risk.

There are a range of other measures already in place to protect against a flood risk, including:

- improved planning guidelines promoting sustainable planning and development,
- improved national and local emergency flood response plans, and
- guidance to households and businesses on planning for a flood event. The Government's Be Winter Ready campaign is an important aspect of this initiative.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

20. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which his Department plans to incorporate further reforms throughout the civil and public service with a view to achieving better value for money, improved economic impact and delivery of services to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47275/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since the first public service reform plan was published in 2011, a comprehensive programme of reform has been implemented and this continues to be a key priority. This is important as the performance of the public service has major implications for the management of the State's finances, and for economic development and employment creation.

The 2014-16 public service reform plan put the public ever more to the centre of what we do both in terms of service delivery and transparency, openness and accountability. The final progress report on this plan, published in July 2017, was sent to all Deputies and is also available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie. The report set out a wide range of improved services for the public and savings across a range of projects.

Work continues in implementing reforms initiated under the 2014-16 plan including the ambitious programme of reform initiated under the Civil Service Renewal Plan and other sectoral reform programmes. The CSR Plan aims to create a more unified, professional, responsive, open and accountable civil service that can provide a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is currently developing a new phase of public service reform called Our Public Service 2020 which is expected to be published by the end of the year. This will build on the achievements of the last six years and allow the public service to better respond to new challenges.

Our Public Service 2020 aims to deliver better outcomes for the public, to support innovation and collaboration and to build public service organisations that are resilient and agile. The framework is built on three key pillars.

- Delivering for our public
- Innovating for our future
- Developing our people and organisations

It will also ensure a continued emphasis on ensuring value for money principles are adhered to across the public service.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

21. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public and civil servants earning the minimum wage and the living wage; his plans to ensure that all public and civil servants earn the living wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47235/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection is responsible for setting the National Minimum Wage on recommendation from the Low Pay Commission.

The current minimum wage is set at €9.25 and the third report of the Low Pay Commission recommended that this be increased by 30 cent per hour.

The Government welcomed that recommendation as a modest increase but one that is ahead of the rate of inflation and average increases in earnings. This would be the fourth increase in the minimum wage since 2011, and the second under this Government. This increase was confirmed by Government in the context of Budget 2018 and the minimum wage from 1 January 2018 will be €9.55 per hour.

Pay band data available to the Department indicates that some 94% of all public service staff are on salary points in excess of €25,000 per annum. The suggested wage at €11.70 per hour based on the Civil Service 37 hour standard net working week equates to an annual salary of €22,589.

Data based on Civil Service staff only, which is some 12% of the overall public service, indicates that only some 1% of staff (FTE) in the Civil Service are on salary points less than €22,589.

Any of those currently on an annual salary of less than €22,589 could also be receiving

remuneration in excess of the suggested living wage through additional premium payments in respect of shift or atypical working hours or are on salary scales that progress to the suggested living wage through incremental progression.

Under the new Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, from January 2018 pay in the public service will be further adjusted. The pay increases provided for under the Agreement are again progressively weighted towards the lower paid with benefits ranging from 7.4% to 6.2% over the term to end 2020.

Expenditure Reviews

22. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his Department's priorities for the next spending review in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47230/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The spending review conducted this year was the first in a series of rolling, selective reviews, which it is intended will cover the totality of Government spending over a three year period from 2017 to 2019. This approach allows for systematic examination of existing spending programmes to assess their effectiveness in meeting policy objectives and also to identify scope for re-allocating funding to meet expenditure priorities.

This year, over 20 analytical papers were produced by officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and some other Departments on significant programmes of current expenditure. In addition, an analysis of expenditure trends in key sectors was also published. These papers are available on my Department's website at www.per.gov.ie/en/spending-review.

Work is ongoing to prepare for the next round of the spending review process which will commence in early 2018. The priority for this round of the spending review is to continue the process of examining existing spending by reference to the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact.

The aim is to ensure that the spending review will produce robust evidence based analysis, the output of which, in each work area, will feed into the consideration of expenditure policy. As was the case this year, the intention is that the spending review analysis will provide a crucial evidence base on key expenditure issues to inform ongoing discussions on Estimates proposals.

Capital Expenditure Programme Implementation

23. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to make provision for the projects previously identified as being integral to crucial infrastructure investment in the context of the capital review programme; his plans to extend the remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47274/17]

24. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has made provision for further changes in the gross capital expenditure ceilings for 2018 in view of the ongoing infrastructural deficits in housing, health, transport and education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47228/17]

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if in the context of the growing needs of the recovering economy, he expects to be in a position to meet infrastructural requirements of the widest possible nature affecting economic perfor-

mance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47560/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 23, 24 and 78 together.

As I announced at Budget 2018, Government has allocated a significant and well-planned, increase in public capital investment amounting to €4.3 billion over the period 2018-2021. This is in addition to the additional €2.2 billion for housing already allocated to the implementation of the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Consequently between 2014 and 2021 public capital expenditure in Ireland will have more than doubled and as set out by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, this will see public investment in Ireland moving to among the highest in the EU.

I am satisfied that this new planned level of public capital investment represents an appropriate balance between the need for additional investment to realise the economy's long-term growth potential, the capacity of the economy to deliver additional public infrastructure consistent with fiscal and macroeconomic sustainability and the need to adhere to the responsible spending path agreed by Government with reference to the requirements of the EU Fiscal Rules.

In the meantime, the delivery of a large number of public capital investment projects and programmes is proceeding and while the position in relation to any individual project is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant responsible Minister, the review of the 2015 Capital Plan which I published on 14 September, includes an update for each Department setting out the significant progress already being made in relation to implementation. A copy of the review has been supplied to all Deputies. My Department also published a major projects tracker, providing an update on progress on all significant projects and programmes with a value in excess of €20m.

In addition work is advanced by my Department in preparing a long-term 10-year capital plan for consideration by Government in due course. The primary objective of the 10-year plan is to underpin the implementation of the new framework for spatial policy under the Ireland 2040 Plan. The assessment of priorities for public capital investment over that period will be strongly informed by the detailed Infrastructure Capacity and Demand Analysis prepared by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) which assessed key drivers of infrastructure demand in the areas of housing, health, transport and education referred to in the Deputy's question. The Infrastructure Capacity and Demand analysis was published alongside the review of the current capital plan and is available on my Department's website.

Garda Stations

25. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the proposed works on Newcastle West Garda station are due to commence. [44076/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): It is envisaged that this project will be completed towards the latter end of the Garda Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021.

OPW has received an outline brief of requirements from An Garda Síochána (AGS) and has completed a feasibility study on the existing Station site. OPW Architectural Services are currently reviewing this feasibility study from a Health and Safety and building efficiency perspective, prior to the preparation of tender documents for the procurement of external Civil and Structural and Mechanical and Electrical Consultants. It is anticipated that tenders for both of

these Services will issue by the end of the year.

OPW Civil and Structural services are arranging to have necessary site investigations carried out.

At this early stage of the project, and until the design team is in place, it is difficult to estimate the timeline for the completion of the new build. However, it is hoped that both the 'Planning' and 'Tendering for construction' phases will take place by end of 2018.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 14.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

27. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of capital expenditure which will be allocated for infrastructure projects for County Donegal; the timeframe for these allocations; the projects for which funding will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47146/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This Government is strongly committed to increasing public funding for capital investment in appropriate regional infrastructure across Ireland over the next four years and beyond in order to meet key requirements in areas such as, for example, housing, transport, broadband, education, health and flood defences.

As I announced at Budget 2018, Government has allocated a significant, but more importantly a well-planned, increase in public capital investment amounting to €4.3 billion over the remaining four years of the Capital Plan 2018-2021. This is in addition to the additional €2.2b for housing outlined in the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Consequently between 2014 and 2021 public capital expenditure in Ireland will have more than doubled and as set out by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, this will see public investment in Ireland moving to among the highest in the EU.

My Department is currently preparing a long-term 10-year capital plan, covering the period 2018 to 2027, which will be integrated with, and will support the achievement of, the spatial planning objectives of the forthcoming National Planning Framework detailed under the Ireland 2040 Plan, to ensure that there is a sustainable basis for future population, employment and economic growth on a balanced regional basis. The 10-year plan will set out the Government's plans for capital investment over the longer term and it will also set out how the Government proposes to ensure an appropriate regional balance is achieved in terms of infrastructural investment, consistent with the objectives of the National Planning Framework.

The Deputy will be aware that promoting the development of the North-West Region as interlinked areas of strategic importance through collaborative structures and a joined-up approach to spatial planning is a specific national policy objective included in the draft Ireland 2040 Plan.

I should point out, however, that the selection of individual projects to be progressed, such as individual infrastructure projects in County Donegal, and the specific level of capital allocations arising will continue to be a matter in the first instance for the relevant Departments and agencies - subject to compliance with the requirements of the Public Spending Code in relation to planning, assessment and appraisal of project proposals in the normal way.

Public Sector Pay

28. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures he plans to put in place to unwind the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 as applied to contract holders that are not part of the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47152/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay and Pension Bill 2017 which the Government agreed on Tuesday, is designed to deliver an orderly exit from the financial emergency legislation and a return to normal industrial and business relationships.

As part of this, the Government has agreed to put the setting and varying of fees for contractors currently subject to the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest legislation on an alternative statutory basis.

In future the relevant Government Minister, operating with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will have the statutory power to set and vary the fees paid to contractors for goods and services based on a range of considerations, including affordability and value for money.

Given that the state often engages in long term rolling contracts for the provision of services to citizens it is vital that the interests of the taxpayer are protected through fluctuations in the economic cycle.

Importantly this power to set and vary fees provides for consultation with the contractors in question.

In relation to primary care contractors whose fees were reduced during the crisis, the Bill provides a pathway for putting in place a new multi-annual approach to fees, commencing in 2019, in return for service improvement and contractual reform and in line with Government priorities for the health service. The Minister for Health intends to undertake a process of engagement with the relevant representative bodies in 2018.

Any contractual re-negotiation will be informed by the significant structural reforms and productivity improvements that have been delivered across the wider public service.

Freedom of Information Legislation

29. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has satisfied himself with the current functioning of the freedom of information system under the 2014 Act; his plans to amend section 44 of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 to give power to him to instruct the Information Commissioner to carry out a review of the operations of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47196/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As specified in section 43(3) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014, the Information Commissioner is fully independent in the performance of his functions, including those under section 44 of the Act. I have no plans to amend the Act to allow for a Minister to instruct the Commissioner in this regard. To do so would adversely affect the important independent role of the Commissioner.

However, as the Deputy may be aware, an extensive review of the operation of the Freedom of Information (FOI) framework fed into the development of the FOI Act 2014 which

introduced a modernised, consolidated, restructured and more accessible FOI system. The Act, alongside an FOI Code of Practice, seeks to bring about greater efficiency, consistency and promote best practice in the operation of FOI throughout public bodies.

FOI gives rise to significant challenges. The number, nature and complexity of requests continues to grow. To support the effective implementation of FOI, the FOI Central Policy Unit at my Department oversees a training framework to ensure consistency in standards and approach. A total of 128 contracts have been awarded with some 8,600 participants receiving training. The Central Policy Unit also provides ongoing support and advice to citizens and to FOI bodies through its website, www.foi.gov.ie and helpdesk and has presented at a number of conferences and training events. Networks for FOI Bodies have been established which provide an excellent means of sharing learning and expertise, assisting in the development of common approaches and facilitating the transfer of learning between FOI bodies.

Some 30,417 FOI requests were processed by public bodies in 2016, a record number and a doubling of the number reached under the previous Act, with some 73% of those requests granted either in full or in part. It is also worth noting that in only 3% of cases did requesters avail of the review mechanism available to them. Furthermore, only 1.5% of requesters seek an independent review by the Information Commissioner. The steps taken by my Department and the low level of appeals gives some indication of the progress being made in the implementation of the 2014 Act and the general satisfaction of requesters.

Departmental Contracts Data

30. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of subcontractors that are engaged by State and semi-State agencies in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47234/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that under a public contract the contractual relationship is between the public body and the main contractor. A public body has no contractual ties with a subcontractor engaged by a main contractor and, in many cases, will not be aware of the identity of those subcontractors. Any contractual relationship is exclusively a matter between the main contractor and its sub-contractor.

Freedom of Information Legislation

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has satisfied himself that section 27 of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 is functioning properly; if all agencies that come under freedom of information following the 2014 Act are applying fees and charges in respect of freedom of information requests in an open and transparent manner; if guidelines are issued to the agencies with regard to calculating fees and charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47197/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 27 of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2014 Act relates to fees and charges. Among the key reforms of the FOI Act was the removal of the requirement to pay up-front fees for making FOI requests to public bodies and the significant reduction in the cost of applying for internal reviews and appeals to the Information Commissioner.

In addition, in relation to non-personal requests, a minimum threshold of €101 was intro-

duced below which no search, retrieval and copying fees can be charged. This means that if a request is focused and takes no longer than 5 hours to search for, retrieve and copy the records, the requests will be processed free of charge. Furthermore a cap of €500 was placed on the amount of search, retrieval and copying fees that can be charged (approx. 25 hours being spent on search and retrieval); and a further upper limit at €700 (which corresponds to 35 hours being spent on search and retrieval) above which an FOI body can refuse to process a request, unless the requester is prepared to refine the request to bring the charges below the limit. The Act also provides for public bodies to assist requesters if the requester wishes to amend or limit the requests concerned in order to reduce or eliminate such charges.

Records which contain only personal information relating to the requester (including requests under Section 37(8)) remain free of charge (other than where the grant concerned relates to a significant number of records and in such cases, the means of the requester must be taken in account).

I consider that these reforms have had a key impact on the number of requests submitted with over 30,000 requests made in 2016 compared to around 10,000 in 2007 and with a 400% increase of non-personal requests in that period.

I, as Minister, have no role in monitoring or policing the individual decisions of FOI Bodies, including in relation to fees. Where a decision is made to charge a fee, the requester has the right to seek a review of that decision by the Information Commissioner and there is no fee payable for that review. Of around 400 reviews referred to the Commissioner in 2016, only 4 (or 1%) related to decisions to charge a fee.

To support the effective implementation of FOI by FOI Bodies, the FOI Central Policy Unit (CPU) at my Department provides a range of support and guidance. It oversees a training framework to ensure consistency in standards and approach which has seen over 8,600 participants receiving training and also provides a website, www.foi.gov.ie and helpdesk and has presented at a number of conferences and training events. Networks for FOI Bodies have been established which provide an excellent means of sharing learning and expertise, assisting in the development of common approaches and facilitating the transfer of learning between FOI bodies. With particular reference to fees and charges, the CPU has published both Manuals on the processing of requests and a specific Guidance Note on Fees and Charges (CPU Notice 6) in order to assist Bodies in making decisions on fees. These are available on www.foi.gov.ie.

Banking Sector

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the further steps she is taking to prevent anti-competitive collusion in the banking sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47375/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory body responsible for the enforcement of competition and consumer law in the State. Section 9(5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions, including carrying out investigations of suspected breaches of competition law. As investigations and enforcement matters are part of the day-to-day operational work of the CCPC, I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation have no direct function in the matter.

Policy responsibility for the banking sector is a matter for the Minister for Finance while the

regulatory authority for the banking sector is the Central Bank.

Design and Crafts Council

33. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding paid to the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland, which was formerly the Crafts Council of Ireland, in 2015 and 2016; the allocation for 2017; if her Department received a copy of its audited financial statements for 2015; if these will be made available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47455/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Design and Crafts Council of Ireland is a company limited by guarantee and is therefore established under and regulated by the Companies Act. The Design and Crafts Council of Ireland receives funding through Enterprise Ireland for the purposes of promoting crafts and design initiatives.

The Design and Crafts Council of Ireland's Financial Statements for 2015 have been provided to my Department as part of the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland's Annual Report 2015 which is available at: https://issuu.com/craftscouncilofireland/docs/dccoi_annual_report_2015_eng

Details of funding allocation for the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland in 2015, 2016 and 2017 are in the following table:

Design and Crafts Council of Ireland Funding via Enterprise Ireland

Year	2015	2016	2017
	€'000	€'000	€'000
Enterprise Ireland Funding	2,919	3,019	2,919
Enterprise Ireland FundingIrish Design 2015	4,950	-	-
Total	7,869	3,019	2,919

Economic Competitiveness

34. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of Ireland's ranking overall when compared with small economies in the latest World Bank Doing Business rankings available for 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47583/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The World Bank's annual Doing Business report sheds light on how easy or difficult it is for a local entrepreneur to open and run a small to medium-size business when complying with relevant regulations.

The most recent report (published on October 31 2017) shows Ireland has achieved an overall ease of doing business ranking of 17th out of 190 economies, an improvement of one place on last year. Ireland is 4th in the Euro Area and performs strongly, in 7th position, in the EU behind Denmark (3rd), UK (7th), Sweden (10th), Estonia (12th), Finland (13th) and Lithuania

(16th). Ireland ranks ahead of key competitors such as Switzerland, Netherlands, Luxembourg and Israel. New Zealand is ranked 1st and Singapore is ranked 2nd.

This is a positive result for Ireland. It is positive that Ireland's ranking on starting a business has improved by 2 places to 8th. As benchmarked by the World Bank, Ireland is in the top ten in the world in terms of Ease of starting a business, paying taxes and protecting minority investors. It is encouraging that the overall trajectory of Ireland's competitiveness performance and scores in international measures of competitiveness is generally positive.

The Institute for Management Development measure of competitiveness ranks Ireland 6th most competitive out of 63 economies. Most importantly, the strong performance of clients supported by the enterprise agencies in winning exports, market share and job creation in the face of intense global competition reflects the competitiveness of the environment in which to do business in Ireland.

While we are improving our performance, we cannot be complacent. Other economies continue to reform and we must continue the implementation of high-level reforms to improve the environment for business competitiveness. My objective is to ensure the economy is resilient at sectoral and firm level to deal with imminent competitiveness challenges and to build further on the progress we have made in making it easier to start and run a business in Ireland.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Reports

35. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the report by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement into a trial (details supplied) will be published. [47584/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I received a report under Section 955(1)(a) of the Companies Act 2014 from the Director of Corporate Enforcement on 23 June. This Report addresses the issues highlighted by Judge Aylmer in his ruling in the case of DPP v Sean Fitzpatrick. The report sets out the facts relating to the case and does not purport to be an investigation or an enquiry.

The Report has been the subject of detailed consultation with the Office of the Attorney General. I received further advice from the Attorney General recently, which I am considering with my officials.

Legislative Programme

36. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when Second Stage of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017, which will transpose a 2014 EU directive, will take place in Dáil Éireann. [47585/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 was published on 6 November 2017. The necessary requirements of the EU Audit Directive and Regulation were transposed in June 2016 to meet the EU deadline by way of statutory instrument (S.I. 312 of 2016).

The Bill elevates S.I. No. 312 of 2016 and enhances it, therefore much of the draft legislation is already on the statute book but through secondary legislation. It also avails of options not appropriate to secondary legislation.

The objectives of the Bill are:

- to provide a straightforward legal framework for statutory auditors and audited entities on the requirements for statutory audit,
- to enhance the powers of the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority, as the competent authority with ultimate responsibility for oversight, to ensure effective monitoring and enforcement of the new requirements,
- to update the rules relating to auditors for Industrial and Provident Societies Acts and the Friendly Societies Acts.

The Bill is one of my Department's measures in the recently published package to enhance Ireland's corporate, economic and regulatory framework and is therefore one of the Government's priorities for enactment. While scheduling of second stage will be a matter for the Business Committee, I hope that this will take place early next month.

Foreign Direct Investment

37. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a report (details supplied) on the way in which the housing crisis and the severe housing shortages could harm Ireland's competitiveness and the ensuing impact this may have on attracting foreign direct investment here. [47589/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government is fully committed to increasing the supply of affordable and quality housing. That is why it has published the 'Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan' which includes financing measures, better use of existing homes, new construction and rental sector improvements.

These steps will first and foremost ensure Irish people are better able to buy and rent suitable homes. They will also serve to reinforce our national infrastructure in terms of its capacity to accommodate further foreign direct investment.

My Department's in-depth engagement in the development of the new National Planning Framework (NPF) over the last 18 months provides an example of efforts to attract foreign direct investment being considered in terms of wider capacity and policy to provide infrastructure and housing. The NPF is a critically important framework for the period to 2040 that will underpin Ireland's future economic development.

The Department of Housing Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) are developing the NPF and my Department has been heavily involved in that process.

Departmental Funding

38. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 56 of 6 October 2017, the Exchequer funds given by her Department to the organisations to conduct this study. [47590/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Further to the Deputy's question of 26 October, I am informed by IDA Ireland that spending on market analysis on property solutions is covered by the IDA's capital budget. For

2017 the capital allocation from the Exchequer to the Agency was €137m.

Planning Issues

39. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to the confirmation by the IDA chief executive (details supplied) that over the past number of months there were concerns about a project in view of the time it was taking to get planning approval; when her attention was drawn to planning issues in this area since taking office; and the steps she took on receipt of this information with senior Department officials and Cabinet colleagues, including the Taoiseach, to ensure the project progressed and the investor did not pull out of the project . [47591/17]

40. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of each occasion and date that a company (details supplied) raised the matter of the planning process for a project in Athenry since 2015 with her, her predecessor, the IDA and her Department; and the steps taken at Cabinet level to ensure the project was not lost. [47592/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 40 together.

In respect of the facility referred to by the Deputy, IDA Ireland has been engaged in ongoing discussions with the company involved. This included continuous engagement regarding the initial plans to situate the investment in Athenry and throughout the subsequent planning and legal processes. The Government has also regularly underlined its support for this valuable project, including at the Taoiseach's meeting with the company's senior management last week. Although it remains a commercial decision for the company itself to take, I am optimistic that the investment will proceed in the future. We will continue working with the company in support of that investment.

The delays that have beset this project have underlined the need to have an efficient and speedy planning process in place in this country. The Government wants to ensure that similar such projects are not unreasonably delayed again. That is why it had already been considering ways to avoid a repeat of this situation, including in advance of the recent High Court ruling. This may include the designation of data centres as Strategic Infrastructure Developments for planning purposes.

Brexit Issues

41. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if an application for a rescue and restructure scheme has been sent to the Directorate General for Competition; the details of the scheme; and the likelihood of approval. [47593/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): A Rescue and Restructure scheme was recently notified to the Directorate General for Competition as one element of my Department's response to the challenges posed by Brexit.

The scheme was notified as a precautionary measure. Since the decision of the UK last July to exit the EU, this Department has been working with Enterprise Ireland and other stakeholders to develop a suite of measures to mitigate the potential effect of Brexit on Irish businesses.

We do not expect that there will be a need for the State to provide rescue/restructuring aid

to companies, however, it is prudent to have contingency measures in place, so that we can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary.

Once approved, this scheme will allow for grants or equity supports to SMEs in severe financial distress who satisfy the conditions of the scheme.

The scheme filed is similar to ones that have been approved for other member States (e.g. Northern Ireland) – so my Department officials are confident of the scheme's approval. However, the ultimate decision lies with DG Competition.

Economic Growth

42. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which pay demands in the public and private sectors are likely to impact on the growing economy to a negative or positive extent in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47557/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Projections published by my Department in *Budget 2018* anticipate growth in the overall pay bill (both private and public combined) of 5.6 per cent in 2018. This comprises growth in average pay of 3.1 per cent and employment growth of 2.3 per cent. Pay bill growth is projected to average 5.2 per cent per annum thereafter, with average pay expected to grow at around 3.3 per cent per annum.

To the extent that wage pressures exceed these projections, this could be expected to boost consumption and overall price levels in the near term. However, to the extent that such higher pay rates result in a loss of competitiveness, any positive impact will be offset by lower overall economic activity and lower numbers employed.

Work published previously by my Department titled '*Quantification of the economic impacts of selected structural reform in Ireland*', www.finance.gov.ie/updates/quantification-of-the-economic-impacts-of-selected-structural-reforms-in-ireland/ indicates that a 1 percentage point wage shock which is not offset by a corresponding rise in productivity, could be expected to reduce the level of real output (GDP) by ¼ percentage point (pp) within 7 years, add 1pp to the rate of unemployment, and reduce the number of people employed by some 0.4 percentage points.

Given downside risks within the international context, it is imperative that wage developments should be commensurate with trends in productivity (output per person employed) over the coming years, in order to avoid a deterioration in Ireland's competitiveness. As such, we will continue to monitor the wage outlook, and labour market and productivity developments.

Stamp Duty

43. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if a farm transfer (details supplied) is subject to stamp duty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47605/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that stamp duty is chargeable on the transfer of a farm from a landowner to a company, whether or not the company is controlled by the landowner. The company acquiring the farm is treated as a separate legal entity to the individual. The amount chargeable to stamp duty is the market value of the assets being transferred. The rate of stamp duty applying to the transfer is 6% on transfers taking place after Budget Day, October 10 2017. There are no stamp duty reliefs available in relation to a transfer of a farm to a company.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

44. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if persons (details supplied) qualify for the help-to-buy scheme for their self-build home. [47345/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that in accordance with the legislation governing the operation of the Help to Buy (HTB) scheme, one of the criteria to be met to qualify for the scheme is that the loan-to-value ratio in respect of a claim shall not be less than 70 per cent. As the loan to value ratio for the person concerned is less than 70 per cent, the application does not meet the conditions required to qualify for HTB. Revenue has no discretion to vary the terms of the scheme in this regard.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

45. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if details of the scheme of compensation for those wrongly denied tracker mortgages by the banks has been examined by him, his Department and the Central Bank; his views on whether the scheme is fair and adequately addresses the different events and circumstances endured by those affected by this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47367/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank is independent in the performance of its duties in the supervision of regulated financial service providers and it is working to ensure that the Tracker Mortgage Examination is completed as soon as possible. Details of the Framework for Conducting the Tracker Mortgage Examination are available at the following link: <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/consumer-hub-library/tracker-issues/appendix1-framework-conducting-tracker-mortgage-examination.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

It should be noted that the Central Bank does not have the statutory power to set compensation levels or to compel lenders to implement redress and compensation programmes in respect of failures that occurred prior to the introduction of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (the “2013 Act”). However, the Central Bank has clearly articulated its expectations of lenders to provide appropriate redress and compensation to all impacted customers in line with prescribed principles for redress developed by the Central Bank. In accordance with the Examination Framework, the Central Bank expects that, for all impacted customers, lenders’ redress and compensation offers will restore them to the position they would have been in had the detriment not occurred and that they are appropriately compensated for the detriment suffered.

As per the Central Bank’s status update of 17 October, circa 13,000 affected customers have been identified to date through the Examination, the majority of whom will receive their redress and compensation before the end of the year. Prior to the Examination, the Central Bank ensured a further 7,100 cases involving tracker mortgage issues were rectified and remedied.

The Framework requires that lenders categorise impacted customers by reference to the type and level of detriment suffered. The types of detriment identified range from overcharging due to the application of incorrect interest rates up to loss of ownership of mortgaged properties. The Central Bank advises that the calculation of redress and compensation proposals for customers can be complex. The Central Bank has challenged all lenders with particular regard to their redress and compensation proposals for loss of ownership situations and as a result

lenders have substantially improved their proposals. Each lender's compensation package is tailored to the specific circumstances of its customer. Given the complexity of the issues identified by the Examination, the scale of detriment suffered is unique to each individual customer, and the level of the redress and compensation payment will, therefore, be dependent on the circumstances of each individual case. The Central Bank will continue to challenge and use all powers to force the best outcomes for all impacted customers.

In line with the Central Bank Principles for Redress requiring that all redress and compensation payments are made to customers on an upfront basis, customers can accept the redress and compensation offered and still make an appeal to the appeals panels required to be established by lenders. Customers' rights to make appeals to the FSO and through the courts are also preserved.

NAMA Debtor Agreements

46. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Finance the way in which NAMA is managing the recovery of the funding of approximately €3.6 billion it advanced to debtors and receivers since 2010; if a large number of these loans are being written off; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47374/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As set out in my reply to Question No. 111 of 3 October 2017, NAMA may provide funding to its debtors and receivers to protect and enhance their assets so as to optimise their income-producing potential and disposal value. This is in accordance with section 10 of the NAMA Act which states that NAMA is required to protect or enhance the value of its acquired assets and to obtain the best achievable financial return for the State.

NAMA advances loans to its debtors and receivers for a range of purposes, primarily for capital expenditure purposes but also for essential current expenditure required to protect the value of assets including remediation works, health and safety requirements, security and insurance. For instance, it has been necessary for NAMA to incur significant expenditure on remediation work so as to enable unfinished or defective housing to be brought to a habitable standard.

I am advised that NAMA has advanced €3.6 billion in funds to its debtors and receivers from inception to August 2017, comprising both current and capital expenditure. I am further advised that the majority of loans have been repaid either by the debtor or receiver, or by the proceeds of loan sales.

I am advised that, of new funding advanced since 2010, €0.6bn is currently outstanding to NAMA and is being actively managed by the Agency, as it relates to debtors whose loans are still held by NAMA.

I am advised by NAMA that there has been no write-off of new funding advanced by it. The proceeds of an asset sale or of the associated loan sale are invariably greater than the amounts of new funding advanced against the asset concerned. Normally, sales proceeds are applied, in the first place, against new advances made by NAMA and the balance of the proceeds is then applied against the loans originally acquired from the participating institutions.

It is important to note that the realised proceeds from asset or loan disposals reflect the positive impact of any new funding advanced in order to preserve or enhance asset values. NAMA advise that, in the absence of new funding, the assets concerned would have deteriorated in value, the health and safety works would not have been completed and, as a result, the proceeds realised from their disposal would have been less than those actually realised.

Company Liquidations

47. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the proceedings of the liquidation of a company (details supplied); the number of persons affected by same; the amount owed to them; the funds available for distribution at the time of the liquidation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47397/17]

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who have been paid in full out of the total number of persons affected by the liquidation of a company (details supplied); the number who have been paid partially; the number who have not been paid at all; the amount that has been paid out to persons as part of the liquidation; when he expects the liquidation to be complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47398/17]

49. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to date of professional and liquidation fees from the liquidation of a company (details supplied); the cost he expects from the liquidation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47399/17]

50. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has a role in the liquidation of a company (details supplied); if it has been consulted since the liquidation has commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47400/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 to 50, inclusive, together.

I am informed by the Central Bank that it has been actively engaged with Custom House Capital Limited (Custom House Capital) since 2009, which led to a series of restrictions being imposed on the firm. In July 2011, on instruction from the Central Bank, Custom House Capital was prevented from carrying out any transactions or making payments to any clients in order to protect the interests of all clients, and prevent any further effect on client investments, until the impact of the issues involved was established.

On 15 July 2011 the Central Bank sought the appointment of High Court Inspectors to conduct an investigation into the affairs of the firm and assess its financial position, as there were significant concerns about the firm's operations following the identification of new and previously unknown issues.

Following a detailed investigation, Central Bank High Court Inspectors published a report identifying a range of significant, serious and previously unknown issues, which threatened client interests and made the firm unviable. This report also recommended the appointment of a liquidator to Custom House Capital as the most appropriate action.

On 21 October 2011 the High Court appointed Mr Kieran Wallace, Chartered Accountant, of KPMG, as Official Liquidator to Custom House Capital. The Official Liquidator was also appointed as the administrator of Custom House Capital for the purposes of and pursuant to Section 33A of the Investor Compensation Act 1998.

The Official Liquidator was appointed by and is accountable to the Court for the conduct and completion of the liquidation of Custom House Capital.

The process of establishing legitimate ownership of all investments involves a significant and lengthy reconciliation of client holdings that will take time to fully complete.

The Official Liquidator continues to undertake reconciliation work on client holdings within Custom House Capital and this can be broadly categorised as occurring in the following order:

- Segregated cash and equities
- Other investments, property funds, equity and cash funds, bonds and other funds
- Segregated property investments (individually owned)
- Syndicated property investments via SPVs (mainly European properties)
- Syndicated property investments via Exempt Unit Trusts (mainly UK properties)

It should be noted that any client wishing to clarify individual investments/holdings will need to contact the Official Liquidator's office directly for information.

The Official Liquidator's work is overseen by the Examiner's Court and this includes reviewing the costs and progress of the Liquidation of Custom House Capital.

The Central Bank has, and continues to be, committed to working with all relevant statutory bodies in supporting them in the exercise of their powers in relation to the activities of Custom House Capital and the individuals concerned. Referrals have been made to the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation, the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, Director of Public Prosecutions, the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Justice and Equality. The Central Bank continues to work with these bodies.

Mortgage Resolution Processes

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of mortgage restructures by restructure type for both PDH and BTL mortgages in tabular form; the number under each restructure type restructured by regulated financial institutions, retail credit firms and unregulated loan owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47411/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that their Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions Statistics show that at end-June 2017, 120,398 PDH mortgage accounts were restructured.

The breakdown by entity type is as follows: Banks 111,156 accounts, Retail Credit Firms 6,695 accounts and unregulated loan owners 2,547 accounts. Similarly, 23,623 BTL accounts were restructured at end-June. The breakdown by entity type is as follows: Banks 22,833 accounts, Retail Credit Firms 318 accounts and unregulated loan owners 472 accounts.

In addition to the above published statistics, please see below a further unpublished breakdown of restructures for PDH and BTL accounts. Given the small number of observations in some categories, it is not possible to provide the level of detail requested. However, the Statistics Division within the Central Bank is currently reviewing the breakdowns published, with a view to expanding coverage in the New Year, subject to confidentiality measures.

Principal Dwelling Houses

-	Banks	Non-Banks	PDH Total
Arrears Capitalisation	34,093	5,074	39,167
Split Mortgages	26,788	724	27,512
Other	50,275	3,444	53,719
Total	111,156	9,242	120,398

Buy-to-Let Properties

-	Banks	Non-Banks	BTL Total
Reduced Payment > Interest Only	5,138	383	5,521
Arrears Capitalisation	5,056	217	5,273
Other	12,639	190	12,829
Total	22,833	790	23,623

Mortgage Resolution Processes

52. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of mortgages owned by a company (details supplied); the credit-servicing firms it uses for these mortgages; the number of these mortgages that are currently deemed by the Central Bank as being restructured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47412/17]

53. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank is satisfied that a company (details supplied) is acting in compliance with the code of conduct on mortgage arrears and the mortgage arrears resolution process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47413/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 53 together.

The Central Bank has informed me that the Company referred to is not an entity regulated or supervised by the Central Bank of Ireland (the “Central Bank”).

Data on mortgages owned and currently being restructured by non-bank entities (which includes Retail Credit Firms and unregulated loan owners) is not published routinely by the Central Bank and it is not therefore possible to provide the breakdown requested. However, I would refer to the Central Bank’s Report on Mortgage Arrears, published on 16 December at <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/news-and-media/press-releases/mortgage-arrears-report.pdf?sfvrsn=0>. Section 4.2 of this report comments on restructuring activity for non-bank entities.

In addition, as an unregulated loan owner, the company referred to would be required to appoint a regulated Credit Servicing Firm to service loans on its behalf. The deputy may be aware that Lapithus Management DAC states on its website that it has been appointed by the company referred to, to administer and manage its loans for and on its behalf.

In relation to PQ 47413/17, the Central Bank has informed me that Credit Servicing Firms are subject to the provisions of Irish financial services law that apply to regulated financial service providers. This ensures that consumers whose loans are sold to third parties maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale, including under the various Statutory Codes such as the Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the “CPC”) and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (the “CCMA”).

Therefore, where a consumer has a grievance or dissatisfaction with the provision of a product or service by regulated entity, or the failure or refusal of a regulated entity to provide a product or service, he/she may make a complaint to the regulated entity, in accordance with Provisions 10.7 to 10.12 of the CPC. If the consumer is not happy with the resolution of the complaint he/she is entitled to escalate the complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman

(FSO) who has the statutory powers to investigate complaints against regulated financial services providers. Further information about the FSO is available at www.financialombudsman.ie.

While, the Central Bank does not have a statutory remit to investigate individual complaints of customers of financial services, it does accept and appreciate information from consumers of financial services in the context of its ongoing supervisory work. In this regard, the Central Bank would welcome any information or evidence that may help its work. As you may be aware however, due to confidentiality requirements imposed by domestic and EU legislation, which provides for confidentiality of information relating to ongoing supervision and limits disclosure to circumstances specifically provided for in Section 33AK of the Central Bank Act 1942, it cannot release supervisory information.

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

54. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the tax-relief-at-source history from the Revenue Commissioners shows the loan of persons was owned by a certain firm (details supplied) when the loan was transferred from its previous lender in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47414/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that the mortgage interest relief in respect of the loans to which the Deputy is referring was correctly applied by the various lenders for the years in question.

The cases to which the Deputy referred were relatively complex cases, with multiple loans and lenders in recent years. When providing confirmation to the borrowers in question regarding the correct application of mortgage interest relief, Revenue used the name of the current lender to assist in distinguishing the loans in question from other older previously held loans.

Mortgage Interest Relief Extension

55. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if the mortgage interest relief scheme will be extended for a period of five years and would then be subject to review (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47447/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I announced in Budget 2018 that, in fulfilment of a Programme for Government commitment, mortgage interest relief for owner-occupiers would be extended on a tapered basis to end-2020 for the remaining recipients of the relief.

The process of phasing out Mortgage Interest Relief for homeowners has been under way since 2009. Relief has expired for qualifying mortgages taken out prior to 2004 and, with some limited exceptions, the relief ceased for new borrowings with effect from January 2013.

Legislation currently provides for the relief to cease for remaining recipients at the end of this year. I am aware of the financial pressures that individuals continue to face and of the fact that, without any action in the Finance Bill, the relief holders of MIR would have faced a ‘cliff’ where their relief would have ceased entirely from January 1st 2018. Therefore, Finance Bill 2017 provides for the relief to be continued on a reducing basis for a further three years, to allow the remaining relief-holders a period of adjustment in which to adapt to the winding-down of the relief. Subject to the passing of the Finance Bill, the effect of the measure will be to provide for 75% of the current relief to be continued into 2018, 50% of the current relief into 2019

and 25% of the current relief into 2020. The relief will then expire at end 2020.

It must be remembered that this relief has ceased for homeowners who purchased before 2004, and that those who purchased their homes from 2013 onwards have never benefitted from the relief. It is my view that this tapered extension of the relief for a three-year period strikes an appropriate balance between supporting those current recipients and also considering fairness to homeowners who have never benefitted from the relief.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

56. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the tax relief scheme for long term leases of agricultural land as it relates to inter family leases in order to consider if the allowance can be extended to inter family leases that were in place prior to the introduction of the tax relief scheme such as in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47533/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that section 664 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides relief from income tax for certain income from long-term leasing of agricultural land. The relief is available, subject to a maximum limit, where farm land is leased to a qualifying lessee for a period of 5 years or more. In order to qualify as a qualifying lessee for the purpose of the relief, the lessee must not be connected with the lessor, or with any of the lessors if there is more than one. The rules for establishing whether or not persons are connected are laid down by section 10 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Effectively, this means that a lessor is not entitled to relief where the land is let to family members or family members of their spouse or civil partner.

The policy behind this restriction is one of anti-avoidance, due to concerns that some may misuse the exemption. In addition, it was felt that allowing the tax exemption in cases where the land was leased to “connected persons” may delay succession or lead to the fragmentation of holdings. In an effort to avoid the misuse of the exemption and unintended consequences, it was decided to limit the eligibility of the tax exemption. The connected party restriction has applied since the introduction of the relief over 30 years ago.

While I understand there are cases caught by this restriction which are not seeking to abuse the scheme, the incentive was structured to take on board the usual anti-avoidance measures seen in much of the tax system. Without this provision the relief would be potentially open to abuse, e.g. the passing back to the lessee of rent on which tax relief had been claimed. This would not arise on arm’s length transactions.

It should be noted that there are already reliefs from stamp duty and capital acquisitions tax available in the case of permanent transfers of land between family members, such as by gift or sale. In Finance Act 2015 succession farm partnerships were introduced to assist succession planning and the transfer of farms between family members.

Film Industry Tax Reliefs

57. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe and nature of changes to section 481; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47547/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides relief in the form of a corporation tax credit related to the cost of production

of certain films. The credit is granted at a rate of 32% of the lowest of:

- (i) eligible expenditure;
- (ii) 80% of the total cost of production of the film;
- (iii) €70,000,000.

* The minimum amount that must be spent on the production is €250,000 and the minimum eligible expenditure amount to qualify is €125,000.

As a tax expenditure of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, Section 481 is subject to the requirements of the Department of Finance tax expenditure guidelines.

As a requirement under the guidelines, reliefs such as section 481 are required to be reviewed periodically. A full ex post analysis and review of section 481 will be undertaken in line with the tax expenditure guidelines prior to any announcement on the extension of the relief.

This review will be done in advance of any extension of the relief beyond 2020.

Tracker Mortgage Examination Data

58. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of mortgage accounts identified in each bank as part of the tracker mortgage examination that involve both current or former employees of that bank; the number that have been restored to the correct rate and that have received redress and compensation, in tabular form; if this is included in the examination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47550/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has advised that, due to statutory confidentiality requirements, the Bank may not publicly disclose much of its supervisory engagement with individual firms. In particular, the Central Bank can, generally speaking, only disclose such information in summary or aggregate form so that individual firms cannot be identified. The Central Bank has to be careful that any public disclosures made by it do not breach its statutory confidentiality requirements, or prejudice any ongoing or possible future supervisory or enforcement actions.

However, the Central Bank has advised that the Tracker Mortgage Examination Framework requires lenders to review all mortgage accounts, including those that have been redeemed, sold or transferred to another entity by the lender, together with mortgage accounts where the customer has lost possession of the secured property for any reason (including by way of voluntary and involuntary sale). Bank staff accounts are included the same as any customer account.

As per the Central Bank's status update of 17 October, circa 13,000 affected customers have been identified to date through the Examination. Prior to the examination, the Central Bank ensured a further 7,100 cases involving tracker mortgage issues were rectified and remedied.

In accordance with the Examination Framework, the Central Bank expects that, for all impacted customers, lenders' redress and compensation offers will restore them to the position they would have been in had the detriment not occurred and that they are appropriately compensated for the detriment suffered. The Central Bank expects the majority of the 13,000 customers identified to date under the Examination will receive redress and compensation by year-end. Central Bank decisions regarding the groups of customers identified as part of the Examination and disputed by some lenders to date will be issued to lenders by mid-December.

As at end-September, €120 million has been paid in redress and compensation to approximately 3,300 impacted borrowers. This is in addition to redress and compensation provided by permanent tsb plc (€36.8 million) and Springboard Mortgages Limited (€6.2 million) to customers pursuant to their Mortgage Redress Programme (MRP), which was required by the Central Bank and predated the Examination. Accordingly from July 2015 to end September 2017 the aggregate figure for redress and compensation to customers arising from the MRP and the Examination is €163 million.

Banking Operations

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when offshore operations commenced in each of the State supported banks; when operations ceased in these institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47597/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Officials in the Department of Finance have received the following responses from the banks in relation to the Deputy's question:

AIB:

AIB's businesses in Isle of Man and Jersey were established in 1977 and 1981 respectively. AIB became the owner of Anglo Irish Bank Corporation (International) PLC (now known as AIB ISL

(Limited) on 24 February 2011. Arising from the recapitalisation and restructuring of AIB, and the European Commission decision on State Aid, it was decided to wind down AIB ISL

Limited and AIB CI Limited in 2012. They ceased operations on 31 December 2013.

PTSB:

In its response, PTSB has assumed the Deputy's question refers to deposit taking operations.

Off Shore Entity Name	Operations Commenced	Operations Ceased
Permanent Bank International Ltd	Acquired from Irish Nationwide Building Society in 2011.	31/12/2017
Irish Permanent (IOM) Ltd	1993	2010

Banking Sector Data

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if offshore operations exist at present in the State supported banks; if so, the number of accounts involved; the amount of deposits held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47598/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Officials in the Department of Finance have received the following responses from the banks in relation to the Deputy's question:

AIB:

Arising from the recapitalisation and restructuring of Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c. the banking operations of AIB ISL Limited and AIB CI Limited were wound down by 30 November 2013.

PTSB:

Permanent TSB plc had two operations in the Isle of Man. The two are now either closed or in the process of closing.

Specifically, Irish Permanent (IOM) Limited (IPIOM) surrendered its banking licence and closed for business in 2010. Permanent Bank International Limited (PBI) is in wind down and will surrender its licence as a deposit taker at the end of next month. PBI was acquired as part of the acquisition of a deposit book from Irish Nationwide Building Society after the financial crash.

In IPIOM there are currently 89 accounts representing deposit balances of £370,000 that remain to be repatriated to “out of contact customers”. In PBI there are 223 accounts that remain to be closed, representing deposit balances of £20.2 million (Note: approximately 100 of these accounts are scheduled to close before the end of this month).

Banking Sector Data

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of deposit accounts held offshore by a bank (details supplied) in each year since the commencement of offshore operations; the value of these deposits in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47599/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will understand, the information requested is not held within my Department. The banks in which the State is a shareholder operate on an independent, commercial basis and I as Minister do not have a role in their operations.

AIB have provided me with the following response to the Deputy’s query:

“AIB ceased banking operations in Jersey and the Isle of Man by 30 November 2013.

AIB CI and AIB ISL has published their Financial Statements in line with their regulatory and statutory obligations during the relevant periods when its entities were licensed by the applicable Regulators in the jurisdictions that it was carrying out regulated activities therein.

Year End	AIBCI Deposit Book*	AIBISL Deposit Book**
	GBP£	GBP£
2012	143m	48m
2011	877m	880m
2010	1.692bn	
2009	2.341bn	
2008	2.458bn	
2007	2.137bn	

* Please note that AIBCI figures are consolidated figures for both Jersey and Isle of Man branches.

** Note ownership of Anglo Irish Bank Corporation (International) PLC, now known as AIB ISL Limited, transferred to AIB on 24 February 2011 under a transfer order made by the High Court on application by the Minister for Finance, acting under powers granted by the Irish Credit Institutions (Stabilisation) Act 2010.

AIB Group does not have ready access to historic customer number data.

On the surrender of the banking licences, the Banks established segregated accounts, with Estera Trust (Jersey) Limited & Estera Trust (Isle of Man) Limited, as administrator, being responsible for administering all unclaimed balances. Any such remaining Account Holders ceased to be depositors with the Banks and instead became a creditor of the respective legal entity for an amount equal to the balance of their former Account(s). Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c. has requested and been furnished with the following information by the administrator Estera Trust (Jersey) Limited & Estera Trust (Isle of Man) Limited.”

Year End	ABCI Scheme	ABCI Scheme	AIBISL Scheme	AIBISL Scheme
	GBP£	Customer Num- bers	GBP£	Customer Num- bers
2013	20.4 m	440	2.6m	70
2014	17.4m	396	1.7m	62
2015	12.8m	374	1.5m	58
2016	12.1m	363	1.5m	57

Tax Data

62. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a bank (details supplied) acceded to requests from the Revenue Commissioners for data held in the Isle of Man and Jersey; the outcome of the Revenue Commissioners investigation that commenced in 2004; if tax was recovered as a result of this investigation; if so, the amount recovered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47600/17]

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding current investigations being undertaken by the Revenue Commissioners in respect of offshore accounts; if current investigations involve the State supported banks; if so, the banks involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47601/17]

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if it is against the law to move data from Ireland to another jurisdiction specifically for the intention to hide data from the Revenue Commissioners; when this law was introduced; if they are retrospective in nature; if the Revenue Commissioners will commence further investigations as a result of papers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47603/17]

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on Ireland’s role in structures that allow corporations to reduce their tax bill in view of the release of papers (details supplied); his views on the impact on Ireland’s reputation; his plans to review current structures to prevent such practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47604/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62, 63, 65 and 66 together.

As respects question No. 62, I am advised by Revenue that section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997 imposes a statutory obligation on Revenue to maintain the confidentiality of information provided by a taxpayer, or obtained by Revenue from a taxpayer, for the purposes of the various taxation codes.

As the Deputy’s question relates to specific taxpayers, Revenue is, accordingly, precluded from providing a response in relation to the specific taxpayers referred to by the Deputy.

As respects the outcome of the Revenue investigation referred to by the Deputy, I am advised that, in 2003, Revenue commenced an investigation into the use of offshore bank ac-

counts and other financial products to evade tax. During the initial phase of the investigation, taxpayers were afforded an opportunity to voluntarily disclose previously undeclared liabilities. The subsequent phase was undertaken primarily by way of enquiry letters issued to taxpayers on the basis of information relating to transfers to, and from, the State, involving a number of other jurisdictions, which was obtained from financial institutions on foot of High Court orders. The amount collected by Revenue over the course of this investigation in tax, interest and penalties exceeds €1 billion. Work is ongoing on a number of cases as part of this investigation.

As respects question No. 63, I am informed that the international environment has changed significantly in the years since the offshore assets investigation was initiated, with the emergence of closer cooperation between tax authorities worldwide aimed at those who hide their profits or gains offshore. Initiatives such as FATCA (an Inter-Governmental agreement to share financial account information with the United States), DAC (EU Directives on Administrative Cooperation), and CRS (the OECD's Common Reporting Standard) are all now helping to ensure that tax administrations have greater visibility in respect of the offshore assets and income of their residents. Revenue inform me that they will make full use of information of this kind to identify and pursue those who have attempted to use offshore accounts, structures or assets to evade their tax obligations.

In the context of these new information sharing initiatives on off-shore income and assets becoming available to Revenue, it is no longer appropriate to provide incentives to tax defaulters to come forward and to disclose previously undisclosed income or assets. Accordingly, my predecessor, Deputy Noonan, introduced specific measures in the Finance Act 2016 to ensure that, as and from May 2017, tax defaulters whose default relates to offshore matters will be unable to avail of the benefits of the voluntary disclosure regime. Anyone who did not come forward by 4 May 2017 to regularise his or her tax affairs now faces the prospect of substantially higher penalties, publication in the Quarterly List of Tax Defaulters and possible prosecution.

Revenue is aware of the recent publication by media outlets of information deriving from the "Paradise Papers". If these papers identify individuals or entities associated with Ireland, Revenue will examine the cases and intervene as appropriate. This could involve an enquiry letter, an audit or, where there are indications of a tax offence, investigation with a view to possible prosecution. Revenue will also work in close cooperation with other tax administrations, in the framework of the OECD's Joint International Taskforce on Shared Intelligence and Cooperation, in addressing issues raised by the papers, and will, as appropriate share information under existing legal frameworks.

As respects question No. 65, I am informed by Revenue that while there is no specific restriction on the moving of data to another jurisdiction, section 886 of the TCA 1997 requires that taxpayers must keep all records that are required to ensure a full and detailed tax return in respect of income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax can be made.

Records includes any records, accounts, documents and any other data maintained manually or electronically which a person is obliged under the various Taxes Acts to keep, issue, or produce for inspection. The records must be kept for a period of 6-years, or a greater period if the person has failed to make a return of income, or where a transaction is the subject of an investigation or proceedings.

I am also informed that section 1078 of the TCA 1997 criminalises failures to comply with the provisions of the various Taxes Acts which require the furnishing of returns of income, profits or gains and the keeping and retention of books, records, accounts and other documents for tax purposes. Specifically, the destruction or concealment of records from an authorised officer is a criminal offence under section 1078 (2)(h) and (hh) of the TCA 1997.

It is also an offence under section 1078 to be knowingly concerned in the evasion of tax, or to knowingly deliver any incorrect return, statement, accounts or information in connection with any tax.

As respects question No. 66, the stories reported by the ICIJ make a number of points about changes in the Irish tax system. They rightly point out that Ireland has already acted to address definitively the issues around stateless and double Irish companies.

Multinational corporations' tax planning has been subjected to intensive international examination in recent years, in particular in the OECD's BEPS Project. Tax administrations worldwide, including many non-OECD countries who have committed to implementing the anti-avoidance recommendations arising from the BEPS Project, have agreed that addressing the global problem of corporations exploiting gaps and mismatches between different countries' tax rules requires the widest international co-ordination.

Ireland is committed to working with our international partners to ensure that agreed measures addressing these issues are widely adopted. Ireland has already taken a number of steps towards implementing the BEPS Actions. In addition, the Coffey Review sets out a roadmap for implementing the remaining OECD recommendations, beginning with the launch of a consultation process which is now underway, and Ireland will also be implementing the EU Anti-Tax Avoidance Directives, which give coordinated effect to specific BEPS Actions across the EU, to the timelines set out in the Directives.

Unilateral national actions will not address multinational corporations' tax planning. Attributing international arrangements put in place by multinational corporations to Ireland's role is damaging and inaccurate. While offering a competitive regime that builds the economy and provides jobs for our people, Ireland continually monitors international tax developments and will take any actions needed to implement enhanced international standards.

Ireland meets the highest standards in transparency and this has been recently verified, for a second time, by the OECD-led Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes. In August 2017, following an in-depth Peer Review, the Global Forum again awarded Ireland the highest rating, making Ireland one of only a small minority of the 145-member Global Forum to achieve this rating.

State Banking Sector Regulation

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if as a shareholder in State supported banks he or his predecessor's attention was drawn to offshore operations within these banks; the actions taken subsequently to stop the operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47602/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I indicated earlier this week I have discussed these disclosures with the Revenue Commissioners who are the most appropriate authority to examine matters raised in the media arising from the so called 'Paradise Papers' and the Chairman has assured me they would be monitoring the revelations as they arose. I would also call on the ICIJ to share any information it has with Revenue.

I would add that the Minister for Finance has no direct function in strategic or operational decisions made by the banks in which the state is a shareholder, and decisions in this regard are the responsibility of the board and management of each institution, under the supervision of their regulator and equivalent authorities in the jurisdictions relevant to their operations.

The Minister must ensure that the banks are run on a commercial and independent basis and in this regard a Relationship Framework has been specified that defines the nature of the relationship between the Minister for Finance and the banks. These Frameworks were originally published on 30 March 2012 and can be found on the Department of Finance website.

Questions Nos. 65 and 66 answered with Question No. 62.

National Monuments

67. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the damage done to the Donaghmore Souterrain was brought to the attention of An Garda Síochána by his Department or an agency or body under the aegis of his Department (details supplied); and if so, if the report confirming same can be provided. [47425/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): As indicated in replies to previous Questions on 28 March and 11 April last, the OPW is not in a position to state with certainty how the damage at the Donaghmore site came to be caused or who was responsible. In these circumstances, a formal complaint to An Garda Síochána was not pursued.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

68. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the recent cross-party Topical Issue on community employment supervisors; the reason the meeting of the forum regarding community employment scheme supervisors to be hosted by his Department was cancelled; when the meeting will be rescheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47439/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In considering the particular matter regarding entitlements for community service supervisors, regard must be had to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being finalised by officials in this Department and should be completed later this year. Due to unforeseen circumstances, it was necessary to postpone the meeting scheduled for 2 November. A meeting of the Forum has been arranged to discuss the scoping exercise in the coming weeks.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

Capital Expenditure Programme Publication

69. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will publish a draft version of the capital plan in advance of the plan being considered by the Cabinet. [47498/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In Budget 2018, I announced the Government's capital spending plans for the next four years. I also set out the intention, as already announced, that the Government will publish a new 10-year capital

plan alongside the proposed new National Planning Framework (NPF) for spatial policy detailed in the Ireland 2040 Plan.

As the Deputy will be aware, Government has allocated a significant and well-planned, increase in public capital investment amounting to €4.3 billion over the remaining four years of the current capital plan. This is in addition to the additional €2.2 billion for housing allocated in the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Consequently between 2014 and 2021 public capital investment in Ireland will have more than doubled and, as set out by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, this will see public investment levels in Ireland moving to among the highest in the EU.

The long-term capital plan will comprise a financial and budgetary plan for public capital investment over the next ten years. It will contain detailed information on public capital investment projects and programmes already funded over the next four years, on the basis of the allocations announced in the recent Budget. It will also identify the longer-term public infrastructure priorities which are intended to underpin the achievement of the key strategic outcomes set out in the Ireland 2040 Plan over the period to the late 2020s.

The NPF which the new 10 year capital plan is designed to help deliver, is the product of extensive consultation, and is a key vehicle for establishing national infrastructure priorities. In addition, as part of the recent review of the current capital plan my Department held an extensive public consultation and has engaged with experts and key stakeholders. Hence, I am satisfied that both the NPF and 10 year capital plan will represent the product of considerable consultation and public deliberation.

I fully expect given the constitutional role of the Dail in approving and scrutinising Voted Expenditure that the 10 year capital plan will be subject to extensive discussion and debate in the Oireachtas, including through the work of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight, of which the Deputy is a member.

In this regard the key messages contained in the Committee's report last July on public capital investment were highlighted in the review of the capital plan published in September. These aligned closely with several of the key themes set out in the review which are informing and guiding the preparation of the 10-year plan.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

70. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the south Ennis flood scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47382/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Ennis South Flood Relief Scheme is being progressed by Clare County Council as the Contracting Authority with funding from the Office of Public Works. When completed the scheme will provide protection for 74 residential and 10 non-residential properties in the area.

A report on the outcome of the tender process is currently being reviewed and this should be completed shortly. It is hoped that the contract for the construction of the works can be awarded shortly.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

71. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the recent Topical Issue on community employment supervisors; the reason the meeting of the forum regarding community employment scheme supervisors to be hosted by his Department was cancelled; the date for the rescheduled meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47491/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In considering the particular matter regarding entitlements for community service supervisors, regard must be had to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being finalised by officials in this Department and should be completed later this year. Due to unforeseen circumstances, it was necessary to postpone the meeting scheduled for 2 November. A meeting of the Forum has been arranged to discuss the scoping exercise in the coming weeks.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

Flood Relief Schemes

72. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason dredging has ceased on the river Shannon; if this will recommence; if so, the areas that will be dredged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47512/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): In December 2016, the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group took a major decision to develop a plan for strategic maintenance works on the River Shannon to complement the Group's existing Work Programme.

A sub-committee of the Group was established to examine all of the necessary legal, environmental, technical and other considerations. The sub-committee identified a small number of areas where targeted maintenance would increase the conveyance capacity of the river.

Work has been undertaken at Maddens Island and Muckinish and tree cutting at Shannon Grove is ongoing, in accordance with the environmental consents in place. Any further dredging has been suspended for the time being, in accordance with the consent conditions associated with the environmental window for such works. Further works will continue to be the subject of license applications for the appropriate environmental consents.

Public Procurement Regulations

73. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which public procurement procedures can achieve savings in the course of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47554/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The OGP and its partner sector sourcing organisations in Health, Education, Local Government and Defence have enabled procurement savings estimated at €300 million over 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

The 2017 savings outturn has not been finalised but the target for 2017 was between €80 and €100 million and current indications are that this will be achieved. The OGP and its partner

sector sourcing organisations in Health, Education, Local Government and Defence are currently developing the 2018 savings targets. Additional direct and indirect benefits attributable to the new model arise from cost avoidance, reduced administration overhead and improved specifications. Increasing the application of professional procurement also reduces risk to the State by identifying risk and establishing contractual arrangements to manage those risks, such as damages payments for non-performance where applicable.

It is important to note that the consistent approach enabled by the new procurement structures can also deliver savings to businesses who bid for State contracts through standardised documents, proportional insurance requirements and reduced administration in submitting documents only when short-listed or successful in competitions.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

74. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether further reform or policy initiatives are now required to maintain a stable path towards economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47555/17]

75. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which reform is likely to remain a key element in managing costs throughout the public sector in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47556/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 75 together.

Public Service Reform was a central element of the response to the challenges of recent years and remains an essential part of building for the future. We must build on progress made in recent years and maintain and renew our focus on Public Service Reform. It is essential that targeted recruitment and investment in public services is done in tandem with further Public Service reform measures, not least as current and future demographic trends will continue to place demands on public service delivery.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is currently developing a new phase of public service reform plan called *Our Public Service 2020* which is expected to be published by the end of the year. It will set out a series of actions to be delivered out to 2020 and beyond which will both build on the achievements of the last six years and respond to new challenges.

Our Public Service 2020 aims to deliver better outcomes for the public, to support innovation and collaboration and to build public service organisations that are resilient and agile. The framework is built on three key pillars.

- Delivering for our public
- Innovating for our future
- Developing our people and organisations

The new reform plan also aims to strongly link expenditure with reform. This is to ensure that real reform is delivered and that there is a continued emphasis on ensuring value for money principles are adhered to across the public service.

Ensuring value for the tax payer is an important element of managing the costs of public services and maintaining stable public finances. In July this year I published the output of the spending review. The papers prepared for the Spending Review cover a wide range of policy

areas and account for a significant proportion of current expenditure. In total, 21 papers have been produced by officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other Departments. In addition, an analysis of expenditure trends in key sectors was also published. This was the first in a planned series of ‘rolling’ selective reviews that will take place each year to 2019.

The aim of the Spending Review process is to examine existing spending by reference to the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. This approach allows for systematic examination of existing spending programmes to assess their effectiveness in meeting policy and reform objectives and also to identify scope for re-allocating funding to meet both expenditure and reform priorities.

In this way, we can ensure that we achieve real reform across the public service and that value for money is achieved for every euro of public funding spent.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full extent to date of recruitment throughout the public sector in the context of economic recovery; the expectation in respect of future recruitments throughout the sector by the end of 2017 and thereafter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47558/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, in my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have overarching responsibility for workforce planning in and recruitment to the Civil Service.

In Budget 2015, it was announced that there will be a targeted programme of recruitment into the Civil Service to address service needs and a shortfall in key skills commencing in late 2014 and continuing. The Deputy will be aware that a number of open competitions have already taken place or are in the process of taking place for recruitment to the Civil Service.

I understand from the Public Appointments Service, who are the independent recruiter for the civil service, that since the lifting of the moratorium, approximately 5,300 civil servants from open competitions excluding temporary assignments and professional and technical posts, have been assigned to Government departments and offices across all general service grades.

In the Civil Service in 2017, competitions for Clerical Officer, Administrative Officer, Higher Executive Officer, Third Secretary and Principal Officer have taken place.

It is too early to say at this stage what competitions may be held in 2018. Factors such as the demand from Departments/offices from existing panels, consequential vacancies arising, retirements and defined skill demands will influence decisions to hold competitions and these are currently being assessed.

However, it is likely that an Assistant Principal Officer competition will be held in the first half of 2018.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

77. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied of being able to continue to meet the targets set by his Department in the context of spending and reform; and if he will make a statement on the mat-

ter. [47559/17]

79. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which each Department continues to maintain good practice in terms of expenditure in keeping with both the effects of the economic recession and the growing demands of the recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47561/17]

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the savings to date achieved through reform or limitation of expenditure in each of the past three years to date in 2017; the extent to which this is in line with targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47562/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77, 79 and 80 together.

Effective management of expenditure has been a key contributor towards putting Ireland's public finances back on a sustainable footing. On an ongoing basis, managing the delivery of public services within budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and their Departments. Important measures are in place to ensure that budgetary targets continue to be met. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters and there is regular reporting to Government on expenditure levels. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored against published expenditure profiles and this information is published each month in the Exchequer Statement.

As set out in the most recent Exchequer Statement, total gross voted expenditure at end-October 2017 was €46,220 million, which is €375 million below profile, but up €2,001 million (4.5%) in year-on-year terms. Gross voted current expenditure of €43,308 million at end-October is €159 million below profile but up €1,602 million (3.8%) year-on-year. Gross voted capital expenditure of €2,912 million at end-October is €216 million below profile, but up €398 million (15.8%) year-on-year. The Deputy will be aware that 2017 was the third consecutive year in which we were able to increase public spending. As set out in Budget 2018 last month, this will continue in 2018 with a modest, sustainable increase of just over 4% in spending compared to 2017.

Since the first public service reform plan was published in 2011, a comprehensive programme of reform has been implemented and this continues to be a key priority. This is important as the performance of the public service has major implications for the management of the State's finances, and for economic development and employment creation.

The 2014-16 public service reform plan put the public ever more to the centre of what we do both in terms of service delivery and transparency, openness and accountability. The final progress report on this plan, published in July 2017, was sent to all Deputies and is also available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie. The report set out a wide range of improved services for the public and savings across a range of projects.

Work continues in implementing reforms initiated under the 2014-16 plan including the ambitious programme of reform initiated under the Civil Service Renewal Plan and other sectoral reform programmes. The CSR Plan aims to create a more unified, professional, responsive, open and accountable civil service that can provide a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is currently developing a new phase of public service reform called Our Public Service 2020 which is expected to be published by the end of

the year. This will build on the achievements of the last six years and allow the public service to better respond to new challenges.

Our Public Service 2020 aims to deliver better outcomes for the public, to support innovation and collaboration and to build public service organisations that are resilient and agile. The framework is built on three key pillars.

- Delivering for our public
- Innovating for our future
- Developing our people and organisations

It will also ensure a continued emphasis on ensuring value for money principles are adhered to across the public service.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 23.

Question Nos. 79 and 80 answered with Question No. 77.

School Management

81. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional moneys will be made available for restoration of posts of responsibility within schools by September 2018 in view of the fact the amount allocated in budget 2017 does not allow for the restoration of posts to pre-moratorium levels (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47424/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2017 provided for a new package of support for school leadership, including middle management posts for primary and post primary schools.

My department recently issued circular 0063/2017 Leadership and Management in Primary schools which sets out a framework for posts in recognised primary schools.

The commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model means that the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts has been lifted and schools can now fill middle management posts in line with circular 0063/2017. The lifting of the moratorium is an initial phase in the restoration of middle management posts and any future improvements to the number of posts allocated will be dependent on budgetary demands.

Departmental Correspondence

82. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he received a report (details supplied); and if a meeting will be scheduled with his Department regarding same. [47342/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department has received correspondence, including a report, from the group referred to by the Deputy and that a response has issued.

As the Deputy may be aware, my Department uses a Geographical Information System

(GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and the Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

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

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools
- Provision of a new school or schools.

As with other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data for the South Kildare school planning areas is being kept under ongoing review by the Department to take account of updated data. It is anticipated that decisions based on the nationwide demographic exercises will be announced before the end of 2017.

With regard to demand for particular models of school provision, it should be noted that the patronage process for new schools is a separate process which has been in place since 2011. This process is run after it has been decided that a new school is required. Parental preferences are central to this process and prospective patrons are required to provide evidence of demand for their particular school model and medium of instruction. Therefore, where, based on demographics, it might be indicated that a new school is required, it cannot be guaranteed that this would be a school under a particular type of patronage as this will be dependent to a large degree on parental preferences in the area at the time of a patronage process.

My Department is aware that representatives of Educate Together and the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board recently entered into discussions regarding a possible partnership to provide Educate Together second-level provision in the Newbridge area of South Kildare, where significant additional places are being delivered. I welcome this development and consider it a great example of constructive co-operation between patron bodies in order to provide greater choice and diversity to the education system.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

83. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application by a school (details supplied) for emergency summer works will be granted. [47348/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question applied for funding under the Summer Works Scheme, to provide a roof over each of the school's courtyards.

The scheme is designed to address necessary and immediate works; funding is not made available for projects unless considered by the Department to be essential. In view of the scale of demand, nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme and having regard to the constrained funding position, my Department advised the school that funding could not be provided for the works sought.

Almost €80 million has been approved to date under the Summer Works Scheme, in respect

of over 640 school projects in categories 1 - 6. Details of the successful school applicants are published on my Department's website *www.education.ie*. The 2018 budgetary provision will allow my Department meet the carry over costs of summer works projects already approved, the assessment of applications in the remaining categories 7-10 is reliant on the availability of funding.

School Accommodation Provision

84. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appeal by a school (details supplied); when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47359/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that an additional mainstream classroom has recently been approved for the school in question and the school authority have been informed.

Schools Site Acquisitions

85. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the search for a site for the proposed 1,000 pupil post-primary school (details supplied) in Dublin 24. [47386/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials in my Department have been working closely with officials from South Dublin County Council towards the acquisition of a permanent site to meet the needs of the school to which the Deputy refers. A number of potentially suitable sites were identified and my Department is currently engaging with landowners in respect of preferred site options. Due to commercial sensitivities it is not possible to provide further information at this time.

I can assure the Deputy that every effort is being made to secure a suitable site for the school as expeditiously as possible.

Schools Facilities

86. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that the playing fields land at a college (details supplied) have been sold; if he has seen the contracts for such a sale; if his attention has been drawn to the legal case that is being taken by the board of the school to stop the deal closing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47394/17]

87. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the board of a college (details supplied) will be supported in its endeavours including the legal proceedings to stop the sale of playing pitches in view of the fact that this school is funded by his Department and the fields are vital green space used by the students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47395/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 87 together.

I would like to clarify for the Deputy that the fields at the school in question are owned by

the Congregation of Christian Brothers. The decision by the Congregation of Christian Brothers to dispose of land owned by the Congregation is a matter for the Brothers. In July 2017, the Congregation advised my Department in writing that the lands concerned were sold and that the Congregation had signed a legally binding contract with the purchasers and the Congregation could not reverse this transaction. My Department has not seen the contracts for sale.

My Department understands that the Board of Management or members of the Board of Management may be taking legal proceedings against the Congregation of Christian Brothers relating to the sale of the fields. My Department has no role in such proceedings.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

88. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special needs assistants (details supplied) employed at the start of a school year do not have hours reduced in the course of the school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47402/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The number of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) employed in a school depends on the allocation given to the school by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), based on its assessment of the special educational needs of pupils in the school. My Department has no control over the allocation process to schools and is not in a position to influence the allocation process in light of the fact that the NCSE is an independent statutory body. A school's allocation can increase or decrease and where schools receive a reduced allocation this can be for a variety of factors, such as pupils for whom the school had previously received an allocation have left, or have declining care needs. In light of this, the employment of SNAs may be reduced from full-time to part-time or may be terminated by way of redundancy where the approved allocation of the school is reduced.

Where a full-time SNA post within a school is reduced to a part-time post, the issue of redundancy payment in respect of the loss of hours may arise. Redundancy arrangements for SNAs are set out in Department Circular 0058/2006.

In addition, as per the provisions of the Supplementary Assignment Arrangements for SNAs which were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed and which continue to operate under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 - 2020, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and IMPACT, have signed up to that agreement, where a school/ETB has an additional allocation of SNA hours/posts, then that additional allocation of hours/posts must be offered to any existing part-time SNAs in that employment, in order of seniority, before the employer has recourse to recruitment. These arrangements are set out in Department Circular 0042/2017 (which can be accessed via the link https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0042_2017.pdf).

On 5 July 2017, I announced that 975 additional SNAs were to be allocated to schools over the period September to December 2017, a 7.5% increase in SNA numbers in order to meet the level of assessed demand. This announcement brings the total number of SNAs to 13,990, representing an increase in the total numbers of SNAs of 32%, from 10,575 to 13,990 since 2011.

In addition, and as announced as part of Budget 2018, funding is being allocated for the recruitment of over 1,090 new SNAs in 2018 (based on current forecasts), including some 130 posts which will be filled in the period between January and June next year, with the remainder being appointed from September 2018. This brings the total number of SNAs to over 15,000.

While reduced hours or redundancies will unavoidably occur in individual schools due to

a variety of circumstances, these increases in SNA numbers coupled with the operation of the Supplementary Assignment Panel Arrangements make it more likely that SNAs can avoid redundancy and that part-time SNAs can gain or regain full-time employment.

School Accommodation Provision

89. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the required extended temporary accommodation necessary to accommodate the intake of students in September 2018 in a school (details supplied); the site location; the timeframe for delivery of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47406/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy is currently located in temporary accommodation across two sites. My Department is working in close co-operation with the patron body, Educate Together, and Cork County Council regarding the arrangements for temporary accommodation for the 2018/19 school year. My Department, in consultation with the local authority, is currently exploring the feasibility of accommodating the school on an interim basis, at a site which is located in the vicinity of the proposed permanent site for the school.

As the Deputy may be aware, a site acquisition process for the school is currently underway and a suitable permanent site for the school has been identified. Agreement in principle with the landowners has been reached and the acquisition process in respect of this site is currently at the conveyancing stage.

My Department is aware of the limitations of the current temporary accommodation and every effort is being made to progress additional temporary accommodation and the permanent accommodation for the school as expeditiously as possible.

Schools Site Acquisitions

90. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the acquisition of a permanent school site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47407/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department has identified a suitable permanent site for the school to which the Deputy refers and agreement in principle in respect of this proposed acquisition, subject to satisfactory conveyancing, was reached in February 2017. This Department requested draft contracts at that time.

The site in question is currently not accessible and aspects of the design and delivery of the access road to the site needed to be discussed with the landowner. Work has been ongoing in the interim in relation to this. On foot of these discussions, the vendor provided draft contracts in August 2017 and this enabled the Chief State Solicitor's Office to commence engagement with respect to this.

It is important to note that the ongoing site acquisition process is not hindering the delivery of the permanent accommodation for the school as preliminary design work has commenced in respect of this project. The Design Team has already had some engagement with officials in the relevant Local Authority in that regard and will shortly be holding formal pre-planning discussions with a view to further advancing the project.

The Department is aware of the limitations of the school's current temporary accommoda-

tion and every effort is being made to progress the permanent accommodation for the school as expeditiously as possible.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

91. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to put a defibrillator in each school in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47433/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the decision to install a defibrillator is made at local school level and is a matter for the board of management of each individual school.

The question of the need for defibrillators to be made available in places, such as schools, and any training needs arising is primarily a public health matter and would therefore be a matter for the Department of Health.

Teacher Exchange Scheme

92. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in discussions with the INTO regarding a permanent exchange scheme for primary school teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47463/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The provisions of the teacher exchange scheme are set out in Circular letter 0017/2015 the contents of which were agreed under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council.

In 2016 the scheme was reviewed under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council and to facilitate this review the maximum period for which an exchange may occur was extended to allow applicants a sixth year of exchange in the school year 2016/17. Following a request from teacher representatives that a voluntary transfer scheme for Primary Teachers be considered it was decided to extend the maximum period for which an exchange may occur for one further year. Therefore the period for which an exchange may occur for those teachers in their fifth or sixth year of exchange was extended for one further year subject to other provisions of the Circular being complied with, i.e. application by the teacher to his/her Board of Management and the approval of the Board of Management being obtained.

The Teachers Conciliation Council is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for Teachers and was set up to deal with claims and proposals relating to the terms and conditions of employment of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of the teacher unions, school management, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission. The proceedings of the Teachers Conciliation Council are confidential.

Education Centre Network

93. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the new regulations which state that a director of education can hold the role for five years were not debated before they were introduced; the consultation process undertaken in advance of the regulations being introduced; the reason the regulations were never brought before the Teacher

Conciliation Council; the rationale for the regulations; the number of submissions received by his Department on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47506/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Section 37 of the Education Act 1998 provides the statutory basis for Education Support Centres and outlines the policy framework underpinning their recognition and functions, funding, staffing and governance. The Act empowers me as Minister to make regulations relating to the operation of centres including the appointment and remuneration of staff which includes the post of director.

The regulations I recently promulgated under Section 37(6) of the Education Act underpins my Department's policy for the secondment of teachers to Education Support Centres. These regulations comply with relevant legal and policy requirements.

Officials of my Department communicated the introduction and the rationale for the regulations to the Education Centres, ATECI as the representative body for Education Centres and the teacher unions. Officials met with ATECI and one of the teacher unions and received a written submission from ATECI.

By way of background, my Department arranges for the secondment of teachers from their teaching posts for the purpose of developing and providing CPD for teachers and for the appointment as Directors of Education Support Centres (ESC's). Secondments are a temporary arrangement renewable on a year to year basis. While on secondment, teachers retain their school post, the terms and conditions that apply to teachers and receive their salary and a secondment allowance which are met in full by my Department.

In 2010, a new policy of secondment was introduced which included a new limit on secondment numbers and established an upper limit of 5 years on the length of a secondment, following which the Directors return to their posts either as a teacher or an inspector. The policy was agreed by the then Minister for Finance Mr Brian Lenihan T.D., and the then Minister for Education and Science, Mary Coughlan T.D.

There are many benefits from the revised policy for teachers, their boards of management and the system as a whole. Because an upper limit of 5 years now applies to secondments, there is:

- confidence that the teachers involved in the delivery of CPD have recent experience of the curriculum and of the school environment
- certainty about secondment parameters which assist individual teachers and their boards of management in planning

There are more opportunities for teachers to take on career enhancing roles in the support services and the Centres. Teachers returning to their school after a period of secondment have the potential to enrich their school environment and they become eligible to take on subsequent secondment opportunities after a period back in their school.

Regular turnover of seconded teachers is now an established practice with teachers returning to enrich their schools so the investment in their skills is not lost. Since 2010, 10 Education Centres have successfully recruited new Directors and the work of the Centres has not been negatively affected.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedure to be followed to return to their former position as a special needs assistant teacher in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47563/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): When an employer has an SNA vacancy to fill, they must undertake the recruitment process in accordance with the provisions outlined in Circular 0042/2017 “Recruitment of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) –Supplementary Assignment Arrangements for the 2017/18 School Year” - https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0042_2017.pdf

The supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed. These supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs continue to operate under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 - 2020, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and IMPACT, have signed up to that agreement. As set out in the LRC proposals, the supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs only apply to current SNAs who are notified that they are to be made redundant. Accordingly, the purpose of these arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school / ETB.

It should be noted that this does not prevent any person from applying for SNA vacancies but employers are obliged to give precedence to applicants who are members of the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel.

Apprenticeship Programmes

95. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the review SOLAS was to commission on pathways to participation in apprenticeship, including participation of persons with a disability; and his plans for developing apprenticeship opportunities for persons with disabilities. [47581/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): SOLAS has commenced the review on pathways to participation in apprenticeship, including participation of persons with a disability. As set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, the review will be completed by end the second quarter of 2018.

Apprenticeship Data

96. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the targeted apprentice registrations forecasted for all craft-based apprenticeships and registrations planned under new consortia led apprenticeship programmes; the apprenticeship population forecasted between craft-based and new consortia led apprenticeships; the number of existing and new apprenticeship programmes forecasted in each of the years 2016 to 2020, in tabular form; and the actual numbers released, apprenticeship registrations and new programmes operationalised for these targets in 2016 and to date in 2017. [47582/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information requested by the deputy is set out in the following table:

-	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Projected Number of Craft Apprenticeships	27	27	27	27	27
Forecast Registration for Craft Apprenticeships	3,390	4,147	4,697	5,087	5,587
Projected Number of New Consortia Apprenticeships	2	15	25	35	40
Forecast Registrations for New Consortia Apprenticeships	82	800	1,500	2,297	3,413
Total Target Registrations	3,472	4,947	6,197	7,384	9,000
Forecast Population Craft Apprenticeships	11,025	13,582	16,243	18,956	21,729
Forecast Population New Consortia Apprenticeships	82	882	2,370	3,994	6,069
Total Forecast Population	11,107	14,464	18,613	22,950	27,798

Springboard Programme

97. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budget allocation for expenditure on Springboard in each of the years 2011 to 2017; the allocation made for 2018; the number of persons enrolled in such courses in each such year; and the projections for the period to 2020 in tabular form. [47586/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Springboard+ which incorporates the ICT skills conversion programme, is a specific initiative which provides free part-time and full-time courses aimed at addressing the current skills needs of employers and supporting jobseekers to return to employment.

Springboard+ courses are at Level 6 (Certificate) to Level 9 (Masters) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and are delivered in public and private higher education providers around the country. All Springboard+ courses are in areas of identified skills need.

Questions - Written Answers

To date over €144m has been allocated to Springboard+ providing for over 35,000 places. Courses have been delivered in areas such as, ICT, Manufacturing which includes the biopharma sector, Construction, Entrepreneurship, Cross-Enterprise Skills, the Hospitality Sector and International Financial Services. 90% of courses (with the exception of entrepreneurship-based courses) have a work placement.

Springboard+ is managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf on my Department. An evaluation of Springboard+ 2011-2016 published by the HEA in 2016 showed that:

80% of Springboard+ participants 2011-2015 are no longer on the live register

- Employment rates 3-6 months after graduation have increased from 37% in 2011 to 61% in 2014.

- ICT Conversion Graduates has the highest employment rates 3-6 months after graduation at 73% in 2014.

The attached file contains:

- The budget allocation and the number of participants enrolled in Springboard+ for the years 2011 to 2016

- The budget allocation and the proposed number of places for Springboard+ 2017 and Springboard+ 2018, and

- The estimated budget allocation and proposed number of places for Springboard+ 2019 and Springboard+ 2020.

Springboard+

Year	Funding by academic year	Participant Numbers
2011/12	€16,706,405	4,836
2012/13	€23,532,410	6,335
2013/14	€24,902,092	6,183
2014/15	€26,396,291	5,178
2015/16	€34,047,356	7,800
2016/17	€18,720,495	5,326
*2017/18	€27,438,000	6,471
*2018/19	€30,438,000	7,471
*2019/20	€30,438,000	7,471
2020/21	€30,438,000	7,471

*€27,438,00 has been allocated to Springboard+ 2017 providing for 6,471 places

*€30,438,000 has been allocated to Springboard+ 2018 providing for 7,471 places

Funding for 2018/19 to 2020/21 is dependent on budget allocations, and this may increase, with corresponding increase in places

National Training Fund

98. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budget allocation for expenditure on Skillnets in each of the years 2011 to 2017; the allocation made for 2018;

the number of persons enrolled in such courses in each such year; and the projections for the period to 2020. [47587/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I can inform the Deputy that the budget allocation for expenditure on Skillnets in each of the years 2011 to 2018 is outlined in the table:

2011 – 2016 Actual

Year	NTF Allocation	Numbers Enrolled
2011	€14.5 Million	42,113
2012	€14.5 Million	44,000
2013	€15.1 Million	45,878
2014	€15.7 Million	46,449
2015	€16.2 Million	48,923
2016	€16.2 Million	50,373

2017 - 2018 Allocations

Year	NTF Allocation	Numbers Enrolled
2017	€18.2 Million	52,000 (projected)
2018	€21.7 Million	55,000 (projected)

It is not possible to supply projections for the years 2019 and 2020 as the allocation figures form part of the of the Annual Budget process.

Immigrant Investor Programme Administration

99. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the immigrant investment programme and recent changes in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47373/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the most recent changes to the Immigrant Investor Programme occurred in December 2016. At that time the Tánaiste and then Minister for Justice and Equality announced the intention to restore the minimum investment for an enterprise under the Immigrant Investor Scheme, from €0.5 million to €1.0 million with effect from 1 January 2017. At the time, developments and trends surrounding the Immigrant Investor Programme indicated to the Expert Committee that the restoration of the Investment threshold to its original level of €1 million was warranted.

I am advised that the increase in the investment threshold has in no way impacted negatively on the number of applications received. Indeed, the quality of application received has improved and the current threshold also provides for a greater commitment from investors.

Garda Strength

100. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in County Kildare by station on 30 April 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47343/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Kildare Division on 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 341. There are also 20 Garda Reserves and 29 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 72 of whom have been assigned to the Kildare Division. In addition, another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. The substantial increase in Garda numbers is tangible progress on achieving this Government's vision of an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

I am pleased to say that Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Kildare Division, in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. Some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021.

The Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides for an investment of €46 million the Garda fleet to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In the period 2013 to end of 2017 almost €44 million will have been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period.

This investment in resources will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I expect that the Kildare Division, like all other Garda Divisions will benefit from these new resources becoming available.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Kildare Division on 30 April 2016 and the 30 April 2017 is as set out in the following table:

STRENGTH OF THE KILDARE DIVISION

DISTRICT	STATION	30 APRIL 2016	30 April 2017
KILDARE	ATHY	27	28
	CASTLEDERMOT	3	4
	KILDARE	34	36
	MONASTEREVIN	4	5
	NEWBRIDGE	49	42
	RATHANGAN	2	3
	TOTAL	119	118
	LEIXLIP	CARBURY	8
	CELBRIDGE	11	11
	KILCOCK	9	9
	LEIXLIP	37	49
	MAYNOOTH	13	14
	TOTAL	78	90
NAAS	CLANE	7	7
	KILCULLEN	2	2
	NAAS	102	104
	ROBERTSTOWN	3	2
	TOTAL	114	115
KILDARE TOTAL		311	323

Garda Data

101. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in County Laois by station on 30 April 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47344/17]

111. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí to be recruited to counties Laois and Offaly; the number recruited for these counties since 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47509/17]

113. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if additional community gardaí will be made available to counties Laois and Offaly in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47511/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101, 111 and 113 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Laois/Offaly Division on 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 324, 8 of whom

are community Gardaí. There are also 17 Garda Reserves and 25 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 66 of whom have been assigned to the Laois/Offaly Division, 37 of whom were assigned since 2016. In addition, another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. The substantial increase in Garda numbers is tangible progress on achieving this Government's vision of an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

I am pleased to say that Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Community Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Laois/Offaly Division, in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. Some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021.

The Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides for an investment of €46 million the Garda fleet to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In the period 2013 to end of 2017 almost €44 million will have been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period.

This investment in resources will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and increased Garda visibility within our communities and I expect that the Laois/Offaly Division, like all other Garda Divisions will benefit from these new resources becoming available.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Laois/Offaly Division on 30 April 2016 and the 30 April 2017 is as set out in the following table:

STRENGTH OF THE LAOIS/OFFALY DIVISION

DISTRICT	STATION	30 April 2016	30 APRIL 2017
BIRR	BANAGHER	5	5

DISTRICT	STATION	30 April 2016	30 APRIL 2017
	BIRR	27	29
	CLOGHAN	1	1
	FERBANE	5	4
	KILCORMAC	2	2
	KINNITTY	1	1
	SHINRONE	1	1
	TOTAL	42	43
PORTLAOISE	ABBEYLEIX	19	20
	ARLES	1	1
	BALLYLINAN	2	2
	BORRIS-IN-OSSORRY	1	1
	CLONASLEE	1	1
	DURROW	1	1
	MOUNTMELICK	6	5
	MOUNTRATH	3	3
	PORTARLINGTON	11	14
	PORTLAOISE	103	117
	RATHDOWNEY	2	2
	STRADBALLY	2	2
	TOTAL	152	169
TULLAMORE	CLARA	3	5
	DAINGEAN	2	2
	EDENDERRY	12	12
	RHODE	1	1
	TULLAMORE	74	72
	TOTAL	92	92
LAOIS/OFFALY TOTAL		286	304

Stardust Fire

102. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the ongoing review into the Stardust fire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47350/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government established an independent Stardust Assessment to evaluate the claim of new and updated evidence presented by the Stardust Victims' Committee relating to the Stardust tragedy. Judge McCartan's assessment report was formally submitted to my Department on 17 October 2017. The report was considered by my Department and was sent to the Office of the Attorney General for advices.

I brought the report to the Cabinet meeting on 7 November 2017, following receipt of those advices. The report was accepted by the Government and furnished to the Stardust Victims' Committee immediately afterwards.

I published the report later on 7 November and also laid the report before the Houses of the Oireachtas on the same date, given that the assessment process was initiated on foot of a Dáil Motion in January.

I would like to express my gratitude to Judge McCartan for the work he undertook in preparing his report. The judge was nominated by the relatives as a person they trusted and I am grateful to him for his willingness to undertake this important public service.

Having carefully considered the two previous independent reports on the Stardust tragedy and considered all material made available to him, Judge McCartan concluded that no further new enquiry is warranted.

The Stardust Fire was undoubtedly one of the greatest tragedies in the history of this country and the Government established this independent assessment process to ensure that all available evidence, including any new material that may have come to light, could be assessed as a matter of urgency. I acknowledge the terrible pain and loss of the relatives of the victims and the fact that the report does not come to the conclusion that they would have wished for.

Residency Permits

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 4 will be renewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47380/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy was granted Long Term Residency (Stamp 4) on 03 February 2009 for five years. INIS did not receive an application for renewal of this Long Term Residency permission (Stamp 4). This person, however, currently holds a Stamp 1 permission to remain in the State valid to 20 August 2018.

Based on the information supplied, INIS is unable to advise on whether the person referred to by the Deputy is eligible for Stamp 4 permission. It is open to the person concerned to submit an application for Stamp 4 to Long Term Residency Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 for examination.

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

Garda Commissioner Appointment

104. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to appoint a Garda Commissioner before the work of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland is completed. [47401/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware the Policing Authority under section 9 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, has responsibility for nominating persons for appointment by the Government to the post of Garda

Commissioner.

This will be the first time that the new legislative process is utilised and I have consulted with the Chair of the Authority about a process to identify and appoint a permanent Commissioner to An Garda Síochána. We are agreed that it is crucial that a deliberate and considered recruitment process takes place so that the best possible candidate is appointed following a selection process. We are also agreed that an overly long delay in the appointment of a new Commissioner would not be optimal for the organisation in terms of performance and morale.

I am pleased to say that the Authority has commenced the groundwork for the recruitment process in advance of the formal triggering of the statutory process by Government. I see this process taking a number of weeks during which the Authority will engage with my Department and with the Public Appointments Service which will undertake the competition on behalf of the Authority. Importantly, it will also allow the Authority to explore with the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland how it sees the future role and responsibilities of the new Commissioner. As the Deputy is aware the Commission is undertaking a comprehensive review of all aspects of policing in the State and has considerable experience and expertise. I very much welcome the willingness of the Commission to share its perspective with the Authority in advance of completing its work in September 2018. This will assist in ensuring that potential candidates have as much information as possible in relation to the future direction of policing in the State.

Subject to the progress that the Authority makes over the coming weeks I would expect that the Government will be in a position to formally approve the Authority to invite the Public Appointments Service to conduct the selection process in the coming weeks. Once the process is triggered I would anticipate that it will take between four to six months to identify and appoint a successful candidate.

Equality Issues

105. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are standard practices in place to ensure companies and semi-State bodies do not discriminate against persons that may be computer illiterate by moving all services online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47419/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy will be aware, computer literacy is not a protected ground of discrimination under the Equality Acts. Accordingly, I have no ministerial responsibility in relation to this issue.

Immigration Policy

106. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when final arrangements to allow asylum seekers to work will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47465/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Supreme Court judgment in the case of *N.V.H. v. The Minister for Justice and Equality* found, on 30 May last, that in an international protection system with no temporal limits as to when the application process will be concluded, an absolute prohibition on the right to work for international protection applicants is contrary to the right to seek employment under the Constitution. The Court recognises that this is a matter for the Executive and Legislature to consider and accordingly has

adjourned consideration of the Order the Court should make for a period of six months.

Following the approval of Government, I established an Inter-Departmental Taskforce to examine the wide-ranging implications of the judgment, and to consider appropriate solutions. The Taskforce is also examining the legal options available to the State to give effect to the judgement.

The Taskforce is due to report back to Government shortly in preparation for the State's response to the Court judgment. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further in advance of the Taskforce reporting on its deliberations on the matter.

Direct Provision System

107. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to address the lack of privacy in direct accommodation, particularly for young women and girls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47466/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The on-going implementation of the McMahon Report recommendations in relation to the facilities in State provided accommodation is contributing to greater privacy and autonomy for all residents, including young women and girls. To date, improved facilities have been or are being implemented in Ballyhaunis and Mosney (full independent living and food hall), Milstreet (independent living and food hall being implemented) Monaghan (communal catering), Athlone (refurbishment of all homes), Clonakilty (communal catering). This work will continue across all centres as resources allow so that we continue to meet the basic needs of protection applicants in a cost effective manner.

Where these facilities have not yet been implemented in an accommodation centre, every family has their own sleeping accommodation in the respective accommodation centre in which they live.

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department is a demand led organisation. It is currently providing accommodation for almost 4,870 persons. The composition of protection applicants requiring RIA accommodation (in terms of individuals / couples / families) is dynamic which means that the process of matching the facilities and accommodation available to the changing requirements of those in need of accommodation is an ongoing exercise.

A large proportion of the protection applicants requiring RIA accommodation are single persons. Single persons are accommodated in RIA in shared rooms with other persons of the same gender. Most single persons will share with one to two other persons and the large majority have access to en-suite or dedicated bathrooms.

Children are only provided with RIA accommodation as part of a family unit. When allocating accommodation to families, the family make up (including number, ages and gender of children) is taken into consideration and where appropriate interconnecting rooms are provided.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the position of persons (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47492/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned are the subject of Deportation Orders made on 15 September 2017.

These orders require the persons concerned to remove themselves from the State and to remain out of the State. The enforcement of the deportation order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

I am satisfied that the decisions made in these cases were made after a detailed examination of all relevant factors and under all applicable legislation. This being the case, I see no basis for having these cases further reviewed.

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

Rural Crime

109. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures he will take to combat rural crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47507/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I want to assure the Deputy that I am very much aware of the impact of crime on rural communities, including the serious damage done by organised gangs who target rural areas to engage in burglary and other property-related crime. In particular, I would like to highlight the good work of An Garda Síochána in relation to a number of arrests in recent days of suspects for burglaries in rural areas.

The Deputy will appreciate it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and Districts and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. However, I can assure the Deputy that Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that optimum use is made of these resources.

The success of the Garda measures to tackle burglary being implemented through Operation Thor is borne out by latest available CSO crime figures which show a very significant decline in property related crime. It is encouraging to note that since the launch of Operation Thor in late 2015, the CSO burglary figures have shown a significant 30% decrease in burglary for the twelve months of 2016 when compared to 2015.

As the Deputy is aware, Operation Thor involves a broad range of activities to tackle organised crime gangs and other prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. This comprehensive operation is supported by the enhanced Government investment in Garda resources, including an allocation of almost €100 million for Garda overtime in 2017. We have also invested heavily in the Garda fleet, with over 720 new vehicles coming on stream since the start of 2015 and a provision of €46 million for new Garda vehicles under the Capital Plan 2016-2021.

These additional investments in policing make it possible to maintain and extend a range of intensive policing operations, including the continued targeting of burglaries and related crime via Operation Thor.

Under Operation Thor we have seen over 87,060 targeted checkpoints and 65,960 crime prevention patrols nationwide. This concentrated policing activity has produced in the region of 6,060 arrests and 6,700 charges covering a range of offences which, in addition to burglary, have included handling stolen property, possession of firearms and drugs offences.

This Government has also made it a particular priority to strengthen our legislative provisions through the enactment of the Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Act 2015 which is targeted at repeat burglars who have previous convictions and who are charged with multiple offences of residential burglary. This new legislation is now available to support the work which is being carried out by An Garda Síochána under Operation Thor.

The Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities. This is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. The Deputy will be aware that, as part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnerships with community stakeholders, including the farming organisations.

There are a range of partnership initiatives which have been established between An Garda Síochána and important rural-based organisations such as the Irish Farmers Association, Muintir na Tíre and other rural community organisations. These include the well established Community Alert Programme, which receives annual funding from my Department, as well as the work of the Metal Theft Forum, the Crimestoppers campaign highlighting the Theft of Live-stock, the Theftstop initiative in relation to farm equipment, and the highly successful Garda Text Alert Scheme.

Furthermore, I was pleased to recently announce that an additional €100,000 was being made available to Text Alert Groups, registered with An Garda Síochána, to provide modest financial assistance with the running costs they incur each year. This Text Alert Rebate Scheme will be administered by Muintir na Tíre and Groups wishing to participate in the Scheme can find more details at www.muintir.ie.

The Deputy will be aware that An Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 places a strong emphasis on developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation and enhancing the current delivery model so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. It will result in the introduction of multi-skilled Community Policing Teams in every District. Community Policing Teams will be made-up of Gardaí from a number of different units who will work with the local community to prevent and detect crime. Undoubtedly, the ongoing recruitment process will support all Garda activities and will enhance the provision of effective Community Policing throughout the country.

The Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. The substantial increase in Garda numbers is tangible progress on achieving this Government's vision of an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

Crime Data

110. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reported crime figures for Counties Laois and Offaly over each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47508/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of the official recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. To be of assistance, I have requested the CSO to forward the available statistics directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 101.

Garda Stations

112. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the pilot project in respect of the reopening of Garda stations has commenced; the stations that have reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47510/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including the opening and closing of Garda stations.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

At its meeting on 13 June 2017, the Government noted the Garda Commissioner's interim Report in this regard, which analysed population and crime trends and the availability of stations for possible reuse. The report contained a recommendation that the former Stepside station in Co. Dublin be reopened on a pilot basis and indicated that, subject to further analysis, the Commissioner is likely to recommend in the final report the inclusion of the former stations at Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and Donard, Co. Wicklow in the pilot scheme. If a second station is to be reopened in Dublin, the Report indicates that the Commissioner is likely, subject to further analysis, to recommend that the former station at Rush, Co. Dublin be included in the pilot scheme.

I am informed that work is ongoing in An Garda Síochána to finalise the report and I understand that it is expected to be received shortly, at which point it will be brought to Government.

Question No. 113 answered with Question No. 101.

Visa Applications

114. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a visa was not granted to a person (details supplied); the alternative options the person has; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47530/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned submitted an application for De Facto Partner Immigration Permission on 18 May 2017. A decision was made on the application and a refusal letter was issued to the person concerned on 31 October 2017. The applicant was refused as it was noted from their application that they left the State in July 2017 and did not return. To meet the prevailing criteria for the De Facto Scheme in May 2017, an applicant must be residing together with their sponsor for a period of at least one year immediately prior to application. The applicant would also be expected to be resident in the State while their application is under review. It is open to the person concerned to submit another application for De Facto Partner Immigration Permission when they are lawfully present in the State.

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

Garda Deployment

115. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 109 of 19 October 2017, the reason the Government has allowed such a divergence arise in the number of gardaí per capita in view of the fact there is one garda for every 447 persons in the State on average however in County Meath there is one garda for every 660 persons (details supplied). [47532/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

In regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division as appropriate.

I am advised that ratios such as the number of Garda per head of population are not an appropriate tool to use when considering the allocation of Garda resources as they fail to take account of, among other things, the fact that crime levels and types can vary significantly among communities of similar population size.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Meath Division on 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 293 compared to a strength of 279 on 30 September 2015, representing a 5% increase in the strength of the Division. There are also 16 Garda Reserves and 29 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College

in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 46 of whom have been assigned to the Meath Division. In addition, another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

As the Deputy is aware, Operation Thor, which is effective in all Garda Divisions including the Meath Division, involves a broad range of activities to tackle organised crime gangs and other prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. It is encouraging to note that in parallel with the implementation of Operation Thor burglary figures in particular have shown a significant downward trend. The CSO official recorded crime statistics for Q4 of 2016 show a 30% decrease in burglary for the twelve months of 2016 when compared to the same period in 2015 - which parallels the implementation of Operation Thor. Furthermore, in terms of burglary, the decrease in Meath Division for this period is 2% higher than the national average with a decrease in burglary of 32%.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. The substantial increase in Garda numbers is tangible progress on achieving this Government's vision of an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

I am pleased to say that Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Meath Division, in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. Some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that on foot of a commitment in the Programme for Government, the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, at the request of the Policing Authority, is carrying out a review of the dispersal and use of resources available to An Garda Síochána in the delivery of policing services to local communities. The Authority has informed the Inspectorate that the review should take account of:

- the changing environments in rural, developing urban and suburban areas;
- the views of local communities;
- the allocation to and deployment of Garda resources at the local policing level, including the use of the Garda Reserve, Garda facilities and Garda equipment; and
- relevant recommendations made in previous Inspectorate reports.

The review will be comprehensive including a consultative process with local communities. It is the view of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate that the review should be completed within the first half of 2018.

Road Safety

116. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of speed cameras operating on average in each county to date in 2017 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47548/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I would like to thank the Deputy for raising the serious issue of speeding on our roads, particularly given the onset of the darker winter months and the greater likelihood of inclement weather. Road safety is, of course, a shared responsibility and it is incumbent upon us all to play our part by driving within the speed limit.

As the Deputy will be aware, the enforcement of road traffic legislation (including the deployment of safety cameras) is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána, in which I have no direct role. You will appreciate that the overall objective of the safety camera network is to reduce the number of speed related collisions and to save lives, as excessive or inappropriate speeding is a major factor in road traffic collisions and fatalities.

A targeted approach to speed enforcement is undertaken in order to significantly reduce the incidence of fatal and serious injuries and improve road safety. To this end, An Garda Síochána, in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland, completed an extensive analysis of the collision history on Ireland’s road network. Sections of road have been identified where a significant proportion of collisions occurred whereby speed was deemed the primary contributory factor.

Based on this analysis, a set of speed enforcement zones was developed. An Garda Síochána utilises these zones in order to direct speed enforcement activity in a proportionate and targeted manner. The locations of these speed enforcement zones are in the public domain and are available on the Garda website: *www.garda.ie*.

These speed enforcement zones are continually reviewed in light of survey data, collision history and local feedback to ensure that enforcement activity is properly targeted. Surveys are conducted to ensure the appropriate deployment of safety cameras on roads which have been identified as subject to inappropriate speed and where fatal and serious injury collisions continue to occur.

In addition, safety cameras are utilised by An Garda Síochána during day to day enforcement of the relevant provisions of the Road Traffic Acts and as part of specific target Garda operations throughout the country.

Leave to Remain

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Question No. 127 of 19 October 2017, if the matter will be investigated with a view to clarification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47564/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the renewal decision

letter of the person concerned advised the person concerned of the requirement that they apply for further renewal of their permission to remain, two weeks before their existing permission expired, to their Local District Headquarters. The person concerned had their permission to remain renewed for a further year to the 05 July 2018 at their Local District Headquarters.

As previously stated, responsibility for the registration process referred to is vested in the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Immigration Status

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a submission in respect of a wish to require residency status has been received in the relevant section of his Department from a person (details supplied); if further initiative is required on that person's part to expedite the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47565/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to identify the person referred to by the Deputy due to the lack of detail provided. If the Deputy can provide further details such as the person's full name (if different from that already provided), their Person ID number, their GNIB Registration Number, a Passport number, and if possible a date when they submitted the request in question, I will have the matter investigated further.

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

Immigration Status

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an appointment will be facilitated in order to update a stamp-4 permission in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47566/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that registration and renewal of immigration permissions for the greater Dublin area is carried out at its Burgh Quay Offices. To ensure customers do not have to queue for services, an online appointment booking system has been put in place.

Appointments are released Monday – Friday at 10am for dates, 8 weeks in the future. A small number of near-term appointments are also released each afternoon at 2:30pm. INIS advises applicants to book an appointment up to ten weeks before their permission expires.

Applicants who have not secured an appointment before the expiry of their permission should check the website at 2:30pm daily to secure an early appointment.

It is recognised that genuine emergency situations can arise and in that regard INIS has in place procedures to deal with these on a case-by-case basis. Enquiries in this regard should be addressed to burghquayregoffice@justice.ie.

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

Naturalisation Applications

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) can have their case for naturalisation progressed, notwithstanding their inability to obtain a national passport from their homeland, which has already been explained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47567/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going, with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, are satisfied. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

Persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide satisfactory evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a currently valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a previously held or out of date passport, birth certificate and marriage certificate. In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot produce their current passport, or a previous passport, birth certificate or other supporting documents the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanation should, where possible, be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from the relevant authorities or embassy responsible for the issuing of passports and birth certificates in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. INIS will consider the explanation given and, if satisfied it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may suggest alternative means to the person to assist in establishing their identity and nationality.

As the Deputy will appreciate, 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.

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

Naturalisation Applications

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a conclusion will be reached in the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47568/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A previous application was refused, for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 17 November 2014 advising of the decision.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. The fact that a person may have had an application refused does not preclude or disqualify them from submitting a fresh application in the future. Indeed, the letter advising an applicant of a negative decision also informs them that they may re-apply for the grant of a certificate of naturalisation at any time. The letter advises that, when considering making such a re-application, they should give due regard to the reasons for the refusal which were contained in the submission attached to the refusal letter and that any further application will be considered, taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

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

Family Reunification Applications

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expected status in respect of naturalisation or leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47569/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for family reunification was received in November 2016 in respect of the person concerned. The application is currently being processed. Applications for family reunification are dealt with in strict chronological order to ensure fairness to all applicants.

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

Visa Applications

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person's (details supplied) residency visa will be renewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47570/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to identify the person referred to by the Deputy due to the lack of detail provided. If the Deputy can provide further details such as the person's full name (if different from that already provided), their date of birth, their Person ID number, their GNIB Registration Number, a Passport number, and if possible a date when they submitted their request, I will have the matter investigated further.

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

Immigration Status

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a submission by a person (details supplied) will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47572/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has submitted written representations.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. All representations submitted will be fully considered in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Immigration Status

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47575/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 12 November 2008, following the refusal of the

international protection claim made by the person concerned and the detailed consideration of their case under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). That Order remains valid and in place.

Representations were received from the person concerned requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). Following the consideration of that request, a decision was taken in August 2016 that the Deportation Order should be 'affirmed' and this decision was communicated to the person concerned by registered post dated 04 August 2016.

The Deputy might wish to note that the effect of a Deportation Order is that the person named on the Order is legally obliged to leave the State and to remain out of the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order in this case is now an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Leave to Remain

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Question No. 336 of 20 September 2017, if compassionate consideration will be given to offering leave to remain or an extension of residency status in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47576/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned are a husband and wife who are the subject of deportation orders made on 11 March 2005.

Both persons were deported from the State on 04 June 2006, however, according to information received from their legal representatives, they returned to this State the year after they were deported.

Representations were received on behalf of the persons concerned requesting that the deportation orders be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as possible. The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be to have the existing deportation orders 'affirmed' or 'revoked'. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation orders remain valid and in place.

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

Naturalisation Applications

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to granting naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47577/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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

Naturalisation Applications

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for naturalisation or long-term residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47578/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

The position in relation to the immigration status of Long Term Residency is that, at the date of application, a person applying for such status must have been legally resident in the State for over five years (60 months) on the basis of work permit, work authorisation or working visa conditions and, as such, must have Stamp 1 or Stamp 4 endorsements on their passport during such periods. Given that the person concerned has no current right of residency in the State, they would clearly not be in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to persons applying to my Department for Long Term Residency status.

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

Registration of Title

129. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the case of persons (details supplied) will be finalised with the Land Registry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47594/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to T.D.s and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Prisoner Transfers

130. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the prisoner transfer scheme following the Supreme Court judgment in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47595/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question 207 of 12 October 2017. The position remains as stated. For convenience I repeat that reply below.

On 12 July, 2016, the Supreme Court dismissed the State's appeal in the case known as 'O'Farrell, McDonald, Rafferty -v- The Governor of Portlaoise Prison'. The case concerns an appeal taken by the State against a judgement of the High Court ordering the release of the three named prisoners who had been transferred to Ireland from the UK where they had been sentenced, under the provisions of the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners Acts, 1995 -1997.

The judgement is detailed and has implications for the continuance in its present form of the process operated by the Irish Prison Service for transferring prisoners from other States to Ireland. The practical effect of this judgement and whether it will necessitate legislative and/or administrative changes is being examined by officials of the Irish Prison Service and my Department in consultation with Attorney General. Given the complex nature of the review being undertaken, it is not possible at this stage to indicate a time frame for its conclusion.

Naturalisation Applications

131. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by a person (details supplied); when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47596/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

As the Deputy will appreciate, 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. While most straightforward cases are generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Turbary Rights

132. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the location in which the turbary rights information for bogs is stored. [47347/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Information on turbary rights is held by the Property Registration Authority of Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as successor to the Irish Land Commission. I also understand that Bord na Móna holds records of turbary rights allocated by it.

My Department receives information on turbary rights from individuals who have applied for compensation under the raised bog Cessation of Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme.

Design and Crafts Council

133. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the role carried out by her Department in respect of crafts and persons that work in the craft area (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47456/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Design & Crafts Council of Ireland is the national agency and development organisation for the craft industry in Ireland. The Design & Crafts Council is funded by the Department of Busi-

ness, Enterprise and Innovation via Enterprise Ireland. I have no statutory responsibility in relation to persons working in the craft area.

Departmental Funding

134. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on further State funding for the event centre in Cork city. [47467/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Cork Event Centre is a project being developed and managed by Cork City Council and the Council is responsible for the delivery of the project.

My Department has allocated €12 million to the City Council towards the cost of the Centre. This allocation is subject to a Service Level Agreement with the City Council to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements in relation to major capital projects.

On 27 September 2017, Cork City Council made an application to my Department for a further grant of €10 million to assist in the development of the project. My Department will now assess the application. There are complex legal, state aid and match funding issues to be considered in relation to this application and the Department is engaging with the City Council in relation to these.

Special Areas of Conservation

135. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the recent ESB actions on the walkways and hedgerows of the Gearagh SAC; the follow up actions she plans to ensure similar actions do not reoccur in this or another SAC; her plans to reinstate the walkways; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47536/17]

136. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if funding will be made available to reinstate the walkways in the Gearagh SAC following the recent ESB actions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47537/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 and 136 together.

The Gearagh special area of conservation is a nature reserve in the ownership of the ESB. The ESB has advised my Department that, due to concerns over public health and safety and access for emergency services, a number of damaged and fallen trees on a public walkway within the site had to be removed following the severe weather conditions of mid-October last.

The ESB has also advised that wet ground conditions, at the time that the works were carried out, have resulted in the surface of the walkway requiring reinstatement. I understand that this will be done by the ESB when weather conditions are favourable.

Officials from my Department will be meeting with the ESB shortly on this matter and will then decide if any further action by my Department is required.

Most land in protected sites is in private ownership. It is the policy of my Department, subject to the availability of resources, when it becomes aware of damage to a protected site to investigate the matter, in conjunction with other public authorities, if required.

Film Industry Tax Reliefs

137. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the changes she has sought to section 481; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47546/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Business, Enterprise and Innovation, commissioned an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries including an examination of the economic impact and potential of the Irish film, TV and animation sector. This Report is being finalised and will make recommendations on Section 481.

It is planned that the study will provide an input into the development of an industry-wide long term plan for Ireland as a global hub for the production of Film, TV Drama and Animation under Pillar 4 of the Creative Ireland Programme. Government proposals in relation Section 481 will be indicated in this plan.

General Practitioner Services

138. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reverse the Financial Emergency Measures in Public Interest cuts on general practices which has had a devastating impact on rural general practitioners; the steps he will take to address this to restore the viability of rural general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47441/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge the contribution made by general practitioners and other health professionals who provide services under contract on behalf of the HSE, through reductions in the fees in respect of these services, to addressing the unprecedented economic crisis which the State faced over recent years.

In the context of the publication by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, of the Public Service Pay and Pension Bill 2017, on 7 November 2017, I announced that in 2018 I will undertake a process of engagement with representative bodies of contracted health professionals, aimed at putting in place a new multi-annual approach to fees, in return for service improvement and contractual reform and in line with Government priorities for the health service.

The Government is committed to ensuring the continued sustainability of general practice in rural communities. An enhanced supports package for rural GP practices was introduced in May 2016. The new Rural Practice Support Framework includes improved qualifying criteria for rural support and an increase in the financial allowance from €16,216 to €20,000 per annum. Over 300 GPs now benefit from rural practice supports under this Framework. This is a significant increase on the 167 GPs who received the Rural Practice Allowance prior to the introduction of the new Framework last year.

Fire Service

139. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Dublin Fire Brigade and ambulance situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47353/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that a mediation process between

Dublin City Council and staff associations is ongoing in relation to Dublin ambulance services. In these circumstances, it would not be appropriate for me to make any comment pending the conclusion of this mediation process.

Hospital Overcrowding

140. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the recent occurrence in Tallaght hospital in which 15 persons were waiting on trolleys for a hospital bed, some of them waiting over a day, in view of the fact that HIQA in May 2012 published a report and issued 76 recommendations to end the dangers of overcrowding in all hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47354/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive for a direct response.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

141. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the average cost of individual procedures to date under the NTPF scheme. [47355/17]

142. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the details of the operation of the NTPF; and the way in which a person can avail of the scheme. [47356/17]

143. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the procedures carried out under the NTPF scheme to date in 2017. [47357/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 to 143, inclusive, together.

I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families. Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities.

Under waiting list initiatives run by the NTPF, the NTPF liaises directly with hospitals to identify patients to be treated. The patients are then contacted to arrange the details of treatment.

My Department has a robust monitoring framework in place which requires the NTPF to submit regular reports to the Department of Health on the number of patients treated, referring hospitals, treating hospitals, and treatment specialty. This monitoring framework also requires reporting on the type, nature and cost of treatments commissioned, including controls to ensure quality patient treatment, value for money and efficient processes.

The recent Budget announced a total 2018 allocation of €55m to the NTPF to address waiting lists and more than doubles their 2017 total allocation. Next year will see a continued focus towards our longest waiting patients, and overall waiting list numbers. It is estimated that this funding has the potential to provide treatment for 18,000 Inpatient/Daycase patients across a range of specialties and procedures through working with both public and private hospitals. This will be in addition to the HSE's hospital activity funded under Budget 2018. It is not possible to make specific information on costs in relation to individual private hospitals available due to its commercial sensitivity however, the NTPF provide the Department with regular financial reports regarding the waiting list initiatives.

The NTPF have advised that, as of 3 November 2017, the following procedures have been undertaken through NTPF funding:

NTPF Insourcing in Public Hospitals:

Procedure
Dental Procedures
Cystoscopies
Angiograms
Cataracts
Carpal Tunnel Release
Hip Replacement
Knee Replacement
Knee Arthroscopy
Inguinal Hernia
Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy
Veins
Gynaecology
Urology
Cruciate Ligament

NTPF Outsourcing to Private Hospitals:

Procedure
Cataracts
Septoplasty
Angiograms
Lesions
Cystoscopy
Veins
DCR (Eye Procedure)
Vasectomy
Entropian
Ectropian
Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ)
Tonsils
Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy
Child Squints

Medicinal Products Data

144. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a registry of the children affected by foetal anticonvulsant syndrome, also known as foetal valproate syndrome, during pregnancy will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47360/17]

145. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a registry of the women affected by taking sodium valproate during pregnancy will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47361/17]

146. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if additional services for children affected by foetal anticonvulsant syndrome during pregnancy will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47362/17]

147. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a six-monthly screening process for a person exposed to sodium valproate during pregnancy will be provided in order that problems are recognised immediately and supports put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47363/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 to 147, inclusive, together.

The Irish Epilepsy and Pregnancy Register, based in Beaumont Hospital, was set up in 2001 for pregnant women with epilepsy in Ireland. The aim of this Register is to find out which type of epilepsy drugs women are taking while pregnant and to collect information on the health of their babies after delivery. Since 2007, the Irish Register has had a formal link to the United Kingdom Epilepsy and Pregnancy Register. Women with epilepsy who become pregnant, whether or not they are taking anti-epileptic drugs for their epilepsy, are eligible to register their pregnancy.

In March of this year, the Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) initiated a new review of the use of valproate-containing medicines in the treatment of women and girls who are pregnant or of childbearing age. This review is examining the available evidence and consulting with relevant stakeholder groups. The most recent component of the current review was a public hearing held at the London offices of the EMA on 26 September.

In its summary of the public hearing, the EMA noted that the PRAC would consider a number of proposals and ideas presented by participants, including registers of women who were receiving valproate and children who had been exposed to valproate during pregnancy.

It is anticipated that the PRAC's current review of valproate will be concluded before the end of this year. As soon as the review is concluded, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), which is the competent authority for the regulation of medicines in Ireland, will communicate the outcome and recommendations of the review to Irish patients, healthcare professionals and relevant stakeholders, including the HSE.

The HSE Clinical Strategy and Programmes Division has developed the National Clinical Programme for Epilepsy, to provide the best value, safe care for all people with epilepsy in the right place, at the right time, sharing the best information available. The model of care under the national clinical programme includes the development of a very detailed Standard Operating Procedure on the management of women with epilepsy. It will cover the pathways of care associated with all aspects of pregnancy, contraception and menopause, and includes detailed support for the obstetrics service in the management of seizures and guidance for ante-natal care, including specific information covering the known extra risks of epilepsy associated with pregnancy to both the mother and foetus.

It is anticipated that this Practice Guide for the Effective Management of Women with Epilepsy will be ready for approval by the HSE before the end of the year.

In relation to the provision of additional services, the overarching principle governing the planning and delivery of health services, and supports for adults and children with disabilities, is that they should be integrated, as much as possible, with services and supports for the rest of the population. The Government's agenda with regard to disability is set out in the current

National Disability Strategy, which is based on a non-condition-specific approach to the delivery of public services. The matter of the services available to these patients has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to you. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 10 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up with the HSE.

Patients currently taking valproate-containing medicines are advised not to stop taking these medicines and, if they have any concerns about their specific drug treatment and management of their condition, to discuss these with a healthcare professional.

Medicinal Products Regulation

148. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the views of the HSE and his Department when their attention was drawn to the fact that pregnant women were being prescribed sodium valproate without proper provision of information on the side effects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47364/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Valproate medicines have been authorised in all EU Member States for the treatment of epilepsy; whilst valproate-containing medicines are also approved nationally in Ireland to treat bipolar disorder.

Valproate medicines should be initiated and supervised by a specialist experienced in the management of epilepsy or bipolar disorder. It is also recommended that valproate should not be used in women of child-bearing potential unless other treatments are ineffective or not tolerated because of the risk of congenital malformations and developmental disorders in infants exposed to valproate in utero. Women who could become pregnant should be given medical advice on the benefits and risks of treatments before valproate is prescribed and use effective contraception during treatment. Clinicians, in consultation with their patient, may consider the therapeutic benefit of valproate to outweigh any possible risks for individual patients where discontinuation of therapy or switching to alternative therapies is not possible or poses an unacceptable risk to the health of that patient and consequentially to the health of the unborn child.

The Irish Medical Council's Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics requires registered medical practitioners to make sure that, "any treatment, medication or therapy prescribed for a patient is safe, evidence-based and in the patient's best interests". They should weigh up the potential benefits with the risks of adverse effects and interactions when deciding what to prescribe and should review their patients' treatment regimes periodically. Registered medical practitioners are also required to, "keep up-to-date with developments in medication safety."

In 2014 a review of valproate by the European Medicines Agency, resulted in measures to strengthen the warnings and restrictions on the use of valproate medicines in women and girls, due to the risk of malformations and developmental problems in babies who are exposed to valproate in the womb. The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) as the competent authority for the regulation of medicines in Ireland has highlighted the results of previous reviews of valproate and provided revised educational materials for both healthcare professionals and patients. A warning label for the outer packaging of the valproate containing products was introduced in Ireland earlier this year; products carrying the new external warning label are now being supplied to retail pharmacies.

In 2015 and again in October 2017, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, as regulator for pharmacists and pharmacies in Ireland, again highlighted the risks of the use of valproate in women of child-bearing age to ensure that those patients are informed and understand:

- the risks associated with valproate use during pregnancy;

- the need to use effective contraception;
- the need for regular review of treatment;
- the need to immediately consult a healthcare professional if they are planning a pregnancy or if they become pregnant.

Pharmacists were encouraged to bring these issues, and any other relevant educational materials, to the attention of patients presenting in their pharmacy.

In October 2016, the HSE's Medicines Management Programme (MMP) launched its 'Valproate Toolkit', an online resource consisting of a patient information booklet, summary guide for prescribers and a patient/prescriber checklist. This information highlights that sodium valproate should not be prescribed to girls or women of childbearing age or pregnant women unless other treatments are ineffective or not tolerated. The MMP continues to monitor the use of valproate by women of childbearing age.

Hospital Appointments Status

149. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47365/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Primary Medical Certificates Applications

150. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a primary medical certificate by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47376/17]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

151. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a date for this procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47377/17]

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

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

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

Occupational Therapy Provision

152. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an occupational therapist assessment will be carried out for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47378/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

153. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be considered for radiotherapy treatment at Altnagelvin area hospital, County Derry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47379/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47381/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Counselling Services Provision

155. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if counselling services are provided for persons that suffer a stroke, family members and carers in rehabilitation units which provide particular support for such persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47384/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Provision

156. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if the provision of home help hours will be reviewed for a person (details supplied); if the hours currently provided will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47392/17]

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

Patient Files

157. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the correct procedure to be followed with regard to patient files; the category of person that can put information into such a file; the appropriate information to be placed in such files; his views on whether information with regard to an allegation of inappropriate behaviour of a staff member to the patient is included in appropriate information for a patient's file; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [47393/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Closures

158. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the closure of Passage West health centre, County Cork [47403/17]

159. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health the type of services which were available in Passage West health centre [47404/17]

160. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that used the services at Passage West health centre [47405/17]

200. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the planned closure of the health centre in Passage West, County Cork; and the measures in place to ensure public health services remain in the community [47534/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 to 160, inclusive, and 200 together.

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

Medical Card Data

161. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if medical card holders are liable for charges for blood tests at their general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47409/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP, or the practice nurse on behalf of the GP, which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition. The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient's symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that in recent times some GPs have begun to charge GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position, under successive Governments, that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient may make a complaint to the HSE Local Health Office, who will deal with the matter in accordance with the HSE's Complaints Policy.

In order to achieve clarity on this issue, I have asked that any difference of perspective in relation to the provision of phlebotomy services be addressed in the GP contractual review process, which is currently underway. The aim is to develop a contract which has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion and disease prevention and for

the structured ongoing care of chronic conditions. I look forward to constructive and positive engagements with a view to achieving a satisfactory outcome.

Orthodontic Services Provision

162. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has received information regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim; if his attention has been drawn to the urgency of this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47410/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Beds Data

163. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the number of beds in the stroke unit in Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47420/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Physiotherapy Provision

164. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the physiotherapy deficit for stroke patients in Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47421/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Stroke Care

165. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the early supported discharge for stroke patients in Beaumont hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47422/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47427/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Tobacco Control Measures

167. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his position in relation to the recently published draft Implementing Acts with regard to the Tobacco Products Directive 2014/40 EU track and trace articles 15 and 16; if a submission has been made to the European Commission on these proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47429/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Articles 15 and 16 of the Tobacco Products Directive (EU) 2014/40/EU ("the Directive") establish an EU-wide tracking and tracing and security feature system for all unit packets of tobacco products manufactured in or imported into the Union. The aim of this system is to fight illicit trade in tobacco products which undermines the free circulation of compliant products and the overall protection provided by tobacco control legislation.

Under Article 15 of the Directive, all unit packets of tobacco products manufactured in or imported into the Union must be marked with a unique identifier (containing defined data elements) and their movements must be recorded throughout the supply chain (up to the last level before retail). Article 16 of the Directive requires that all unit packets of tobacco products which are placed on the EU market carry a tamper proof security feature composed of visible and invisible elements. The above requirements shall apply to cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco from 20 May 2019 and to tobacco products other than cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco from 20 May 2024.

Although the central requirements have been laid down in the Directive, Articles 15(11), 15(12) and 16(2) require the EU Commission to adopt secondary legislation (Commission Implementing Acts) to determine the technical details and key elements of the system, as well as to ensure aspects such as the system's interoperability.

The EU Commission has published three draft Commission Implementing Acts providing the specifications for the system and discussions on these drafts are ongoing at EU level. Ireland is represented on the relevant EU tobacco expert sub-groups. Once adopted, the Commission Implementing Acts must be transposed into Irish law.

Hospital Appointments Status

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47432/17]

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

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

169. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to put a defibrillator in each school in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47434/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The issue of defibrillators in schools is a matter for individual schools in the education sector.

Department of Health is committed to improve survival rates of those who suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest by implementing the an out hospital cardiac arrest strategy. An Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Steering group has been established. Its work will support the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and Community First Responders Ireland (CFR Ireland) in their commitment to improve clinical outcomes for Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest.

Cardiac First Responders (CFR) Ireland, launched in 2015, is the national umbrella organisation for Community First Responders Groups. CFR Ireland works with the National Ambulance Service, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council and the Centre for Emergency Medical Science UCD. Both the NAS and CFR Ireland currently support over 145 Community First Responder schemes throughout Ireland, who train community members to provide emergency care support.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

170. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for a CT scan in St James's hospital, Dublin 8. [47435/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive for a direct response

Hospital Appointments Status

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47436/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and

the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Building Programme

172. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the national forensic mental health service hospital at Portrane, County Dublin; when the construction of the hospital is due for completion; when phase two of the construction will begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47448/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Planning permission for a new modern forensic mental health facility in Portrane, to replace the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum together with associated new facilities, was granted in June 2015. Site preparation works were undertaken by the HSE during 2016.

Phase 1 comprises a new 170 single bed National Forensic Mental Service (NFMHS) facility, includes a 130 bed main Hospital as well as a co-located 10 bed Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit, and a 30 bed Intensive Care Rehabilitation Unit (ICRU). Construction on Phase I commenced in June 2017, and this is progressing satisfactorily. The new facility will open in 2020, following Equipping and Commissioning.

Phase 2 of the National Forensic Mental Health capital project envisages new regional Intensive Care Rehabilitation Units in the HSE West and HSE South areas. These will be provided over the longer-term, as resource availability allows.

Disability Services Provision

173. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the gold star disability project nationwide; his views on the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47449/17]

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

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

Mental Health Services Provision

174. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, received from the mental health budget in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47450/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service

matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service Provision

175. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the allocated hours of home help service will be commenced for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47451/17]

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

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

Disability Support Services

176. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 18 years of age with severe physical disabilities that are living in their family home in which the family is in receipt of a social housing payment support (details supplied) in each of the years 2014 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47473/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): This is not a matter for the Department of Health.

Mental Health Services Provision

177. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 444 of 3 October 2017 if a phased opening of closed beds at the inpatient unit at Linn Dara, Cherry Orchard, Dublin 10 took place in the week beginning 30 October 2017; the time-frame for opening all beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47480/17]

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

Mental Health Services

178. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health to outline the way in which he will address the failures in reporting and managing incidents of sexualised behaviour within Roscommon mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47481/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service

matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services

179. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health to outline his views on the cultural issues highlighted in the recent report into County Roscommon's mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47482/17]

190. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to introduce regulations for all mental health services in view of the Roscommon mental health services report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47501/17]

191. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health to outline his views on the finding of the report into Roscommon mental health services, which found that the service's funding returned €17.6 million unspent over three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47502/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 179, 190 and 191 together.

I am familiar with the recently published Report by the HSE referred to by the Deputy, including concerns around funding or other serious issues highlighted in the report. I also visited Roscommon earlier this year and met with HSE officials to discuss the implementation of the recommendations strategy. I have referred the question of the Executive for a more detailed reply to the Deputy. The Deputy can rest assured that the Department of Health and I will continue to closely monitor the progress of the Implementation Team.

Mental Health Services Provision

180. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health to outline the measures in place to ensure that staff members within the HSE's mental health services make decisions based on a clinical focus rather than cost containment in view of the report into Roscommon mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47483/17]

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

Mental Health Services Staff

181. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if a strategic plan or nursing strategy will be developed for mental health nursing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47484/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The development of all aspects of mental health policies and services, including that relating to nursing, remains a priority for both the Government, and the HSE. The HSE has statutory responsibility for the planning and delivery of mental health services, particularly in the context of priorities agreed under its Annual Service Plan. A strategic priority under its Service Plan 2017 relates to the

provision of mental health services by highly trained and engaged staff. As this is an operational matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Executive for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Expenditure

182. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he will delegate budget authority further down the structure of mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47485/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Funding is provided to the HSE for mental health services in accordance with the letter of determination which sets out the approved level of overall HSE expenditure to resource the National Service Plan. The Executive has responsibility for implementing the Mental Health Services budget as part of the Service Plan which must under legislation, set out the type and volume of health and personal social services, to be provided during the year in question. The Executive is accountable to the Oireachtas for this budget as part of its overall expenditure. Further delegation within the HSE is then a matter for the Executive. I have therefore asked the Executive to respond directly to the Deputy on this aspect of the matter raised.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

183. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health to outline the options available to chemotherapy patients who request THC cannabis oil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47486/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under existing legislation it is open to the Minister for Health to consider granting a licence to an Irish registered medical practitioner, under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, for access to medical cannabis for named patients. In line with the Chief Medical Officer's advice, the granting of a licence for cannabis for medical purposes must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

The main elements of an application submitted under the Misuse of Drugs legislation for a licence for cannabis for medicinal use must include:

- An outline of the treatment the patient has received to date and justification from the doctor as to why it is appropriate in their patient's specific circumstances to prescribe a Schedule 1 drug.
- Details of the cannabis-based product which it is proposed to prescribe and administer to the patient.
- The source of the cannabis-based product.
- The arrangements for the ongoing monitoring and care of the patient once the cannabis-based treatment has commenced.

Valid applications received by the Department are assessed and responded to without delay.

Any consultant requiring further information or clarification in relation to the licence application process should contact the Department of Health directly.

Pharmacy Services

184. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding a person's (details supplied) long-term illness card. [47488/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply 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.

Health Services

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the death of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47489/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular case raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Nursing Home Services

186. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an assessment can be rearranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the person in question wishes to live independently and is not suitable for long-term nursing home care and that the person is in respite care in a nursing home facility. [47490/17]

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

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

187. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can access a programme. [47495/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): For the purposes of clarity the following information may be helpful.

The two most common active components found in cannabis oil are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

- CBD is derived from cannabis. However, since CBD is not psychoactive it is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs legislation, therefore does not require a licence. CBD oil is not authorised as a medicinal product, however, it is sometimes marketed as a nutritional or dietary supplement.

- THC is the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis. Under the Misuse of Drugs legislation products containing THC are strictly controlled and possession is unlawful except under licence.

As the Deputy will be aware, in March 2017, on foot of the conclusions from the Health Products Regulatory Authority's report 'Cannabis for Medical Use – A Scientific Review', I established an Expert Reference Group to advise on the development of a Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme.

The Expert Group is tasked with the development of clinical guidance for healthcare professionals treating patients through the Access Programme. The Expert Group is also considering other operational aspects for the implementation of the Access Programme. Officials in my Department are working on secondary legislation to underpin the programme. This work is well advanced but will take a number of months to complete.

The Deputy will be aware that under the Misuse of Drugs legislation it is open to the Minister for Health to grant a licence to an Irish registered medical practitioner for access to medical THC-based cannabis for a named patient. The granting of a licence is based on submission of an application to the Minister which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of treatment over time. To date two such applications has been successful.

Ultimately it is the decision of the prescribing clinician, in consultation with their patient, to prescribe or not prescribe any particular treatment, including cannabis, for a patient under their care.

Hospital Services

188. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health to describe the relationship between the report with his Department from the HSE on the future of accident and emergency services at the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise and the document entitled Dublin Midlands Hospital Group Strategy 2018 - 2023, which was scheduled to be discussed by the regional management of the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47499/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A priority in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan is the development of Hospital Group strategic plans. The Dublin Midland Hospital Group is concluding the development of its multi-year strategic plan (Dublin Midlands Hospital Group Strategy 2018-2023) which focuses on developing clinical networks and pathways across hospitals and between hospitals and their primary and community care partners.

The Dublin Midlands Hospital Group has also been working for some time on a draft plan for a new model of clinical service delivery at Portlaoise Hospital which takes account of the need to develop services at Portlaoise in the context of developing the model of service provision for the entire Hospital Group. This draft plan has been submitted to my Department and it is being reviewed in detail. Once there is an agreed position on the draft plan, there will be further engagement with all interested parties, to ensure that the needs of patients, staff, the local and wider community are addressed.

Mental Health Services Provision

189. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the measures in place for the regulation and oversight of community residences within the HSE's mental health services; if he has satisfied himself that there is sufficient oversight of the services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47500/17]

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

Questions Nos. 190 and 191 answered with Question No. 179.

Mental Health Services Report

192. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when the first report on the progress of the implementation of the report into the Roscommon mental health services will be sent to the report's commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47503/17]

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

Home Help Service

193. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the actions he plans to take in order to address the shortfall in home help hours in counties Laois and Offaly; the amount allocated under budget 2018 for home help in these counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47516/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The overall funding for Services for Older People nationally is €765 million in 2017 with €367m for direct funding of Home Help and Home Care Packages. A further €9m supported by HSE and Atlantic Philanthropies will provide Intensive Home Care Packages (IHCPs) for people with more complex needs. The HSE's National Service Plan for 2017 provides for a target of 10.57 million Home Help Hours to support about 49,000 people, 16,750 Home Care Packages and 190 Intensive Home Care Packages for clients with complex needs supported with co-funding from Atlantic Philanthropies. This represents a significant increase on home care in comparison to last year's Service Plan, which had an original target of 10.4 million hours home help and 15,450 Home Care Packages.

Budget 2018 has provided additional resources for Services for Older People and a significant proportion of this additional funding will go towards home care services. The Department is working with the HSE to prepare the 2018 National Service Plan. Pending agreement of the Plan I am not in a position to comment either on the funding or the specific services that will be provided.

In relation to service levels in the specific counties mentioned, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

HSE Data

194. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the numbers of persons on the waiting lists for speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy in counties Laois and Offaly; the waiting times for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47517/17]

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

Disability Services Provision

195. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for an assessment under the early intervention team in counties Laois and Offaly; the number of these that have been waiting over six months; the number that have been waiting over a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47518/17]

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

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

Disability Services Provision

196. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for assessment under the school age team in counties Laois and Offaly; the number of these that have been waiting over six months; the number that have been waiting over a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47519/17]

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

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

Medicinal Products Availability

197. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 951 of 26 July 2017, the status of the provision of the drug Spinraza to persons with muscular atrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47520/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Disease Management

198. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement a similar practice to that in Germany for the detection and treatment of Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47521/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Lyme disease is diagnosed by medical history and physical examination. The infection is confirmed by blood tests which look for antibodies produced by an infected person's body in response to the infection. These normally take several weeks to develop and may not be present in the early stages of the disease. The standard approach to Lyme diagnostics is a two-stage approach and involves using a sensitive enzyme immunoassay (EIA) as an initial, screening step. Screening EIAs can be insufficiently specific, giving false-positive reactions in the presence of other similar bacteria, and certain other viral infections, including glandular fever. In addition, blood samples from patients with autoimmune disorders and other inflammatory conditions can also lead to false-positive results. Samples giving positive or equivocal results in screening tests are further investigated in a second-stage immunoblot (Western blot) tests. Use of immunoblot testing greatly increases specificity. Using this two stage approach will give a great degree of certainty around the diagnosis of Lyme.

All clinical (and other) laboratories in Ireland must undergo continuous quality assurance to ensure that the quality of the diagnostics they provide is maintained at the highest international level for human diagnostics. Some laboratories abroad do not use antibody tests like the EIA (screening ELISA test) and Western Blot and instead will use other types of tests, for example, testing for levels of a specific white blood cell (CD-57) or lymphocyte transformation tests (tests to measure how specific cells in a person's immune system respond when exposed to antigens against *Borrelia burgdorferi* - the bacterium responsible for Lyme disease). These types of tests are not currently recommended by international groups such as the CDC, Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) or BIA for a number of reasons:

1. There is not enough scientific evidence that they are suitable tests to diagnose Lyme disease;
2. There is no standard method to perform and interpret these kind of tests; and
3. Positive results in these kinds of tests may be due to other illnesses or conditions and not just *Borrelia* infection.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC, the Infectious Diseases Society of Ireland, the Irish Society of Clinical Microbiologists, the Irish Institute of Clinical Neuroscience and the Irish College of General Practitioners agreed a Consensus Statement on the Clinical Management of Lyme Borreliosis, which endorsed the previously referenced, internationally recognised set of guidelines (those of the IDSA) to Medical Practitioners to ensure a standardised approach to the diagnosis and management of Lyme disease in Ireland.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC has established a Lyme Borreliosis Sub-Committee, the aim of which is to develop strategies to undertake primary prevention in order to minimise the harm caused by Lyme Borreliosis in Ireland. In addition to staff from the HPSC, the membership of the Sub-Committee includes specialists in Public Health Medicine, Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Clinical Microbiology, Occupational Health an Entomologist from the Parks and Wildlife Service, a representative from the Local Government Management Agency, an Environmental Health Officer and, very importantly, a representative from Tick Talk Ireland, the primary Support Group for Lyme disease in Ireland.

The initial work of the Lyme Borreliosis Sub-committee involved a survey of laboratory methods for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis in Ireland, the development of Lyme borreliosis guidance for general practitioners, the publication of medical media articles to highlight diagnostics and laboratory methods relating to Lyme borreliosis available in Ireland. Material has been produced which is aimed both at the general public and General Practitioners.

Any changes to testing and treatment will take into account the report of the HPSC Sub-Committee.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

199. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of smaller pieces of equipment and aids such as over bed tables which were previously supplied by the HSE to medical card holders are now no longer supplied by the HSE (details supplied); his views on this change in policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47529/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 200 answered with Question No. 158.

Hospital Appointments Delays

201. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been on a waiting list for a long time without treatment. [47535/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018. Budget 2018 allocated additional funding in the region of €10m for the remainder of 2017 to fund patient treatment across a range of key specialties and procedures.

Under waiting list initiatives run by the NTPF, the NTPF liaises directly with hospitals to identify patients to be treated. The patients are then contacted to arrange the details of treatment.

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 HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Card Applications

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will is-

sue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47574/17]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

203. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the changes introduced in budget 2018 with respect to the fair deal scheme; and the future treatment and possible discount on chargeable assets for farms and businesses. [47588/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. The amount of funding allocated to the NHSS in 2017 was €940m. This amount was increased to €949.7m in the recent budget.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. Arising out of the Review, a number of key issues have been identified for more detailed consideration across Departments and Agencies.

An Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group has been established to progress the recommendations contained in the Review. This Group is chaired by the Department of Health and includes representatives from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the HSE, the Revenue Commissioners, and when required, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). These recommendations include examining the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the Scheme. The programme for a Partnership Government has also committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small businesses and family farms. It is important to remember that the NHSS is largely underpinned by primary legislation and changes to the NHSS will require legislative implementation.

On this basis, I have requested legal advice from the office of the Attorney General regarding potential changes to the legislation that will address this matter. My department has also been cognisant of this matter in the context of this years estimates process. I have recently met with representatives from the IFA. to discuss various strategies that may assist with addressing their members concerns and have apprised them of the current progress. We agreed to meet again in the near future for further discussions. I am committed to this review of the position with regard to family farms and small businesses for the purposes of the financial assessment of the scheme and I hope to be able to clarify proposed changes before the end of this year.

HSE Funding

204. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE provides funding for a programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47607/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy's question refers to operational matters I have referred it on to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.

Forestry Grants

205. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the forestry applications with regard to an area (details supplied) in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; the size of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47453/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department received 14 forestry applications for the District Electoral Division/townland in question for the years 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017. These applications included applications for approval for afforestation, for forest roads, for reconstitution and applications for payment of premiums on forestry plantations. As the area referred to by the Deputy is a DED/townland it is not possible for data protection reasons to provide a further breakdown of the figures as that could reveal details of individual applicants.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

206. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will be made to a person (details supplied) under the knowledge transfer scheme; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47462/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payments under the Knowledge Transfer Programme have commenced on a rolling basis by sector. The person named is a participant in the Knowledge Transfer Beef Programme and payments have commenced in respect of farmers in this sector who have completed all the requirements of Year 1. In a small number of cases, including this case, an issue has arisen in relation to processing the payment to the relevant bank account. This is currently being rectified, and it is expected that payment will issue shortly. In line with EU regulatory requirements, payment under this scheme will issue to the person named via their Knowledge Transfer Group Facilitator.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

207. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not yet received the 75% advance of their 2016 single farm payment; if the payment issues will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47496/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Issues relating to the transfer of entitlements have caused a delay in relation to the Basic Payment for the person named. My Department have been in direct contact with the person named to resolve outstanding issues. The case has now been cleared for payment and the payment will issue in the coming week.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

208. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the sta-

tus of a single farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47505/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2017 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint schemes application on 5 April 2017. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. Processing of this inspection necessitated the verification of the position on the ground by means of a field visit. The inspection results are now being finalised with the intention of issuing any payment due to the nominated bank account of the person named as soon as possible. In the event that any issues are identified from the inspection my Department will be in contact directly with the person named.

Agricultural Production Costs

209. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposals he has put forward at the EU Council of Agriculture Ministers on the need to reduce the cost of fertilisers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47528/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am acutely aware that fertiliser is a major input cost on farms. Indeed EUROSTAT estimates that fertiliser is the third most important expenditure item on EU farms, accounting for €19.2 billion of input costs in 2014. In terms of Irish farms, the Central Statistics Office 2016 final estimates of Output, Input and Income in Agriculture identifies fertiliser expenditure at €508 million in 2016.

I have long believed that the elimination of fertiliser tariffs and anti-dumping duties is something that could help farmers reduce their input costs and this is something that I have actively pursued at Agri Fish Council in 2016 and 2017, both with the Commission and in consultation with my Council colleagues.

At the Agri Fish Council in June 2017, I asked the Commission to address the significant overpricing of fertilisers in the EU brought about by the imposition of anti-dumping duties on imports.

Against that background I welcome the European Commission's intention to conduct a partial interim review of the anti dumping measures applicable to imports of ammonium nitrate originating in Russia. The anti-dumping duties on Russian fertiliser imports range from €32.83 per tonne to €47.07 per tonne of ammonium nitrate with Nitrogen being the main nutrient used in Ireland relative to Phosphorus or Potassium.

I should point out, however, that member States are not ad idem on this point, and that while Commissioner Hogan acknowledged the desirability of bringing about lower prices, he has also indicated that, despite considerable efforts on his part both with other Member States and internally within the Commission, consensus will be difficult to achieve.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

210. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons participating in the beef data genomics scheme who have completed

a beef carbon navigator, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47538/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme provides for six years of payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability. As part of the scheme, applicants must complete a carbon navigator with an approved advisor and provide data for an annual update to their carbon navigator.

There are currently 25,340 participants in BDGP I and BDGP II.

24,597 participants have thus far completed their Carbon Navigator broken down by County in the table.

A total of 20,332 BDGP I participants have also returned their 2017 Carbon Navigator update which is required for full payment to issue to them when payments commence in 2017.

County	BDGP I	BDGP I 2017 Up-date	BDGP II
Carlow	315	290	13
Cavan	1156	976	59
Clare	1800	1592	132
Cork	1684	1433	97
Donegal	1310	1136	93
Dublin	58	51	1
Galway	2527	2189	236
Kerry	1255	1085	50
Kildare	306	266	8
Kilkenny	576	521	34
Laois	578	500	34
Leitrim	910	807	68
Limerick	774	654	47
Longford	611	527	39
Louth	222	187	14
Mayo	2184	1909	174
Meath	559	495	32
Monaghan	810	697	54
Offaly	568	498	39
Roscommon	1323	1144	96
Sligo	919	798	54
Tipperary	975	821	65
Waterford	338	280	9
Westmeath	708	615	38
Wexford	567	506	31
Wicklow	386	355	21
Total	23419	20332	1538

Knowledge Transfer Programme

211. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of approved persons who have applied to the knowledge transfer group scheme under the rural development programme 2014 to 2020 and to date in 2017 in the beef, sheep, dairy, tillage, equine and poultry sectors; the targeted number of groups formed; the number of groups finalised to date; the number of payments that will issue; the 2017 budget allocation for the KTG scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47539/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Knowledge Transfer is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves the formation of knowledge transfer groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors.

Funding of €100m under the Rural Development Programme, 2014-2020 has been allocated for this measure, which involves Department approved agricultural consultants acting as Knowledge Transfer Facilitators administering groups operating over a three year period.

The number of applications received for Knowledge Transfer Groups and Participants is broken down between the sectors in the following table:

	Total	Beef	Dairy	Sheep	Tillage	Poultry	Equine
Number of Participant Applications Received	20,252	10,072	4,258	4,310	885	248	479
Number of Group Applications Received	1,190	581	268	251	55	13	22

It should be noted that a portion of those applications received did not meet eligibility requirements and therefore did not progress to take part in the Programme. Additionally a number of group facilitators and participants subsequently decided that they no longer wished to proceed in the programme.

To date approximately 19,100 farmers in circa 1,190 Knowledge Transfer Groups have actively participated in the Programme attending group meetings, approved Knowledge Transfer National events and completing Farm Improvement Plans and Animal Health Measures.

€23m is allocated in the Department's vote for 2017 in respect of the Knowledge Transfer Payments. Payments commenced at the end of October for participants who successfully completed Year One and are currently being rolled out across the six sectors.

Laboratory Facilities

212. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the review of the regional veterinary laboratories; and if all such laboratories will remain open. [47540/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) Laboratories are an integral part of the De-

partment, providing critical scientific evidence and expertise (in animal health, food safety and plant sciences) which allows the Department to function effectively as a regulator, to deal with new and emerging risks and to rapidly respond to disease outbreaks and food safety incidents. The laboratories also provide valued services and advisory support to the farming community, the food industry and wider society.

The ambitious targets of the Agri-food industry for growth and development over the next decade, as set out in Food Wise 2025, must be underpinned by robust systems which protect and enhance our reputation as a producer of safe and wholesome food and one of the ways in which we must respond to this challenge is by developing a long-term strategy for the laboratories - building on existing capability and expertise in animal health, food safety and plant sciences, and ensuring we achieve both operational and scientific excellence.

This was the primary reason for tasking a Working Group led by Prof. Alan Reilly to undertake a comprehensive review of the Department's Laboratories. This review has considered both the central laboratory complex at Backweston and the eight regional laboratories located at Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Sligo. The Group has presented a report to the Department, which makes recommendations on:

- Oversight and co-ordination of the laboratories activities;
- Re-organisation of Divisions and support functions within the Central Laboratory complex;
- Options for the future development of the Regional Laboratories – with a view to improving disease investigative and surveillance capability but with the over-riding imperative of maintaining and enhancing services to farmers; and
- Human resources management within the laboratories - with a focus on grading structures, career development opportunities and workforce planning.

To date no decision has been taken in respect of the options proposed for the Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVLs). My Department completed an initial consultative process with all relevant stakeholders on the Working Group report (including on the options for RVLs) earlier this year. A cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of the various options proposed will be undertaken shortly. My Department has tendered for independent economic expertise to carry out this CBA and a tender award notice has issued. Any decision I make on the RVLs will be informed by the consultative process and the outcome of the cost-benefit analysis.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

213. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly regarding GHG emissions in the agriculture sector. [47541/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have been following the proceedings of the Citizens' Assembly with interest and in particular the topic of last weekend's session on Climate Change. I look forward to reading the report of the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly when it is received by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

I am pleased to see the level of interest among citizens in what is a very serious global issue, evidenced in the huge number of submissions made to the Assembly on the topic of climate change. Officials in my Department have been engaged in reviewing the agriculture and forest

sector elements which have been raised in those submissions.

Many of the sentiments behind the recommendations put forward by the members of the Assembly at the weekend are consistent with our approach to agri-policy. For example, the recommendations include rewarding farmers for good environmental practices, this is consistent with our Rural Development Programme which is strongly targeted towards environmental benefits. The Agri-Environmental Scheme, 'GLAS' has over 50,000 farmers participating, addressing climate and other environmental threats such as biodiversity and water quality. The knowledge transfer programmes aim to bring the latest innovative sustainability research and practices direct to farmers. Other schemes such as TAMS provide supports for low emission slurry spreading equipment, farm nutrient storage and renewable energy efficiency. The Assembly also recommended supporting organic farming which is another of our RDP measures.

My Department is also actively supporting the planting of trees and has set an ambitious target to increase forest cover in Ireland from the current 11% to 18% by mid century. We have supported the establishment of over 300,000 ha of forestry since 1990 and over 9,000 km of forest roads.

Food waste, while not directly within the remit of my Department, is part of the Origin Green Sustainability charter which requires companies to draw up independently certified plans which must include specific targets relating to waste management. The 2016 Sustainability Report identified 4,600 tonnes of waste diverted from landfill and 24,000 tonnes of waste recycled or recovered.

The suggestion of tax on greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture should be considered against the context of a range of actions being undertaken in fulfilment of the Government's policy of an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land use sector, which does not compromise sustainable food production. I am also cognisant of the requirement in the Paris Agreement which places an obligation on Parties to foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production.

The sector is committed to playing its part and to ensuring that growth continues on the basis of sustainability, however, when considering policy options we must consider the multiple objectives of the agriculture and land use sector and their lower mitigation potential, something that has been recognised in the October 2014 European Council Conclusions.

Departmental Expenditure

214. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the latest Exchequer returns for October 2017 showing that his Department's spend to this point is €65 million behind profile in gross voted expenditure; and if all moneys projected to be spent by year end will be met. [47542/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A profile of projected expenditure on a monthly basis is drawn up at the beginning of each year in order to anticipate the Department's funding requirements and financial management over the course of the year. The profile which is the best estimate of expenditure available at the time is difficult to forecast and may vary significantly during the year for a variety of reasons, such as the level of payments under demand led multi-year schemes, a different level of participation in some schemes than anticipated, the pattern of drawdown of Grants by State bodies, the levels of disease incident and payment of compensation, etc. A monthly comparison is then reported showing actual expenditure against the profile.

The recent Exchequer returns for my Department show that there are a number of budget lines, which are, for a variety of reasons, below profile. The Department's expenditure at the end of October was behind profile by €75m, of which €38.6m is current and €36.4 is capital.

The profiled current expenditure for the January to October period represents just over two thirds of the voted funds so activity in the next seven weeks is also important, most particularly in relation to Programme B (farmer payments). In this area almost half of the total annual spend is scheduled to take place in the last 2 months of the year. Expenditure is being monitored and managed carefully with a view to minimising expenditure savings on this year's Vote, in order to avoid spending pressures in subsequent years for multi-year schemes. The department's staff are fully focussed on ensuring that scheme payments are made to eligible recipients. In this regard the submission of Nutrient Management Plans for GLAS, and Carbon Navigator updates for BDGP, will determine the maximum amount of payments that can be made.

The final outcome is, to an extent, driven by factors outside the Department's control but in the context of the Department's overall Vote every effort will be made to maximise the levels of expenditure.

TAMS Funding

215. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the budget allocation for TAMS II in 2017; and the expenditure realised to date. [47543/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The budget allocation for TAMS II in 2017 is €50m.

To date the expenditure in 2017 amounts to €23.8m. Of the 11,619 approvals that have issued payment claims have been received from 23% of the farmers concerned. This equates to 2,591 payment claims of which 1,922 applicants have been paid to date. Payments and approvals are continuing on an ongoing basis.

A further 775 applicants have advised the Department through the submission of a special notification known as a Card A that they have commenced major building works, in these cases a claim for payment has not yet been submitted. The TAMS II Scheme has in excess of 350 individual investment opportunities and applicants can also avail of investments that do not require the pre notification Card A. For example, in the case of equipment.

All farmers are being actively encouraged to act on their approvals. There is a budget in place of €395m for the duration of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Hen Harriers Threat Response Plan

216. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the new hen harrier scheme; when details of the new scheme will be published and open for applications; when the first payments will issue; the budget allocated under the rural development programme 2014 to 2020 to this scheme; and the amount of funding expended to date under the relevant rural development programme measure. [47544/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At the outset, I should stress that this is a locally-led programme, which is not directly administered by my Department. The design and management of the programme are primarily matters for the local project team, who will work closely with my Department, as this is rolled-out.

The design work for the new Hen Harrier programme has already commenced following the appointment of a locally-led Project Team earlier this year. The Project Team has now completed a series of consultation meetings with farmers in the six designated Hen Harrier Special Protected Areas (SPAs), at which more than 500 farmers attended. A seminar for advisors took place in September, and comprehensive training courses are planned for January 2018 and May 2018. The scientific officers in the team have carried out Hen Harrier monitoring in all SACs and preliminary results from this campaign will be available within weeks. Work is also progressing on detailed Terms & Conditions for the new programme.

I understand that the first expressions of interest from farmers in taking part in the new programme will be invited before the end of 2017. Unlike other schemes, the new hen harrier programme will not be tied to calendar years and this provides for greater flexibility in both recruitment and payment. At this point in time I have no firm projections for payments in relation to 2017 or 2018 – this is something the Project Team is examining and will advise my Department in due course.

A budget of some €25 million has been allocated for the hen harrier programme. It is worth noting that a significant framework of support for farmers with hen-harrier designated land is already in place through my Department's agri-environment scheme GLAS. Under GLAS, farmers with hen harrier habitat qualify for a payment of €370 per hectare and can earn up to €7,000 per annum through a combination of GLAS and GLAS Plus payments. The GLAS Hen Harrier action has proved hugely successful, with some 2,678 farmers now signed up. This accounts for almost 70% of all farmers with hen harrier habitat and represents a major step forward in the conservation of the bird and in securing important additional income for the farmers concerned.

Waste Management Regulations

217. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the current demarcation between a waste licence and a waste permit of 100,000 tonnes is due to be updated; if so, the timeframe for change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47351/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration) Regulations 2007, S.I. 821 of 2007 set out waste activities which may be authorised under a waste facility permit or certificate of registration as opposed to being authorised under a waste licence. Different thresholds (above which a licence is required) apply to different waste activities, depending on the nature of the waste activity concerned.

The Regional Waste Management Offices published a report on construction and demolition waste (soil and stone) recovery and disposal capacity in December last year. The report made a number of recommendations, including that consideration should be given to increasing the maximum tonnage of soil and stone which could be recovered at a facility authorised under a waste facility permit (currently set at 100,000 tonnes over the lifetime of the facility for that particular waste activity).

My Department intends to publish a consultation paper shortly to seek the views of stakeholders on the thresholds set in the Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration) Regulations 2007, S.I. 821 of 2007 for the recovery of soil and stone. A decision on whether the existing limit should be amended will be made after the submissions on the issue have been considered.

Better Energy Homes Scheme

218. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount expended to date on the energy refurbishment scheme for persons on fuel allowance that have respiratory conditions; the budget for 2017; the anticipated budget for 2018; the number of homes that have been dealt with under this scheme to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47358/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Warmth and Wellbeing scheme is a pilot initiative being delivered under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. The main aim of the scheme, which began in 2016, is to demonstrate the positive effects that making homes warmer and more energy efficient can have on the health and wellbeing of people in energy poverty who are living with a chronic respiratory condition. An independent research project will assess the impact the scheme is having. At the conclusion of the scheme, and with independent evidence on its effectiveness, the potential for a wider rollout will be considered.

In total, 312 homes have been upgraded so far under the scheme, with another 184 homes currently having work done. A further 118 homes are at survey stage. There is an additional list of applicants who have been referred to the scheme as applications are coming in every week. This list will expand over the winter months and those people will have their upgrades carried out as early as possible in 2018. This type of work cannot always take place during the winter months.

I expect to allocate at least €20m in funding in total to this three year (2016-2018) pilot to provide for the upgrade of at least 1,500 homes. This is the minimum size needed to develop the evidence base on the impact on the health outcomes of participants of making their homes more energy efficient and warmer, and make the business case for a wider rollout of the scheme.

The Deputy may also be aware that the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme is available on a nationwide basis to low income households who are at risk of energy poverty. More information on this scheme is available on SEAI's website at: http://www.seai.ie/Grants/Warmer_Homes_Scheme/About_the_BEWH.html or Freephone: 1800 250 204

National Broadband Plan Implementation

219. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when e-fibre broadband will be extended to an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47457/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband and this footprint is expanding. By 2020, 90% of premises in Ireland will have access high speed broadband.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, which outlines how premises around the country will be able to access a high speed broadband service. Premises are separated by colour into 3 categories.

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- LIGHT BLUE areas are part of eir's planned rural deployment of high speed broadband to 300,000 premises.

The map shows that of the 56 premises in the townland of Ballyhide, 46% fall within the AMBER area, 13% are in BLUE areas and 41% are in LIGHT BLUE.

Individuals can themselves check whether their premises are in an AMBER, BLUE or LIGHT BLUE area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie. The premises at the Eircode detailed by the Deputy is in the LIGHT BLUE area and is part of eir's planned rural deployment of high speed broadband.

My Department is engaged in an on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network for the State led intervention. A significant milestone in that process was reached in September with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage of the procurement process before receipt of final tenders and ultimate progression to the appointment of a preferred bidder(s).

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the roll-out of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area I established, in July 2016, a Task force to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, to identify priority areas for roll-out and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the NBP State-led intervention.

Under this Task force, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

220. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has satisfied himself that a company (details supplied) has complied with the agreement signed with his Department in the roll-out of rural broadband; if there has been adjustment made to the targets dates for this roll-out to the end of 2018; if he has satisfied himself that it will complete this programme as promised in connecting 300,000 houses and premises by the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47458/17]

221. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises which have access to high speed broadband to date under a contract signed by his department with a company (details supplied); if this is in line with the target agreed with the company; if not, the steps he will take to deal with the failure to comply with the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47459/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 and 221 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland via a combination of commercial investment and State Intervention. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecommunications sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband. By 2020 it is expected that 90% of premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the rollout by the end of 2018. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Quarterly updates are published on this website. Q1 and Q2 quarterly targets to date have been achieved by eir and published on the website.

Evaluation by my Department of the Q3 update for eir's rural deployment is at an advanced stage and indicates that eir has met its Q3 target of 101,000 premises passed. County by county statistics are available on my Departments website for Q2 and can be viewed at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/County%20Statistics.pdf>. The statistics for Q3 will be published on my Department's website in the coming weeks.

Road Signage

222. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that Fáilte Ireland and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, adhere to an agreement reached with representatives of the golf course industry to erect motorway signposting for those courses that receive the quality and standards certification. [47340/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

TII has, therefore, overall responsibility for signposting on the national road network and TII's 'Policy on the Provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads' publication provides detailed guidance in relation to tourist-leisure and advertising-commercial signage.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

223. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47341/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Bren-

dan Griffin: The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on 24 February. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to.

The assessment of all the 2,320 applications is now nearing completion and I expect to be in a position to announce full details of the allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

224. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the names of the clubs and organisations in Dublin 24 that applied for sports capital funding in 2017. [47387/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on 24 February. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. A list of all applications received is available on the Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-applications-received>.

The assessment of all applications is now nearing completion and I expect to be in a position to announce full details of the allocations in the coming weeks.

Invasive Plant Species

225. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided to Kerry County Council to allow it to carry out treatment of Japanese knotweed along regional and local roads (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47408/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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.

My Department has not sought applications from local authorities for grant assistance in relation to the treatment of Japanese Knotweed on the regional and local road network and has no record of a request for funding from Kerry County Council for such treatment in relation to regional and local roads.

Ports Traffic

226. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the volume of activity at Waterford Port in terms of goods in and out for each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47415/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Central Statistics Office publish Statistics of Port Traffic on their website [cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/). <http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/>

transport/. Figures for 2017 will not be available on this website until the 2nd Quarter of 2018.

Ports Traffic

227. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the volume of activity at Rosslare Europort in terms of goods in and out for each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47416/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that Rosslare Europort is unique among the State owned ports as it is not a company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated as a division of Iarnród Éireann.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's questions to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Ports Development

228. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deepen the ports of Waterford or Rosslare; if a feasibility study has been done regarding costs and benefits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47417/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Port of Waterford operates as an independent commercial company under the Harbours Acts and the planning of infrastructural requirements is an operational matter for the port.

I am aware that Waterford Port is in the process of developing a Masterplan to meet the future trading needs of the Port. That plan will inform whether there will be a requirement for deepening the channel or otherwise. As the Port of Waterford does not receive any State funding, any such work must be funded from the port's own resources.

Rosslare Europort is unique among the State owned ports as it is not a company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated as a division of Iarnród Éireann and any plans to deepen the port to allow larger ships to dock or otherwise is an operational matter for the port and Iarnród Éireann.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's questions to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Brexit Issues

229. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the ports of Rosslare and Waterford in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47418/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Irish ports operate as independent commercial companies and planning and preparations in the context of Brexit are operational matters for the ports. I have therefore forwarded the question to the Port of Waterford Company and, with regard to Rosslare Europort, to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply.

The impact of Brexit on shipping and on Irish ports will be dependent on the outcome of

EU-UK negotiations. Ports are aware of the possible negative implications Brexit may have on the movement of goods and people and are working with relevant agencies to try and avoid undue delays. In line with normal business planning, ports review their infrastructural requirements on a regular basis.

My Department held a Workshop in April on the impact of Brexit on maritime transport, regulation and on the sectors on which this impacts. Stakeholders, including Rosslare Europort and Waterford Port, were invited from organisations across the broader maritime sector, such as merchant shipping, national shipping, fishing vessels, recreational craft, ports, equipment suppliers, service providers and training providers.

In addition, my Department, in conjunction with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO), is commencing a study into the use of the UK Land bridge by Irish importers and exporters. The purpose of this research is to establish the volume of traffic using the UK Land bridge at present, the likely consequences that Brexit will have on Land bridge usage and the various alternative options that may be viable. I expect this piece of research to be completed in Q1 of 2018.

My officials will continue to work with the maritime sector and with other stakeholders to identify and plan for the implications of Brexit.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

230. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital funding application by a club (details supplied); when funding announcements will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47426/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to.

When the programme was launched, it was envisaged that €30m would be available which would have made the allocation of grants particularly challenging. Following the conclusion of the budget discussions and in order to allow as many worthwhile projects as possible to receive some funding, I am pleased that significant extra resources have been secured to allocate under this round.

The assessment of all the 2,320 applications is now nearing completion and I expect to be in a position to announce full details of the allocations in the coming weeks.

Rugby World Cup 2023

231. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the bid for the Rugby World Cup was weaker than other bids due to the lack of broadband infrastructure; if broadband access was discussed at any point; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47444/17]

232. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the bid for the Rugby World Cup bid was weaker due to the lack of delivery of the N20; if this road infrastructure or other infrastructure weaknesses were

discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47445/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 231 and 232 together.

I was disappointed and surprised by the recent findings of the Rugby World Cup Board which has made a recommendation for previous hosts South Africa to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup. That said, while all candidates had relative strengths and weaknesses that were subject to comment within the report, it is very clear that Rugby World Cup Limited (RWCL) was hugely impressed by the quality of the bid put forward on behalf of Ireland.

Ireland scored top / joint top in 12 of the 21 scored categories, second in two and in all cases met or exceeded RWCL requirements. Ireland's bid included proposals for Transport and Information Technology and while there was some comment about the lack of current provision, the plans for delivery of the tournament ensured that Ireland met or exceeded the requirements for hosting a successful Rugby World Cup.

In that regard, I was pleased to see that the Evaluation Report acknowledged the quality of Ireland's plans, and our ability to stage a successful event in 2023, stating as it does 'any of the three candidates could host a successful Rugby World Cup'.

I would hope that a majority of World Rugby Council members, who will vote on November 15th, will place their trust in Ireland to deliver an outstanding Rugby World Cup 2023. Appropriate engagement with various Rugby Unions will continue over the coming days ahead of the concluding vote.

Together with the Irish Rugby Football Union the Government will, in the coming week, strongly relay Ireland's compelling proposition to World Rugby Council members ahead of the vote on November 15th as the team competes to turn our historic bid plans into reality.

Road Safety

233. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Medical Bureau of Road Safety formally informed his predecessor regarding a matter (details supplied); if not, the reason therefor; if the bureau has formally informed him since taking office; if he was not formally informed, the disciplinary action he will take in view of the fact that this omission may have led to a greater number of road deaths and injuries than might otherwise have occurred; if the former Minister was informed of the reason this process of fake breath tests was not immediately terminated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47504/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): One of the statutory functions of the Medical Bureau of Road Safety (MBRS), as laid down in the Road Traffic Acts 1968 –2016, is the approval, supply and testing of equipment or apparatus for indicating the presence of alcohol in the breath. The Bureau is not responsible for the administration of breath tests, the oversight of breath tests or the auditing of breath tests which is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána.

In the summer of 2014, the Director of the Bureau verbally informed my Department of his concerns in relation to the lack of demand from An Garda Síochána for the purchase of replacement mouthpieces for the roadside breath-alcohol screening devices in recent years. This was in the context of early discussions between my Department and the Bureau to identify Exchequer funding requirements for 2015. This matter was raised with An Garda Síochána during 2015 and 2016.

The full extent of the issues with the Garda Mandatory Alcohol Testing (MAT) statistics only became known to my Department as a result of the Garda announcement on this issue on 23rd March 2017.

As the role and functions of the MBRS are clearly set out in legislation and do not include operational oversight of An Garda Síochána, the question of disciplinary action does not arise.

Rail Network

234. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the rail review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47513/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann report on the Rail Review was published in 2016.

Since then, the NTA has held a public consultation on the Review. Over 300 submissions were received in response to that consultation process.

The NTA has recently submitted a report of those submissions to my Department. Once I have reviewed the report, I intend to bring it to Government for consideration.

It is my intention that the consultation report should be published by the NTA following consideration by Government. In advance of that, no decisions have been taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines or investment in the company and its relevant infrastructure.

Child Care Services

235. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address the issues facing a centre (details supplied) with regard to funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47346/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I note the Deputy's question relates to the 2016 Childcare Regulations, which have impacted on the eligibility of Community Employment (CE) participants active within some providers including the service in question. Additionally, the communication refers to the affordability of childcare to families in disadvantaged areas and the need for additional funding in relation to payment for out of school time activities and services. Concerning the changes in the CE scheme, €1m in funding has been made available to services that may find themselves unsustainable under the 2016 Regulations. Two phases of funding were made available in the 2017 budget to aid community childcare providers as a result of these regulatory developments; phase one related to HR and recruitment support, while phase two is being provided on foot of a detailed financial analysis of services.

The application for phase two of CE funding, from the service in question, has been provisionally approved, and they will shortly receive a communication outlining the next steps required to complete the funding process. However, to be eligible for receipt of CE Sustainability funding and childcare supports a service is required to have the correct legal status. Therefore, our assessment process for this stream of funding includes checks regarding the legal structure and governance structures of applicant services. At the time of application the service in question was not a registered company, and therefore their application could not be progressed until the issue was resolved. As the service was aware of this issue in advance of application, the

resultant delays were out of the Department's control, and could have been averted following appropriate notification and engagement from the service in question.

In respect of the wider sustainability issues identified in your communication: In September 2017 subvention rates under the targeted schemes rose by 50%, and an additional universal subsidy to the amount of €20 a week per child was also made available. This increase in funding will provide support for parents in low paid employment and training or education by enabling qualifying individuals to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating community childcare services. In addition, €3.5m in Programme Support Payments have been allocated to all childcare providers who register for the enhanced (September) childcare measures. There is a commitment to pay this additional €3.5m between September and the end of this year. This will therefore bring the total payments in respect of 'Programme Support Payments' in 2017 to €18m.

Economic Growth Initiatives

236. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of proposals to establish the Atlantic economic corridor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47515/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both contain a commitment to progress the concept of an Atlantic Economic Corridor which was proposed in February 2016 by a group involving a number of Chambers of Commerce in the Western region and the American Chambers of Commerce of Ireland.

The overarching objective of the Atlantic Economic Corridor concept is to maximise the assets of the western region, from Kerry to Donegal, and connect the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for those who live in the region.

I established an Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce in March to progress the proposal. The Taskforce includes senior representatives from the business sector, key Government Departments and other public bodies, and Third Level institutions.

The Taskforce has met four times since it was established and will continue to meet on a regular basis. A number of sub-groups of the Taskforce have also been established to progress specific aspects of the overall proposal.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor has the potential to contribute to effective regional development in the context of the forthcoming National Planning Framework.

Leader Programmes Data

237. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of contracts that have been signed under the new Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47522/17]

238. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of projects that are at contract stage of the new Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47523/17]

239. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the bodies responsible for entering into contracts under the new Leader programme; if his Department received legal advice on whether the local community development committees are the appropriate bodies to enter into contracts for projects under Leader; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47524/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 to 239, inclusive, together.

The 20014-2020 LEADER programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been approved for each LAG area.

In the case of 4 LEADER areas under the current programme, the Local Action Group is a Local Development Company. In the other 25 areas, the Local Action Group is a Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), with the Local Authority as the Lead Financial Partner and one or more Local Development Companies operating as the Implementing Partners. My Department understands that the LCDCs have the power to enter into contracts as are necessary for, or incidental to, the performance of their functions.

To date, 429 projects have been fully approved by the LAGs for funding. The approach to the issuing of contracts is a matter for each individual Local Action Group. However, I would expect that most of these projects have already been issued with, or will soon receive, a contract for funding.

My Department does not have details regarding the number of contracts that have been signed at this stage. Information regarding the date that the contract enters into effect is provided by the Local Action Groups when the first claim for payment is made for each individual project.

Leader Programmes Administration

240. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the steps undertaken by his Department to reduce the bureaucracy associated with the new Leader programme; the steps taken to monitor the impact of these changes; his views on whether these steps are adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47525/17]

241. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the operation of the Leader programme will be reviewed; if so, when this review will commence; the consultation process associated with the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47526/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 240 and 241 together.

LEADER plays a valuable role in supporting rural development and is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development. I am committed to implementing the LEADER programme as effectively as possible and to continuously monitoring progress in the delivery of the programme at all levels. In that regard, it became clear earlier this year that project promoters and Local Action Groups had specific concerns regarding the implementation of the programme, including the application process and associated criteria.

In light of those concerns, a forum was held in May with participants from all of the Lo-

cal Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER. The forum provided a platform to review the operation of the LEADER programme, to explore the administrative issues impacting on project approvals, and to identify potential solutions to the issues identified.

Arising from the forum, my Department identified a series of 31 actions designed to improve programme delivery. Most of the measures have already been introduced, while the remainder are being progressed in collaboration with the Local Action Groups and their Implementing Partners where appropriate.

I am satisfied that these actions are far reaching and will result in very significant changes to the way the programme is delivered, making the application process easier for all concerned. I am regularly updated by my Department regarding the impact of the changes and the level of progress in approving projects under the programme. While the changes need to be given time to take full effect, I am pleased to note that there are now 429 projects approved for LEADER funding of almost €11 million, compared to projects with grant aid of less than €1 million in the first 6 months of the year.

Progress on the delivery of the LEADER Programme was discussed by the Monitoring Committee on the Action Plan for Rural Development at its meeting of 26 October. There was general agreement at that meeting that progress was being made in implementing the actions and that their full effect should be seen in the coming months.

Other mechanisms for reviewing the delivery of the LEADER programme include annual reporting to my Department by each Local Action Group on progress in the delivery of their Local Development Strategies. An evaluation of the LEADER Programme is also provided to the EU Commission each year as part of the Annual Implementation Report on the Rural Development Programme.

Carer's Allowance Applications

242. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47349/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that the Department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 23 June 2017 in respect of her parents.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer (DO) decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care and attention was satisfied in respect of her mother.

Carer's allowance was awarded from 29 June 2017 to the person concerned in respect of her father on 16 September 2017 and the first payment along with arrears due issued to her nomi-

nated bank account on 21 September 2017.

The person concerned was notified on 16 September 2017 of these decisions, the reasons for them and of her right of review and appeal.

If the person concerned wants a review of the decision to disallow CA, it is open to her to submit additional evidence to demonstrate the requirement for full time care and attention.

A review can then be processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Alternatively the person concerned may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

243. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a charge of €100 for a community organisation in County Donegal that has a Tús participant working in the organisation is a countrywide charge or if this is a charge introduced by a company (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47352/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware Tús is a community work placement initiative designed to provide short-term, work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. The scheme is delivered through the network of local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta. These are known as Implementing bodies (IB).

There are no specific charges set by the Department for Tús participants on a work placement. However the terms and conditions of the Tús scheme do not preclude an Implementing Body from seeking a financial contribution from the community or a placement provider to offset the costs of services delivered or towards the cost of providing equipment and inputs. The arrangements regarding any such contribution remain a matter between the IB and the voluntary groups concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

244. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47366/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received in respect of this child on 21 June 2017. The application was not allowed as it was considered that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for the allowance. A letter issued on 26 October 2017 outlining the decision in this case.

In the case of an application which is refused, the applicant may submit additional information and ask to have the decision reviewed, and/or they may appeal the decision directly to the

Social Welfare Appeals Office. The options available have been advised in the decision letter.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

245. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason her Department and Tús do not inform employment support scheme participants of their entitlement to fuel allowance prior to entering such a scheme in view of the fact that, due to a technicality, persons are not given their fuel allowance entitlement if they apply for it after they have started on such a scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47383/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week from October to April, to some 376,000 low income households to assist them 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.

The fuel allowance scheme is widely advertised. To qualify for a fuel allowance, a jobseeker must satisfy a number of conditions, including being in receipt of jobseeker's allowance for at least 391 days (time spent on jobseeker's benefit can make up the 391 days). It should be noted that free fuel application forms are issued automatically to jobseekers who reach 391 days of unemployment. Accordingly, the onus is on a jobseeker to apply for the fuel allowance if they consider themselves eligible. Further information on eligibility is available on www.welfare.ie.

Participants on Tús and other employment support schemes can be paid the fuel allowance where they applied for and were awarded the allowance prior to commencing on the scheme and where they satisfy or continue to satisfy the conditions. I would like to reiterate that claimants moving to Tús cannot accrue entitlement to the fuel allowance while on the scheme e.g. a person moving from jobseeker's allowance with less than 391 days.

However, if there is a change in circumstances e.g. where the Tús participant has an underlying entitlement to fuel allowance, but is not in receipt of the allowance because another member of the household was receiving it, if the fuel recipient is no longer residing at the address, then it is open to the Tús participant to apply for the fuel allowance. In these circumstances, the fuel entitlement can be reviewed and awarded provided the participant satisfies all conditions for receipt of fuel allowance.

The guidelines for the fuel allowance scheme are kept under review. Any decision to extend the eligibility criteria for fuel allowance to allow persons on Tús to accrue entitlement to the allowance while on the scheme would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement

246. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the detail of the family income supplement, FIS, scheme; and the families that are entitled to same. [47385/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Family Income Supplement (FIS) which was introduced in 1984 is a social welfare payment which provides an income support for employees on low earnings with families. The main provisions are contained in the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005, as amended, primarily Part 6, Sections 227 to 233 and in the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control Regulations) 2007 to 2017, as amended, primarily Part 6, Articles 172 to 177.

New FIS applications are administered by: Family Income Supplement Section, Department of Social Protection, Government Offices, Ballinalee Road, Longford.

Renewal applications are administered by: Family Income Supplement Section, Department of Social Protection, St Oliver Plunkett Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

The main qualifying conditions are as follows:

- The applicant(s) must be engaged in full-time remunerative employment as employee(s) for not less than 38 hours per fortnight

- The applicant(s) must have at least 1 qualified child, who normally resides with them or is part of a family wholly or mainly supported by them

- The weekly family income must be less than a set limit for their family size

There are set income limits for each family size. Family size is determined by the number of qualified children. Weekly family income must be below these set income limits in order for an applicant to qualify.

The current limits are as follows:

Family Size	Weekly Family Income Limit	Annual Family Income Limit
1 child	€511.00	€26,572.00
2 children	€612.00	€31,824.00
3 children	€713.00	€37,076.00
4 children	€834.00	€43,368.00
5 children	€960.00	€49,920.00
6 children	€1,076.00	€55,952.00
7 children	€1,212.00	€63,024.00
8 children	€1,308.00	€68,016.00

Further information is available on the Welfare.ie website and the Citizens Information Board website.

Social Insurance Data

247. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if contributions records requested by Deputies on behalf of persons who have no broadband or who are not familiar with computers will continue to issue to persons in the interest of equality and fairness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47391/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department is committed to providing a contribution record statement to all customers who require one and will provide this in written copy by phone request in the case of customers who

are not in a position to use the online facility. However, the main facility for accessing social insurance contribution statements is now online, via the MyWelfare.ie application. This service was introduced on 27 January 2017; and details of how to register are available at: <https://www.mygovid.ie/en-IE/GettingStarted/> .

The online application has been designed to ensure that all customers can access their records directly and conveniently; and do so in a much shorter timeframe than was previously possible. Registering for MyWelfare.ie also enables a customer to apply online for payments including jobseeker's and maternity/paternity benefit; to close claims for payments, to make appointments, view claims and benefits information; update their address and to request payment statements.

Some 800/850 customers per week currently engage successfully with the service to request copies of their record; and this number is increasing on a month-by-month basis.

The new service is an efficient and secure service and also allows for the automated processing of requests, which as you will understand, allows the Department to concentrate its resources on maintaining and updating social insurance records for customers.

As set out at the outset, any customer who has a difficulty engaging with the MyWelfare service can contact the Department's customer service team on 1890 690 690 or 01 4715898 for assistance. The customer service team is available to assist from 9am to 5pm and is also open during lunchtime.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

248. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be reached in the case of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47423/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 9 March 2017. Shortly after the oral hearing the Appeals Officer dealing with this case became ill and was absent on long term sick leave. The case was referred to another Appeals Officer who decided in the interest of fairness to convene a further oral hearing which took place on 2 August 2017.

However, due to the complex nature of this case the Appeals Officer is still considering the appeal in the light of all of the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the oral hearing. The Appeals Officer hopes to be in a position to make a decision within the next two weeks and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

249. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an oral hearing can be facilitated to determine an appeal in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47428/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 1 November 2017, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Driver Test

250. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the public services card is required as proof of identity to sit the driver theory test; if an in date passport will suffice instead; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47430/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): This is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

251. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the families and persons that are entitled to fuel allowance and the new telephone allowance. [47431/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week from October to April, to 376,000 low income households to assist them 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 qualify for a fuel allowance under the fuel allowance scheme, a person must satisfy a number of criteria including being resident in the State, having primary responsibility for the heating of a household and being in receipt of a qualifying payment.

A fuel applicant and members of his/her household may have a combined assessable income of up to €100 a week above the appropriate rate of State Pension Contributory and qualify for a payment. All non-contributory recipients are accepted as satisfying this means test.

Fuel applicants must also satisfy the household composition criteria, i.e., they must live alone or only with the following:

- a qualified spouse/civil partner/cohabitant or qualified child(ren);
- a person in receipt of a qualifying payment who would be entitled to the allowance in their own right;

- a person who is receipt of Carer’s Allowance or Carer’s Benefit in respect of providing full time care and attention to the Fuel Allowance applicant or their qualified spouse/civil partner/cohabitant or qualified child(ren);

a person receiving short term Jobseeker’s Allowance (JA) or Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance (less than 391 days for JA and less than 15 months/456 days for Basic SWA).

Therefore a social welfare dependant who is living with someone other than those listed above would not be entitled to the fuel allowance.

The new weekly telephone support allowance (TSA) of €2.50 will be paid from June 2018. People in receipt of both the living alone increase and fuel allowance will automatically qualify for the TSA. It is expected that approximately 124,000 customers will qualify for the scheme at a cost of €16 million in 2018.

A central objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security. The allowance will also encourage social contact and assist in the prevention of social isolation for those living alone.

Therefore as stated above only customers who are in receipt of fuel allowance and the living alone increase will receive the new weekly TSA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

252. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of rent supplement tenancies active on 31 December in each of the years since the payment was introduced to 2017, in tabular form; and the annual cost of the scheme for each of these years. [47442/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 36,200 recipients for which the Government has provided €253 million for in 2017.

Statistics on rent supplement recipients since 1999 are provided in the attached tabular statement to date, information for earlier years is not readily available.

Rent supplement is a demand led scheme and recipient numbers have declined significantly in recent years. The strategic initiative of returning the scheme to its original purpose that of a short-term income support, facilitated by the introduction of HAP has been the main driver in rent supplement’s base decline. There are currently over 29,000 tenants in receipt of HAP support. Other contributory factors include the continuing improvement in the economy leading to fewer people seeking support due to retaining and securing long-term employment allied with people exiting rent supplement through activation and securing job opportunities. The strategic goal as set out in Rebuilding Ireland is to transfer all long-term tenancies from rent supplement to HAP by 2020.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Tabular Statement: Rent Supplement - Recipient Numbers: 1999 to Present

Year	Recipients	Cost €000
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1999	41,873	128,240
2000	42,683	150,590
2001	45,028	179,438
2002	54,213	252,203
2003	59,976	331,471
2004	57,874	353,762
2005	60,176	368,705
2006	59,861	388,339
2007	59,726	391,466
2008	74,038	440,548
2009	93,030	510,751
2010	97,260	516,538
2011	96,803	502,747
2012	87,684	422,536
2013	79,788	372,909
2014	71,533	338,208
2015	61,247	311,059
2016	48,041	275,294
2017	36,238 1	

1 As at end October 2017

Carer's Allowance Applications

253. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of applications for carer's allowance and domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied). [47446/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) can only be paid in respect of care recipients aged less than 16 years where domiciliary care allowance (DCA) is being paid in respect of that care recipient.

DCA was awarded on 2 November 2017 and CA was awarded on 8 November 2017.

As the carer is currently in receipt of another social welfare payment at a higher rate than CA, the allowance will be awarded from a future date.

The person concerned was notified on 8 November 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

Social Welfare legislation provides for the backdating of domiciliary care allowance (DCA) applications by a maximum of 6 months if a deciding officer considers that it has been shown that there was good cause for the delay in making the application.

This lady's entitlement was backdated by 6 months when her DCA claim was awarded on 2nd November 2017. There is no legislative provision to allow for the backdating of a DCA award to exceed 6 months.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme

254. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person on farm assist would still qualify for the back to work enterprise allowance were they to participate on the rural social scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47452/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is designed to provide a monetary incentive for people who are dependent on certain social welfare payments to develop an enterprise, while allowing them to retain a reducing proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment over two years (100% in year one and 75% in year two).

In the case of individuals in receipt of Farm Assist, the qualifying period required for access to the BTWEA is 9 months provided that the self-employment is not in relation to their holding and is not a continuation of an existing operation.

Periods spent on the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) count towards the qualifying period provided they are preceded by a qualifying payment. Following a period on RSS an applicant will have to re-establish an entitlement to a qualifying payment (e.g. Jobseekers or Farm Assist) prior to applying for BTWEA

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

255. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when applications lodged for State pensions by persons (details supplied) will be processed; the reason for the non-granting of a State pension (contributory) to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47461/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The persons concerned are a couple who both have contributions records based on self-employment.

Since one member of the couple has not yet applied for the state pension (contributory), a decision on his state pension (contributory) cannot be made. An application form has been issued to this person. On receipt of the application, the pension entitlement will be examined and the person will be notified in writing of the decision.

The second member of the couple was notified on 26 July 2017 that there were self-employment liabilities outstanding for the year 2009. Section 110 (1) provides that a self-employed contributor shall not be regarded as satisfying the qualifying conditions for state pension (contributory) unless all outstanding self-employment contributions have been paid. The person was advised to contact the Department for a pension review once these liabilities were paid.

The Department's Self-employment Section has confirmed that all self-employment contributions outstanding issues have now been resolved. A Deciding Officer has decided that the person is entitled to state pension (contributory) from their 66th birthday, 3 October 2014. A written notification of the decision has been sent to the person and arrears of pension have also been issued.

The person has applied for an Increase for a qualified adult on their pension for their spouse. This means-tested part of the claim will be referred to the Department's Social Welfare In-

spector for investigation. However, as the person's spouse has been advised to apply for state pension (contributory) in their own right, they will be awarded whichever payment is more financially beneficial.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Data

256. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of both domiciliary carer's allowance and a housing support payment (details supplied) in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47474/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy, in relation to housing support payments administered by this Department, is detailed in the following table:

The Rental Accommodation Scheme and Housing Assistance Payment are administered by the Local Authorities under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

Recipients as at end of	Domiciliary Care Allowance	Of which were in receipt of Rent Allowance	Of which were in receipt of Mortgage Interest Supplement
December 2014	27,268	1,326	97
December 2015	29,305	1,044	47
December 2016	31,963	1,255	46
October 2017	34,498	1,023	36

Carer's Allowance Applications

257. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47476/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

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 outside the home for a maximum of 15 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.

An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 7 March 2017.

The evidence before the deciding officer showed that the person concerned was engaged in employment outside the home in excess of 15 hours per week. Accordingly, the person concerned was notified on 17 October 2017 that she was not entitled to CA, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal. The person concerned requested a review of this decision and

submitted additional evidence to show that she is no longer working in excess of 15 hours per week.

Following this review the person concerned was awarded carers allowance from 19 October 2017. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 16 November 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 19 October 2017 to 15 November 2017 will also issue.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Disability Allowance Applications

258. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47477/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance from this gentleman on 10 August 2017.

On 13 October 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and this gentleman will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

259. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47478/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 29 June 2017. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 16 November 2017. Any arrears due from 29 June 2017 to 15 November 2017 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 09 November 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

260. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47479/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my Department was notified by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 13 October 2017 that the appeal for this lady was upheld. She was deemed to be medically suitable for the scheme.

Her file has been passed to a deciding officer to implement the appeals officers' decision and the person concerned will be notified in writing once full entitlement has been established.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Reviews

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the basis on which a conclusion was reached that a person (details supplied) is co-habiting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47487/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of the Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Contributory) Pension. In the course of a review of the entitlement, the claimant advised the inspector that she had commenced a cohabiting relationship in August 2017 and signed a voluntary declaration to this effect.

The claimant has been written to and her response is awaited before a final decision is made on the matter. The claimant will also be advised of her right of appeal in the event that she is unhappy with the Deciding Officer's decision.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

262. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the case of a person (details supplied) who has been in receipt of a carer's allowance for some time to care for a relative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47494/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to a person who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

The Department periodically reviews claims in payment to ensure that there is continued entitlement. Following a review in this case it was determined that the evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 4 October 2017 of the outcome of this review, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal. The person concerned requested a review and submitted additional evidence in support.

Following a review of this new information, CA was re-awarded to the person concerned on 6 November 2017 and payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 9 November 2017. Arrears for the period 26 October 2017 to 8 November 2017 will also issue on this date.

The person concerned was notified on 6 November 2017 of this decision.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

263. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who have received penalties in their social welfare payments as a result of non-compliance with the JobPath programme, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47514/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment.

The service commenced operations in mid-2015, and reached full State-wide delivery of the service in July 2016.

It is important to note that the rules and processes for the application of a reduced rate of payment are the same across all of the Department's activation services, whether they are delivered directly by the Department's own Intreo service or through its contracted services such as the Local Employment Service (LES) or JobPath service.

Only a departmental official - and not contractor's staff - can make a decision to apply a reduced rate of payment. Contractors have no role in the decision making process. The process with regards to such decisions includes written / verbal warnings and an opportunity for the jobseeker to re-engage with the services prior to the application of a reduced payment rate.

Up to the end of September approximately 7000, or 5.8% of all clients who engaged with the JobPath service have had, at some point, a penalty rate applied to their payment: some of these clients may have had the penalty rate applied after finishing their engagement period with the JobPath service, so the actual numbers who have had a penalty rate applied while with the JobPath service will be lower. Application of penalty rates is not routinely recorded on a county basis but will be sourced and provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

264. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the pensions report will be published (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47527/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is my intention to introduce a Total Contributions Approach to the calculation of the State Pension (Contributory) from 2020 onwards and I'll be bringing forward proposals in this regard in the near future.

In the meantime, I have asked my officials to carefully examine approaches that may help to address the issue in relation to the averaging approach as it affects people with a short work period early in their career followed by a long break. We need to ensure that any proposed approach does not cause further anomalies or disadvantages to arise, or hinder the move to a Total Contributions Approach. We also need to determine, as best we can, the cost of any such approach and how that cost can be financed in the future.

It is worth remembering that the 2012 rate bands more closely reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person than those in place prior to that and people with only 20 years of contributions over nearly 50 years will still get an 85% pension.

Reverting to the pre-2012 bands would move additional resources to people who already have means, and it is estimated that it would result in an annual cost of well over €70 million in 2018, and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10-12 million each following year.

Spending on State pensions has increased rapidly in recent decades. This year, the cost is €7.3 billion. This is estimated to increase by €1 billion every five years due the increased number of pensioners. These projections mean that there are considerable sustainability and affordability challenges in the years ahead and we must start to address them now.

Accordingly, I want to ensure that any approach taken is fair and sustainable in the long term.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizen Information Services

265. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent on consultations for MABS and Citizens Information Services in the context of restructuring plans by the Citizens Information Board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47531/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In February 2017, the Board of Citizens Information Board (CIB) decided to change the governance model from ninety three local Citizens Information Services (CIS) and Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) companies to a new sixteen regional board model, comprising eight CIS and eight MABS companies.

CIB has established an implementation group to progress the change. The group will have a local rolling membership element in order to harness the necessary skills and expertise as the regional structure is rolled out.

As part of its communications campaign, since the decision was made, CIB has undertaken 14 regional consultations and a series of focus groups, to examine and discuss some of the key aspects of implementing the new sixteen board model. Almost 600 people representative of local company Boards, management, staff and volunteers of local CIS and MABS services have attended. All attendees had an opportunity to raise any concerns they had about service delivery under the new model. CIB reports that the regional consultations were well received and there was considerable support for, and constructive discussion about, the change.

The regional consultation costs incurred by CIB amounted to € 28,263. This includes €17,348 in respect of room hire costs and independent facilitator costs of €10,915. Where incurred, the costs of travel and subsistence of attendees is borne by respective local CIS or MABS services, which are in turn entirely funded by CIB. Details of such costs in respect of individual companies are not readily available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

266. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on a social welfare appeal. [47551/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 27 September 2017, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) qualified for payment of disability allowance for six weeks after death with a view to meeting funeral costs; if an exceptional needs payment can be made for funeral costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47571/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): If a person in receipt of disability allowance (DA) dies and he/she was claiming qualified adult allowance then six weeks after death payment at personal and qualified adult rate is made to the surviving spouse. Also if a person in receipt of DA dies and his/her surviving spouse/partner is in receipt of a Social Welfare payment in their own right, then the spouse is entitled to receive six weeks of their deceased spouse/partners payment in addition to their own. There is no provision in Social Welfare legislation for friends and neighbours to be entitled to six weeks payment after death.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. An application can be made under the ENP scheme for assistance with funeral and burial expenses where there is an inability to pay these costs, in part or in full, by the family of the deceased person without causing hardship. Any persons who consider that they have an entitlement to an ENP under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme should contact the Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the decision to refuse disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47573/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance on 23 August 2017.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and this lady was notified in writing of this decision on 23 October 2017. She was also notified the reason for it and of the option to submit further medical evidence in support of her application for review and of her right to appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) qualifies for invalidity pension in view of their serious condition following a fire some years ago and the fact they have been in receipt of disability allowance in the interim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47579/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. The gentleman concerned is in receipt of IP at the maximum weekly personal rate since 05 March 2015. In addition, he receives an increase for a qualified adult payable at the maximum rate and an increase for a qualified child. He is also in receipt of the fuel allowance and a travel pass.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed in view of the fact that they have submitted a reasonable explanation in respect of their means and have a dependent spouse and son; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47580/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review of this gentleman's entitlement to disability allowance (DA), payment was stopped as he failed to show that his means did not exceed the statutory limit and failed to disclose to my Department that he was out of state on several occasions. Notification of this decision issued to him on 19 October 2017.

This gentleman has lodged an appeal with the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). All the relevant papers requested by that Office recently were submitted by my department and the SWAO will be in touch with the person in due course in relation to the progress of the appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

271. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for a domiciliary care allowance declined at first instance; the number appealed; the outcome of those appeals; and the average time for applications under the domiciliary care allowance from initial application to final decision. [47608/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In 2016, the last complete year for which total figures are available, the Domiciliary Care Allowance section received 7,434 applications of which 1,683 were disallowed. This represents 22.5% of the total received. There were 319 appeal submissions

to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) in 2016, 162 appeals were allowed and 6 other cases were partially allowed.

The current processing time for Domiciliary Care Allowance is approximately 17 weeks. It is hoped to reduce this further over the coming weeks.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Vacant Sites Levy

272. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the increase to the vacant site levy from 3% to 7% announced on 10 October 2017 as part of the budget statement 2018 will be introduced; if the levy is a general increase from 3% to 7%; and if a 3% levy remains for the first year and the announced 7% increase will only be applied on the second and subsequent years a site remains vacant. [47545/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017, and to issue annual notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy will be applied by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019 in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the year 2018 and will subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

As part of Budget 2018, an increase in the rate of the levy was announced. Under the new arrangements, the levy will be applied at the rate of 3 per cent of the market value of a vacant site from January 2019 for sites entered on the vacant site register of a local authority in 2018. For vacant sites on the register in 2019, an increased 7 per cent rate of levy will be applied from January 2020, with the same arrangements applying annually thereafter.

The increase in the rate of the levy will require changes to the levy provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015. I will bring forward the necessary legislative amendments in this regard in due course.

Housing Policy

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he expects to be in a position to offer continued scope for recovery towards resolution of the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47553/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government recognises the serious challenge we face in terms of housing. For that reason housing has been made a top priority through the development and implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. This priority has been reinforced further through increased capital and current funding for housing. Following Budget 2018, over €6bn has been ringfenced for housing between 2016 and 2021.

Under the Action Plan we have set clear, measurable and ambitious targets, including to:

- Double the annual level of new homes built to 25,000 by 2020;
- Deliver an additional 50,000 social housing units in the period to 2021; and
- Meet the housing needs of some 87,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment.

Significant progress has been made since Rebuilding Ireland was in the programme of social house building. All the relevant indicators – including planning permissions, construction commencement notices and connections to the ESB grid - are showing very significant upward trends. Planning permissions are up almost half on the same period last year and commencements are also up over 40%.

The rent pressure zones introduced at the beginning of this year have led to a capping of rent inflation below 4%, which is a significant decrease when compared with the increase of more than 8% last year.

Over 19,000 new social housing solutions were provided in 2016, with a further 21,000 such supports to be delivered in 2017.

Strong supply-side measures are also beginning to have a positive impact, such as the €226m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF); a streamlined planning process for large-scale housing developments; and other planning reforms to provide flexibility to deliver viable housing schemes and apartment developments in the right locations.

Notwithstanding this wide-ranging platform of action, significant challenges remain and, one year on from Rebuilding Ireland's publication, I initiated a focused review of the Action Plan. A number of themed initiatives have already been announced as part of the review.

In relation to social housing and homelessness, these include -

- The increase in social housing build, with the target for 2018 of c.3,000 newly built homes increasing by almost 30% to 3,800 new homes;
- Additional emergency accommodation and family hubs to meet the short-term needs of homeless households; and,
- The establishment of a new Homeless Inter-Agency Group.

Further measures have also been signalled in relation to the rental sector, including:

- A further extension of Rent Pressure Zones;
- An enhanced regulatory role for the Residential Tenancies Board;
- A reinforced awareness campaign to ensure wider awareness by tenants of their rights, an important measure in terms of homelessness prevention; and
- Additional legislative and other measures to strengthen the protections available to tenants and to address issues in relation to short-term lettings.

The Government re-inforced its commitment to delivering on housing through the allocation of very significant funding under Budget 2018. In total, I have secured €1.9 billion for housing next year, an increase of €600 million, or 46%, on 2017. This represents an increase of 62% on the capital side to build new homes and 35% on the current side to support homelessness, as well as supporting households into new social housing tenancies.

Looking beyond 2018, I have secured an extra €500 million for capital investment in social housing in the years 2019 to 2021 allowing the Rebuilding Ireland social housing target to be increased from 47,000 to 50,000 homes.

Budget 2018 removes the remaining significant obstacles to building more homes, more quickly and at more affordable prices: by investing more in direct house building by the State; by removing the capital gains tax incentive to hold on to residential land; by escalating penalties for land hoarding; by introducing new affordability measures; and by providing a new, more affordable finance vehicle for housebuilding, through Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI), which will provide finance at commercially competitive rates to developers with sites ready to go but who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining funding.

A second phase of LIHAF supported by €50 million in funding will unlock even more sites. A new fund of €25 million will be provided over 2018 and 2019 to unlock local authority-owned land specifically to deliver affordable housing on those sites using models such as co-operative housing that have already proven to be successful but are now needed on a much greater scale. My Department is currently drawing up the criteria for access to this scheme, to be announced in the coming weeks.

I believe that this Government's commitment to tackling housing has been clearly demonstrated in terms of the delivery on Rebuilding Ireland and the resources that have been allocated. My focus and that of all delivery agents will remain firmly on implementation and delivery to maintain and accelerate housing output.

Housing Inspections

274. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent on rental inspections in each of the years 2012 to 2016, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47368/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, sets out a wide range of measures to be introduced under the headings of Supply, Security, Standards and Services, many of which have already been progressed.

I have already introduced a range of measures to strengthen the applicable standards and to improve the services provided in terms of inspection and enforcement systems.

On 1 July 2017, updated standards, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, came into effect. These regulations focus on tenant safety and include new measures covering heating appliances, carbon monoxide and window safety. In addition, my Department published a guidance document to assist and support local authorities in implementing the 2017 regulations. With very limited exemptions, these regulations apply to local authority and voluntary housing units as well as private rented residential accommodation.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations and responsibility for the enforcement of the regulations rests with the relevant local authority supported by a dedicated stream of funding provided from part of the proceeds of tenancy registration fees collected by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

Since the establishment of the RTB, over €34 million has been paid to local authorities to assist them in the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts, including the inspection of rented accommodation. Over 185,000 inspections were carried out during this period.

Over the five years from 2012 to the end of 2016, a total of €10.31 million was provided to local authorities for inspection purposes; €2.4m in 2012, €2.31m in 2013, €2.02m in 2014, €1.88m in 2015 and €1.7m in 2016.

The Rental Strategy recognises the need for additional resources to be provided to local authorities to aid increased inspections of properties and ensure greater compliance with the regulations. Provision has been made to commence this process in 2018, when €2.5m in funding will be provided, with the intention of providing further increases each year in the period to 2021, by which point it is envisaged that €10m will be provided annually, so as to achieve an inspection coverage of 25% of rental properties annually.

Rental Accommodation Standards

275. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce regulations or legislation to limit the number of persons permitted to occupy a bedroom or a property dependent on its size; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47369/17]

286. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking to address the set of circumstances which led to the conditions shown in a report (details supplied) on RTÉ; his plans for legislation or other actions to improve dramatically Dublin City Council and other local authority management structures following the showing of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47469/17]

287. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for legislation or other actions to improve dramatically Dublin City Council and other local authority management structures following the showing of a report (details supplied) recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47470/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 275, 286 and 287 together.

The Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, set out a series of measures to be introduced to ensure the quality of private rental accommodation by strengthening the applicable standards and improving the inspection and enforcement systems.

On 1 July 2017, updated standards, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, came into effect. These regulations focus on tenant safety and include new measures covering heating appliances, carbon monoxide and window safety. In August, my Department published a guidance document to assist and support local authorities in implementing the 2017 regulations.

Additional resources for inspection and enforcement are also being provided. Over the four years to the end of 2017, a total of €7.5m has been provided to local authorities for inspection purposes. However, the rental strategy recognised the need for additional resources to support increased inspection of properties and ensure greater compliance with the regulations. Provision has been made to start this process with an allocation of €2.5m in 2018. The intention is to earmark further increases over the period to 2021, by which point it is envisaged that €10m will be provided annually, achieving an inspection coverage of 25% of rental properties each year.

The issues of inconsistency and differences in capacity across local authorities are being addressed under the Rental Strategy. Work is underway to build a more efficient, standardised and transparent inspections and enforcement approach across all local authority areas. My De-

partment, the Residential Tenancies Board and local authorities are working together to develop a national system of shared support services covering ICT, legal services, training and capacity development and resource and performance management. This will mean that best practice approaches that work well in some local authorities will be developed and replicated across the system, taking advantage of economies of scale and ensuring that all local authorities have the appropriate personnel and systems in place, not only for inspection but also to act promptly and effectively when non-compliance is found.

It is also my intention to introduce further measures to ensure that landlords meet their obligations in relation to quality, safety and compliance with regulations and standards. Landlords, when registering a tenancy with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), will be required to certify that the property in question is compliant with regulations relating to standards for rental accommodation, overcrowding and fire safety. In tandem, annual registration with the RTB will be introduced, effectively requiring annual certification by the landlord. Failure to provide this certification, failure to register the tenancy or the provision of an untrue certification will all constitute offences, prosecutable by the RTB.

The 1966 Housing Act already establishes effective limits on the numbers of people that can occupy the same bedroom. The Act requires that there is at least 400 cubic feet of free air space for each person in a bedroom. It also provides that people of opposite sexes, who are not living as a couple, cannot be required to sleep in the same room.

The local authorities are responsible for enforcement. Under the Act, a local authority can prohibit the use of an overcrowded dwelling, irrespective of whether it is being let or not, and can serve notice on the owner of a dwelling specifying the maximum number of persons that may occupy it without causing overcrowding. If the owner of a house is causing or permitting the house to be overcrowded, the authority can require the owner to desist from causing or permitting such overcrowding within a period not exceeding twenty-one days. Any person who neglects or refuses to comply with these requirements is guilty of an offence.

In the context of legislative changes in relation to the rental sector, particular attention will be given to possible amendments to the provisions in relation to overcrowding, both in terms of its legal definition and the enforcement actions and sanctions applicable to such situations.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

276. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the local authorities historically had or currently have interest rates on home loans that are linked to the ECB base rate and are, therefore, tracker mortgages; if he has satisfied himself that all borrowers are paying the correct rate of interest to their local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47370/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The current standard variable interest rate charged to local authority borrowers, applicable since 1 July 2016, is 2.3%, which is below the average variable mortgage rate charged by commercial lenders.

The rate charged by local authorities is arrived at taking into account their cost of funds from the Housing Finance Agency plc (HFA) (currently 1%), and the local authorities' costs for administration and mortgage arrears resolution (1.3%).

The interest rate charged is not linked to the ECB rate. It is the case that as the cost of funding for the HFA has declined, six different interest rate cuts totalling 1.5%, have been passed to

local authorities, since 2012. This has resulted in the rate charged to borrowers being significantly lower than the average market rate.

Voluntary Housing Sector

277. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when legislation to underpin statutorily and regulate the work of housing voluntary bodies will be brought before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47371/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness recognises the key contribution that Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) make to the delivery of social housing and in this context it is important that AHBs have the capability to contribute to the additional social housing targeted over the period to 2021.

To this end, the housing delivery capacity of AHBs will need to expand greatly and they will require significantly increased external investment. AHBs that have statutorily regulated standards of governance and management capacity will be better able to access private or loan finance.

The proposed Housing (Regulation of Registered Housing Providers) Bill and the underlying policy, which was formulated in consultation with the sector, intends to establish a regulator to oversee the effective governance, financial management and performance of voluntary and co-operative housing bodies. The Bill aims to safeguard public and private investment in the sector, to rationalise and enable increased supply from the voluntary and co-operative housing sector and to ensure that the assets built through investments in the sector are managed sustainably and retained for the purpose for which they were created. The statutory regulatory framework will provide further assurances to investors, tenants, the Government and to the sector itself that social housing providers operate in a well-regulated and stable environment.

My Department continues to work with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to finalise the text of the Bill for publication as soon as possible. The complex nature of some of the issues related to transitioning from voluntary to statutory regulation has required additional consultation and consequential drafting. Notwithstanding this, I expect the Bill to be published before the conclusion of the current Dáil session. Until such time as the legislation is enacted and the statutory system of regulation is put in place, the interim regulatory arrangements in operation since 2014 will remain in operation.

Voluntary Housing Sector

278. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to carry out value-for-money audits of State expenditure on housing voluntary and advocacy bodies in addition to existing annual audits of the sector by the Comptroller and Auditor General and his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47372/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Government Departments undertake expenditure reviews over three-year cycles; the current cycle covers the period 2015-2017. The reviews may take the form of value for money reviews (VFMs), which are evaluations of major spending programmes, or focussed policy assessments

(FPAs), which are smaller-scale exercises.

Departments commit to specific reviews in each cycle. In the current cycle, my Department is undertaking a value for money review on expenditure in the homelessness area and focussed policy assessments on housing adaptation grants and Met Éireann's international subscriptions. The Met Éireann FPA is completed and published while the other reviews are underway.

The selection of a programme for a value for money review is informed by a number of criteria including the volume of expenditure (generally greater than €100 million); the relative impact of the programme area selected; and the availability of data. No decisions have yet been made in relation to the choice of programmes for review in the 2018-2020 cycle.

In addition to this cycle of expenditure reviews, the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) of my Department carries out VFM studies on local authority operations with a view to identifying best practice and recommending ways of improving existing procedures, practices and systems, thereby promoting efficiency and cost effectiveness. In December 2015 the LGAS published a report on the oversight role of local authorities in the provision of social housing by Approved Housing Bodies under the main funding schemes.

In 2014, my Department established an interim Regulation Committee for the Approved Housing Body (AHB) Sector under the auspices of the Housing Agency, which, supported by a Regulation Office based within the Agency, oversees implementation of a voluntary regulation code (VRC) for AHBs. At present, 249 AHBs have signed up to the VRC accounting for more than 90% of the total estimated housing stock in the sector.

As part of any application for housing funding from my Department and local authorities, each AHB is required to furnish proof of compliance with the VRC. Only those AHBs that have undergone a satisfactory assessment as part of the annual assessment process by the Regulation Office are considered eligible for funding.

The Housing (Regulation of Registered Housing Providers) Bill and the underlying policy, which was formulated in consultation with the sector, intends to establish a Regulator to oversee the effective governance, financial management and performance of voluntary and co-operative housing bodies. My Department is working with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to finalise the text of the Bill for publication during the current Oireachtas session. Until such time as the legislation is enacted and the statutory system of regulation is put in place, the interim regulatory arrangements in operation since 2014 will remain in operation.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

279. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the report on the review of the tenant purchase scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47388/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has

been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review in the coming weeks.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

280. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average HAP payment issued by local authorities in 2017. [47389/17]

281. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent on the HAP payment in 2016; and the estimated cost for HAP in 2017 and 2018. [47390/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280 and 281 together.

There are currently over 29,000 households being supported by the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme across the State. On average, 350 households are being set up on HAP each week in 2017.

The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. The exchequer outturn for the HAP scheme in 2016 was in excess of €57 million. The majority of this funding supported the ongoing costs of tenancies established in 2015 that continued into 2016, and the costs of the 12,075 new households supported by the scheme in 2016.

Budget 2017 increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme to €152.7 million, in order to meet the continuing costs of existing HAP households, and the costs of the additional 15,000 households, targeted under Rebuilding Ireland, to be supported by HAP in 2017. I expect this allocation to be expended in full.

The 2017 average monthly rent paid to landlords under the HAP scheme (up to the end of Q2) was €688. However, it should be borne in mind that the roll-out of the HAP scheme was not fully implemented until 1 March 2017 with the introduction of Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council.

Budget 2018 has increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme by €149m to €301 million. This will allow for the continued support of existing HAP households and also enable the additional 17,000 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by HAP in 2018, as well as supporting the roll-out of the HAP Place Finder Support Service across the country.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Administration

282. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the housing needs of persons on RAS are deemed to be met; if persons on RAS are still eligible for inclusion on local authority housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47396/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 April 2011 and the commencement of section 19 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, rental accommodation availability agreements, including Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) agreements, are considered to be a form of social housing support. As

such, tenants accommodated by a local authority in a RAS arrangement are deemed to have their housing needs met.

However, it was recognised that tenants who were allocated RAS accommodation prior to 1 April 2011 may have had expectations that they would remain on the main housing waiting list and be eligible for other forms of social housing support. Accordingly, my Department issued guidance to local authorities at the time, recommending that RAS tenants who wished to transfer to other forms of social housing support be given this opportunity via the creation of a transfer list option.

The principle being applied was that the reasonable expectations of these households should be preserved and they should be placed on a transfer list with no less favourable terms than if they had remained on the main housing waiting list. This list, whilst being a ‘transfer list’, would reflect the specific priority/previous position that that household had on the main waiting list within the authority area in which they are resident. Local authorities are responsible, in the context of their individual schemes of letting priorities, for managing the operation of their transfers lists.

Since its introduction, RAS has provided and continues to provide high quality accommodation to many thousands of households. It remains an important delivery mechanism to meet social housing need in the context of the targets for delivery set out in the Government’s Re-building Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Housing Data

283. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of RAS, HAP and privately owned SHCEP long-term lease tenancies inactive on 31 December or each year since each scheme was introduced, in tabular form; and the annual cost of each scheme for each of these years. [47443/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) support the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the leasing of houses and apartments. The properties are secured by local authorities for social housing under leases or availability agreements which provide the local authorities with the authority to allocate the properties to tenants from their housing lists in accordance with their scheme of letting priorities.

Where a dwelling becomes vacant, the terms of the agreements provide that lease payments, to be made by the local authorities to the owners, continue for a maximum period of 3 consecutive months in order to allow for re-tenanting of the dwelling by local authorities. If the dwelling remains vacant at the end of that 3 month period, it is deemed to be inactive. No payment is made by my Department in respect of inactive dwellings. A property under a lease or availability agreement may become vacant because a tenant has moved to other accommodation or is deceased. During the period of vacancy the local authority will undertake to allocate the property to another household in accordance with its scheme of letting priorities and on occasion, repair work may be required before it can be relet.

Under the Housing Assistance Payment scheme (HAP), a tenant sources their own accommodation, and the tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is covered by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). HAP support is paid in arrears and only provided in respect of active tenancies that meet the terms and condition of the scheme.

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 gives legislative recognition to rental accommodation availability agreements, including both SHCEP and RAS agreements, as a form of social housing support since 1 April 2011. The number of inactive privately owned dwellings under RAS and SHCEP, and the annual cost of each scheme for each year since then, is set out in Tables 1 and 2. My Department does not collect data relating to periods of vacancy of less than three months.

HAP was provided for by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 and Table 3 provides details in relation to the cost of the HAP scheme in each year since. The term “privately owned” excludes dwellings owned by AHBs, unsold affordable dwellings and dwellings owned by National Asset Residential Property Services (NARPS).

The number of inactive dwellings under SHCEP and RAS combined at end of 2016 (i.e. 315) constituted approximately 1% of the total number of 29,200 dwellings under the schemes at that stage.

Table 1: SHCEP

Year	Total Scheme Cost	No. of Privately Owned - Inactive Dwellings at 31/12
2011	€13,817,464	Data not available
2012	€20,814,526	Data not available
2013	€27,362,615	Data not available
2014	€34,844,781	104
2015	€42,275,724*	164
2016	€54,028,752	232
2017 to end Q3	€40,551,993	322

*Of this figure, a total of €7,933,651 was self-funded by local authorities using funding from their RAS Reserves.

Table 2: RAS

Year	Total Scheme Cost	No. of Privately Owned - Inactive Dwellings
2011	€115,917,365	170
2012	€125,429,967	56
2013	€130,886,608	71
2014	€133,512,889	70
2015	€121,789,178*	60
2016	€130,998,164**	83

* An additional €14.84m in RAS recoupment claims was offset against local authority RAS Reserves in 2015.

** An additional €13.9m in RAS recoupment claims was offset against local authority RAS Reserves in 2016.

Table 3: HAP

Year	Total Scheme Cost	No. of Privately Owned - Inactive
2014	€0.394m	0

2015	€15.64m	0
2016	€57.69m	0
2017 to end Q2	-*	0

* It is anticipated that the Exchequer funding for 2017 of €152.7 million will be fully expended on the operation of the HAP scheme at year end.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

284. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase the income limits for eligibility for social housing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47464/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

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

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

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports has commenced. I would expect the results of this review to be available for publication in 2018.

The Government is very aware of the general rise in house prices and in response, my Department has examined housing affordability in consultation with the Housing Agency, local authorities and other stakeholders as part of the targeted review of Rebuilding Ireland. The review is now at an advanced stage and I expect to be in a position to announce details of the outcome, including any additional measures, in the coming weeks.

It is important to note that there are currently two house purchase loan offerings available to lower income first time buyers from local authorities.

The first is a standard annuity mortgage available from all local authorities. The relevant terms and conditions applying to local authority housing loans are set out in the Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012. Key eligibility criteria provide that a loan applicant must be a first time buyer and must be able to show their local authority that they cannot get a loan from a bank or building society. Also, the gross income (before tax) of a single income household in the previous year must be €50,000 or less and the combined gross income (before tax) of a two income household in the previous year must be €75,000 or less. The loan is subject to a maximum amount of €200,000 and can be used to finance up to 97% of the purchase price of a new or second hand property or the applicant can use it to finance the building of their own

home. Further more detailed information is available from all local authorities.

The second option is the Home Choice Loan, a Government-backed mortgage for first time buyers. First time buyers can apply for a Home Choice Loan to purchase a new or second hand property or build their own home. Home Choice Loan provides up to 92% of the market value of a property purchased, subject to a maximum loan amount of €285,000. Home Choice Loan offers one variable interest rate. The rate is currently set at 3.25% variable, APR 3.30%. Further information is available at <http://www.homechoiceloan.ie>.

Severe Weather Events Response

285. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the applications for storm relief funding that have been submitted by Cork County Council and Cork City Council; and the engagement that has taken place between officials in his Department and officials from both councils. [47468/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department was in regular contact with Cork County Council and Cork City Council in the run up to Storm Ophelia which impacted the country on 16 October. As the track and intensity of the storm became more certain my Department wrote to Cork County Council and to Cork City Council as well as all other local authorities on 13 October advising that the Department intended to convene a National Emergency Co-ordination Group (NECG) and recommending that local authorities activate their local emergency co-ordination structures in advance of the weather system impacting the country.

As the storm approached the country on 16 October, the counties of the southwest, including Cork, were the first to be impacted. The NECG was in regular communication with the Cork local authorities during this time and information supplied by those authorities on the effects and severity of the storm were relayed to other local authorities and helped them to plan and focus their response. On 17 October a tele-conference was conducted between Cork County Council and the NECG to review the impact of the storm.

My Department has written to all local authorities, including the Cork local authorities, inviting them to submit claims for recoupment of response and clean-up costs that were incurred by them in dealing with the storm. We await claims for recoupment from the local authorities, including the Cork local authorities, in due course.

Funding for repair of any public infrastructure damaged by the storm is arranged directly between the relevant funding Department and the local authorities. I understand that, in contrast with other severe weather events, the overall damage to public infrastructure arising from the storm was limited.

Questions Nos. 286 and 287 answered with Question No. 275.

Rent Controls

288. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking to bring rents down to affordable levels for persons on low incomes, in particular in Dublin and other urban districts; the way in which rents will be reduced in 2018 across the areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47471/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, recommended the introduction of a Rent Predictability Measure to moderate rent increases in those parts of the country where rents are highest and rising - where households have greatest difficulties in finding accommodation they can afford. The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 provided for the Rent Predictability Measure and for areas, called Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs), where rents can now only rise by a maximum of 4% annually for a period of 3 years.

This measure was implemented immediately in the four Dublin local authority areas and in Cork City as these areas already met the criteria for a Rent Pressure Zone in December 2016. A further 12 Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) were designated in January 2017, with the measure further extended to Maynooth and Cobh LEAs in March 2017 and to Drogheda and Greystones LEAs in September 2017.

The data collected by the Residential Tenancies Board to produce its Rent Index Data shows that although there is still volatility in rental trends from quarter to quarter, the rate of increase in rents has slowed measurably since the designation of RPZs.

In addition a number of significant changes are being made to the Rent Pressure Zone system following a recent review. Charging rents above those permitted by the legislation will become an offence and the RTB will be provided with the powers to investigate and prosecute transgressors so that it will no longer be solely up to the tenant to initiate a dispute. The conditions under which properties can be exempted from the rent increase limits will be more closely specified and landlords will have to notify the RTB when claiming an exemption. These changes will strengthen the impact of the Rent Predictability Measure and will further slow the growth in rents.

To deal with the issue of affordable rents on a longer term and sustainable basis, my Department, reflecting the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government and the Strategy for the Rental Sector, will lead an Expert Group to develop a viable cost rental model for the Irish rental sector taking into account the work already completed in this area, including by the National Economic and Social Council and others. This Group will address issues such as funding mechanisms, the need to grow the necessary institutional capacity, particularly within the AHB and not-for-profit sector (whether through mergers, new entrants or strategic partnerships), rent levels, the households to be targeted and the appropriate regulation mechanisms.

The Expert Group will assess the benefits that a larger and more developed not-for-profit segment would bring to the rental sector and the housing system, by increasing supply of rental accommodation for low to middle-income households and ensuring new capacity is developed. Following the conclusion of the focused review of Rebuilding Ireland, it is my intention to establish this Expert Group in the coming weeks. A proposal regarding its membership and terms of reference is currently being finalised in my Department.

Mortgage Lending

289. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking to address the anomaly whereby persons on certain social protection payments are excluded from accessing mortgages through their local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47472/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The terms and conditions governing the operation of the standard annuity House Purchase Loan provided by local authorities to first-time buyers are set out most recently in the Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 408 of 2012). To support local authorities in operating their housing loan scheme in a consistent and efficient manner, the Housing Agency provides a central credit assessment service to local authorities. The final decision on loan approval is a matter for the relevant local authority and its credit committee on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with the relevant statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with this statutory credit policy in order to ensure prudence and consistency in approaches in the best interests of both borrowers and local authorities as lenders alike.

The Local Authority House Purchase Loan is not, as a general rule, available to those whose sole income relies on social welfare benefits. However, where there is a primary income of a permanent waged or salaried nature and where the secondary income is from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), then long-term social welfare payments can be considered, provided that the long-term nature of the payment is confirmed by the DEASP or other relevant Government Department.

Homelessness Strategy

290. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he has taken arising from recommendations of a review (details supplied) of homelessness services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47549/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Mazars Ireland's Independent Review of Homeless Services report was commissioned by my Department and published in late 2015. The report was primarily a desktop review of available information and broadly sets out an overview of the organisations involved in delivering homeless services, the types of services and their public funding. With regard to recommendations, in summary the report referred to the need for a more comprehensive review of homeless services, including direct engagement with service providers, to consider the efficiency of funding a very large number of service providers and the extent to which duplication exists in the sector.

Following on from the Mazars report, my Department is currently engaged in a Value for Money Review with regard to expenditure on homelessness services and an independently chaired steering group is in place to oversee the Review. Questionnaires recently issued to a wide range of non-governmental homeless services providers and also the nine lead local authorities for the administration of homeless services. The questionnaires seek details on the material resources available to service providers, their overall goals and the specific objectives of the services they deliver and invite comment on the policy challenges and opportunities. The data produced via the questionnaires will be an important component of the overall Review process. I expect that the Review will be finalised early in 2018.

Land Availability

291. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the figures contained in the table 3 of the residential land availability survey 2014 for land owned by local authorities and that is publicly owned. [47552/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department, in conjunction with local authority planning departments, carried out a national

survey of all lands zoned for residential development in statutory local authority development plans and local area plans across Ireland.

This exercise, the Residential Land Availability Survey 2014, published in February 2015, determined the location and quantity of lands that may be regarded as being undeveloped and available for residential development purposes at 31 March 2014 in each local authority area. The survey measured the total amount of lands, whether owned privately or by the local authority, that have been identified for housing development in the various local authority development plans and that are the highest priority for development.

The area of such lands amounts to 17,434 hectares which, given a range of densities appropriate to whether the areas are in small villages or larger towns and cities and as determined by the relevant local authorities, could enable the construction of an estimated 414,000 dwellings.

The survey identifies zoned lands available for residential development and therefore does not detail information on land ownership. However, the active management of the publicly-owned housing land bank is part of a range of actions being progressed under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, designed to accelerate and increase housing output.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, an online Housing Land Map was launched by my Department which aims to provide users with details of residentially zoned lands, local authority owned and Land Aggregation Scheme sites, other publicly owned sites with potential for housing development, and active private housing construction sites in the Dublin region. It represents a vital initial step in the new State Housing Land Management Strategy being developed under Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework.

On 27 April 2017, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes. These sites can be viewed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

In order to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to the development of these lands, I have asked all local authorities to prepare Strategic Development and Management Plans for housing lands in their ownership, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites that are already serviced and with the most potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term.

In the first instance, the final development model for each site, including the tenure mix, will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, including its elected members.

My Department is continuing to work with all local authorities and State bodies to ensure that housing is delivered from appropriately located and publicly owned sites to meet our current and future housing requirements.

Defence Forces Recruitment

292. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to fill vacancies at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47454/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following the lifting of the embargo on recruitment to the Public Service, the military authorities have been identifying posts to be filled at various locations throughout the country on a prioritised basis. Competitions to fill posts identified by the military authorities are initiated following assessment of the business requirement for the posts. Posts in Custume Barracks, Athlone, are currently the subject of this ongoing assessment process.