

## **Written Answers.**

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Social and Affordable Housing Funding**

11. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether setting up funding models in conjunction with various private equity funds is the most efficient way to provide social and affordable housing to deal with the current crisis. [18460/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In seeking to address the shortage of housing supply I am open to considering different delivery models, including those that utilise private sector funding to deliver additional units to be used for social housing and for affordable rental, whilst at the same time providing value for money. To this end, three specific measures are currently being developed and implemented by my Department.

The Programme for a Partnership Government provides that, as part of the development process for the Action Plan for Housing, we will explore the option of incentivising developers to build and lease back homes to housing authorities and associations.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme currently provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) with the combined use of State and private funding, and leased by AHB's and Local Authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. Changes are now being proposed to this scheme to provide revised arrangements which serve to expand these mechanisms to facilitate larger institutional private investors that want to build and lease back homes to housing authorities and associations.

The Programme for Government further provides for the introduction of a new model of affordable rental to deliver more housing options for low income households. €10m has been committed to this scheme in 2016.

The National Development Finance Agency is acting as financial advisor to my Department in respect of these schemes. In addition, a Social Housing Public Private Partnership to provide for a capital investment of €300 million is currently being implemented. This PPP programme will deliver 1,500 social housing units.

Each of these initiatives is in addition to social housing being delivered by other means, including through Exchequer capital spending.

## Social and Affordable Housing Provision

12. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the action he is taking to ensure that the Irish Glass Bottle site in Dublin 4 will have the maximum level of social and affordable housing possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18480/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended by the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, at least 10% of the housing development on Poolbeg West Strategic Development Zone, as in all residential development areas, must be reserved for the provision of social housing.

Subject to the finalisation of a planning scheme for Poolbeg West, up to 3,000 new homes are considered achievable by the City Council which suggests a potential social housing yield of up to 300 new homes. Going beyond this level would require the agreement of the landowners and developers of this area in the context of an acquisitions strategy.

A detailed planning scheme is in the process of being drawn up for the area by Dublin City Council as a comprehensive planning framework for its orderly development and I understand from the City Council that this is expected to be published for public consultation before the end of this year.

## Housing Policy

13. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the Action Plan on Housing will be published. [18473/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to the preparation and publication of an ‘Action Plan for Housing’ within the Government’s first 100 days.

The Action Plan is currently being drafted in my Department, with input from key Government Departments and Agencies, and other stakeholders working in the housing and homelessness sector .

The Action Plan will also draw on the Report of the Special Committee on Housing and Homelessness, which was published on 17 June 2016, demonstrating this Government’s commitment to a collaborative approach to solving the housing crisis.

The initial focus of the Action Plan will be to expedite and boost supply of all types of housing, including social housing, in the immediate, medium and longer-terms, focusing in particular on those experiencing most difficulty in accessing accommodation in the housing and rental market at the moment.

The Plan will also put in place measures to ensure we have a more stable and sustainable housing system in the future.

I have made the development and implementation of this “Action Plan for Housing” my number one priority. I am accelerating plans for Government approval and aim to publish the final Action Plan before the end of July.

## **Regeneration Projects Funding**

14. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to provide a breakdown of the current programme of the 2016 allocation for existing commitments on regeneration projects which is €50 million. [18511/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** As the Deputy will be aware, regeneration projects funded by my Department target the country's most disadvantaged communities, including those defined by the most extreme social exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour.

My Department currently supports a programme of large-scale regeneration projects in Dublin, Cork and Limerick and smaller projects in Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk. The 2016 allocation for existing commitments on regeneration projects is €50 million, including allocations of €28m for Limerick, €11m for Cork City, €5m for Dublin and €2m each for Dundalk, Sligo and Tralee.

In the context of the priority on urban regeneration set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government, Minister Coveney and I will be working to provide increased funding in 2017 and subsequent years for a range of measures that address deep-rooted disadvantage, while developing an approach to urban regeneration that empowers people to work together to improve their communities and to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

## **Library Services**

15. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his proposals for amalgamating local library services across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18557/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** Proposals to introduce changes to the library management model are outlined in the report *Managing the Delivery of Effective Library Services*. The proposed operating model seeks to put in place planning and implementation arrangements that will deliver more effective and efficient public libraries with a view to securing the delivery of an enhanced quality and range of services. This will ensure the long-term sustainability of the library service in Ireland.

The key challenge in the present structure is the need for the creation of scale for existing library authorities, in particular in the smaller counties. In order to achieve this, it was determined that a new operating model for library authorities should be established, with a minimum population target of 100,000 as an appropriate basis for determining a revised libraries' structure.

The proposed model does not involve the closure of libraries nor will it require the reduction of the library services available in those areas; in fact, the model seeks to enhance the services that are available. It will secure a stronger senior management structure and increase capacity across the relevant library authorities to focus on frontline services and opportunities for enhanced individual and community support services and engagement. Discussions have commenced with the relevant local authorities with a view to exploring how the proposals might best be implemented and all options will be considered as part of these discussions.

## Housing Policy

16. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the legislative changes he plans to implement to provide for the much needed massive increase in social and affordable housing in order to deal with the current housing crisis. [18461/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** A range of actions is currently being considered to provide for the much needed boosting of supply of all types of housing, including increasing the delivery of social housing, in the immediate, medium and longer-term. These actions, including possible legislative changes, will be brought forward in the context of the new “ Action Plan for Housing ” which will be published in the coming weeks.

A key objective of the Plan will be to accelerate, and exceed if possible, the delivery of the targets under the Social Housing Strategy: importantly, local authorities and approved housing bodies already have a strong pipeline of construction, turnkey and acquisition projects underway, which will deliver some 3,900 homes, with approved budget costs of some €680 million.

The most recent changes to legislation which impact on the delivery of social housing were a number of amendments made in 2015 to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which provides for the provision of social housing units from within private developments.

The amendments provide for Part V delivery of 10% of the total units in a scheme, with the priority being the delivery of social housing. Crucially, the options of a payment of cash in lieu of units, or the transfer of sites or parts of sites, have been removed. The focus is now on the delivery of completed units and the amendments seek to maximise the contribution Part V can make to social housing supply and sustainable mixed-tenure communities across the country. An increase in the overall supply of housing in the coming years will therefore yield a dividend for social housing under the provisions of Part V.

The operation of Part V is kept under review in my Department, in consultation with local authorities, and should further legislative changes be required, in the light of experience with the revised provisions, I will bring these forward.

*Question No. 17 answered with Question No. 7.*

*Question No. 18 answered with Question No. 9.*

## Waste Management Inspections

19. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied with the level of enforcement, inspection and compliance relating to waste collection operators here; the inspection regime that is in place to ensure they are compliant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18455/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** While issues concerning the enforcement of waste legislation are a matter for local authorities who have significant powers under the waste regulations to secure compliance by waste collectors, my Department has introduced a number of measures to strengthen efforts to improve enforcement generally.

Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) have been established in each of

the three existing waste regions with responsibility for coordinating waste enforcement actions and ensuring consistent enforcement of waste legislation, while still leaving local authority personnel as first responders on the ground to specific breaches of waste legislation. This will facilitate a transformation from process-driven enforcement, structured around separate implementation of individual regulations, to one that focuses greatest effort on the waste problems and issues that matter most and to take swift, proportionate and effective action.

The work of the WERLAs is being supported by continued funding provided by my Department for the local authority waste enforcement network. Some €8.2 million is being provided in 2016 for the retention by local authorities of 155 specialised waste enforcement officers, critical to tackling issues such as illegal dumping in local communities and in providing an enhanced response on the ground to infractions of the waste code.

A working group on the introduction of the Pay-By-Weight charging consisting of members from my Department, the WERLA's and National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO) has to date devised and completed a programme of data collection and inspections to help ensure that household waste collectors are, *inter alia*, weighing waste and making those weights available to customers. The first phase began in March 2015 with an information and awareness visits followed by vehicle inspections (June 2015), customer account inspections (February 2016) and back office Inspections (April 2016). There are currently further inspections on-going in coordination with the NWCPO review of waste collection permits.

An effective system of waste management is critical to the welfare of the environment and society in general and the appropriate use of enforcement powers currently being deployed by local authority waste enforcement personnel is important, both to secure compliance with the law and to ensure the provision of appropriate household waste collection services.

### Building Regulations

20. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his understanding on the status of a resolution for Longboat Quay residents; and his plans to introduce comprehensive building regulations so this does not happen again. [18479/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The specific matters in relation to the Longboat Quay development are currently before the Courts and, as a consequence, are subjudice. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on this development at this time.

In response to the many building failures that have emerged over the past decade, my Department introduced the *Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014*, which provide for greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design and construction by registered construction professionals and builders, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates.

Statutory certificates of compliance, where relevant, must be given at commencement (design only) and completion and must be signed by a registered construction professional (i.e. an Architect or a Building Surveyor or a chartered Engineer who is included on a statutory register maintained respectively by the Royal Institution of Architects of Ireland, the Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland or Engineers Ireland). The statutory certificate of compliance on completion must also be signed by the builder.

In effect, the statutory Certificate of Compliance on Completion certifies that a building is compliant with all relevant requirements of the Building Regulations 1997 to 2014.

The Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 were reviewed following their first 12 months in operation. It is clear from this review that the recent reforms have brought a new order and discipline to bear on construction projects. I am confident that as the transition to the new arrangements for the control of building activity continues to progress, these reforms will in time prove capable of transforming the culture of the construction industry in Ireland to one of improved compliance and quality.

### **Marine Plan Implementation**

21. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he will be in a position to designate marine protection areas as required under Article 13.4 of the marine strategy framework directive; if legislation is necessary in the first instance; if so, when that will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18475/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland intends to institute a network of Marine Protected Areas within our maritime area to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems and biodiversity as required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). This network will incorporate existing and future maritime special areas of conservation established under the Habitats Directive and special protection areas designated under the Birds Directive for which my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is responsible in the first instance. It will also incorporate specific marine protected areas created under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). These will be agreed at a regional level and may be located either fully or partially in Ireland's marine jurisdiction. My Department will be working with my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and other member states in our CFP region to designate marine protected areas of this type.

While many such areas can be, and have been, established under existing legislation, there may also be a requirement for other types of marine protected area which do not readily fall within the ambit of existing statutes. These would require new enabling provisions in legislation. It is my intention to introduce such legislation at the earliest opportunity, within the context of the Government's overall legislative priorities. This legislation will also formally identify special areas of conservation or protection under the Habitats and Birds Directives or under the CFP as Marine Protected Areas for the purposes of the MSFD.

In tandem with this, we need to identify what additional marine protected areas are required including what form they should take, where they should be located, and whether they should be local to Irish waters or transboundary in nature.

Identifying marine protected areas and developing the necessary legislation will require consultation with other relevant Government Departments and State agencies as well as other key stakeholders. These stakeholders include other EU member States, external scientific experts, NGOs and those who use the marine environment as appropriate. This process will also work in tandem with the development of any maritime spatial plans under the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, for which my Department is also responsible.

*Question No. 22 withdrawn.*

**Departmental Functions**

23. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the responsibilities transferred to other Departments since the Government was formed and the funding that transferred with these responsibilities broken down by Department and the subheads, as published in the first volume of the Revised Estimates; the responsibilities that transferred into his Department broken down similarly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18458/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Rural Affairs and Social Enterprise (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2016 took effect from 9 June 2016.

This Order provides for the transfer of certain community-related functions from my Department to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, which will be renamed as the Department of Arts, Heritage, Rural, Regional and Gaeltacht Affairs.

These functions relate to the LEADER programme; the CLÁR programme; the Town and Village Renewal Scheme; the Tidy Towns scheme; the Western Development Commission; the implementation of the report of the Commission on the Economic Development of Rural Areas; the dormant accounts fund and social enterprise.

The table sets out, pursuant to that Order, the functions and programme funds transferring from my Department's vote as set out in the 2016 Revised Estimates Volume for Public Services:

Programme Area	Funds Transferred to DAHG (full year) € 000		
	Current	Capital	
E.1 Administration Pay	2,338	0	
E.2 Administration Non Pay	586	97	
E.6 Dormant Accounts	2,320	2,006	
E.7 Western Development Commission	1,488	1,000	
E.8 National Rural Development Schemes	4,000	3,383	
E.9 Leader Rural Economy sub Programme	0	40,000	
E.12 Tidy Towns Competition	1	0	
E.15 Town and Village Regeneration	0	4,000	
E.16 Other Services	0	6,000	
Gross	10,733	56,486	67,219

Programme Area	Funds Transferred to DAHG (full year) € 000		
H7 Dormant Accounts A-in-A	1,570	2,006	3,576
H8 Dormant Accounts A-in-A	750	0	750
H9 LEADER		4,000	4,000
NET			58,893

Responsibility for environmental functions, including in relation to climate, waste, resource efficiency, air quality and environmental radiation policies will transfer to the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources which will be renamed as the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The statutory transfer of functions process to give effect to these changes in respect of the environment portfolio is underway, with the aim of completing the transfer as soon as possible. As the transfer of these functions has not been formally completed, the Environment programmes are still reflected in my Department's Estimate.

No new functions will be transferring into my Department.

### Water Services Provision

24. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the nature of legal advice both his Department and Irish Water have received relating to article 9.4 of the Water Framework Directive and the derogation within; and if he will publish this legal advice. [18489/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. They may be contacted via email at [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on 1890 578 578.

With regard to specific advice obtained in relation to Article 9 of the Water Framework Directive and water charges, my Department was informed by Ervia, as part of a general update on Irish Water matters, that Ervia had sought such advice. Ervia has provided my Department with a copy of the legal advice it obtained on the application of Article 9 of the Water Framework Directive. As this is advice obtained by Ervia, any question regarding its publication would be a matter for the company itself.

My Department has sought the advice of the Attorney General in relation to the Water Framework Directive and water charges and this issue is under examination by that Office. As would be normal with the drafting of legislation, the Office of the Attorney General has also been fulfilling an advisory role in relation to the Water Services (Amendment) Bill 2016, which is designed to suspend domestic water charges for a period of at least nine months from the end of the current Irish Water billing cycle.

The suspension period is to allow for the establishment of an Expert Commission to consider and make recommendations on the long term funding of public domestic water services by Irish Water. These recommendations will be considered by a Special Oireachtas Committee and the Oireachtas will then ultimately vote on the enduring funding model for such services into the future.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

25. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if, in response to the Oireachtas committee report on housing and homeless, he has finalised the offer from the Irish League of Credit Unions of €2 billion with the Department of Finance and the Central Bank to facilitate the building of social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18299/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The agreed Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that credit unions can play in housing finance and supports the efforts of the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing. The Programme further provides that we will investigate with all stakeholders how credit unions can support the delivery of social housing.

The Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU) has set out a proposed means by which funding could be provided to Approved Housing Bodies, by credit unions, for the development of social housing. My Department has met with the ILCU on a number of occasions to address technical aspects of its proposal. The most recent meeting was on 13 April 2016.

The Central Bank commenced a number of new regulations for credit unions on 1 January 2016. Prior to their commencement, following careful consideration, the Central Bank made a number of modifications, including to Regulation 25(2), which makes reference to the fact that the Central Bank may prescribe, in accordance with section 43 of the Credit Union Act 1997, further classes of investments for credit unions which may include investments in projects of a public nature. The effect of these modifications is that regulation 25(2) now provides that investment in projects of a public nature can include, but are not limited to, investments in social housing projects.

I acknowledge the modifications made by the Central Bank and the willingness of credit unions to actively seek a role in financing the delivery of social housing.

Conscious of the independence of the Central Bank in its regulatory role in respect of credit unions, bilateral engagement has taken place between my Department and the Department of Finance to consider the potential regulatory and legislative implications of credit union involvement in the social housing sector.

My Department and the Department of Finance met with the Central Bank on 21 April 2016 to provide information of a technical nature in relation to social housing funding arrangements. This was with a view to assisting the Central Bank in understanding how these arrangements operate, as it deals with issues arising from proposals put forward for credit union investment in social housing.

My Department received an update from the Irish League of Credit Unions on its progress on 31 May 2016, and responded on 1 June 2016.

Ultimately, the funding mechanisms will have to be put in place in the first instance by the

ILCU with the support of its members, and with the agreement of the Central Bank. I and my Department are happy to continue to contribute to this process by providing necessary technical advice and support.

### **Social Enterprise Sector**

26. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to report on the performance and plans of Pobal in supporting local development and social enterprise jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18294/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Catherine Byrne) (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The Government currently provides substantial funding to social enterprises through a range of programmes and schemes, many of which are implemented through the nationwide network of Local Development Companies, including the Community Services Programme, Community Employment Schemes, the Wage Subsidy Scheme for the employment of people with disabilities, public sector contracts through the HSE, and the Social Finance Foundation.

Pobal, on behalf of the Government, manages the Community Services Programme (CSP) and Dormant Account Fund Social Enterprise Measure. A total of 404 service providers are supported under the CSP to provide local social, economic and environmental services through the application of a social enterprise model of delivery. In 2016, the total allocation to service providers under CSP amounts to €42.53m. This contributes to the employment of 306 managers and 1,702 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions under the programme. A total of 27 projects are currently supported by the allocation of a Dormant Accounts capital grant with a total disbursement of €1,042,256.

In addition, my Department funds a number of programmes operating within communities including, for example, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), which is one of my Department's key priorities. SICAP has been rolled out since 1 April 2015 and it aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies, and operates across the country. It is a key intervention for the harder to reach and is managed and overseen by the Local Community Development Committees in each Local Authority area. The SICAP horizontal principles are collaboration, community development and equality, and the programme is delivered in each area by local development companies and one community consortium (in Dublin Inner City area). The SICAP budget for 2016 is €37.5 million.

Pobal has been contracted by my Department to act as its agent with respect to the national management and oversight for the monitoring and evaluation of SICAP.

Further information regarding the performance of the programmes under the remit of my Department, such as the local and community development programme and its successor, SICAP, are contained at the following links:

<https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Pages/Current.aspx> (includes information on CSP, Dormant Accounts, SICAP and its predecessor the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP)).

<https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/LCDP%20Final%20Report%202010-2015.pdf>

<https://www.pobal.ie/Beneficiaries/SICAP/Documents/SICAP%20Mid%20Term%20Re->

### **Local Government Fund**

27. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will offer compensation from the Local Government Fund in 2017 as was offered in 2016; the amount he will offer by local authority, in tabular form; if not, the funding deficit that each local authority will have to address; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18505/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Commissioner for Valuation is responsible for valuation matters, including the global valuation of property of public utility undertakings under Part 11 of the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015.

The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 come under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality. This legislation provides for global valuations of utility undertakings to be carried out by the Valuation Office every five years and entered on the central valuation list. This can result in either increases or decreases to the relevant valuation. In 2015, the Valuation Office carried out global valuations for Gas Networks Ireland, Iarnrod Eireann and telecommunications companies BT Ireland, Eircom, Vodafone, Three Ireland and Meteor. In November 2015, the Valuation Office issued a copy of the Valuation Certificate and a schedule setting out the apportioned value for each rating authority to my Department. The previous valuation for these utilities had taken place in 2010. The Global Valuation Certificates showed a reduction in the combined valuations for these utilities of €112m. In addition, the reduction in the global valuation of the ESB, following an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal, reduced the rates payable by the ESB from 2016.

The timing of the global valuations in 2015 caused particular difficulties for local authorities as they were published at an advanced stage of the local authority budgetary process. In this regard, my Department engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and it was agreed that there would be a once-off adjustment in support from the Local Government Fund in 2016 to local authorities affected by the global valuations. The additional allocation provided was on an exceptional and once-off basis, solely for the 2016 budgetary period.

The elected members of a local authority have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, which includes adopting the annual budget, and are democratically accountable for all expenditure by the local authority. As such, it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

### **National Planning Framework**

28. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the draft national planning strategy to replace the national spatial strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18555/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The current National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was published in 2002 and was Ireland's first national strategic spatial planning framework, setting an overarching planning framework. The Strategy remains in force and as a result of the Planning and Development (Amendment)

Act 2010, its statutory role and influence has been strengthened by new requirements for local authority and regional plans to align with the NSS.

Bearing in mind the elapsed time, as well as the changed circumstances and new challenges that have emerged in the planning arena since the NSS was adopted, the previous Government approved the preparation of a successor to the NSS - the National Planning Framework - and in December 2015, it published a roadmap for its preparation: this is available on my Department's website at the following link;

*[http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/towards\\_a\\_national\\_planning\\_framework\\_december\\_2015.pdf](http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/towards_a_national_planning_framework_december_2015.pdf)*.

The commitment to preparing the National Planning Framework was re-affirmed in A Programme for a Partnership Government, published in May.

I intend that the National Planning Framework will be a high-level nationally focused document, developed to ensure the optimal development of the country as a whole, while maximising Ireland's economic recovery and on-going growth at national, regional and local level. It should contribute further to sustainable national recovery through an inclusive and participative approach with all relevant national, regional and local interests.

Furthermore, the National Planning Framework will act as the strategic planning context for relevant Government policies and investment in housing, water services, transport, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure, as well as the preparations by the three new Regional Assemblies of their new regional spatial and economic strategies, and for planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála.

Earlier this month, my Department undertook a series of key stakeholder consultation events as an initial step in identifying a range of issues for consideration ahead of preparing the draft National Planning Framework. Further consultation will take place with relevant stakeholders ahead of any formal national consultation programme being launched. An invitation will issue shortly from my Department to all Oireachtas Members to attend a briefing on the National Planning Framework next month.

In line with the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment, it is anticipated that the National Planning Framework will be finalised by the first quarter of 2017, taking account of all relevant inputs and statutory requirements. It would be inappropriate at this early stage to comment on the likely content of the framework, until sufficient preparatory and consultative work has been undertaken.

### **Regeneration Projects Status**

29. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the start date for the regeneration projects in the Dublin city area (details supplied); and the amount of funding allocated to these projects. [18513/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Regeneration projects funded by my Department in the Dublin City area target some of the country's most disadvantaged communities, including those defined by the most extreme social exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour. The projects seek to address the causes of disadvantage in these communities through investment in physical, social and economic regeneration.

In the Dublin City area, the two regeneration projects which the Deputy refers to in the details supplied, are now underway with estimated costs of some €32 million between them. Demolition and enabling works funded by my Department are being undertaken on both sites, with the main building works expected to commence later this year. Social regeneration activities are also being supported for both projects throughout the regeneration process.

### **Water Charges Arrears**

30. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if arrears will be written off in the event of water charges being abolished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18478/16]

51. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he discussed with Irish Water whether arrears would be written off in the event of water charges being abolished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18469/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Question Nos. 30 and 51 together.

The Water Services (Amendment) Bill 2016, which commenced second stage debate in Dáil Éireann on 24 June 2016, seeks to implement water elements of the “Confidence and Supply Arrangement” agreed with Fianna Fáil in the context of supporting the current minority Government.

The Bill provides for the suspension of domestic water charges for a period of nine months to allow for the establishment of an Expert Commission to consider and make recommendations on the long term funding of domestic public water services. The Commission’s recommendations will be considered by a Special Oireachtas Committee and, ultimately, the Oireachtas will then determine the enduring funding model for such services into the future.

Any question of writing off water arrears has not been discussed with Irish Water in advance of these deliberations being concluded. The ‘Confidence and Supply Arrangement’ affirms that those who have paid their water bills to date will be treated no less favourably than those who have not.

### **Seaweed Harvesting Potential**

31. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the implementation of eight recommendations by the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht in relation to the Report of the Committee on Developing the Seaweed Industry in Ireland published in May 2015, which specifically considered the commercial aspects of harvesting seaweed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18476/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The May 2015 report of the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht on Developing the Seaweed Industry in Ireland puts forward 8 recommendations for developing the industry. However, I have no statutory role in the promotion or development of the seaweed industry. Under the Foreshore Act 1933, I am responsible for regulating only the harvesting of wild seaweed and the report does make a number of recommendations in this regard.

Any regulatory regime must seek to balance existing rights and commercial potential while ensuring sustainability of the resource and compliance with the State's obligations under EU environmental law. In that regard, the interaction between the Foreshore Act 1933 and traditional rights to harvest seaweed that may exist in certain places is under consideration by my Department in the context of advice from the Office of the Attorney General.

Options for the future licensing of seaweed harvesting, including the relevant recommendations contained in the Oireachtas Committee's report, are currently under review.

### **Electoral Reform**

32. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to address the issue of remote voting for those persons such as fishermen and seafarers who cannot be ashore when voting is taking place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18454/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Electoral law provides that a person who is entitled to vote at an election or referendum shall vote in person at a polling station allotted to him or her unless they are included in the postal voters list or in the special voters list for the constituency concerned. While electoral law is subject to on-going review, I have no proposals at present to amend the existing arrangements for voting to provide for remote voting.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding**

33. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will broaden the expert commission on water services' terms of reference as the current terms are too narrow and should include issues such as how best to avoid water poverty, how to increase water conservation through investment in green technologies and how to ensure that water and sanitation services are kept in public ownership and are fully accountable and transparent. [18491/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Under the 'Confidence and Supply Arrangement' agreed with Fianna Fáil in the context of supporting a minority government, the Government is committed to establishing an Expert Commission to consider and make recommendations on the long term funding of water services. The proposed terms of reference form part of that 'Arrangement', and I am satisfied that they cover all of the issues relevant to the consideration of the future funding of domestic water services.

### **Rent Controls**

34. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will introduce rent controls; if so, the form they would take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18471/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015, enacted on 4 December 2015, introduced a number of measures to address rent stability. The Act provides, *inter alia*, that the minimum period between rent reviews for tenancies is increased from 12 to 24 months and this

new provision will apply for a 4 year period. In addition, the Act increased the minimum period of notice of new rent from 28 days to 90 days. Each of these new provisions commenced on enactment. Further provisions to support rent stability in the 2015 Act include that a notice of new rent must be in the prescribed form, include details of dispute resolution procedures available through the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and be accompanied by details of the rent sought in respect of 3 comparable dwellings in the area.

The rental market in Ireland has grown significantly in recent years and now accounts for around 20% of total Irish households. In Dublin rents are now back to 2007 peak levels. The most recent RTB rent index shows that in the first quarter of 2016, rents were 8.6% higher nationally than in the same quarter of 2015. Data for Q1 2016 show that rents have continued to increase, although the rate of growth slowed in most sectors.

Ultimately, the key to addressing rising rents in the medium to long term is through increasing the supply of housing. Housing is an absolute priority for this Government and, accordingly, a key priority of the Programme for a Partnership Government is the preparation and publication of an 'Action Plan for Housing' within the Government's first 100 days. The Action Plan will be drafted with input from a number of key Departments, and will draw on the work of the Special Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness, which submitted its final report to the Dáil on 17 June 2016.

In addition, the Programme for a Partnership Government also contains a specific commitment to review the regulatory regime for the rented sector to ensure that an appropriate balance is struck between the rights, interests and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

35. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reintroduce apprenticeship schemes in local authorities. [18501/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The matter of apprenticeships in local authorities is subject to ongoing discussion at the Local Authority National Council (LANC), which is the sectoral management/union forum for discussing industrial relations matters pertaining to the sector as a whole. My Department is positively disposed to apprenticeships in local authorities and will support the outcome of the ongoing process at the LANC.

The specific content of any apprenticeship scheme is a matter for the relevant Government Department.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

36. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on expanding the income limits for social housing to allow more low and middle-income workers to benefit from differential rents in tandem with a large-scale programme of direct building and acquisitions of vacant properties by the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18474/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** 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 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.

I am satisfied that the current income limits generally provide for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households unable to provide accommodation from their own resources. However, these limits will be considered in the context of the review of social housing assessment procedures currently being undertaken by my Department, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda outlined in the Social Housing Strategy 2020.

My Department is preparing an 'Action Plan for Housing' which aims to address the challenges in the housing sector in a targeted and meaningful way. The Plan will include actions to expedite and boost supply of all types of housing, including social housing, in the immediate, medium and longer-terms, focusing in particular on those experiencing most difficulty in accessing the housing and rental market at the moment.

### **Programme for Government Implementation**

37. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which he expects to be in a position to implement in full the aspects of the programme for Government relevant to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18463/16]

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his priorities for the implementation of the aspects of the programme for Government relevant to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18775/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 37 and 113 together.

There is a significant number of objectives in A Programme for a Partnership Government relevant to my remit. My Department has reviewed the programme and has commenced work on the implementation of priority actions; with those due within the first 100 days well underway.

One of the more urgent challenges facing my Department is the need to address issues relating to housing and homelessness and, drawing on the work of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness, an "Action Plan for Housing" will be published next month which will directly address many of the commitments in relation to housing contained in the Government Programme. The Action Plan will be subject to key targets and deadlines and regular Cabinet review.

Other priorities for my Department, which are included as Year 1 Actions, include finalising a new National Planning Framework to replace the National Spatial Strategy and commissioning a "root and branch" review of the planning system with the aim of reducing uncertainty and improving efficiencies within the planning processes.

In addition, as part of the next wave of local government reform, I plan to consult widely with all relevant stakeholders and prepare a report for Government and for the Oireachtas, by mid-2017, on potential measures to boost local government. This will ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy.

I am committed to pursuing each of the aspects of the Programme for Government that are relevant to my Department. In addition to the commitments in the Government Programme, my Department will also be progressing a number of actions on water-related issues in the coming months.

### **Climate Change Policy**

38. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his proposed plans to meet environmental challenges such as flooding arising from climate change and the need for revitalising of rural and urban communities. [18462/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The extent of the environmental challenge posed by climate change is well understood by Government and this understanding is reflected in the prominence given to climate change in the Programme for a Partnership Government and in the establishment of a new Department of Communications, Climate Change and Environment, pending the making of the necessary Government orders.

Existing policy in this area is set out in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (2014) which provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050; statutory authority for these mitigation and adaptation plans was subsequently provided for in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

While climate policy has been and must continue to be focused on limiting greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with our national, EU and international obligations, taking steps to adjust human and natural systems in response to existing or expected climate change in order to prevent or moderate environmental damage, or to take advantage of any opportunities that may arise, is also an urgent policy priority.

Under section 5 of the 2015 Act, the Minister must submit to Government for approval (not later than December 2017), a National Adaptation Framework (NAF). The NAF will specify the national strategy for the application of adaptation measures in different sectors and by local authorities in their administrative areas in order to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change and to exploit any beneficial opportunities. The 2015 Act also provides that relevant Ministers will be required to develop sectoral adaptation plans which will specify the adaptation policy measures the Minister in question proposes to adopt; these measures will include, for example, adaptation actions to be implemented by OPW and other responsible Departments and agencies in relation to flood risk management.

The policy response to climate change in terms of mitigation of emissions of greenhouse gases and adaptation to the negative impacts will, over time, help to protect people, buildings, infrastructure, businesses and ecosystems and these benefits will apply to both rural and urban communities. Apart from climate change related considerations, revitalisation of these communities is also recognised as a priority in the Programme for a Partnership Government, with a series of specific actions identified to facilitate the regeneration of urban centres. In this context, the Government will seek to introduce a new Town and Village Renewal Scheme to sup-

port the revitalisation of towns and villages and improve the living and working environment of communities.

In addition, it is also proposed to examine a series of further initiatives, including the introduction of a scheme, similar to the *Living City Initiative*, to regenerate urban centres and villages; the establishment of a national register of derelict sites, in addition to the new vacant site levy, to bring vacant and underutilised sites into beneficial use for housing and urban regeneration purposes; the mandating of local authorities with better land management powers; reclassifying and incentivising the use of under-utilised or vacant areas over ground floor premises in urban areas; and examining the scope to reform the Derelict Sites Act to tackle the under-use and hoarding of derelict land.

### **Pyrite Incidence**

39. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to carry out a review of the number of properties that have pyrite but are not displaying damage that would register a damage condition rating of 2 in a building condition assessment; and his plans to devise a strategy regarding how these properties can be remediated. [18303/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The independent Pyrite Panel, which was established in September 2011, undertook a desktop study, in conjunction with stakeholder consultation, to establish certain facts in relation to the potential exposure of pyrite in dwellings. The information was gathered from a number of sources including local authorities, structural guarantee providers, representatives of homeowners, private builders, construction professionals and public representatives and was cross referenced to verify, as far as practicable, its validity.

Seventy four estates were identified to the Pyrite Panel as possibly having pyrite. At the time of the Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012), all of these estates were located in the five local authority areas of Dublin City, Fingal, Kildare, Meath and Offaly, although two estates were subsequently identified in 2014 as having pyrite problems, one each in the administrative areas of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and South Dublin County Council.

The Pyrite Panel recommended a categorisation system as a means of prioritising pyrite remediation works in recognition of the expensive and intrusive nature of pyrite remediation and the unpredictability of pyritic heave. The Panel was clear in its view that only dwellings with significant damage due to pyritic heave should be remediated and that it would be unreasonable to expect dwellings not exhibiting such damage to be remediated. Dwellings which have no significant damage but have reactive pyrite in the hardcore should be monitored and only remediated if they display significant damage due to pyritic heave.

The Panel's report provided the overarching framework for the development of the Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 and the ensuing pyrite remediation scheme. The scheme's eligibility criteria are reflective of the conclusions and recommendations of that report. I am satisfied that the Panel developed a reasonable and pragmatic approach to facilitate the remediation of dwellings exhibiting significant pyritic damage and that the conditions for entry into the pyrite remediation scheme are appropriate and proportionate. In this regard, I have no proposals to carry out a review along the lines suggested.

### **Departmental Programmes**

40. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the responsibility he has with respect to any legal challenge regarding the workings of the Mahon tribunal; the communication he has had from the tribunal about the laying of a statement from the tribunal before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 25 March 2016; and the actions he will take to implement the recommendation of the tribunal. [18467/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments (the Mahon Tribunal) was appointed by the Houses of the Oireachtas in October 1997 to inquire into and report on allegations of corruption within the planning system, set out in its terms of reference which have expanded since its establishment.

As an independent Tribunal of Inquiry, the Mahon Tribunal is responsible for defending and handling any legal challenge regarding its workings. In keeping with standard practice, since the subject matter of the Tribunal falls within my policy remit, the costs of the Mahon Tribunal, including the legal costs of any challenge regarding the workings of the Tribunal are paid from my Department's Vote. My responsibility regarding any legal challenge to the workings of the Mahon Tribunal is limited to the payment of any related legal costs from my Department's Vote.

There was no communication between the Tribunal and the previous Minister regarding the statement and amended report laid before the Oireachtas on 25th of March, 2016. The statement and the amended report were furnished to the Clerk of the Dáil by the Tribunal, and were also posted on the Tribunal's website.

The final Report of the Tribunal, published in March 2012, made a total of 64 recommendations, ten of which were planning-related. While some of the planning-related recommendations have been already implemented, it is intended that the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, published in January, will implement the remainder. The main provision of the Bill is for the establishment of the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR), whose main functions will be to:

- carry out independent assessment of regional and local level statutory plans, including zoning decisions, prepared and adopted under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, namely, development plans, local area plans, regional spatial and economic strategies etc. to ensure their consistency with national and/or regional policy;
- review the organisations, systems and procedures used by planning authorities, including An Bord Pleanála, in the performance of their statutory functions under the Act; and
- carry out research, education and training in the planning area.

The Bill is currently before the Dáil, awaiting Second Stage debate.

### **Local Government Reform**

41. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to re-establish town councils; and when he expects town councils to be re-established. [18558/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The decision to replace town authorities with a new model of municipal governance under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 was designed primarily to strengthen local government within counties and to address widely acknowledged and long-standing weak-

nesses and anomalies in the previous system, including divided administration between town and county authorities, for example, in relation to matters such as planning, rating and charges.

Municipal districts now cover the entire territory of each county, reflecting European norms, removing outdated boundaries and ending the anomaly of small towns having municipal status and dual representation, while some larger centres and rural areas lacked any sub-county governance. As well as creating a more rational and comprehensive structural arrangement, the new system enables more effective and community-focused decision making and implementation. Under the new arrangements, there is full integration of local authority resources across each county and elimination of duplication both in administrative and electoral terms.

In 2015, which was the first full year of the revised local government structures, a broadly based Advisory Group was convened to carry out a review of their operation, in conjunction with a Local Government Forum for engagement with the Association of Irish Local Government. Feedback from these deliberations and the results of surveys of local authority members and chief executives, indicate that the revised structures are generally operating well but will need more time to bed down fully. The results of this operational review will provide a key input to the consideration of issues in the preparation of a report for Government and the Oireachtas by mid-2017, pursuant to the Programme for a Partnership Government, on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability and to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy, including the issue of town or borough council status. Initial scoping work in relation to the development of proposals to address the requirements in the Programme for a Partnership Government is being undertaken in my Department.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

42. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the discussions he has had on new planning guidelines for wind turbines; the scenarios he has examined for setback distances between wind turbines and residential homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16376/16]

54. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to regulate developments in the wind turbine sector, and the engagement he will make with local communities affected by these developments. [16410/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 54 together.

In December 2013, my Department published proposed “draft” revisions to the noise, setback distance and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines.

These draft revisions proposed:

- the setting of a more stringent day- and night-time noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments,
- a mandatory minimum setback distance of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations, and
- the complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was also initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines, which ran until 21 February 2014. My Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this public consultation process.

As outlined in the recently published Programme for a Partnership Government, this Government is committed to finalising the revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines within 3 to 6 months. The revisions to the Guidelines will be informed by the public consultation process and by best international practice. My Department will continue to advance work on the Guidelines, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

The revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines, when finalised, will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála are required to have regard to such guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

### **Housing Provision**

43. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce additional measures to address the escalating crisis in the increase in child homelessness in May 2016, which is now at 2,177, a 79% increase for the same period in 2015. [18507/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The long-term solution to the challenge of homelessness, including those families with dependants who are homeless, is to increase the supply of homes. The Social Housing Strategy 2020 targets the delivery of 110,000 units for social housing purposes with 35,000 new units to be delivered by local authorities and approved housing bodies, and 75,000 households to be supported mainly through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme. The Social Housing Strategy 2020 is available on my Department's website at the following link :[http://www.environment.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/social\\_strategy\\_document\\_20141126.pdf](http://www.environment.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/social_strategy_document_20141126.pdf).

While the units identified under the Strategy are coming on-stream a significant number of measures are being taken to address the incidence of homelessness. These measures are identified in the Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness (May 2014) and in the Action Plan to Address Homelessness (December 2014). These Plans represent a whole-of-Government approach to dealing with homelessness. The implementation of measures identified in these Plans is co-ordinated by my Department and is being overseen by a group of senior officials drawn from key State agencies concerned. This group, which is chaired by my Department, includes the Department of Social Protection; the Department of Health; the Department of Children and Youth Affairs; the Health Service Executive; Tusla (the Child and Family Agency); the Irish Prison Service; and local authorities. The Plans and quarterly progress reports on the implementation of the measures therein are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environment.ie/housing/homelessness/policy/homelessness>.

In addition, the Government has committed to publishing an 'Action Plan for Housing' within its first 100 days. The Action Plan aims to address the challenges in the housing sector in a targeted and meaningful way, building on the considerable work already carried out or underway, including actions to expedite and boost supply of all types of housing, including

social housing, in the immediate, medium and longer-terms, focusing in particular on those facing most difficulty in accessing the housing and rental market. There will also be a focus on tackling, more quickly, the issue of those living in emergency accommodation, including households with dependents, by expanding and expediting solutions. Importantly, it will also set out measures to prevent homelessness and keep people in their own homes as far as possible.

### **Pyrite Issues**

44. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views regarding the issuing of a green certificate for pyrite properties, particularly in cases where remediation has not taken place, as many persons have been unable to sell their properties due to difficulties in receiving certificates. [18304/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** One of the key recommendations of the Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) was the development of a protocol which would facilitate the testing and categorisation of dwellings in order to establish if there is reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material and whether it has caused pyritic heave.

In response to this recommendation, I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and Categorisation was published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland in January 2013 and provides the means by which dwellings, which may be affected by pyrite can be tested and categorised. In broad terms, the standard sets out a two-step process to facilitate the testing and categorisation of dwellings.

The first step requires that a Building Condition Assessment be carried out; this comprises a desktop study and a visual non-invasive internal and external inspection of a dwelling to establish the presence or absence of visible damage that is consistent with pyritic heave and to quantify the extent and significance of such damage in that dwelling. Damage ratings of 0, 1 or 2 can be assigned to a dwelling under this process.

The results of the Building Condition Assessment will inform whether the second step, i.e. sampling and testing of the sub-floor hardcore material, will be required in order to confirm the presence or otherwise of reactive pyrite. Dwellings which have been tested and the hardcore is shown not to be susceptible to expansion are classified as Category A (i.e. green certificate). These dwellings have a negligible risk of pyrite damage given that testing has demonstrated that the hardcore is not susceptible to expansion; any damage that may be visible in such dwellings is likely to be attributable to other causes.

My Department understands that the National Standards Authority of Ireland has commenced a review of I.S. 398-1:2013 in the light of practical experience since the standard was first introduced in January 2013. This review is now at an advanced stage and a public consultation on proposed revisions to the standard is anticipated shortly.

### **Waste Disposal Charges**

45. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce legislation to deal with price increases in the event that at the end of the 12-month freeze on bin charge increases, bin companies intend to proceed with significant price hikes. [18485/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I have engaged actively and intensively with representatives of the waste industry and have agreed a clear way forward that results in customers paying no more than their current rate for presenting the same amount of waste over the next 12 months - by means of a price freeze to end-June 2017.

Under the agreement reached with the waste industry, customers will from 1 January 2017 be able to see, through a dual billing process, details in their bills about the amount of waste they are disposing of, their costs under the continuation of their current price plan and details of the comparative pay-by-weight charge.

During this transition period, the Government, in partnership with the waste industry, will drive an intensive public awareness, information and promotion campaign to support customers in understanding the new system, how they can change their waste management behaviour and manage better their waste costs under a pay-by-weight system.

The above approach provides increased transparency around what charges households would incur under pay-by-weight and also provides householders with information on the operation and benefits of pay by weight along with the option to switch to pay by weight charging from 1 January, 2017.

After the transitional 12-month period, the operation of pay-by-weight and of the wider waste market will be reviewed to inform decisions in relation to arrangements beyond 1 July 2017, including the need for further legislation as appropriate.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

46. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to acquire distressed properties from vulture funds for social and affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18470/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department supports local authorities and approved housing bodies to acquire properties for social housing use through a range of funding methods and from a range of vendors.

In 2015, local authorities acquired over 1,000 new properties in transactions ranging from individual units to large blocks of units. In addition, with support from the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme and the Capital Assistance Scheme, approved housing bodies acquired over 600 units that have been made available for social housing purposes either through outright purchase or long term lease arrangements with a range of local authorities.

This support for the acquisition of new social housing across all funding programmes is continuing in 2016 and delivers homes for immediate use for those on the waiting list.

### **Local Authority Staff Recruitment**

47. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his recruitment plans for the next five years across the State's 31 local authorities. [18500/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon**

**Coveney):** Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, it is a matter for each individual Chief Executive to recruit and assign staff to specific divisions. My Department works closely with all local authorities to ensure the continued delivery of key services in the context of staffing and budgetary constraints. In considering sanction requests public safety, maintaining key front line services, and economic issues are given precedence.

My Department will continue to support all local authorities, to ensure that they are adequately staffed to carry out their functions and to provide the required services to the public, over the next five years.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

48. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to report on his recent meeting with the Local Authority Members Association, LAMA; his position on the group's demands (details supplied); and if he will give LAMA a place on the Local Government Reform Committee. [18504/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Following receipt of a request for a meeting, I met with representatives of the Local Authority Members Association (LAMA) on 21 June 2016. During the meeting the LAMA delegation set out its views relating to elected member workload, following the implementation of the 2014 local government reforms, financial supports and social insurance issues affecting its members, as well as LAMA representation on groups involved with reviewing the operation of the revised local government structures.

I advised the LAMA delegation that my Department has no function in relation to PRSI contributions. I understand that this matter is being considered by the Minister for Social Protection.

On the issue of workload and financial supports for elected members, I have noted the views put forward by the LAMA delegation and I will be giving this issue further detailed consideration.

In 2015, a process was established by my predecessor to review the operation of the revised local government structures. This involved a broadly based Advisory Group, consisting of members appointed in a personal capacity rather than as representatives of particular organisations, and a Local Government Forum for engagement with the Association of Irish Local Government, which is the statutorily recognised body to represent the collective interests of local authorities.

I will consider the question of a role for these groups in the development of potential measures regarding local government reform arising from the Programme for a Partnership Government. Subject to decisions in this regard, it would be open to the Advisory Group and the Forum to engage with representatives of LAMA in a stakeholder capacity, where appropriate, having regard to the different roles of that Association and the Association of Irish Local Government, as set out in sections 225 and 226 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 56 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

49. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he investigated a recent funding from the European Investment Bank for a new Austrian housing bank that will finance the building of approximately 25,000 public rental housing units delivered via municipalities and non-profit providers; if so, if he is seeking a similar investment programme to enhance the proposals from the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and the Homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18301/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Funding from the European Investment Bank is available for use in the provision of social housing in Ireland. In 2015, a €300 million fund for investment in social housing was put in place by the Housing Finance Agency, with the support of the Government. €150 million of this fund was provided by the European Investment Bank.

This funding is available to approved housing bodies for the upgrade and delivery of social housing. A 25-year fixed rate of 3.25% is charged. The Housing Finance Agency has reported that there has been significant demand for this funding.

### **Building Regulations**

50. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for an update on the work to date of the expert panel set up to examine the Mica issue; when he expects the panel will be in a position to report its findings to his Department; to put a redress scheme in place to provide financial assistance to affected homeowners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18296/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The expert panel on concrete blocks has met on three occasions since it was established in early April last and is continuing to review the information that has been made available to it in relation to the problems that have emerged in affected homes. Additional information has been sought from affected homeowners as well as from Donegal and Mayo County Councils, which will be of assistance in the research necessary to inform the preparation of the panel's report.

The panel has also visited the owners of nine affected homes during the second week of May in order to view first-hand the problems that have emerged in those homes. Meetings with representatives from the Mica Action Group and with elected members and officials from Donegal County Council were also held in order to seek additional information on the nature of the problems that have emerged in the blockwork of the affected homes. Further meetings will be held with a broad range of stakeholders, other interested parties and elected representatives over the course of the panel's investigations, including in particular with certain homeowners in Mayo, who are facing similar problems with their homes.

Early last week, I also held meetings with the elected members from Donegal County Council and with representatives from the Mica Action Group in order to hear their concerns directly. In addition, I visited three of the affected dwellings and spoke with the homeowners concerned on the very difficult and distressing situations they are facing due to the damage to their homes.

Ultimately, the panel's terms of reference aim to establish the facts behind the problems that have emerged in Donegal and Mayo and to outline technical options for addressing the problems identified in order to assist affected homeowners. It is anticipated that the panel will require in the order of six months to complete their work. In this regard, I will await the outcome of the panel's report before considering what further actions may be required to assist the

parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

*Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 30.*

### **Homeless Accommodation Provision**

52. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of persons he expects to be accessing emergency homeless accommodation at the end of 2016; which of the recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness he plans to implement first; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18295/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to the preparation and publication of an ‘Action Plan for Housing’ within the first 100 days of Government. The Action plan will draw on the Report of the Special Committee on Housing and Homelessness, which was published on 17 June.

The Action Plan aims to address the challenges in the housing sector in a targeted and meaningful way, building on the considerable work already carried out or underway, including actions to expedite and boost supply of all types of housing, including social housing, in the immediate, medium and longer-terms, focusing in particular on those facing most difficulty in accessing the housing and rental market. There will also be a focus on tackling, more quickly, the issue of those living in emergency accommodation by expanding and expediting solutions.

Importantly, the Action Plan will also set out measures to prevent homelessness and keep people in their own homes as far as possible, thereby making an important contribution to addressing the current homelessness issue.

A homelessness report is published on my Department’s website on a monthly basis providing details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. While it is not possible to forecast the number of persons who will be accessing homeless emergency accommodation at the end of 2016, the most recent report confirms that 3,993 adult individuals used State-funded emergency accommodation nationally during a week in May 2016, a slight decrease on the 4,068 recorded in respect of the previous month. These monthly reports are available on my Department’s website at the following link:

*<http://www.environ.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>*

### **Waste Management**

53. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the type of investigation that should be initiated into the waste industry in view of circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18302/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Waste collection in Ireland is subject to compliance with applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, primarily the Waste Management Act 1996, as amended, and conditions attached to each waste collector’s collection permit under the Waste Management

(Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, as amended. Waste collection in individual local authority areas may also be subject to local bye-laws.

Waste collection is the statutory responsibility of local authorities. Under section 33 of the Waste Management Act 1996, as amended, there is a general duty on a local authority to either itself collect the household waste in its functional area or alternatively to arrange for its collection by third parties. I am precluded under Section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996 from the exercise of any power or control in relation to the performance by a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in under the Act.

While waste collection companies must comply with environmental and all other applicable legislation in the course of collecting waste, issues concerning the corporate structure of waste collection companies fall outside my remit as Minister.

*Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 42.*

### **Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration**

55. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the strategic steps he is taking to manage the volume of mortgage to rent applications; the way he is streamlining the process for all stakeholders; the barriers he has encountered to the functioning scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18554/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme is a targeted intervention for those households in unsustainable mortgage arrears who are not in a position to meet their long-term housing needs and are therefore eligible for social housing support. The Housing Agency co-ordinates the operation of the scheme on behalf of my Department.

The scheme has performed well for the 162 families that continue to live in their homes and are now secure in the knowledge that they can afford to remain there. As at the end of May 2016, an additional 17 applications were with the lenders, who are seeking the consent of borrowers to share information, and for the carrying out of an independent valuation.

As part of the package of commitments on mortgage arrears announced by Government in May 2015, a number of amendments to the MTR scheme were made with the objective of enabling more properties to qualify for the scheme and make it more flexible and accessible to borrowers. Amendments made with effect from July 2015 include: valuation thresholds for permissible properties were increased; households in marginal positive equity were permitted as eligible; and flexibility was introduced to allow households who may be over-accommodated in their current house to be permitted. The funding available to approved housing bodies (AHBs) to purchase these units from lenders was also increased.

Arising from these changes, an increasing number of applications for MTR are now being received from lenders. This is likely due to the widening of the eligibility criteria but also is likely to arise because confidence and familiarity with the scheme is increasing on both the part of the lender and the borrower.

My Department, together with the Housing Agency, meets regularly with representatives of the main lenders in relation to the scheme and are constantly seeking to ensure its effective operation. In addition, my Department works with the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), the Citizens Information Bureau and the Departments of Justice and the Social Protection to ensure that the MTR is integrated in the communications with borrowers in mortgage

difficulties.

While there are, of course, continuing operational challenges for the MTR scheme, including that the scheme must be offered by a lender to a borrower, my Department is committed to keeping the scheme under ongoing review, with the objective of keeping families in their homes in so far as is possible.

### **Local Authority Housing Funding**

56. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to increase funding for capital expenditure for house building to local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13011/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The future capital funding provision for the delivery of social housing will be determined in the context of the 2017 Estimates process and will be informed by the forthcoming ‘Action Plan on Housing’, which I am currently preparing. The Action Plan will seek to address the challenges in the housing sector in a targeted and meaningful way. In this regard, my Department is examining ways to accelerate, and exceed where possible, the delivery of the targets under the Social Housing Strategy.

Currently in overall terms, €933 million, which is broken down between €528 million capital funding and €405 million current funding, is being made available for social housing programmes in 2016. This funding will support the targeting of 17,000 new social units through a range of delivery programmes. The capital programmes will support a combination of construction projects that are being advanced, the acquisition of units which are being actively pursued for quick delivery of social housing and returning vacant social units to productive use. This funding also provides other important improvements to existing social housing stock, through programmes such as regeneration, adaptation grants for people with a disability and the elderly, and energy efficiency upgrades to homes.

Information on the capital-funded social housing projects approved to date, to the value of almost €680 million for over 3,900 social housing new builds, turnkey developments and acquisitions, is available on my Department’s website at the following links:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,42225,en.htm>

<http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-further-1000-social-housing-units>.

It should be noted that funding made available from the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities for the long term leasing of houses and apartments from private owners, developers and approved housing bodies. Properties made available under the programme are used to accommodate households from local authority waiting lists. Leased properties are allocated to tenants, in accordance with the relevant local authority’s allocation scheme.

### **Immigration Policy**

57. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the

reason for the increasing income requirement for retirees living here; the further reason for the change from stamp 3 to stamp 0 for Americans retiring to Ireland; if she will make an exception for American nationals looking to retire here, acknowledging the historic and important relationship between America and Ireland; and if she will restore the status quo ante for Irish-Americans. [18588/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** All States, including Ireland, operate immigration controls for well established reasons of public policy, including consideration of the economic impacts for the State. To this end policies regarding all non-nationals wishing to enter the State are kept under review and revised from time to time. As outlined in previous responses for Parliamentary Questions, I requested officials in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department to review the current policy position regarding the migration of non-EEA retirees to Ireland. That review is underway. As part of the review process there will be a public consultation which will seek the views of stakeholders in relation to the review's recommendations.

Pending that, the current policy remains in force. The criteria for persons wishing to retire in the State was reviewed in 2014 and a notice was placed on the website [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie) in March 2015 aimed at clarifying and standardising the terms and conditions in respect of applications from retired foreign nationals seeking to come and live in Ireland. The key financial consideration in respect of a retiree is that the person must have sufficient and sustainable resources to ensure that they will not now, nor in the future become a burden on the State. This is a fair and reasonable expectation on the part of the State and, in the case of retirees, the income level was set at €50,000 per person per annum. The applicant would also be expected to have a lump sum significant enough to cater for unforeseen circumstances, for example, health care and possible nursing home care in the future.

### **Passport Applications**

58. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will give consideration to applications for Irish passports made by persons whose great grandparents were born here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18669/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The processing of applications for passports is the responsibility of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and I therefore have no function in the matter.

The entitlement to Irish citizenship however, including citizenship by descent and through naturalisation, is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. I have no plans to amend the citizenship laws in this regard. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) website at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie)

### **Garda Deployment**

59. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of the decrease in Garda Síochána resources in the Greystones district of County Wicklow. [18592/16]

60. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if and when she will replace the Garda Síochána recruits who have left the Greystones district in

County Wicklow. [18593/16]

61. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider redirecting the next phase of new recruits to the Garda Síochána to the Greystones district in County Wicklow to ensure that it is properly resourced. [18594/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 to 61, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continual review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible 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 assured by the Commissioner that personnel assigned throughout the country, together with the overall policing arrangements and operational strategies are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of resources and the best possible policing service is provided to the general public.

Greystones Garda Station lies in the Garda District of Bray, which in turn forms part of the Garda Division of Wicklow. I have been informed by the Commissioner that the distribution of members of An Garda Síochána in the Wicklow Division on 30 April 2016, the latest date for which figures are to hand, was as set out in the table.

The Wicklow Division is also supported by 24 members of the Garda Reserve and 21 civilian staff. All Divisional resources are further augmented by a number of Garda national units such as the Garda Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) and other specialised units.

As the Deputy will be aware, when the financial crisis hit, the Government of the time introduced a moratorium on recruitment and the four year National Recovery Plan, published in 2010, envisaged a steady reduction in Garda numbers. Thankfully, in a recovering economy, we were able to reopen the Garda College in September 2014, and a total of 851 Garda trainees have been recruited with a further 300 planned to be recruited during the remainder of this year. So far 463 of the new Garda trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties nationwide. Another 76 will attest on the 7 July with 150 more to attest in November. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that so far this year 10 newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to the Wicklow Garda Division.

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 deter crime. Key to achieving this goal is the commitment in the Programme for Government, “A Programme for a Partnership Government” to continue the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000.

Taking account of projected retirements, the current rate of recruitment will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,000 mark this year. We must, I believe, endeavour to make more rapid progress than this to reach our target of 15,000 and I am engaging with my colleague, the

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to increasing the planned annual intake this year and in coming years.

		Wicklow Garda Division 30 April 2016
District	Station	Total
	BALTINGLASS	34
	BLESSINGTON	21
	CARNEW	4
	DUNLAVIN	2
	SHILLELAGH	1
BALTINGLASS	TINAHELY	2
	BALTINGLASS Total	64
	BRAY	119
	ENNISKERRY	3
	GREYSTONES	26
BRAY	NEWTOWNMOUNTKEN- NEDY	3
	BRAY Total	151
	ARKLOW	33
	ASHFORD	9
	AUGHRIM	2
	AVOCA	2
	RATHDRUM	4
	ROUNDWOOD	3
WICKLOW	WICKLOW	43
	WICKLOW Total	96
WICKLOW DIVISION TOTAL		311

### Immigration Controls

62. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to roll out the civilianisation of immigration control, which is already being undertaken at the Dublin Airport Terminal 1 by members of the Irish Naturalisation Immigration Service, to the other main ports of entry, including Cork Airport, given ongoing reforms of An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18621/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Since 16th June, 2015, front-line immigration controls are being undertaken in Terminal 1 at Dublin Airport on a 24/7 basis by civilian staff from the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department. In October, 2015 INIS civilian staff took over the front-line immigration controls in the Transit Area of Terminal 2. A Public Appointment Service (PAS) recruitment competition for Immigration Control Officers is currently under way from which the necessary additional staff will be recruited to complete the civilianisation of front-line controls in the remainder of Terminal 2 which is expected to be completed as soon as possible.

In relation to expanding the civilianisation programme to other ports of entry, I have indi-

cated that I am also looking at deploying civilian officers to other major ports of entry to the State where this makes sense from a cost and efficiency perspective. In circumstances where An Garda Síochána will maintain a presence at our ports to continue their crucial policing role in protecting our borders from a security and enforcement perspective, one of the requirements of further civilianisation at other ports of entry will be to achieve the right balance between Gardaí and civilian staff. In this light, the nature and volume and time distribution of passenger traffic at certain ports of entry will be a determining factor in any decision to deploy civilian immigration officers.

### **Gambling Legislation**

63. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to progress the gambling control Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18655/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill was published in July 2013 following approval by the Government and is currently in drafting by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. The Bill, as proposed, will update all existing laws on the regulation of gambling, including betting and gaming but excluding the National Lottery. It will provide for the licensing of all forms of on-line gambling.

The Gambling Control Bill will, as set out in the General Scheme, confer responsibility for all regulatory matters on the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Minister's functions will include licensing, inspections and prosecutions, and it is envisaged that these functions will be carried out by a body located within my Department. The General Scheme also provides for a dedicated inspectorate to ensure compliance by licence holders with the terms of their licences and with the new legislation generally.

The proposed legislation will have consumer protection generally as one of its core principles, and it is envisaged that it will include several measures aimed at the protection of vulnerable persons, including children, from risks to their well-being arising from gambling. In particular, the Scheme of the Bill envisages the establishment of a Fund to promote socially responsible gambling and to assist in counteracting the ill-effects of irresponsible gambling. The purposes of the Fund may also include public education and awareness programmes, research and treatment programmes.

It would remain the intention to proceed with this legislation at the earliest feasible opportunity and, in that light, I expect that this will be given renewed consideration in the preparation of the next legislation programme. At the same time, and pending the bringing forward of the main Bill, I have also asked my Department to examine whether there are any individual pressing areas of concern, intended to be dealt with in the Bill, which could be dealt with sooner by separate legislative measures.

### **Garda Youth Diversion Projects**

64. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the funding her Department provided to the Garda juvenile diversion programme and to the Garda youth diversion programme in each of the years 2006 to 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18745/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Garda Diversion Programme operates in accordance with Part 4 of the Children Act 2001, as amended, and under the general superintendence and control of the Garda Commissioner. The aim of the Diversion Programme, through the network of Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs), is to deal with young people who offend, by way of administering a formal or informal caution, thus diverting the young offender away from the Courts and minimising the likelihood of further offending. The Programme embraces, whenever possible, the principles of restorative justice and, at all times, pays the highest regard to the needs of victims. The Programme has proven to be highly successful in diverting children and young people away from crime by offering guidance and support to them and their families. This is evident from the continuing fall in the number of children and young people referred to the Programme in recent years.

The Programme is supported by my Department through the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) which funds and oversees over 100 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) across the country.

GYDPs are community based multi-agency crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people who have become involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour. The projects aim to bring about the conditions whereby the behavioural patterns of young people towards law and order can develop and mature through positive interventions and interaction with the project. The projects are particularly targeted at 12-17 year old “at risk” youths in communities where a specific need has been identified and where there is a risk of them remaining within the criminal justice system.

The funding to Garda Youth Diversion Projects in each of the years from 2006 to June 2016 is as follows:

2006 - €6.4m 2007 - €7.5m 2008 - €8.8m 2009 - €8.5m 2010 - €11.6m 2011 - €11.3m 2012 - €10.9m 2013 - €11.3m 2014 - €11.3m 2015 - €11.3m 2016 (June) - €5.7m

The GYDPs are co-funded under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) of the European Social Fund Programme 2014-2020. EU receipts totalling some €6m are anticipated in respect of expenditure in 2015.

Dormant Accounts funding has also been secured under the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Scheme 2013 – 2016 to support the GYDPs. The IYJS received €0.33m reimbursement from the Dormant Accounts Fund in respect of GYDP related expenditure in 2015 and has secured €1.9m in Dormant Accounts funding in 2016 for the establishment of new GYDPs and providing additional support to existing GYDPs.

## **Garda Recruitment**

65. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when recruits in the Garda station in Swords, County Dublin will complete their studies; if she will retain these recruits in Swords; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18746/16]

66. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members of An Garda Síochána who are available to man patrols from the station in Swords, County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18747/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 65 and 66 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continual review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible 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 assured by the Garda Commissioner that personnel assigned throughout the country, together with the overall policing arrangements and operational strategies are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of resources and the best possible policing service is provided to the general public.

Swords Garda station is situated in Coolock Garda district, which in turns forms part of the Dublin metropolitan region (DMR) North. I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the distribution of members of An Garda Síochána in DMR North on 30 April 2016, the latest date for which figures are to hand is as shown in the table below. The DMR North Division is also supported by 55 members of the Garda Reserve and 40 civilian staff. All Divisional resources are further augmented by a number of Garda national units such as the Garda Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) and other specialised units.

As the Deputy will be aware, when the financial crisis hit, the Government of the time introduced a moratorium on recruitment and the four year National Recovery Plan, published in 2010, envisaged a steady reduction in Garda numbers. Thankfully, in a recovering economy, we were able to reopen the Garda College in September 2014, and a total of 851 Garda trainees have been recruited with a further 300 planned to be recruited during the remainder of this year. So far 463 of the new Garda trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties nationwide. Another 76 will attest on 7 July with 150 more to attest in November. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that so far this year 35 newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to the DMR North Garda Division.

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 deter crime. Key to achieving this goal is the commitment in the Programme for Government, “A Programme for a Partnership Government” to continue the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000.

Taking account of projected retirements, the current rate of recruitment will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,000 mark this year. We must, I believe, endeavour to make more rapid progress than this to reach our target of 15,000 and I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to increasing the planned annual intake this year and in coming years.

30 April 2016	District	Station	Total
	BALBRIGGAN	BALBRIGGAN	68
		GARRISTOWN	2
		LUSK	10
		SKERRIES	9

30 April 2016	District	Station	Total
		BALBRIGGAN Total	89
	BALLYMUN	BALLYMUN	121
		DUBLIN AIRPORT	20
		SANTRY	82
		BALLYMUN Total	223
	COOLOCK	COOLOCK	103
		MALAHIDE	30
		SWORDS	69
		COOLOCK Total	202
		CLONTARF	65
		HOWTH	27
	RAHENY	RAHENY	66
DMR NORTH		RAHENY Total	158
	DMR NORTH Total		672

### Garda Resources

67. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has updated the Police Using Leading Systems Effectively, PULSE, system to record the description of pedal bicycles that can be searched for; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18748/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda resources, including in relation to developments of the PULSE system, are a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have, however, been informed by the Garda authorities that the PULSE system allows for the creation of searchable records in relation to bicycles.

### Garda Deployment

68. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number, rank, title and job of members of An Garda Síochána who are assigned to the Limerick city division; the number of stations and vehicles in this division; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18749/16]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel and vehicles, among the Garda Regions, Divisions and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continual review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible 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 assured by the Garda Commissioner that personnel assigned throughout the country, together with the overall policing arrangements and operational strategies are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of resources and the best possible policing service is provided to the general public.

I have been informed by the Commissioner that the distribution of members of An Garda Síochána in the Limerick Division on 30 April 2016, the latest date for which figures are to hand, was as set out in the table. There are 26 Garda stations in the Division. The Limerick Division is also supported by 50 members of the Garda Reserve and 49 civilian staff. All Divisional resources are further augmented by a number of Garda national units such as the Garda Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) and other specialised units.

As the Deputy will be aware, when the financial crisis hit, the Government of the time introduced a moratorium on recruitment and the four year National Recovery Plan, published in 2010, envisaged a steady reduction in Garda numbers. Thankfully, in a recovering economy, we were able to reopen the Garda College in September 2014, and a total of 851 Garda trainees have been recruited with a further 300 planned to be recruited during the remainder of this year. So far 463 of the new Garda trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniformed duties nationwide. Another 76 will attest on the 7 July with 150 more to attest in November. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that so far this year 12 newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to the Limerick Division.

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 deter crime. Key to achieving this goal is the commitment in the Programme for Government, “A Programme for a Partnership Government” to continue the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000.

Taking account of projected retirements, the current rate of recruitment will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,000 mark this year. We must, I believe, endeavour to make more rapid progress than this to reach our target of 15,000 and I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to increasing the planned annual intake this year and in coming years.

High visibility policing requires high-powered vehicles, marked and unmarked patrol cars, and motorcycles. Investment in a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose Garda fleet will continue under the Government’s Capital Plan 2016-2021 which provides €46 million for new Garda vehicles, ensuring that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime. This is in addition to the €34 million that has been invested in the fleet since 2012 with over 720 new vehicles coming on stream since the start of 2015. A breakdown of all the Garda vehicles in the Limerick Division is also attached. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of Garda vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between stations, as required by operational circumstances.

Questions - Written Answers

30 April 2016	District	Station	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
		BALLYLANDERS	1						1
		BRUFF	22	5					27
		BRUREE	1						1
		CAPPAMORE	2	1					3
		HOSPITAL	2						2
		KILMALLOCK	5	1					6
		MURROE	2						2
	BRUFF	PALLASGREEN	2						2
		BRUFF Total	37	7					44
		ARDNACRUSHA	3						3
		CASTLECONNELL	3	1					4
		HENRY STREET	193	35	4	2	1		235
	HENRY STREET	MAYORSTONE PARK	58	10	1				69
		HENRY STREET Total	257	46	5	2	1		311
		ABBEYFEALE	7	1					8
		ADARE	2						2
		ASKEATON	9	1					10
		ATHEA	1						1
		CROOM	3						3
		DRUMCOLLOGHER	2						2
		FOYNES	2						2
		NEWCASTLE WEST	29	5	1	1			36
		PALLASKENRY	1						1
	NEWCASTLE WEST	RATHKEALE	7	2					9
		NEWCASTLE WEST Total	63	9	1	1			74
		BALLYNEETY	2						2
		CAHERCONLISH	2						2
		PATRICKSWELL	2						2
	ROXBORO ROAD	ROXBORO ROAD	98	17	2	1			118
LIMERICK Division		ROXBORO ROAD Total	104	17	2	1			124
		LIMERICK Division Total	461	79	8	4	1		553

**Limerick Divisional Fleet as on 28th June 2016**

-	MARKED	UNMARKED	CARS TOTAL	VAN	Motorcycle	4X4	OTHER	Total
LIMERICK DIVISIONAL Total	33	26	59	19	3	3	4	88
BRUFF DISTRICT	3	1	4	1	0	0	0	5

-	MARKED	UNMARKED	CARS TOTAL	VAN	Motorcycle	4X4	OTHER	Total
HENRY STREET DISTRICT	15	19	34	13	3	3	3	56
NEWCAS- TLEWEST DISTRICT	10	2	12	3	0	0	0	15
ROXBORO ROAD DIS- TRICT	5	4	9	2	0	0	1	12

### Tobacco Control Measures

69. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that Ireland maintains its downward trend in smoking rates (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18639/16]

72. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance if he allowed officials of his Department to meet with any tobacco company in 2015 where the tax treatment of heated tobacco products was discussed; if he fully supports the objectives of Tobacco Free Ireland and if he will not permit a reduced excise rate on any tobacco product whose reduced risk claim has not been verified by an independent scientific body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18642/16]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 72 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a key public health commitment to make Ireland tobacco free by 2025. I support this commitment.

The tax treatment of tobacco products is provided for in Directive 2011/64/EU (the 'Tobacco Products Tax Directive'), which harmonises the structures and definitions of tobacco products. However, the Directive does not, at this time, explicitly provide for heated tobacco products. Work is underway at EU level to amend the Directive to provide for a harmonised definition and tax treatment of heated tobacco products and officials are currently engaged in technical discussions at EU level in this regard.

I am informed by Revenue that, while heated tobacco products are not currently available on the Irish market, in the event that they are introduced here before the Directive is amended, the current national tobacco tax provisions are sufficiently broad to ensure that they will fall to be taxed as smoking tobacco.

On 28 August 2015, officials from my Department met with representatives of a tobacco company. The issue of the excise treatment of new heated tobacco products was raised by the company representatives. My officials referred them to the Revenue Commissioners for the clarification of the treatment of these products as set out above. In this regard, Revenue officials meet regularly with the tobacco companies and with tobacco industry representatives to discuss administrative and operational issues around tobacco products tax.

### Revenue Commissioners Staff

70. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the recruitment process used to fill a recent vacancy for a clerical officer position based at the

Office of the Revenue Commissioners in Donegal town; if this post was filled using the central applications facility central transfer list; if not, why this method was not utilised to recruit for this vacancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18662/16]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that no clerical officer positions have been filled recently in their offices in Donegal Town.

Staffing within Revenue is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners and Revenue reviews its business and staff resource requirements in all locations and at all grades on an on-going basis as part of its workforce planning.

### **Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme**

71. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the disabled passenger tax concession scheme. [18599/16]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that a completed application under the Disabled Drivers & Passengers Scheme was received by them on 23rd June 2016. This application will now be processed as quickly as possible and the person concerned will then be advised of the outcome of the application.

*Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 69.*

### **Tax Code**

73. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) is due a refund of tax payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18647/16]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that the person concerned is not due a tax refund. Her tax credits exceed her income and she has not paid tax. The person concerned is exempt from Universal Social Charge.

### **Property Tax Exemptions**

74. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if he will grant persons living in a complex (details supplied) an exemption from the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18658/16]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that any property that is in use as, or that is suitable for use as, a dwelling house is liable to LPT. Therefore, the condition of a property does not result in exemption from LPT where it is occupied. The only exception in this regard is where a property is certified as having significant pyritic damage.

Where a property is occupied and liable to LPT, it is up to the property owner to assess its market value on the relevant ‘valuation date’ (1 May 2013). When doing so, the property owner should take account of any structural deficiencies that existed on that date. The declared valuation then remains in place for the ‘valuation period’ (1 May 2013 to 31 October 2019) and is not affected by any subsequent repairs or improvements made to the property or by any general increase or decrease in property prices that might occur over the period.

Because it is suitable for use as a dwelling house, Revenue has confirmed that the property in question is not entitled to an exemption from LPT and no further reduction is possible as the property owner has valued the property in the minimum band (Band 1). Revenue has already confirmed the situation to the property owner on a number of occasions and has also clarified that it is obliged to administer LPT in accordance with the law as currently set down.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

75. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to confirm his commitment to pay equality for more recently appointed teachers; if he will meet the unions concerned to progress this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18715/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and would require broad consultation, including engagement with staff representatives as was committed to in the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The teacher unions have made it clear to my Department that this is an issue of major concern to them.

The Government recognises the importance of being able to attract quality new entrants to the public service, particularly so in important professional areas like education.

The restrictions in entry pay levels were introduced in 2011 and 2012 across the public service at a time when the pressure in public finances was severe and the scope for new recruitment was very restricted.

Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement the process of restoring public service pay is commencing. An important feature of this is the flat rate increase which is being implemented. This is proportionately more valuable to those early in their careers. Restoration of the supervision and substitution payment is provided for subject to co-operation with the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement did not address the issue of pay of new entrants.

The Government has also indicated that it will support the gradual negotiated unwinding of FEMPI measures having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Apart from the issue of new entrant pay, my Department continues to seek to engage with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern and has recently reached agreement with INTO and TUI in respect of:

- discussions to improve the position of teachers on fixed-term and part-time teaching
- a robust review of in-school management structures
- an increase in the quantum of the extra Croke Park hours which do not have to be worked on a "whole school" basis.

### **Departmental Strategies**

76. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consultation process he has established on a new three-year Strategy for Education and Skills 2016 to 2018;

when he will complete the consultation process and publish the final report; the key priority areas of the consultation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18716/16]

84. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how he will progress the three areas in the education sector that he has identified as his core priority areas of focus, including helping children with special needs, supporting schools and building a stronger bridge between education and the workplace; why he has prioritised these three areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18724/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos 76 and 84 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government provides for a three year Statement of Strategy for my Department within the first 100 days and a framework for measuring its progress. The Strategy will be informed by the Government's Programme for a Partnership Government and will aim to advance the transformation of the education system to support the principles of the Programme in the development of a strong economy and a fair and compassionate society.

The three priority areas I have identified are contained within the broader Programme for Government's priority areas for education:

1. Prioritising Early Years
2. Tackling Disadvantage
3. Diversity and Choice for Parents
4. Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools
5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students
6. Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities
7. Special Needs Education
8. Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future.

By focusing on these priority areas through the development of my Department's Strategy Statement, we intend to transform the learning experience. All learners will receive a quality education that enables them to reach their potential and contribute to social and the economy. The Statement of Strategy and the associated documents will provide further details on implementation.

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

77. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce class sizes and to build on the measures to reduce class sizes in Budget 2016; and if he will continue to reduce class sizes [18717/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The pupil teacher ratio in the current school year is 1 classroom teacher for every 28 pupils. Budget 2016 provides for a one point adjustment to the staffing allocation to primary schools, which will be implemented for the 2016/17 school year. This will see the primary staffing schedule operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils. Lower thresholds apply for DEIS

Band 1 schools, ranging from 20:1 to 24:1 depending on the type of school. Staffing arrangements for the 2016/17 school year are available in Circular 0007/2016, which is published on the Department website.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level. In the next Budget I will consider the best approach to further meeting commitments in the Programme for Government.

### **School Management**

78. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reform the model of leadership in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18718/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** It is widely accepted that the quality of school leadership is a key determinant of school effectiveness and the achievement of good learning outcomes. Indeed international research indicates that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. Therefore my Department, in consultation with the representative school management bodies has commenced an exploration of the opportunities to support school leaders and how their needs might be addressed.

The recently established Centre for School Leadership (CSL) is a collaboration between my Department and the representative professional bodies for school principals. It has been created to offer professional and practical support to schools leaders. This support structure for leadership teams in schools will attempt to ensure that school leaders have opportunities to access, share and create knowledge and experience within their leadership roles. The work of the Centre draws on best international practice and research in the professional development of school leaders. Priorities for the Centre include a new post graduate qualification for aspiring school leaders, a mentoring programme for newly appointed school principals, coaching support for serving principals who are facing new challenges in the role, a review and alignment of leadership programmes with Department standards and the development of a quality assurance framework for leadership provision. In addition my Department will shortly publish Looking at Our School 2016, a quality framework for schools which is designed to support the efforts of teachers and school leaders, as well as the school system more generally, to strive for excellence in our schools.

In Budget 2016 and as part of the 2,260 additional teaching posts announced in that budget, 250 posts were provided to second level schools to enable Deputy Principals to be freed from teaching time and be more fully available for leadership in schools. Thus with effect from 01 September 2016, second level schools with over 400 students will receive an allocation that will bring those schools in line with the schools that have over 500 pupils where the Deputy Principal is fully freed up for leadership in the school. A pro rata allocation of additional hours to support school leadership will also be provided to the schools with 400 or fewer students enrolled. At primary level Budget 2016 provided for additional release days for teaching principals to range between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

### **Lansdowne Road Agreement**

79. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to issue a directive on implementing pay deductions for members of teachers' unions who rejected working additional hours under the Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement 2010 to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18719/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** ASTI members voted recently to authorise the ASTI Standing Committee to direct its members to cease fulfilling the Croke Park hours. ASTI's decision to withdraw from these hours is a serious issue that has implications beyond the question of whether these hours are fulfilled or not. As I have stated previously, this decision means that ASTI is withdrawing from the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

These hours represent a real reform with real benefits for parents and children. They facilitate staff meetings and parent teacher meetings without schools closing for half days. They represent 33 extra hours per year, less than one hour per week.

In opting to withdraw from the Lansdowne Road Agreement, ASTI members are also opting to forego a series of benefits and protections, as communicated by my Department previously. These include avoiding an increment freeze, continuation of the alleviation of the FEMPI Act 2013 pay cut for higher earners, the Supervision and Substitution payment of €796 due to be paid on 1 September and protection against compulsory redundancy.

In regard to the increment freeze, the effect of the FEMPI legislation is that the freeze would be applied retrospectively with effect from 1 July 2013. However, my intention is to seek a temporary modification to this from my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, so that the immediate impact of the increment freeze is prospective rather than retrospective. A further significant consequence of withdrawing from the Lansdowne Road Agreement will be the withdrawal of the benefits introduced for new teachers under the Ward Report, which enable them to gain permanent employment and full hours more quickly than before.

I am aware of union concerns regarding the usage of the Croke Park hours. In response to those concerns, my Department recently agreed with INTO and TUI that the usage would be reviewed, having regard to teacher professional judgement, system and school requirements and experience to date of best practice in the utilisation of the hours.

ASTI have previously declined an open invitation to engage with my Department on this or other issues.

The Lansdowne Road Agreement provides stability, security and financial benefits for teachers. The members of ASTI have exercised their democratic mandate and I respect their right to do so.

However, there are serious consequences for ASTI members in opting out of the Lansdowne Road Agreement. I would prefer that those consequences are avoided. In my view, continuing cooperation with collective agreements offers financial and other benefits for teachers without compromising the legitimate right of their representatives to advance their case when successor agreements are negotiated.

With that in mind, I have again extended an invitation to ASTI to discuss issues of concern and I genuinely believe that it would be in the best interests of ASTI members and the school system as a whole for the union to engage with my Department on this.

I understand that ASTI issued a statement yesterday saying that they will be issuing a directive to their members to withdraw from the Croke Park hours, thereby repudiating the Lansdowne Road Agreement. I am disappointed that the ASTI has chosen to repudiate the agreement. However, I also understand that the union has indicated that they will accept my invitation to talk, and I hope this will give the union and my Department the opportunity for a constructive exchange of views on matters of mutual concern.

My Department is currently putting arrangements in place for implementation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement for teachers represented by unions that have accepted the Agreement.

These arrangements are currently being finalised and my Department will publish a Circular in early July to notify teachers and the system in general.

### **School Curriculum**

80. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the roll-out of the junior cycle reform process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18720/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Implementation of the new framework for Junior Cycle is proceeding. Members of the TUI are fully co-operating with the implementation. The teachers involved are benefiting from extensive continuing professional development and are availing of professional time to support the implementation. The ASTI continue to operate a directive of non-cooperation with the framework. The effect of this is that ASTI teachers are not participating in the continuing professional development that is available to all teachers of junior cycle and are not co-operating with the delivery of class-room based assessments. This is impacting on current first year and second year students of English who are taught by ASTI member teachers. The Department is continuing to work with the management bodies and other partners in addressing ongoing implementation matters. In fact, in March 2016 the Department issued a circular to school management on the “Arrangement for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior cycle with particular reference to school years 2015/ 2016 and 2016/ 2017.” The Circular provides detailed data to supplement that which was provided in the Framework for Junior Cycle published in August 2015 and in addition it provides details on the extra resources and supports available to schools and teachers.

The position of ASTI in relation to continuing non-cooperation is unsustainable, unjustified and unfair on the teachers and students involved. I met with ASTI recently and had an exchange of views in relation to junior cycle. I am committed to the continuing implementation of the framework and have told ASTI that I am willing to engage with them to discuss their implementation concerns and to provide any further clarifications that they require. ASTI are aware that I would welcome further engagement on this matter and I hope that they will agree to this.

### **Skills Shortages**

81. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the areas the skills and labour market research unit has highlighted as having skills shortages such as business administration and management, the green economy, financial services, information technology, manufacturing and engineering, sales and marketing and transport; how he will tackle these skill shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18721/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Skills Bulletin is produced by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) and highlights a number of areas where there are skills shortages. The scale of these shortages varies and there can be a variety of reasons that impact on the ability of employers to recruit.

The work of the SLMRU provides valuable input in terms of labour market research and is a critical component in the annual service planning process, that takes between SOLAS and each of the 16 ETBs in preparing the annual Further Education and Training service plans, so as to inform education and training provision to meet the identified skill needs of learners, employers and enterprise, across all sectors and on a national and regional basis.

My Department launched a new National Skills Strategy to 2025 in January, to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade. Through the vision, objectives, actions and indicators outlined, the Strategy will support the development of a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable labour force, creating and sustaining a strong pool of talented people of all ages throughout Ireland.

The Strategy's vision and objectives focus on relevant, high quality education and training provision with continuous evaluation; strong employer participation in skills development and use of skills in their organisations to drive productivity and competitiveness; support for life-long learning; active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market and increasing the supply of skills to the labour market.

It sets out the elements of a new skills architecture which seeks to foster close collaboration between relevant Government Departments and agencies and develop structures to strengthen engagement between the education and training system and enterprise. It provides for establishment of the National Skills Council to provide a mechanism to mediate demands across the full range of needs identified through the research and analysis conducted under its direction and by the new network of nine Regional Skills Fora.

The skills needs of the economy are met from both mainstream Further and Higher Education and Training provision as well as through targeted programmes such as Momentum and Springboard. In recent years, higher education enrolments have continued to increase throughout the economic crisis. Numbers have increased from 196,000 in 2011/12 to around 210,000 in 2014/15. Within the Further Education and Training sector, a range of flexible high quality provision will be made available for almost 340,000 beneficiaries in 2016, with provision including new career traineeships in areas such as hospitality and engineering and new programmes in IT, entrepreneurship, information technology, manufacturing and business and finance.

As part of the Springboard programme, between 2011 and 2015, 30,000 free places have been provided on 1,000 programmes in disciplines related to high growth areas in the economy. Springboard+ 2016, which incorporates the ICT skills conversion programme, is providing nearly 6,000 free higher education places for jobseekers who wish to upskill or reskill in areas where there are identified skills needs. These include ICT, manufacturing, international financial services and entrepreneurship.

Following on from a comprehensive review of the Irish apprenticeship system, a major initiative is also underway to reform and expand apprenticeship. The content of existing apprenticeships is being modernised, with new curricula being rolled out in five of the most popular trades and a curriculum review underway in the remaining trades. A new Apprenticeship Council has been established that is prioritising the development of 25 new apprenticeships in areas such as ICT, financial services, transport and tourism and hospitality. These new apprenticeships are being progressed following the evaluation of responses to a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. This expansion of apprenticeship will provide new options for school leavers as well as for those seeking to reskill or upskill in the labour market. In the Programme for Partnership Government we have committed to double the number of apprenticeships by 2020, together with the Apprenticeship Council, SOLAS, the ETBs and with Industry and to target 100 different apprenticeship schemes spread across sectors of the economy and in every region of Ireland.

Given the scale of demand for ICT skills, my Department and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation launched a revised Government/Industry ICT Skills Action Plan in 2014. The Plan takes a comprehensive approach including increases in high-level graduate

output, enhancing awareness of ICT as a career among students, maintaining a strong talent pool and promoting Ireland as a destination for ICT talent. Implementation of the plan is being overseen by a high-level steering group shared by the two departments and including representatives from industry and the education system, and delivery teams have been set up to progress areas of work set out under the plan. ICT graduate output from the higher education sector has increased significantly since the first ICT plan was published in 2011.

Under the umbrella of Springboard+, ICT conversion courses are also open to a wide cohort of applicants given the priority in this area. This year, for the first time, two-year part time ICT Conversion Courses are also being made available on a pilot basis, to enable people who are unable to commit to a full-time course, the opportunity to reskill in this area. Employment outcomes for Springboard graduates are very strong and further information on outcomes is available in the trend analysis reports published on my Department's website.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

82. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposals he is reviewing in conjunction with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to carry out the programme for Government commitment to have schools available for child care services outside school hours; if he will permit community groups and private providers to tender for access to these facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18722/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In accordance with key commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016) in relation to encouraging the use of school buildings outside school hours which the Government has committed to delivering progress on within the first 100 days, my Department is working closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in considering how to facilitate schools who wish to make their facilities available as part of the range of options available to parents where there is demand. In general, school authorities have a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to how their premises are managed and utilised at local level. The use of school facilities must be approved by the school authority. In 2005, my Department issued a circular to Trustees, Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Voluntary Secondary Schools (Circular Letter Prim 16/05) to encourage Trustees and Boards of Management to make their facilities available where possible for community, education and recreation purposes. This circular recognises that the decision ultimately lies with the relevant Board or Trustees and that the first priority at all times should be the interest of the school, its teachers and pupils. In facilitating such extra provision there are a number of complex issues that need to be considered in respect of such arrangements. These issues - including property, governance, insurance and liability - are being considered as part of a review within my Department of the requirements to be established around the use of school premises/property for pre-school and after school services and the preparation of guidelines in relation to same. In that regard, a cross-departmental group is also meeting regularly to assess the following:

- Capacity and demand for services
- Children's views on afterschool care
- An appropriate quality and standards framework
- The development of criteria for the capital scheme to be funded by DCYA under Budget 2016
- Estimated existing use of school buildings

- Collaborative models with existing community/private service providers
- Potential funding incentives for provision of services.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

83. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the suggestions by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation that related capital investment will be necessary if the programme for Government commitment on having schools available for child care services is to be successfully implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18723/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** An interdepartmental working group has been established with officials from my Department and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to progress the key commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016), in order to improve the range and quality of options for Parents for afterschool care for school-age children. My department has undertaken to consider how to facilitate the use of school buildings for this purpose. The Government has committed to delivering progress on this commitment in the first 100 days. As part of this work, the Group will consider and assess the following;

- Development of quality standards framework for after school provision
- Existing provision of after school care of school-age children
- Existing use of school buildings
- Capacity and demand for services
- Children's views on afterschool care
- An appropriate quality and standards framework
- The development of criteria for the capital scheme to be funded by DCYA under Budget 2016
- Collaborative models with existing community/private service providers
- Potential funding incentives for provision of services.

*Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 76.*

### **Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme**

85. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his review of the school support programme through the delivering equality of opportunity in schools action plan, including when he will complete and publish it; if he envisages changes to the funding or delivery model under the action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18725/16]

87. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will publish the new national action plan for educational inclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18727/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 87 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the review of the DEIS programme is currently underway and it is my intention that a New Action Plan Educational Inclusion will be published by the end of this year. The current DEIS Action Plan, was published in 2005 and currently provides support to 836 schools serving a total of 169,500 pupils. The DEIS programme has been implemented in partnership with schools and other Government Departments and agencies such as Tusla who manage the Home School Community Liaison and School Completion Programmes, and the Department of Social Protection, which is responsible for the School Meals Programme. The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the identification process for the inclusion of schools in the programme, the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and agencies, in order to improve effectiveness. As part of the review, targeted measures in a number of key areas will be considered. They include:

- Supporting school leadership
- Networks and clusters for DEIS teachers and schools
- Teaching methodologies
- Exploring ways in which the work of schools could be better integrated with other state supports within the community, and
- In consultation with Minister Zappone, making greater use of Home School Community Liaison.

I intend that innovative measures such as these, which are shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged children and students, can form pilot schemes under a new schools support programme. The number of additional schools to be included in the new programme will be determined by a new identification process for this purpose, which is currently in development and all schools will be assessed. Therefore, there will not be a requirement for an application process. Subject to Government approval, it is intended to begin to implement actions arising from an updated plan in the 2017/18 school year. In the meantime, I do not propose to make any changes to the current programme, including the addition of further schools until the completion of the Review and agreement on a new Action Plan.

### School Curriculum

86. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide new courses in the leaving certificate, such as coding, physical education and politics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18726/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the need to focus on the future needs, abilities and capacity of students. The Government is committed to enhancing the availability of technology in schools through the introduction of ICT/Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has been asked to consider options in this regard. Physical Education is being developed by the NCCA as a full subject that can be assessed as a Leaving Certificate subject in a manner similar to other subjects. Also, a Senior Cycle Physical Education framework is being designed to provide schools with a framework within which they can design a P.E. programme for those students who may not choose to take

P.E. as part of their Leaving Certificate examination. A new subject specification for Politics and Society will be introduced in September 2016 to a selected cohort of over 40 schools, following an open invitation to introduce this as an optional Leaving Certificate subject. Politics and Society aims to develop the student's ability to be a reflective and active citizen, in a way that is informed by the insights and skills of social and political science. The introduction of the specification is part of the Department of Education and Skills' commemoration of 1916 and its commitment to education for sustainable development. The new subject has four main strands of study:

- Power and decision-making
- Active citizenship
- Human rights and responsibilities
- Globalisation and localisation.

*Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 85.*

### **School Staff**

88. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will lift the moratorium on filling certain promoted posts in schools, given that it was introduced as an emergency measure in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18728/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** When the moratorium on the filling of posts of responsibility was introduced in 2009, the Government exempted Principal and Deputy Principal posts in all primary and post-primary schools. These posts continue to be replaced in the normal manner. The impact of the moratorium was therefore limited to the Assistant Principal and Special Duties posts of responsibility. There are limited alleviation arrangements in place for schools that are acutely affected by the impact of the moratorium at Assistant Principal level. These arrangements are mainly focused at post-primary level. However, it is fair to say that before the moratorium, notwithstanding the fact that one out of every two teachers held a management allowance the workload issue and the pressures on Principals and Deputy Principals existed. It is widely accepted that the quality of school leadership is a key determinant of school effectiveness and the achievement of good learning outcomes. Indeed international research indicates that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. Therefore my Department, in consultation with the representative school management bodies has commenced an exploration of the opportunities to support school leaders and how their needs might be addressed. The recently established Centre for School Leadership (CSL) is a collaboration between my Department and the representative professional bodies for school principals. It has been created to offer professional and practical support to schools leaders. This support structure for leadership teams in schools will attempt to ensure that school leaders have opportunities to access, share and create knowledge and experience within their leadership roles. The work of the Centre draws on best international practice and research in the professional development of school leaders. Priorities for the Centre include a new post graduate qualification for aspiring school leaders, a mentoring programme for newly appointed school principals, coaching support for serving principals who are facing new challenges in the role, a review and alignment of leadership programmes with Department standards and the development of a quality assurance framework for leadership provision. In addition my Department will shortly publish *Looking at Our School 2016*, a quality framework for schools which is designed to support the efforts of teachers and school leaders, as well as the

school system more generally, to strive for excellence in our schools. In Budget 2016 and as part of the 2,260 additional teaching posts announced in that budget, 250 posts were provided to second level schools to enable Deputy Principals to be freed from teaching time and be more fully available for leadership in schools. Thus with effect from 01 September 2016, second level schools with over 400 students will receive an allocation that will bring those schools in line with the schools that have over 500 pupils where the Deputy Principal is fully freed up for leadership in the school. A pro rata allocation of additional hours to support school leadership will also be provided to the schools with 400 or fewer students enrolled. At primary level Budget 2016 provided for additional release days for teaching principals to range between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

### **Teacher Training Provision**

89. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the ways, including investment, in which he supports continuous professional development for teachers at primary and at secondary level; the investment as a percentage of overall education spending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18729/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department will spend approximately €46m on teacher continuing professional development (CPD) in 2016 across the primary and post primary sectors. The teacher CPD budget represents 0.74% of my Department's overall budget for first and second level - almost 7% if salary and pension costs are excluded from the Department's budget. The spend of €46m includes a) salary costs for support service personnel and b) substitution costs to facilitate teacher attendance at various CPD events and programmes. The professional development needs of serving teachers in recent years have been addressed through the provision of an induction programme for newly qualified teachers, national in-service for new or revised curriculum areas and ongoing support for the curriculum generally with a particular focus on priority areas - literacy and numeracy, well-being, support for school leaders and for teachers to meet the needs of children with special educational needs. The recently established Centre for School Leadership, a partnership between my Department, IPPN and NAPD, is intended to become a centre of excellence for school leaders. Its responsibilities cover the range of leadership development from pre-appointment training and induction of newly appointed principals, to CPD throughout leaders careers. Other areas of expenditure include training for child protection, Board of Management training, a Teacher Fee Refund Scheme, Teacher Professional Networks and a number of postgraduate programmes to meet particular identified needs such as the teaching of mathematics and special educational needs. CPD is provided in a variety of ways, for example, through Department funded support services, who use a variety of formats including seminars, workshops, on-line and in-school support. Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015, evidence of teacher learning (continuing professional development) may be a requirement for renewal of registration. The Teaching Council, the professional body and regulator for teachers has published its policy, Cosán, on teacher learning and will continue to engage with stakeholders including teachers in preparation for commencement of section 39 of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 which will enable the Teaching Council to review and accredit programmes of continuing professional development.

### **Teaching Council of Ireland**

90. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if and when he will implement the fitness-to-teach provisions of the Teaching Council Acts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18730/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Under the Teaching Council Act 2001, the Teaching Council is, since 2006, the body with statutory authority and responsibility for the regulation of the teaching profession. The Teaching Council Act has been commenced on a phased basis and the next step in the commencement schedule is Part 5 (Fitness to Teach), the provisions of which were amended by the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015. Part 5 provides for, inter alia, the grounds for complaint to the Council concerning a registered teacher, how the Council will deal with such complaints, a range of potential sanctions and the appeal of decisions. Officials of my Department are liaising closely with the Teaching Council in relation to the arrangements for Part 5, and I intend to commence that part shortly, along with other sections of the amended Act.

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

91. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timescale and cost of the commitment in the programme for Government to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in junior and senior infants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18731/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce the pupil teacher ratio for junior and senior infants.

The pupil teacher ratio in the current school year is 1 classroom teacher for every 28 pupils. Budget 2016 provides for a one point adjustment to the staffing allocation to primary schools, which will be implemented for the 2016/17 school year. This will see the primary staffing schedule operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils. Lower thresholds apply for DEIS Band 1 schools, ranging from 20:1 to 24:1 depending on the type of school.

Each 1 point adjustment for junior and senior infant classes would have an estimated cost of €4.1m to €4.9m.

In the next Budget I will consider the best approach to further meeting commitments in the Programme for Government.

### **School Patronage**

92. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location of schools under religious patronage which he will divest in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18733/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030. Progress on the divestment process has, in recent years, been slower than might have been hoped. However, by developing new approaches I am convinced that we can significantly increase the rate of progress. The Government is committed to working with all stakeholders to facilitate this process and I am progressing these matters as a priority.

In relation to the new schools which will open in 2016 under the patronage divesting process, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a new multid denominational primary school will

open in Greenhills, Dublin, in September 2016 under this process. My Department and representatives of the Dublin Archdiocese and of the local parish have agreed that a former school building in which St. Peters Boys' National School, Limekiln Road, Greenhills was located, will be made available to the Department for educational use. My Department and Archdiocese representatives have worked, and continue to work, very closely on the practicalities of the property issues involved in advance of this school opening from the start of the coming school year 2016/17. My Department is also liaising closely with the patron of the new school, Educate Together, in this regard.

My Department is also continuing to work very closely with Mayo County Council in order to make a Council-owned property in Castlebar, which is currently vacant, available to my Department for educational use under the divesting process. This will facilitate a new multi-denominational primary school opening under the patronage of Educate Together for the start of the coming school year.

### **Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme**

93. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that have had status under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools action plan in each of the years 2006 to 2016, to date, in tabular form; why his Department postponed the action plan when it was highlighted in the national drugs strategy as a key mechanism for addressing deprivation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18735/16]

94. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budgetary allocation under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools action plan in each of the years 2006 to 2016, to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18736/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 94 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the table.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the DEIS programme was not postponed and continues to be delivered in 836 schools serving a total of 169,500 pupils schools nationwide.

As the Deputy is aware, the review of the DEIS programme is currently underway and it is my intention that a New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion will be published by the end of this year.

The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the identification process for the inclusion of schools in the programme, the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and agencies, in order to improve effectiveness.

In the meantime, I do not propose to make any changes to the current programme, including the addition of further schools until the completion of the Review and agreement on a new Action Plan.

**Table 1: DEIS Expenditure , illustrates the yearly expenditure on the DEIS programme from 2006 to 2015 and the 2016 estimate as well as the total number of schools participating in the programme.**

Table 1: DEIS Expenditure

Year	Total Number of Schools	Total DES Expenditure €m	Total DSP Expenditure €m	Total DCYA Expenditure €m	Total Overall Funding for DEIS
2006	873	139.80	Not Available	n/a	139.80
2007	873	159.99	28.2	n/a	188.19
2008	876	161.51	32.3	n/a	193.81
2009	881	151.12	31.1	n/a	182.22
2010	881	139.59	35.0	n/a	174.59
2011	866	112.32	35.0	30.26	177.58
2012	860	111.44	35.0	26.89	173.33
2013	851	112.80	36.8	26.45	176.05
2014	849	111.09	16.6	24.76	152.45
2015	836	110.69	38.8	24.76	174.25
2016	836	110.27	42.0	24.76	177.03

### Notes on Table

Changes in the total number of schools reflect school amalgamations or closures.

In 2011 under the National Education Welfare Board (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order, 2011 responsibility for the School Completion Programme (SCP) transferred to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. SCP funding transferred from Department of Education and Skills to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the same year.

### Early School Leavers

95. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the statistics on early school leavers in each year of the years 2006 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18737/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The following information is taken from the 2008 Retention report by the Department of Education and Skills, on school retention in Ireland. It is based on a detailed analysis of the records held in the Department's Post-Primary Pupils Database (PPPDB) for the cohort of entrants to the first year of the junior cycle from the years 2000 to 2008 who sat the Leaving Certificate Examinations in the years from 2005 or 2006 to 2014 or 2015. The Department will produce a report on the 2009 cohort for those who sat the Leaving Certificate in 2015 by July this year. See attached table 1.

For more detailed information on these cohorts please visit the DES website for the full report. [http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/stats\\_retention\\_report\\_2008\\_cohort.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/stats_retention_report_2008_cohort.pdf)

My Department has also published two reports are based on a detailed analysis of the records held in the Department focusing on those pupils who were enrolled in post-primary schools in one academic year but not enrolled in one of these schools one year later. These pupils, using a unique personal identifier (a protected identifier key based on the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN)), were tracked to other data sources that were available at the time. The first report was based on cohort of pupils who were enrolled in years prior to the final year of senior cycle in the 2009/2010 academic year and who were not enrolled in the 2010/2011 academic year

form the subject of the companion report and the subsequent report was based on the cohort of pupils enrolled in the 2010/2011 academic year and not enrolled in the 2011/2012 academic year. The full reports are available at <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Early-Leavers-What-Next-.pdf><http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/Early-Leavers-What-Next-2016-Report-.pdf>.

Table 1: National Leaving Certificate Retention Rate for 2000-2008 entry cohorts

Year	Retention Rate
2000	84.8
2001	84.7
2002	84.8
2003	85.7
2004	87.7
2005	89.5
2006	90.2
2007	90.1
2008	90.6

### RAPID Programme

96. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding under the RAPID education programme in each of the years 2006 to 2016, to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18738/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The RAPID Funding made available to schools through my Department in the years in question was:

2007 - €175,331

2008 - €4,326,170.41

2009 - €1,254,888.13

No further RAPID funding was disbursed through my Department in 2006 or after 2009.

The funding was made available to provide educational infrastructure in disadvantaged schools serving RAPID areas by way of small scale capital grants to enhance existing, and provide new, outdoor play areas, school libraries, dining areas and parent rooms.

### Substance Abuse Prevention Education

97. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that have a substance misuse strategy; if he liaises with schools as to the way to implement and manage their substance misuse strategies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18739/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Data, taken from the Department's Lifeskills survey 2012, indicates that more than 90% of schools provide their students with information on alcohol and drug misuse, through SPHE and other means. The report on the 2015 Lifeskills survey is currently being finalised and will be available shortly. Analysis

so far indicates that the high level of implementation of strategies regarding substance misuse remains.

My Department is making a significant contribution to the implementation of the current National Drugs Strategy, primarily through the delivery of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum in schools. The Department is also represented on the key national structures that oversee implementation of the Strategy including the Oversight Forum on Drugs and the National Coordinating Committee for Drug and Alcohol Taskforces and the Education and Training Boards are represented on the relevant Local Drug and Alcohol Taskforces.

SPHE, which has a specific module on the use and misuse of a range of substances, is currently mandatory in all primary schools and at junior cycle level in post primary schools. Schools are also encouraged to deliver the SPHE programme in senior cycle.

The Department's Inspectorate, including dedicated SPHE inspectors at post-primary level, visit SPHE lessons and provide support and advice to teachers and schools. In recent years, the Inspectorate published two composite reports which provide insights into the effectiveness of the teaching of SPHE at primary and post-primary level. At primary level, the report published in 2009 drew from forty inspections of the teaching of SPHE. At post-primary level, the report published in 2013, drew from sixty-three inspections at post-primary level which focused on Junior Cycle SPHE and Senior Cycle Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). Within these reports, inspectors describe the overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support for SPHE as very good or good in most schools. In response to questionnaires in these schools, 84% of students strongly agreed that SPHE helped them to understand the reasons for substance misuse, and 90% of students strongly agreed that SPHE helped them to understand the effects of abuse on individuals.

### **School Curriculum**

98. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the teaching of social, personal and health education and its progression as a subject on the curriculum for the senior cycle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18740/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum is mandatory at primary level and up to junior cycle at post-primary level. Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is embedded within SPHE at Junior Cycle level. A framework for Senior Cycle SPHE is available to schools and while its implementation is not mandatory, schools are required to provide a Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme in Senior Cycle.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Physical Education (PE), and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), along with guidance will be included in a new area of learning called Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme from September 2017. A school's Wellbeing programme will provide learning opportunities that enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students.

The SPHE curriculum aims to provide a range of generic skills such as communicating, making decisions, knowing where to find reliable data, belonging and integrating, handling conflict constructively, dealing with bullying, expressing feelings and emotions, substance abuse, resisting peer pressure, personal safety, values and mutual respect.

### **School Accommodation**

99. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to expedite an application by a school (details supplied) that has four teachers and 90 pupils, given that the number of pupils will increase to 100 in September 2016, that the building is over 100 years old and is no longer fit for purpose and that the provision of a new building is essential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18769/16]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted applications to my Department for capital funding in relation to its school accommodation. The applications concerned are currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority shortly.

### **Local Authority Housing Maintenance**

100. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the allocation to local authorities for housing maintenance, in tabular form. [18595/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs to properties, is a matter for each individual local authority under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966 and is not directly funded by my Department.

Over and above maintenance programmes and responsive repairs of social housing by local authorities, my Department supports local authorities under a range of specific exchequer-funded programmes to improve the quality and availability of social housing stock. These programmes include support for the return of vacant properties to productive use, improving the energy efficiency of social housing stock and providing funding towards the cost of adaptations and extensions to meet the needs of tenants with a disability or to address serious overcrowding. Full allocations for 2016 in respect of these programmes are currently been formally notified to local authorities and in the meantime, local authorities have been authorised since early 2016 to carry out works as needed, to deal with vacant social houses, to make energy efficiency improvements by way of attic/roof insulation and cavity wall insulation, and to carry out extensions/adaptations, where required.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

101. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for a progress report on rapid-build housing in Dublin City. [18596/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In October 2015, the Government approved a programme to deliver 500 units of rapid-delivery housing across the Dublin Region for homeless families currently residing in commercial hotels. This programme is being implemented to mitigate the issues associated with an increasing volume of homeless households accommodated in inappropriate commercial hotel arrangements. The units will provide emergency accommodation for those families currently in hotels in the first instance, offering a greater level of stability while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will

facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning for access to all required services, including welfare, health and housing services.

An initial 22 units have been delivered and occupied in Poppintree, Ballymun and another 131 units are expected for completion in the Dublin City Council area by the end of this year. In addition, 44 units are to be delivered in the Fingal County Council area by the end of this year. A further 305 units will be provided in 2017 across the four Dublin authorities, the bulk of which will be delivered in the early part of the year. A procurement framework, overseen by the Office for Government Procurement, will be in place by September and will be available all local authorities for the procurement of rapid-delivery housing.

### **Local Authority Housing Standards**

102. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to expand the insulation programme to remaining houses that do not benefit from cavity insulation (details supplied). [18597/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Local authorities are currently undertaking an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting, with the support of my Department, on the least energy efficient social homes. Funding of some €85 million has been provided from 2013 to end-2015 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in over 46,000 local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy reduction targets for 2020.

The insulation retrofitting programme is being implemented in two phases, Phase 1 commenced in 2013 and is focused on providing attic/roof insulation and the less intrusive cavity wall insulation in all relevant properties. There are 80,000 social homes to be tackled in that phase and to end-2015, some 46,000 homes have been retrofitted, with further good progress anticipated under that phase in 2016.

Phase 2 of the programme will focus on the external fabric upgrade of those social housing units with solid/hollow block wall construction, of which there are 28,000 homes. This phase has commenced on a pilot basis in both Fingal and Westmeath local authorities in 2015 and the outcome of this pilot work will inform the full national roll-out of Phase 2 across all local authorities.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

103. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Bagenalstown, County Carlow which should result in the creation of 24 housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18624/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the project at Bagenalstown, County Carlow to construct 24 new social housing units through design, planning and construction is a matter in the first instance for Carlow County Council.

My Department recently granted funding approval for this project following the completion of the tendering process by the local authority and I expect works to commence on site shortly.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

104. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Tullow, County Carlow which should result in the creation of 14 housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18625/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the project at Tullow, County Carlow to construct 14 new social housing units is a matter in the first instance for Carlow County Council.

I understand that the Council is currently preparing tender documents in relation to this project with a view to advancing the project at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

105. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Rathvilly, County Carlow, which should result in the creation of ten housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18626/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the project at Rathvilly, County Carlow to construct 10 new social housing units through design, planning and construction is a matter in the first instance for Carlow County Council. I understand that this project is due to start on site shortly.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

106. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Myshall and Mount Leinster, County Carlow which should result in the creation of eight housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18627/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the projects at Myshall and Mount Leinster, County Carlow to construct 8 new social housing units is a matter in the first instance for Carlow County Council.

I understand that the Council is currently preparing tender documents in relation to these projects with a view to advancing them at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

107. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Bagenalstown, County Carlow which should result in the creation of six housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18628/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The social housing project to deliver 6 units at Bagenalstown, County Carlow is now complete, with funding of €829,969 provided by my Department.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

108. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Borris, County Carlow which should result in the creation of four housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18629/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the project at Borris, County Carlow to construct 4 new social housing units through design, planning and construction is a matter in the first instance for Carlow County Council. I understand that the Council is preparing tender documents for the project at present with a view to advancing this project at the earliest opportunity.

### **Local Authority Housing**

109. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Rathvilly and Tullow, County Carlow which should result in the creation of two housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18630/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the projects at Rathvilly and Tullow, County Carlow to construct 2 new social housing units through design, planning and construction is a matter in the first instance for Carlow County Council.

I understand that the Council is undertaking the tendering process in relation to the unit at Rathvilly, and in the case of Tullow, the Council is preparing the tender documents.

### **Local Authority Housing**

110. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Hackettstown, County Carlow which should result in the creation of four housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18631/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the project at Hackettstown, County Carlow to construct 4 new social housing units through design, planning and construction is a matter in the first instance for Carlow County Council.

The project was given funding approval in principle in January this year and I understand that the Council is now working on the design and costings for the project.

### **Local Authority Housing**

111. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Ballyhaise, County Cavan which should result in the creation of eight housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18632/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon**

**Coveney):** The advancement of the project at Ballyhaise, Co. Cavan to construct 8 new social housing units is a matter in the first instance for Cavan County Council. I understand that the Council is currently in the process of procuring a design team to advance this project.

### **Local Authority Housing**

112. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of a construction project at Butlersbridge, County Cavan which should result in the creation of six housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18633/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The advancement of the project at Butlersbridge, Co. Cavan to construct 4 new social housing units through design, planning and construction is a matter in the first instance for Cavan County Council. This project also includes the refurbishment of 2 units for social housing purposes.

I understand that the refurbishment works on the 2 units is nearing completion, while the 4 units to be constructed are currently at design stage and will progress at the earliest opportunity.

*Question No. 113 answered with Question No. 37.*

### **Flood Risk Management**

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which he has access to or sight of a national hydrological study with a view to identification of the most sensitive and seriously affected areas of flooding over the past number of years with a view to prevention in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18777/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In September 2004, Government approved a national flood risk policy which assigned OPW the lead role for flood risk management and mitigation.

The OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme is the principal vehicle for implementing the Government's 2004 national policy on flood risk management. The CFRAM Programme will in mid-2016 publish, for public consultation, 29 draft Flood Risk Management Plans that will provide recommended solutions of both a structural and non-structural nature, through 29 Flood Risk Management Plans, to proactively manage flood risk in those areas at significant risk from fluvial and coastal flooding. The Plans are scheduled to be finalised at the end of 2016.

The OPW Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination Group, established to support the CFRAM Programme, was reconvened in July 2015. The purpose of the Co-ordination Group is to have regard to the extent of non-structural solutions that will inform the ten year implementation strategy of the Flood Risk Management Plans and to ensure that policies that can benefit communities and individuals directly - to be prepared and respond to or live with flood risk - are carefully considered. The Co-ordination Group is to report to Government with its costed recommendations to support a smooth implementation of the Flood Risk Management Plans.

My Department is represented on the Co-ordination Group and has work closely with the OPW on the generation of their Final Report to Government, providing input on a number of

policy initiatives under consideration. The Final Report from the Group is being progressed to align with the development of draft Flood Risk Management Plans.

### **Community Development Initiatives**

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for community development in urban and rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18778/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The successor programme to the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP), the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) was rolled out across communities, both urban and rural, in April 2015 and will run until 31 December 2017. The aim of the SICAP is to reduce poverty, and promote social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration. SICAP is a key priority of Government and its vision is to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalised in society, living in poverty or in unemployment, through community development approaches, targeted supports and interagency collaboration, where the values of equality and inclusion are promoted and human rights are respected.

Community development is an integral part of SICAP and underpins the entire programme. There is a strong focus on community activation, social inclusion and community development, in addition to prioritisation of those most hard to reach in our communities. The SICAP budget for 2016 is €37.5 million. This includes an allocation of €3 million under the European Structural Funds (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

The programme's target groups are children and families from disadvantaged areas, lone parents, new communities (including refugees, asylum seekers), people living in disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, Roma, the unemployed (including those not on the Live Register), Travellers, low income workers/households, young unemployed people from disadvantaged areas and young people aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

SICAP is delivered locally by programme implementers who operate a range of community schemes and programmes, and is being overseen and managed by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each Local Authority area. Each LCDC is mandated with bringing a more joined-up and coherent approach to the local management of public-funded programmes in the areas of economic, social and community development, including SICAP. The primary means through which this will be achieved will be the development and implementation of the community elements of the Local Economic and Community Plans, which have been developed in each Local Authority area. These six year plans will look to coordinate the delivery of community supports within their area. The primary focus of my Department is to ensure that front-line services, particularly those focused on the needs of the most socially deprived communities, are protected. The Programme for Government includes provisions for the development of a new Community Development Scheme for rural areas as well as the reactivation of and increase in funding to RAPID. My Department will collaborate with other stakeholders including LCDCs and Local Authorities in addressing this commitment.

Insofar as rural areas are concerned, lead responsibility for rural development, including the LEADER programme, rests with my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

## Regeneration Projects

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent, if any, to which he has plans to address urban and rural decay in all regions; if he has conducted an audit in this regard with a view to determining the full extent of the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18779/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The new Programme for Partnership Government sets out the ambitious priority attached to urban regeneration by the new Government, with a series of specific actions set out therein as to how it is proposed to facilitate the regeneration of our urban centres.

In this context, I have established a working group, which I will chair, comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities and other relevant actors, to bring forward proposals for new urban regeneration measures as early as possible. It is intended that such new measures will complement the existing regeneration programme under the Social Housing Capital Programme, as well as other social regeneration initiatives already under way.

The series of specific actions set out in the Programme for Partnership Government are examples of the Government's commitment and approach to regenerating our urban centres, many of which were adversely impacted by our recent economic difficulties. In this context, the Government will seek to introduce a new Town and Village Renewal Scheme to support the revitalisation of our towns and villages and improve the living and working environment of communities. Using the €30 million available to local authorities for town and village regeneration from this year, it is envisaged that the scheme will, among other things, particularly seek to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of our towns and villages as places to live and work.

In addition to this new Scheme, it is also intended under the new Programme for Partnership Government to examine a series of further initiatives, including:

- the introduction of a similar scheme to the 'Living City Initiative' to regenerate urban centres and villages throughout Ireland (Year 1 action),
- reclassifying and incentivising the use of underutilised or vacant areas over ground floor premises in urban areas, for both residential and commercial use (Year 1 action),
- examining the scope to reform the Derelict Sites Act to tackle the under-use and hoarding of derelict land by the State, semi-State and private sectors (Year 1 action),
- the establishment of a national register of derelict sites, in addition to the new vacant site levy, to bring vacant and underutilised sites into beneficial use for housing and urban regeneration purposes (Year 2 action), and
- the mandating of local authorities with better land management powers (Year 2 action).

In the context of the priority being attached to urban regeneration by the current Government, I will be aiming to provide increased funding in 2017 and beyond for a range of measures that will address deep-rooted disadvantage, while simultaneously developing an approach to urban regeneration that empowers people to work together to improve their communities, to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality. It is intended that these new measures will also include strengthening the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) as well as reactivating funding to areas covered by the RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Plan-

ning, Investment and Development) Programme through the local authorities.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes**

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when his Department last received a submission from Kildare County Council in respect of the group water scheme at Ballyna, Broadford, County Kildare; if he has accorded priority to the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18781/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department engaged with Kildare County Council on costs associated with the Ballyna Group Water Scheme during 2015. Kildare County Council did not include this scheme in its bid for funding under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018. I understand that proposals for the Ballyna Group Water Scheme is dependent upon related investment in major public water supply infrastructure by Irish Water. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes**

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when his Department last received a submission from Kildare County Council in respect of the group water scheme at Kilmacreddock-Barrogstown in County Kildare; if he has accorded priority to the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18782/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department approved a grant to Kildare County Council for a Feasibility Study on the proposed Kilmacreddock/Barrogstown Group Sewerage Scheme in 2014. However, the Study, in its recommendations, stated that the preferred and least cost option was to upgrade the individual on-site wastewater treatment systems (septic tank or similar systems) and the estimated cost of this option would far exceed €14,000 per house. The approach proposed in the Study is not fundable under my Department's Group Sewerage Grant Scheme and Kildare County Council was informed accordingly.

Kildare County Council did not include this scheme in its bid for funding under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the current position in regard to Ireland's response to European Union or other international agreements in relation to climate change; if he has formulated a progressive plan to address issues arising, with a view to ensuring that no damage is done in the context of economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18783/16]

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which he continues to monitor the level of greenhouse gas

emissions with particular reference to reduction in line with national and international guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18784/16]

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which this country remains compliant with international carbon reduction targets; his programme for the future in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18785/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 119 to 121, inclusive, together.

Ireland is a Party to both the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which together provide the international legal framework for addressing climate change at a global level.

Ireland has demonstrated compliance with its greenhouse gas emission reduction target for the purposes of the Kyoto Protocol in the commitment period 2008 to 2012. The Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, which establishes a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol from 2013 to 2020, was agreed in 2012 but has not yet entered into force. Ireland has completed the necessary domestic acceptance procedures in relation to the Doha Amendment. However, it has been decided that the European Union, its Member States and Iceland should formally accept the Doha Amendment simultaneously, on a date yet to be fixed. Ireland stands ready to formally accept the Doha Amendment as and when this date is agreed.

On 12th December 2015, an ambitious new legally binding, global agreement on climate change was agreed in Paris. The Paris Agreement puts in place the necessary framework for all countries to take ambitious action as well as providing for a transparency system to ensure that ensures all countries can have confidence in each other's efforts. The Agreement sets out a long-term goal to put the world on track to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. It should be noted that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been tasked with evaluating what will be the specific policy implications of this goal with a special report to be published in 2018.

The Agreement aims to tackle 95% of global emissions through 188 Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs). Ireland will contribute to the Paris Agreement via the INDC tabled by the EU on behalf of Member States which commits to 40% reduction in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. The specific details of the contribution to this 40% to be made by each Member State remain to be defined and will be announced as part of the 2030 Climate and Energy package in due course.

At an EU level, for each year between 2013 and 2020, Ireland has a greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target under the 2009 Effort Sharing Decision (ESD) No. 406/2009/EC. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20 per cent below their value in 2005. This is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated under the ESD and one shared only by Denmark and Luxembourg. The 2013 target is based on the average of emissions for the years 2008-2010. The target for each of the years 2014 through 2019 is on a straight-line trajectory between the targets for 2013 and 2020, and surpluses in one year can be used to cover deficits in any subsequent year. The average incidence of these targets is a 12% reduction relative to 2005.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) produces national GHG emission projections on an annual basis. The latest projections, published in March 2016, projected emissions for 2020 which indicate that Ireland's emissions at that stage could be in the range of 6-11% below

2005 levels. On a cumulative basis, Ireland will have a deficit of between 4 and 12 Megatonnes Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e). The projections suggest that Ireland may have a cumulative deficit of units in 2018 or 2019.

The extent of this challenge to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU and international commitments, is well understood by the Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and now underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 which was enacted in December 2015. The National Policy Position provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. Statutory authority for the plans is set out in the Act.

It should be noted that the overall outcome of the Paris Conference means that the long-term objective that Ireland has also established in the National Policy Position, and that is now underpinned by the Act, namely to pursue substantial decarbonisation of the energy, transport and built environment sectors, as well as pursuing neutrality in the land sector, will now be undertaken within a broader international context.

This means that the more ambitious actions that will be required over time can be taken on the basis of shared experience and co-operation with other States and regions, in the knowledge that all countries will be moving in the same direction, crucial for a small open economy like Ireland's that competes in global markets.

In addition, and cognisant of the need to safeguard our economic recovery, there will, and must be, a strong economic dimension to the work that Ireland is carrying out to transition to a low carbon, environmentally sustainable economy, as Ireland's finances continue to stabilise and recover. The National Policy Position clearly identifies competitiveness as a pillar of the fundamental national objective on transition to a low-carbon economy by 2050 and in this context sets out a number of key issues for consideration in the on-going evolution of national climate policy, including

- the need to ensure that objectives are achieved at the least cost to the national economy and that any measures adopted to achieve those objectives are cost-effective, and do not impose an unreasonable burden on the Exchequer, and
- the need to take advantage of environmentally sustainable economic opportunities both within and outside the State.

The Act statutorily underpins these and other key economic considerations, to be taken into account in the development of the mitigation and adaptation plans to be adopted by the Government for the purpose of progressing the national transition agenda. We must therefore look for economic opportunities in the low carbon transition process with policies to be adopted ideally being a spur to sustainable economic growth.

In terms of putting in place a plan to manage our transition to a low carbon economy, in accordance with Section 4 of the Act, a National Mitigation Plan will be submitted to Government for approval by June 2017 at the latest. Work is well underway on the development of this Plan, the primary objective of which will be to track implementation of measures already underway and identify additional measures in the longer term to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. The first iteration of the National Mitigation Plan will place particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address the challenge to 2020 but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures will be in place beyond that.

The ultimate objective of successive 5-yearly National Mitigation Plans is to incrementally achieve this low-carbon transition vision by 2050. In that context, the National Mitigation Plan will have regard to Ireland's obligations under the current 2009 Effort Sharing Decision, the Paris Agreement and any likely future EU and international obligations that may arise, including new national targets to be agreed under the 2030 Climate and Energy Package.

## Air Quality

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the degree to which he continues to monitor air and water pollution; if he has noticed particular trends arising from this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18788/16]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out to meet the requirements of EU Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe, also known as the CAFE Directive. The Directive requires that certain minimum levels of monitoring are conducted for the purpose of assessment and management of air quality. The EPA has responsibility for the monitoring of air quality in Ireland, and monitors a range of atmospheric pollutants, based on data obtained from the 31 monitoring stations that form the national ambient air quality network.

The EPA publishes an annual report on air quality, primarily based on the monitoring requirements of the CAFE Directive. The most recent report, Air Quality in Ireland 2014 – Key Indicators of Ambient Air Quality, was published in September 2015 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2014, compared to the CAFÉ Directive standards, as well as assessments in relation to more stringent World Health Organisation (WHO) air quality guidelines for the protection of human health and the European Environment Agency (EEA) estimated reference levels.

The report indicates that NO<sub>x</sub> values, arising primarily from the transport sector, are showing a slight increase over 2013 figures at some locations, and indicates a risk that growth in economic activity will lead to an increase in NO<sub>x</sub> levels. Similarly, the report indicates that levels of particulates (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) and compounds (PAH) have increased at some stations.

Notwithstanding these points, I welcome the fact that no levels above the EU limit value were recorded at any of the ambient air quality network monitoring sites in Ireland in 2014. Particulate matter levels are of concern, particularly during the winter heating season in some areas where the sale of smoky coal is permitted. Because of this, levels of particulate matter in smaller towns can often be similar to, or higher than, those in cities where the sale and use of smoky coal is banned. To help protect our good air quality, consumers must become more aware of their choice in home heating fuel and the potential impact that this choice can have on air quality in their locality and on human health.

In relation to the monitoring of water quality, pursuant to the Water Framework Directive, the EPA monitors surface waters, including rivers, lakes, estuarine and coastal waters, as well as groundwater. Under this monitoring programme, the EPA assesses general physico-chemical parameters (nutrients, oxygen, temperature, salinity) and biological quality elements (phytoplankton, macro-algae and angiosperms). On-the-ground sampling is conducted by local authorities, and operational and surveillance samples are then brought to EPA laboratories.

The findings from the monitoring programme are detailed in the EPA's Water Quality in

Ireland reports. The most recent report covers the period from 2010 to 2012 and is available on the EPA website at: -

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/water/waterqua/wqr20102012>

The aforementioned report contains an overview of water quality and, in summary, notes that 53% of rivers, 43% of lakes, 45% of transitional waters, 93% of coastal waters and 99% of groundwater were satisfactory at good or high status. There was a 4% increase in high or good condition (73%) river channels based on the biological Q-value assessments. Serious pollution of rivers reduced to 17 km from 53 km since the last reporting period (2007-2009). Reported fish kills declined to an all-time low of 70 recorded between 2010 and 2012. There was a 5% reduction in satisfactory quality lakes (10 lakes). Water quality in canals remains very high at over 90% satisfactory. The south and south-east of the country continue to have the greatest proportion of groundwater and rivers with nitrogen concentrations over 10 mg/l NO<sub>3</sub>. Although there was a decrease in detections of faecal coliforms in groundwater from 61% in 2008 to 51% in 2012, these levels highlight a risk for drinking water in areas where there is inadequate treatment. Approximately 35% of the designated shellfish areas were non-compliant with the guide value for *Escherichia coli*.

A new national update on water quality for the period from 2013 to 2015 will be available later this year.

### **Blind Person's Pension**

123. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to increase the entitlement under the blind person's pension which was reduced dramatically a number of years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18752/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Blind Pension is a means-tested payment for blind people and certain people with low vision operated by my Department. Some €14 million has been allocated for the scheme this year, which has over 1,300 recipients.

Budgets 2010 and 2011 reduced the weekly rate of payment for all working age schemes, including the Blind Pension. In this regard, the weekly personal rate for Blind Pension decreased by €16.30 per week, from €204.30 to €188 per week. Furthermore, the Christmas Bonus was abolished in 2009.

Blind Pension recipients who live alone are eligible for the living alone allowance. Budget 2015 increased the living alone allowance from €7.70 to €9 per week. In addition, the Christmas Bonus was partially restored in December 2014, with a 25% bonus payment to over 1.2 million social welfare recipients, including those in receipt of Blind Pension. The Bonus was increased to 75% payment in December 2015.

The appropriate rates of welfare supports for working age people will be considered by the Government in the context of the forthcoming Budget. In this regard, the Programme for Government contains a number of significant commitments to enhance the welfare system in the years ahead, including support for an increase in the rate of Blind Pension. I want to make progress on these commitments in the forthcoming Budget. I look forward to engagement and input from my colleagues in the Oireachtas in the matter.

### **State Pensions**

124. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reverse the changes introduced to the State pension in 2012 which disproportionately affects women and their ability to qualify for a full State Pension (Contributory); the full year cost in 2016 of reversing these changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18567/16]

125. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has conducted research on or an impact assessment of the changes introduced to the State pension in 2012, with particular reference to the impact on women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18568/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 124 and 125 together.

State pensions account for the single largest block of social welfare expenditure. In 2016, €6.976 billion will be spent on pensions, which represents 35% of the Department's total current expenditure. While expenditure on pensions is increasing by approximately €1 billion every five years because of demographic pressures, this is being successfully managed within the overall welfare budget. A number of significant reforms to State pensions were introduced in recent years which have allowed my Department maintain the value of the State pension, and indeed increase it in Budget 2016.

From September 2012, new rate bands for State Pension contributory were introduced. These additional payment rate bands more accurately reflect the social insurance history of a person and ensure that those who contributed to the Social Insurance Fund more frequently during their working life will, generally, benefit more in retirement than those who made less frequent contributions. People who qualify for a lower contributory pension as a result, but who have an income need, may still claim the means-tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum rate of which is 95% that of the State pension contributory. At the time this measure was introduced, the net exchequer savings arising were estimated to be in the region of €2.8 million in 2013, €5m in 2014 and €8m in 2015, rising as the number of new claimants, assessed under the new rates, entered the system. While a projection was not made at that time for 2017, a figure of some €14 million might be expected to apply using a similar rate of increase.

To provide for sustainable pensions and to facilitate a longer working life, the Government decided to increase State pension age in three separate stages. In 2014, the State pension age was standardised at 66. This will be increased to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. This process saw the abolition of the State Pension Transition payment from 2014. In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseekers Benefit (albeit at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or may claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension. However, there are others who would not make a social welfare claim during that year (most notably those who continue in employment). Therefore, it is anticipated that over half of the cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, and (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65. It is estimated that the net saving in 2017 is likely to be in the region of €75-80 million.

With effect from April 2012, the number of paid contributions required to qualify for a State Pension increased from 260 paid contributions to 520 paid contributions. At the time this measure was introduced, the annual exchequer savings were expected to be in the region of €6m per annum.

It is worth noting that the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund in 2012 confirmed

that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the distributive nature of the Fund. For example, those with a yearly average of only 20 contributions (38% of the maximum) may qualify for 85% of the maximum rate. The Review also examined the changes in the contribution rules and the associated rates of payment which were to be introduced in September 2012. The Review found that those with lower earnings and those with shorter contribution histories still obtain the best value from their contributions.

Any significant measures that would increase the cost of the State pension would have to be considered in an overall policy and Budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme**

126. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Social Protection to rescind the ban in Ballymun, Dublin 11 under the rent supplement scheme which was due to the regeneration project, given that this project is coming to a close. [18572/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The provision of rent supplement in the Ballymun designated area of regeneration was identified by housing authorities as a risk to the tenure diversity objective of the project, aimed at achieving a balanced tenure mix through the provision of additional private market housing. In response to these concerns, Section 25 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provided that a payment of rent supplement can be refused in respect of accommodation which is situated in an area notified to the Minister for Social Protection by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, as being an area of regeneration. An amendment to an area of regeneration is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

The measures provided for in Section 25 are not a blanket refusal of rent supplement in areas of regeneration. Specific provision is made to ensure that:

- people already residing in such areas and in receipt of rent supplement may continue to receive payment; and
- people already residing in such areas in private rental accommodation and who may have recourse to rent supplement in the future would not have their entitlement restricted.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

127. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the disability allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18578/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that my department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance from the above named person on 10 June 2016. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with

their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

128. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18645/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Applications**

129. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the jobseeker's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18646/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Jobseeker's Allowance application for the person concerned has now been processed and payment approved from 17th February 2016. The first payment will issue on 30th June 2016. Any arrears due will be included in the first payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

130. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection why he does not accept that a person (details supplied) cares for another person 24 hours a day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18650/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I confirm that my department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 5 November 2015.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the carer must be providing full-time care and attention. It is a further condition that the person being cared for must require full-time care and attention.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and a deciding officer (DO) decided that the person in question was not entitled to CA on the grounds that neither of

these conditions was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 22 February 2016 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support. On review of the supplementary information, it has been decided that the person being cared for does require full-time care and attention.

In relation to the condition of provision of full-time care, the deciding officer has referred the application to a local social welfare investigative officer (SWI) to assess the level of care being provided and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied. Once the SWI has reported, the review will be completed and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Appeals**

131. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will forward a file for a person (details supplied) to the Social Welfare Appeals Office regarding the illness benefit scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18660/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Illness Benefit is a payment for people who are incapable of work and who satisfy certain insurance contribution (PRSI) conditions.

The person concerned was examined by one of my Department's medical assessors in July 2015 who expressed the opinion that they were capable of work. This view was upheld by a deciding officer.

The decision was appealed and, as part of the appeal process, a further medical examination by another medical assessor was held in December 2015. The opinion was that the person concerned was capable of work.

The papers on the case were inadvertently filed away and the matter was not referred at that stage to the Appeals Office. This has now been done and the procedure for processing the appeal will proceed. The appeals office will contact the person concerned directly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy and my Department apologises for the delay in processing the case.

### **Public Services Card**

132. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection why it is necessary to provide an up-to-date Irish passport with an application under the public services card scheme; why an out-of-date passport, where available, is not acceptable as proof of citizenship, particularly where a welfare recipient has no further need for a passport; if he will meet the cost of acquiring a new passport solely for this purpose; and if there is any other avenue available to a person who no longer holds a valid passport but requires proof of citizenship. [18734/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Public Services Card (PSC)

is designed to replace other cards within the public sector such as the social services card and free travel pass and to make it easy for providers of public services to verify the identity of customer. A PSC is issued following a registration process called SAFE, which involves the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of identity data. Details of the registration process and information on the documents which a person should provide are available on the Department's website at [http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Public-Services-Card\\_holder.aspx](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Public-Services-Card_holder.aspx).

Ordinarily, the identity document required for a person who is not an EU citizen is in line with immigration requirements, i.e., a current, valid passport. Out of date documentary evidence is not generally accepted for registration with the exception of Irish and UK passports which may be accepted up to 12 months after their expiry date.

Cases such as that referred to by the Deputy are considered, on a case-by-case basis, by the Department's Client Identity Services Division, and where it is considered appropriate, they are permitted to proceed through the SAFE registration process. This person's case can be so considered if the Deputy is willing to provide their details.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Review**

133. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection to review the provision in the community employment programme for older jobseekers over 62 years of age which restricts the number that an area project manager can employ on a scheme, as it discriminates on the basis of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18766/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Community Employment (CE) is a labour market activation programme which helps long-term unemployed people (those 12-months or more in receipt of a jobseeker's payment) and other disadvantaged groups to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. It is designed to be a temporary fixed-term activation intervention. The programme assists participants to enhance and develop both their technical and personal skills which can then be used in the workplace.

CE is open to participants aged up to 65 years of age who meet the current eligibility criteria. A pilot initiative was introduced in December 2015 to enable those aged 62 and over to extend their participation beyond the standard maximum participation limits (currently set at 6 years cumulative lifetime participation) providing the eligibility conditions are met. Participants aged 62 and over are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the state pension age, subject to satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The total number of places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme is limited to 7% of each scheme's overall budgeted places.

The limitation on such places per scheme is in place to maintain the overall throughput on the programme. The participation limits set allow for the highest utilisation of places amongst qualifying persons and aim to ensure the benefit of these schemes are available to the widest possible number of jobseekers.

My Department is not aware of any issues arising with the limits in place at present. If the Deputy has details of a specific case I would ask that he bring it to the attention of my office. All aspects of the operation of activation programmes are kept under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

134. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the invalidity pension scheme; if same will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18789/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of 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 department received a claim for IP for the person concerned on 29 January 2016. The person concerned was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 27 June 2016 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Eligibility**

135. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to amend and extend the community employment pilot scheme in order to permit participants who are 60 years of age and older to continue their participation beyond the present maximum standard participation limits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18806/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Community Employment (CE) is a labour market activation programme which helps long-term unemployed people (those 12-months or more in receipt of a jobseeker's payment) and other disadvantaged groups to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. It is designed to be a temporary fixed-term activation intervention. The programme assists participants to enhance and develop both their technical and personal skills which can then be used in the workplace.

CE is open to participants aged up to 65 years of age who meet the current eligibility criteria. A pilot initiative was introduced in December 2015 to enable those aged 62 and over to extend their participation beyond the standard maximum participation limits (currently set at 6 years cumulative lifetime participation) providing the eligibility conditions are met. Participants aged 62 and over, are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the State pension age, subject to satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme are limited to 7% of each scheme's overall budgeted places.

With the welcome reductions in the live register, the eligibility criteria for work programmes including CE will be kept under review to ensure that the schemes remains fit for purpose and that the eligibility conditions continue to be appropriate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Free Travel Scheme**

136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the proceedings of the interdepartmental working group between his Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to examine and report on the current and future operation of the free travel scheme, including the removal of the cap; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15828/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The free travel scheme provides free travel for those with eligibility on the main public and private transport services which includes road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 853,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million.

In 2012, during a period of economic uncertainty, my Department along with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, set up an interdepartmental working group to review the free travel scheme. The purpose of the review was to examine and report on the current operation and future development of the free travel scheme. Owing to the range of policy changes implemented since its establishment, the scheme is now universally available to all persons permanently living in the State aged 66 and over as well as carers in receipt of carers allowance and certain others such as persons in receipt of disability allowance and invalidity pension.

The group's report was drafted by October 2014, and it considered a number of potential changes to the free travel scheme, notably options which would reduce its cost by limiting its scope or by the introduction of charges. However, Government policy is strongly supportive of the scheme, and by late 2014 the economy had started to recover and the need to make cost saving changes in respect of this scheme abated. The subsequent publication of the report might have been seen to signal the intention to actively pursue some of the options identified, and would have caused anxiety among vulnerable users of the service. The report drafted was not, therefore, submitted for Government approval and publication.

I am aware that the free travel pass is a valuable support for older people and people with disabilities, and I am committed to its full retention.

With respect to the cap on funding imposed by a previous Government under the National Recovery Plan, 2011-2014, the cap on funding was not extended beyond 2014 and in Budget 2016 an additional €3 million in funding was allocated to the free travel scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

137. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will carry out an impact assessment on the cuts to the one-parent family payment to analyse the impact of these cuts on child poverty and to ascertain if this has directly added to the high poverty levels of children living in one-parent households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15214/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department monitors on an ongoing basis all social welfare income support schemes including the one-parent family payment scheme (OFP).

The majority of customers affected by the reforms to the OFP scheme transitioned to the jobseeker's transitional payment (JST). My Department, at the request of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, intend to carry out a Value for Money review of the JST

scheme and this is due to be completed during 2017.

It is important to highlight that in Budget 2016 OFP recipients gained a 75% Christmas bonus, a €5 increase in Child Benefit and an increase of €2.50 per week in fuel allowance. Those in receipt of that family income supplement (FIS) also benefitted from the increases to the FIS thresholds. Lone parents on JST also gained as a result of the closer alignment of the JST means test with the more generous OFP means test.

My Department published a social impact assessment of the main social welfare and tax measures of Budget 2015 and 2016. The assessment found that the cumulative impact of these budgets on lone parent households fared above that of the average household. The assessment indicated that average income in households where the lone parent is employed will rise by 2.8 per cent, while that of unemployed lone parents will rise by 2.4 per cent.

### Child Poverty

138. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of children living in relative and consistent poverty here; how this compares to the European Union and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14722/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions shows that 134,000 children were living in consistent poverty in 2014 and 222,000 children were at-risk-of-poverty (relative poverty).

Neither Eurostat nor the OECD produces a measure equivalent to the Irish measure of consistent poverty.

Eurostat data find that 209,000 children were living in relative poverty in Ireland in 2014. This is a lower number than the national figure, reflecting minor differences in the income concept and the equivalence scale between the measures. The total number of children in relative poverty in the EU overall in 2014 was estimated by Eurostat at 19.9 million. A comparable OECD figure for 2014 is not available.

Social transfers are a key driver in preventing poverty among children. In 2014, social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the relative poverty rate for children in Ireland from 44.3% to 17% lifting more than a quarter of all children out of income poverty. Ireland was the second best performing EU-28 member state in 2014 in this regard, with a rate 1.6 times the EU average.

The Government set a child poverty target in 2014 in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020. The target is to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020. Meeting this target means lifting over 97,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020.

In support of the target, the Government is implementing a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty, building on the life-cycle approach in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016* and informed by the European Commission Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage'. A range of government departments and other stakeholders are involved in implementing this approach.

### JobPath Implementation

139. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the nature and duration of the contracts and the financial arrangements made with two companies to deliver JobPath; if persons in receipt of disability payments are included; the status of the implementation of JobPath; how he is overseeing the effectiveness of the contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15841/16]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Ireland's Public Employment Service (PES) is managed by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and delivered directly by its own Intreo service as well as by contracted private companies under the JobPath service; the Local Employment Service (LES) and Job Clubs. The JobPath element of the service is a new approach to employment activation designed to support long-term unemployed people and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. My Department has contracted two companies, Turas Nua Limited and Seetec Limited, to deliver JobPath services.

The roll-out of the service commenced on the 20th of July 2015 on a phased basis and the service is now fully rolled out to all 121 Departmental offices. To date c. 38,000 jobseekers have been referred to the JobPath service. Only clients in receipt of a jobseeker payment are referred to JobPath. Clients in receipt of a disability payment are not referred to JobPath.

JobPath is a payment by results model and all set-up and day-to-day operational costs are borne by the companies. Payments are made on a phased basis over a 12 month period in respect of each jobseeker placed into sustained employment. Accordingly the contractors will not be able to fully recover their costs unless they help a sufficient number of jobseekers to secure employment and then support them to sustain that employment over a 12 month period.

The contracts are for six years comprising two consecutive phases, (phase one entails four years of client referrals while phase two entails a 'run off' period during which time no additional clients will be referred). The contracts include options to extend phase one for further periods (up to a maximum of 24 months) at the department's discretion.

The contracts stipulate a significant number of obligations that both companies are required to meet, for example, in terms of the service elements to be delivered and the performance to be achieved. The delivery of these obligations is subject to on-going review and monitoring by the department, including on-site checks and inspections and a customer satisfaction survey to be undertaken by a third party research firm commissioned by the Department. Payments to contractors can be reduced if these inspections and surveys do not yield satisfactory results. Payments can also be reduced if the contractors do not meet their contracted targets with regard to employment outcomes, and if employment growth in the economy exceeds the medium term forecasts of the Department of Finance. Failure by the contractors to improve performance (if they are not meeting contracted target levels for employment outcomes) or to address any service deficiencies identified in the inspections and surveys mentioned above can lead to termination of the contracts.

It is not intended to publish the individual fees agreed with the JobPath contractors as these are commercially sensitive and to do so would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts now in place and any future procurement that may be undertaken.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **International Agreements**

140. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the implica-

tions for the working of the European Court of Human Rights and the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement arising from the British decision to leave the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18765/16]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** There is no change to the status of the Good Friday Agreement or the workings of the European Court of Human Rights arising from the result of the UK referendum of the EU last week.

As reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and the subsequent agreements, including the 2014 Stormont House and the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, is a priority for the Government.

Following the referendum result on Friday, I spoke with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and we both agreed that the Good Friday Agreement and its institutions remain central to both Governments' approach to Northern Ireland.

The Government will seek to ensure that future EU-UK and Ireland-UK negotiations give priority attention to the Northern Ireland dimension. This includes issues relating to the border and EU funding. During such negotiations we would actively seek to avoid the introduction of any new measures that could negatively impact on the Border region, either North or South.

It is important to underline that we do not envisage any immediate changes to EU funded Cooperation Programmes involving Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These include the current round of PEACE and INTERREG Programmes under the European Regional Development Fund which are managed on a North-South basis by the Special EU Programmes Body, which reports to the North-South Ministerial Council.

On the specific issue of the operation of the European Court of Human Rights, the UK remains a party to the European Convention of Human Rights under which the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe are established. This Convention system is separate and distinct to the European Union, and the referendum result has no impact on the UK's participation in that system.

The protection of human rights in Northern Ireland law, incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights, is one of the key principles underpinning the Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement is clear that there is an obligation to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into Northern Ireland law and this is an ongoing obligation.

The Government has underlined this obligation in the context of British Government proposals to repeal the UK Human Rights Act, which incorporates the ECHR into domestic law and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government takes very seriously its responsibility to safeguard its institutions and principles including in the area of human rights. We will continue to work closely with the UK Government and with the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that the protection of human rights remains at the heart of civic life, politics and ongoing societal change in Northern Ireland.

### **Passport Applications**

141. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he expects an increase in applications for Irish passports from British citizens as a result of the British intention to leave the European Union; his plans to ensure the Passport Office is ad-

equately resourced for an increase in applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18807/16]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Since the referendum result there has been a notable increase in queries concerning Irish passports from Northern Ireland, Great Britain and elsewhere. However, it is too early as yet to identify the precise impact of the outcome in terms of the volume of passport applications. Statistics relating to applications are usually compiled on a monthly basis.

I would like to underline that there is no need for concern in terms of freedom of movement or entitlement to an Irish passport. The process of negotiation to enable the United Kingdom to leave the European Union is likely to take two years as envisaged under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty and once the article is triggered. During this period, the United Kingdom remains a member of the European Union, and its citizens continue to enjoy full rights including freedom of movement within the EU. At the same time, the referendum has not in any way changed the entitlement to an Irish passport including as it extends to those people born on the island of Ireland and those with Irish citizenship through parents or grandparents born in Ireland.

I would urge people who have concerns about freedom of movement within the European Union and those who are interested in applying for an Irish passport for the first time to get the full facts and research their particular situation before contacting the Passport Service. Full information on passport entitlements and procedures is available on the website of the Department at [www.dfa.ie](http://www.dfa.ie).

First-time applicants might also keep in mind that this is peak season and unless a passport is needed for urgent travel reasons the timing of an application should be considered.

My Department will closely monitor the situation with respect to the impact of the referendum outcome on the level of applications for Irish passports. Passport Service staff and other resources will be re-deployed as needed to deal with an increase in applications, if sustained.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

142. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of rent he is paying for the Intreo centre at Fairgreen in County Galway; the terms of the lease; the nature of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18679/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** The Commissioners of Public Works hold a 10-year lease at the Sean Duggan Building, Fairgreen Galway at an annual rent of €583,065.35 + VAT. The building is occupied by the Department of Social Protection Intreo Office.

### **Flood Prevention Measures**

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects to be in a position to produce a flood alleviation, defence and prevention plan, in the short term, to deal with possible flood issues arising next winter and over the longer term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18776/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** Local flooding issues are matters for the local authority concerned to investigate and address in the first instance and it is open to them to carry out flood mitigation works using their

own resources.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) operates a Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. Local Authorities may apply to the OPW for funding having regard to cost benefit eligibility criteria. Application forms are available on the OPW's website under Flood Risk Management and decisions are made having regard to the overall availability of funding for flood risk management and are assessed on a case by case basis. This administrative Scheme's eligibility criteria, including cost benefit requirements, are published on the OPW website; [www.opw.ie](http://www.opw.ie).

Good progress is being made on the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW working in partnership with the local authorities. The Programme involves the production of predictive flood partnership with the local authorities. The Programme involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each Area for Further Assessment (AFA), the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of flood risk management plans.

The draft flood mapping is now being finalised following completion of the national statutory public consultation on 23rd December 2015. Work on the development of preliminary options to address flood risk is underway. Following finalisation of the mapping and the identification of flood risk management options, the final output from this important project will be integrated Flood Risk Management Plans containing specific measures to address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risks identified. The draft Plans are scheduled to be made available for public consultation from mid-2016. Following the public consultation process the finalised Plans will include a prioritised list of measures, both structural and non-structural, to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner.

The Government recently announced increased levels of investment in the area of flood relief as part of the overall Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021 and this investment programme will allow for consideration of measures arising from the Flood Risk Management Plans.

### Flood Prevention Measures

144. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18768/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** The River Flesk, which flows through the area mentioned, does not form part of any Arterial Drainage Scheme which would fall under the remit of the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act. The OPW therefore has no responsibility for the maintenance of this river or any bridges crossing it.

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and Kerry County Council may carry out flood mitigation works using its own resources. The Office of Public Works operates a Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This administrative Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial are published on the OPW website, [www.opw.ie](http://www.opw.ie). It is open to the Council to submit a funding application under the Scheme. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the overall availability of resources for flood risk management and the scheme's eligibility criteria.

## Natural Heritage Areas Designation

145. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if and when she will designate the Curragh Plains a natural heritage area as requested by Kildare County Council. [18643/16]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department has prioritised the designations required by the EU Nature Directives. While the Curragh was included on a list of proposed Natural Heritage Areas in the 1990s and a review of this network is foreseen, this will not take place in the immediate future, having regard to the available resources.

## Gaeltacht Policy

146. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will continue to provide supports to an Údarás na Gaeltachta client company (details supplied) following the company having had its certified approval to deliver industry specific training withdrawn; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18751/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne):** I understand from Údarás na Gaeltachta that the company referred to by the Deputy has been a valued client and tenant of an tÚdarás since 2009. Údarás na Gaeltachta is aware of the present difficulties that the company has in relation to certification of its core industry specific training courses. I am informed that the management of the company has kept in regular contact with an tÚdarás as the company continues to seek a resolution and that an tÚdarás will endeavour to provide whatever assistance possible, within its existing schemes and rules and regulations, to the company, on an ongoing basis.

I have also been informed that an tÚdarás is hopeful a resolution can be found through an early certification audit and that its client, through a successful audit, can sustain and develop its business in the Donegal Gaeltacht.

## Home Care Packages Provision

147. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health why a person (details supplied) has not received the home care help that his Department authorised in April 2016. [18656/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

## Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

148. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health to expedite an order for specialised footwear for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18566/16]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the particular issue raised relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to

you. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

149. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the case of a person (details supplied) who has medical difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18573/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Blood Donations**

150. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health his plans to lift a ban on blood donations from gay men and to bring Ireland into line with Northern Ireland, which lifted a lifetime ban in June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18576/16]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Having reviewed the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) report regarding a change in deferral policies for blood donation by men who have sex with men, I am accepting their recommendation to reduce the current lifelong ban from donating blood to a one-year deferral, and also to defer those with a history of a sexually transmitted infection for five years after that infection. The change to a one-year deferral, when implemented, will bring Ireland in to line with a similar deferral policy to commence in September this year in Northern Ireland and similar policies which are in place in a number of other European countries and elsewhere.

I have asked the IBTS to continue to engage with my officials on the development of a robust plan to support the implementation of this change in blood donation policy and to communicate the policy change, its rationale and its implications, clearly to all potential blood donors, recipients of blood products and the general public. I will announce a date for implementation of the amended policy once the implementation plan is agreed.

### **Health Services**

151. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the health care system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18577/16]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the matters raised by the Dep-

uty, a key commitment of the Programme for a Partnership Government is the establishment of the Oireachtas Committee to develop cross party consensus on the future of the health service. As I have said, I believe the health service would benefit enormously from a single unifying vision that we can all get behind and that can help to drive reform and development of the system over the next ten years. I'm pleased that the House agreed to move ahead quickly on this and get the committee up and running. We all know that the health service faces many challenges. The Programme for Partnership Government acknowledges that we have an ageing population who are living longer, whose needs will become greater and more diverse, and that we also have the highest birth rate in Europe. All of us, as citizens, at some point in our lives, will need to access our health services, and so we have a common interest in finding a common way forward in improving and developing our health services.

### Medical Card Eligibility

152. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if he will list spinal cord injuries as long-term illnesses with an automatic entitlement to a medical card in view of representation from the Spinal Injuries Ireland panel. [18579/16]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme, which are as follows: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme.

Under the Drugs Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

Under the provisions of the Health Acts, medical cards are provided to persons who are unable, without undue hardship, to arrange health services for themselves and their dependants.

I can clarify to the Deputy that the legislation does not have a provision for the HSE to award a medical card to persons by virtue of an illness or a medical condition. However, where an applicant's means are above the qualifying financial thresholds, the HSE routinely examines for indications of medical or social circumstances which might result in undue financial hardship in arranging medical services and, exercising discretion, may grant eligibility for a medical card on this basis.

The Deputy may be aware of the "Keane" *Report of the Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility*, which made a recommendation that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. It also recommended that it is neither feasible nor desirable to list conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility.

Following the Keane report, the Clinical Advisory Group (CAG) on medical card eligibility was established by the Director General of the HSE to provide clinical oversight and guidance to the operation of a more compassionate and trusted medical card system which can strive to ensure that the relatively small percentage of cases requiring the recognition of the burden of a medical condition(s), over and above financial hardship, can be accommodated. The Group is continuing its work on the development of guidance on assessing medical card applications

involving significant medical conditions.

As a result of a range of improvements on foot of the Keane Report, the HSE is exercising greater discretion, as is evident in the increase in the number of discretionary medical cards in circulation - by about 102% - from about 52,000 in mid-2014 to 106,174 at 1 June 2016.

### Mental Health Services Data

153. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of admissions under the Mental Health Acts that had their status regraded from voluntary to involuntary and the number of admissions that had their status regraded from involuntary to voluntary for each of the years 2012 to 2015, inclusive, and in 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18582/16]

154. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients admitted involuntarily for each of the years 2012 to 2015, inclusive, and in 2016 to date, who did not have a tribunal review their detention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18585/16]

163. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of admission orders revoked under the Mental Health Acts before a mental health tribunal was held for each of the years 2014 and 2015 and 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18649/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 153, 154 and 163 together.

Figures sought by the Deputy for the years 2012 to 2016 are set out in the table:

Year	Numbers regraded from Voluntary to Involuntary Status	Number of Admissions and Renewal Orders revoked before Mental Health Tribunal is held	Number of Admissions and Renewal orders revoked at Mental Health Tribunal
2012	567	1530	142
2013	541	1457	171
2014	507	1514	149
2015	608	1661	170
2016	188*	428*	72*

\* Figures to end April 2016

Section 28 of the Mental Health Act 2001 provides that the consultant psychiatrist responsible for the patient shall revoke an order where they become of the opinion that the patient is no longer suffering from a mental disorder as defined in the Act. The figures for admission and renewal orders revoked by the responsible consultant psychiatrist under the provisions of Section 28 for each year from 2012 to date are listed in the table above. Figures for the numbers of involuntary patients who, having had their admission or renewal order revoked, sought to have their Mental Health Tribunal take place are not readily available. I will pass these figures on to the Deputy when they are provided to me.

### Hospital Appointments Status

155. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health to expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied). [18587/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

156. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for an appointment. [18589/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Patient Transfers**

157. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can transfer from Waterford University Hospital to a Dublin hospital dealing with orthopaedics. [18590/16]

**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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

## Disability Services Provision

158. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in a person (details supplied) receiving an appointment for speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18591/16]

**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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

## Hospital Waiting Lists

159. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18598/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

## Hospital Waiting Lists

160. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to be called for an assessment. [18619/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Hospital Accommodation Provision**

161. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health to examine the delay being experienced by a person (details supplied) who has been awaiting discharge from Tallaght hospital for the past ten weeks and admission to the dementia unit in Cherry Orchard Hospital. [18634/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

### **Tobacco Control Measures**

162. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will not permit the introduction of any novel tobacco product such as heated tobacco products here unless it can be independently proven that it cannot be smoked like a traditional cigarette and the product does not release second hand-smoke emissions as the World Health Organization warns that there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18640/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):** Novel tobacco products are regulated under the European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016 which transposed the European Tobacco Products Directive 2014/40/EU. The Regulations do not provide for an authorisation system for novel products but manufacturers or importers of these products are required to notify the Health Service Executive (the Executive) of any such product they intend to place on the market in Ireland. The notification must be submitted 6 months prior to placing the novel product on the market and be accompanied by a detailed description of the product concerned as well as instructions for its use and information on its ingredients and emissions.

A manufacturer or importer of a novel tobacco product must also submit available scientific studies on toxicity, addictiveness and attractiveness of the product and studies and market research on the preferences of various consumer groups, including young people and current smokers. They must also provide a risk-benefit analysis of the product, its expected effects on cessation of tobacco consumption, initiation of tobacco consumption and predicted consumer perception.

Furthermore, a novel tobacco product must comply with all other relevant provisions of the European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016 and other existing Irish tobacco control legislation.

*Question Nos. 163 answered with Question no. 153.*

### **Motorised Transport Grant Closure**

164. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to replace or restore the motorised transport grant which was abolished in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18653/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Conscious of reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Schemes in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes. Both schemes remain closed.

However, the Government also decided that monthly payments will continue to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time the scheme closed, on the basis that this would prevent hardship and, on an interim basis, alleviate stress, anxiety and uncertainty among a vulnerable group in society.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Department is seeking a solution which would best meet the aim of supporting people with severe disabilities who require additional income to contribute towards the cost of their mobility needs, while remaining within the available budget and satisfying all legal and equality concerns.

Work is ongoing on the policy proposals to be brought to Government for the drafting of primary legislation for a new scheme. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with the greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and it is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Programme for Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

165. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will secure a residential placement for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18657/16]

**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. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, the Deputy can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

### **Legislative Measures**

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Autism Bill (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18663/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** In March 2013, a Private Members Bill entitled the Autism Bill 2012 was debated and passed, unopposed by Government, to Second Stage in the Dáil. As a Private Members Bill, however, it did not form part of the Government's legislative programme. The Oireachtas has advised that all Private Members legislation has fallen following the dissolution of the Dáil.

Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that the Government is already committed under the National Disability Strategy (NDS) to ensuring that people with autism are empowered by policy and programmes to participate meaningfully as citizens in Irish society. The NDS is driven by this basic but fundamentally important objective and is the most effective combination of legislation, policies, institutional arrangements and services to support and reinforce equal participation for all people with disabilities.

The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy has been examining issues around autism across Government Departments in association with the National Disability Authority (NDA). This work by the NDA, which has included consultation with families, has been of significant assistance in informing how best to address the needs of people with ASD, so that we can be sure that they are appropriately reflected and included in policies and actions. The proposed approach was also discussed with the National Disability Strategy Steering Group.

A programme of specific measures has now been agreed for delivery by the relevant Government Departments and agencies, including actions to be delivered by the NDA.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration**

167. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware that the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 requires the Health Service Executive (HSE) to place the cost of care in long-term residential care and for the components that make up the cost before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and why this has not happened since March 2011 when the HSE last published the fees payable to its nursing homes for care provision. [18664/16]

168. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he has concerns regarding breaches of competition law by his Department and the Health Service Executive in relation to the cost of care in State run nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18665/16]

169. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health why a report promised in a reply to a Parliamentary Question in February 2015 has not been published; his views on the review of costs undertaken and its conclusions; and if he agrees with the former Minister who stated the review would lead to good practice and value for money actions being embedded

within spending for care in Health Service Executive nursing homes. [18666/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 to 169, inclusive, together.

In relation to the cost of care in public residential facilities, the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act, 2009 provides that the components that make up the cost of care must be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas, and the HSE has complied with this requirement. There is no legal obligation under the Act for the HSE to publish the public cost of care.

Over the past number of years the cost of care for public nursing homes under the Scheme as published on the HSE website has not been updated as the HSE was undergoing a process to review all costs associated with both long stay and short stay care services provided in public facilities. This work was acknowledged in the Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, which was published by the Department of Health in July 2015. The HSE will, however, publish the cost of care for public residential care centres in September 2016 as part of a process to provide additional information on its services to the public.

It should be noted that more complex and highly dependent residents are catered for by the public system whereby private nursing homes may not have the available skillset and multi-disciplinary personnel to cater for such complex needs. From an acute hospital discharge perspective the challenge to find suitable placements for those with more complex needs is often resolved in public centres where nurse staffing levels in particular can cater for their needs.

In addition, conditions of employment and tenure differ between private and public residential care facilities. Negotiations relating to the review of costs referred to by the Deputy, as mentioned in a reply to a Parliamentary Question in February 2015, have extended longer than anticipated. As part of the process to review and bring consistency to pay costs in public facilities, the HSE has been engaged in extensive negotiations with staff organisations to agree consistent staffing levels and mix in public centres. To date it has not been possible to get agreement despite extensive discussions under the auspices of the Haddington Road Agreement and the Joint Oversight Group. The HSE is now considering its options to focus on those centres with a higher cost of care and will also continue to strive to reach an overall framework agreement with the staff representative organisations.

It is important that public facilities operate as efficiently and economically as possible, and towards that end the Department of Health will conduct a Value for Money Review of public nursing home costs to identify more fully the factors that may be increasing costs and any areas that require correction.

I am not aware of any breaches of competition law arising in this context.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

170. **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. [18678/16]

**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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Hospital Beds Data**

171. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 326 of 20 April 2016, the number of hospital beds required by the number of patients undergoing full and partial lower limb amputation procedures in 2014 and 2015 by county, in tabular form. [18683/16]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **National Drugs Strategy Implementation**

172. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health for an update on the prevention pillar of the national drugs strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18741/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The overall objective of the National Drugs Strategy is to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs through a concerted focus on the five pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. Periodic reviews of progress of the actions of the current Strategy are carried out through the Oversight Forum on Drugs, which I chair. The 2015 progress report on the implementation of the actions of the National Drugs Strategy is available on the Department's website at [www.health.gov.ie](http://www.health.gov.ie).

Prevention programmes constitute a significant part of the Government's response to the drug problem, particularly among young persons. Substance use education in schools is provided in the context of Social Personal and Health Education. Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces operate a range of education and prevention programmes in non-school settings, which aim to promote healthier lifestyle choices among young people and other vulnerable groups at risk of problem drug use. In addition, young people at risk of drug misuse can access diversionary programmes, facilities and services and family support. More information in relation to these initiatives, as well as information campaigns and harm reduction initiatives undertaken by the Health Service Executive, is available in the 2015 progress report on the Strategy referred to above.

Finally, my Department has commenced work on the development of a new Strategy for the period after 2016. This process will involve a comprehensive consultation with key stakeholders and the public on the current national drugs policy and future priorities. A Steering Committee with an independent chair has been set up to oversee the development of the new Strategy and focus groups have been established to advise the Committee on priorities for the next Strategy, which will include education and prevention measures.

*Question No. 173 withdrawn.*

### **National Drugs Strategy**

174. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his views on the efficacy of the national drugs strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18743/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 is a cross cutting area of public policy and service delivery, which requires a coordinated multi-sectoral approach to tackling the drugs problem. Periodic reviews of progress of the actions of the current Strategy are carried out through the Oversight Forum on Drugs, which I chair. The 2015 progress report on the implementation of the actions of the National Drugs Strategy is available on the Department's website *www.health.gov.ie*.

As the Deputy will be aware, a Steering Committee has been established to advise me on a new National Drugs Strategy, which will take effect in 2017 when the current policy expires. A high level review of the current Strategy has been undertaken by a panel of international experts as part of this process, which includes consideration of the overall impact of the Strategy in tackling the drugs problem in Ireland and on progress in terms of developments internationally. The final report of the expert panel, which is expected shortly, will assist the Steering Committee in determining how the new Strategy should address problem drug use to meet the challenges ahead.

### **National Drugs Strategy Implementation**

175. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of the working group that was meant to be established to enhance the prevention pillar in non-school settings in the national drugs strategy. [18744/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The matter raised by the Deputy relates to an action in the 2001-2008 National Drugs Strategy, which has been superseded by the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016.

### **Pension Provisions**

176. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his views on issues (details supplied) regarding health insurance matters for members of the Defence Forces; and if he will review the regulations for lifetime community rating loadings so that those in the Defence Forces will not be subject to the penalty loadings for not taking out insurance policies that they do not need. [18764/16]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Community rating, reflecting the principle of intergenerational solidarity, is a fundamental cornerstone of the Irish health insurance system. This means that people who are old or sick do not have to pay more for health insurance than the young and healthy. Lifetime Community Rating (LCR) came into effect on 1 May 2015 and is designed to encourage people to join the private health insurance market at an earlier age and thus support affordable community-rated premiums for everyone who wishes to purchase insurance. Late entry loadings of 2% per annum now apply for people who buy health insurance for the first time at the age of 35 and older.

For the purposes of LCR, an insured person must have a continuous period of cover under an in-patient indemnity health insurance contract effected by a registered undertaking. The arrangements in place for Commissioned Officers in the Defence Forces, which include the reimbursement of fees incurred when members require medical treatment, do not fulfil the definition of a health insurance contract provided by a registered undertaking. The arrangements

do not comply with health insurance legislation or the key principles of community rating, open enrolment, lifetime cover and minimum benefit on which the Irish private health insurance regulatory system is based.

Section 7 of S.I. 312 of 2014, the enabling legislation for Lifetime Community Rating, explicitly provides for a review of the Scheme to be carried out by the Health Insurance Authority (HIA) after 30 April 2017. This review will provide the appropriate opportunity to consider the wider implications of LCR and address any issues that may arise from the operation of the Scheme as currently provided in the Regulations. My Department has shared the details of previous discussions with the Department of Defence on this matter with the HIA and will continue to highlight any concerns raised for consideration as part of its planned independent review of the Regulations in 2017.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18808/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18809/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### Hospital Appointments Status

179. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18810/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### Hospital Waiting Lists

180. **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. [18811/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### Hospital Waiting Lists

181. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18812/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

182. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18813/16]

**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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

183. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health to initiate and complete as a matter of urgency an independent review of the delivery of the ambulance service with a special focus on rural areas; to focus immediately on establishing cardiac and medical emergency first responders through all avenues such as the fire service, voluntary emergency services and community responders, given that the management of the National Ambulance Service remains insufficient to ensure adequate cover and to achieve the eight-minute response target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18814/16]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Ambulance Service (NAS) has been the subject of three separate independent reviews in recent years. The first of these, HIQA's review of NAS governance arrangements, was published in December 2014. The second, the NAS Capacity review, which examined overall resource levels and the distribution of resources against demand and activity, was published recently. The third review, an independent review of services in the greater Dublin area, was jointly commissioned by the HSE and Dublin City Council; this review is expected to be completed shortly.

An action plan addressing the recommendations of the HIQA and Capacity reviews is currently being implemented. On completion of the Dublin service review the action plan will be updated, as appropriate.

The Capacity Review makes it clear that we need a very significant programme of investment in our ambulance services. In that context, a phased investment in a multi-annual programme involving manpower, vehicles and technology is required. The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for Partnership Government commits to additional annual investment in terms of ambulance personnel and vehicles. In 2016, additional funding of €7.2m has been provided for the NAS which includes €2m for new developments.

The Capacity Review identifies particular difficulties serving rural areas. Population density in Ireland is significantly different to that of many other countries. Outside the greater Dublin area, the population is widely dispersed with a relatively large population living in rural areas. Because of this population distribution, Ireland has a far higher percentage of activity in rural areas than other ambulance services.

The report recommends expansion of the Community First Responders (CFR) scheme as a means to address the needs of rural communities. This had also been recommended in the 2014 HIQA report. The Deputy may wish to note that the CFR scheme has been expanded in recent years and currently 135 groups are operating in 18 counties nationally. Additional funding of €0.3m has been provided in 2016 for further expansion of the scheme.

In relation to support from the Fire Services, the position is that a significant degree of co-operation already exists between the NAS and the Fire Services in providing an emergency first responder service. However, there may be scope to further utilise fire services as a first responder for certain types of calls, where this is warranted. This will be explored with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and local authorities.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

184. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18815/16]

**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. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

### **Food Labelling**

185. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the fine of €16,000 imposed on a company (details supplied) for mislabelling the origin of beef

products is an adequate response to the food safety and farmer welfare issues involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18569/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The FSAI is the body responsible for enforcement of regulations governing traceability, labelling and provision of food information to customers. The case referred to by the Deputy was prosecuted at Navan District Court following an investigation conducted by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and Meath County Council.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of the case as it is a matter for the bodies who brought this prosecution, and the penalties applied are a matter for the Courts.

Nonetheless a successful prosecution such as this shows that bodies responsible for the enforcement of labelling legislation are utilising the relevant legislative powers to enforce the law in this area. Customers have the right to assure themselves that the food they consume is labelled authentically and that the integrity of the supply chain has not been compromised.

It is imperative that food businesses ensure that they have robust traceability systems in place to check that the appropriate food safety systems and compliance with the law are assured. I assign the highest priority to this issue to ensure continued confidence in our agri-food industry, and my Department continues to work with all stakeholders to ensure the highest standards continue to be enforced across the sector.

### **Livestock Theft**

186. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he is putting in place to support farmers who have had livestock stolen, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan, where in some instances farmers have endured multiple thefts of livestock; the action he is taking on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18580/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The theft of livestock is primarily a matter for the Garda Síochána and any incident involving the theft of livestock should be reported to the Garda Síochána in the first instance. Officers of my Department assist with investigations when requested to do so by the Garda. There is also close liaison with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland aimed at addressing the issue of stolen livestock. In this regard, a cross border liaison Group comprising my Department's Investigation Division, gardaí and the PSNI liaise and investigate the theft of livestock on an all-Ireland basis.

Stolen cattle cannot be traded legally in the State as all bovines must bear official ear tags, be properly registered and be located on my Department's Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) database in the herd of the individual moving or selling the bovine. When cattle are reported as stolen to my Department, they are marked on the AIM database as being stolen on foot of a Garda report. If these animals are presented anywhere in the State for sale, slaughter or export they are checked against the database and will be rejected at these outlets and an investigation initiated.

### **Young Farmers Scheme**

187. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who have been accepted by his Department under the young farmer

scheme and the value of entitlements which have been allocated to them, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18583/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information sought will be compiled by my Department and forwarded directly to the Deputy at the earliest opportunity.

### Young Farmers Scheme

188. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who have been accepted by his Department under the old young farmer scheme and the value of entitlements which have been allocated to them, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18584/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** To date my Department have accepted 260 applications under the “Old” Young Farmer category of the 2015 National Reserve. The number of successful applicants per county, and the value of entitlements allocated to them under the 2015 National Reserve is set out in tabular format:

County	Number of Successful Applicants (to date) Under Old Young Farmer Category of the National Reserve	Value of National Reserve Allocation
CARLOW	5	€15,059.88
CAVAN	4	€8,228.91
CLARE	15	€30,699.14
CORK	30	€104,000.31
DONEGAL	22	€84,208.06
DUBLIN	0	€0.00
GALWAY	15	€50,801.31
KERRY	23	€118,335.59
KILDARE	5	€31,585.10
KILKENNY	8	€39,124.43
LAOIS	8	€28,478.89
LEITRIM	17	€66,822.26
LIMERICK	17	€48,573.84
LONGFORD	6	€9,243.84
LOUTH	0	€0.00
MAYO	17	€49,281.02
MEATH	8	€25,482.07
MONAGHAN	5	€11,823.29
OFFALY	7	€32,691.34
ROSCOMMON	11	€35,755.93
SLIGO	8	€27,826.28
TIPPERARY	12	€52,417.88
WATERFORD	2	€7,152.19

County	Number of Successful Applicants (to date) Under Old Young Farmer Category of the National Reserve	Value of National Reserve Allocation
WESTMEATH	4	€7,597.16
WEXFORD	8	€38,123.94
WICKLOW	3	€5,719.00

### Crop Losses

189. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to reconsider the decision to refuse compensation to a person (details supplied) for lost crops which has resulted in financial hardship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18623/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named has submitted applications to my Department under the Fodder Aid Scheme and the Emergency Flood Damage Relief Measure. These schemes were introduced by my Department as part of the targeted response to the flooding in December 2015 and January 2016.

The Terms and Conditions of the Fodder Aid scheme list the eligible feedstuffs considered for aid under the scheme as silage, hay, straw and concentrates. Therefore, losses to other sources of feed on a holding such as crops in the ground do not qualify for support under this scheme.

The terms and conditions of the Emergency Flood Damage Relief Measure, introduced to support those that had faced the brunt of the flooding difficulties, set out that support is available to farmers under 3 categories:

- a) loss of livestock,
- b) damage to fixed agricultural structures and fittings, and
- c) the necessity to move livestock to alternate housing (excluding the cost of feed).

Given that the applications of the person named related to the loss of a crop, the applications were not eligible for compensation under the terms of either scheme. The person named has been advised of the decisions in each case, and advised of the appeal options available.

### Coillte Teoranta

190. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if only qualified Coillte Teoranta instructors are permitted to provide chainsaw courses on Coillte-owned property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18635/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Coillte Teoranta was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the provision of training to its staff, are the responsibility of the company.

Coillte has, however, confirmed that only qualified Coillte Teoranta instructors are permitted to provide chainsaw courses on Coillte owned property. Coillte advise that it made the decision not to facilitate requests from private training companies/instructors to provide such

training on their forest estate predominantly due to the level of risk associated with the uncertainty around the accreditation of those performing the training and the commercial viability of the business case.

### Fishing Vessel Licences

191. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the current 100% replacement capacity rule operated by his Department (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18661/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy may be aware, under the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003, the functions of sea-fishing boat licensing were transferred from the Minister to the Licensing Authority for Sea-fishing Boats, which operates on an independent basis subject to criteria set out in that Act and Ministerial Policy Directives. All applications for sea-fishing boat licences are considered by the Licensing Authority.

As Minister I have responsibility for policy in relation to sea-fishing boat licensing under Section 3(3) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003, as amended by Section 99 of the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006. In this context and, as referred to above, Section 3 of the Act makes provision for Ministerial Policy Directives to issue to the independent Licensing Authority for Sea-fishing Boats. I am, however, precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to individual cases, or a group of cases, with which the Licensing Authority is or may be concerned under Section 3(5) of the 2003 Act.

In relation to policy, the 100% capacity rule referred to by the Deputy is laid down in Regulation (EU) 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) which came into force on 1 January 2014 and which requires that the entry of new capacity into Member States' fleets must be compensated by the previous withdrawal of at least the same amount of capacity. This is known as the "Entry/Exit" regime.

Safety Tonnage was a provision of the previous Regulation (EC) 2371/2002 on the CFP, which allowed for an increase in the gross tonnage of a fishing vessel which was not subject to the "Entry/Exit Regime" referred to above, where the increase in gross tonnage resulted exclusively from modifications to improve safety on board, working conditions, hygiene or product quality but did not increase the fishing effort of the vessel. As the Deputy is aware, there is no provision for Safety Tonnage in the current CFP Regulation, 1380/2013. Therefore, any increases in vessel capacity (for whatever purpose) must be balanced with the provision of the equivalent amount of replacement capacity.

I have received proposals from a Producer Organisation (PO) in relation to replacement capacity for certain ring-fenced fisheries. In summary, these proposals relate to the possibility of reducing the requirement to provide 100% replacement capacity with the relevant track record to 80% (the balance being sourced from capacity without track record). The Deputy will appreciate that any amendments to current licensing policy such as these have to be carefully considered and analysed. I am committed to examining these proposals in detail and, in this regard, Department officials are at present examining thoroughly the potential impacts of these proposals on fleet policy. This process involves, *inter alia*, an evaluation and impact analysis and is ongoing currently.

Once the analysis is completed, my Department proposes to circulate a paper incorporating these proposals to POs for their views. Depending on the views received from the POs, a deci-

sion will then be made on whether the matter goes to full consultation with all stakeholders.

### **Dairy Sector**

192. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the €15,000 cashflow loan proposal to farmers who experienced financial difficulties as a result of the milk superlevy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18682/16]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am fully aware of the pressures on farmers right now and I have committed to working with all the stakeholders, both at national and EU level, to address these issues and ensure that we continue to have a sustainable and resilient sector. One of my priorities is to support the provision of lower-cost, more flexible finance for the sector. Access to finance was discussed at the Dairy Forum on 21 June, with an exchange of views with the main banks now a part of the agenda at each meeting. Before the meeting I formally launched the Dairy Forum's 'Financial Management Initiative', a programme of cash flow and financial management training and advice for dairy farmers. I believe that equipping farmers with better financial planning skills is essential and I am encouraging all farmers to engage with this initiative.

Access to finance was also discussed at the meeting of the Food Wise 2025 High Level Implementation Committee earlier this month which I chaired. This meeting was a good engagement with representatives of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the Irish Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF). Both are now active in the market and my Department, in cooperation with all the other State bodies, will continue to explore additional funding mechanisms for farmers, the agri-food sector and for SMEs generally.

I also recently met with the CEOs of the main banks and stressed the need for them to be flexible in the context of increased income volatility. The banks assure me that they recognise and are responding to the challenges facing farmers in this regard. In addition, my Department is about to publish a request for tender to procure an ex-ante assessment to assess any current failures in the access to finance market in Ireland. This is a first step towards the potential introduction of Financial Instruments under the Rural Development Programme.

With specific reference to the more flexible State aid support announced by the EU Commission, I am working with all the financial institutions, particularly SBCI, to identify new solutions to working capital finance for farmers experiencing liquidity gaps. At this week's Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting I asked the Commissioner to consider the deployment of a further targeted aid package, similar to that provided last September which gave considerable flexibility to Member States to adopt responses suited to their national circumstances, and I believe such a measure could play a further important role in 2016. The key word here is flexibility and I have called on the Commission to provide flexibility for MS to deploy the targeted aid in accordance with their needs.

### **Better Energy Homes Scheme**

193. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to make further funding allocations available in 2016 for Waterford City and County Council towards the energy bureau of Waterford Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18620/16]

194. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural

Resources if and when he will make funding available under energy efficiency and renewable energy technology for a project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18622/16]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 194 together.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Communities scheme on behalf of my Department. This scheme aims to support and encourage community based partnerships to improve the energy efficiency of homes, businesses and community facilities in a local area. Local Authorities actively participate in this scheme. To date the scheme has supported the upgrade of more than 12,000 homes and several hundred shared community facilities, including sports clubs, community centres and childcare facilities.

Under this year's scheme, €20 million in grant support has been awarded to 38 community groups. This will provide for energy efficiency upgrades to more than 2,600 homes and almost 300 community and commercial facilities. The total investment in energy efficiency, including funding from local communities themselves, is almost €48 million, which will support an estimated 700 direct and indirect jobs right across the country.

If the Deputy is referring to the application made by Waterford Energy Bureau, on behalf of Waterford City and County Council, for funding under this year's Better Energy Communities scheme, I would like to note that SEAI have informed me that their application was high quality but was unfortunately unsuccessful due to the very high standard of applications.

All applications to the Better Energy Communities Scheme are assessed in a competitive process operated by SEAI and neither I, nor my Department, have any function in relation to the evaluation or selection of projects. This competitive process is fully transparent and I would urge any unsuccessful applicants to contact SEAI directly for feedback in relation to their application, which may assist in any future applications for support.

Any homes that are owned by an approved housing association, such as the Saint Vincent de Paul, are eligible for inclusion in the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme, which, based on defined eligibility criteria, provides a range of energy efficiency measures to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. The homes of the scheme beneficiaries are retrofitted free of charge, thus making those homes more energy efficient. The measures available include draught proofing, attic insulation, lagging jackets for hot water tanks, low energy light bulbs and cavity wall insulation. Since the scheme commenced in 2000, 123,174 homes around the country have received energy efficiency measures at a cost to the Exchequer of €161.75m. €16.5m has been allocated to the scheme for 2016.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

195. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if there is a cost differential to the State in defining a minimum 100 Mbps broadband speed rather than a 30 Mbps broadband speed for the roll-out of the national broadband plan; and, if so, what is that differential. [18637/16]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. Delivery of high speed broadband is a strategic priority under the Programme for a Partnership Government. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment is not forthcoming.

The State intervention to address the identified deficit in access to High Speed Broadband in Ireland was guided by a set of intervention principles that are aligned with the State Aid Guidelines (SAG) namely:

- technology neutrality
- use of existing infrastructure
- effective wholesale access
- step change in broadband availability
- step change in broadband customer experience
- future-proofed technology.

In order to assess the case for intervention the Department conducted detailed cost modelling and financial appraisal models over very complex design simulations. The costings and key assumptions have been used to design the National Broadband Plan (NBP) Intervention Strategy. These key assumptions form part of the bid evaluation within the procurement process and if publically made known would undermine the integrity of a competitive procurement process.

The Broadband Intervention strategy for Ireland available on my Department's website sets out a detailed service specification including a requirement that the State-funded network must:

- be capable of delivering high-quality, high speed broadband of at least 30mbps download and 6mbps upload to all citizens.
- be capable of catering for higher performance in the future so as to keep pace with consumer demand.
- ensure the availability of high quality wholesale services to allow retail competition to develop

The emphasis therefore is on putting in place a high quality infrastructure network capable of being scaled up to meet current and future demand, with 30Mbps as a minimum rather than a ceiling for consumers.

In addition, the intervention strategy also requires measures to meet the specific needs of businesses as well as ensuring scalability in terms of future anticipated growth in demand for bandwidth. Bidder(s) will therefore be invited to put forward minimum speeds for businesses, which can be built into the service standards of the winning bidder(s) contract. The winning bidder(s) network will be subject to periodic reviews on a 3-5 year basis to ensure that it is keeping pace with demand.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

196. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of staff employed to deliver the tendering stage of the national broadband plan within his Department. [18638/16]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to the delivery of High Speed Broadband under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) as a matter of priority. This is be-

ing achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) in areas where commercial investment is not forthcoming. The National Broadband Team oversees the delivery of every aspect of the NBP including:

- Mapping of the areas where commercial services are available and monitoring of commercial rollout
- Addressing barriers to commercial rollout
- Development of the detailed intervention strategy under the NBP
- Analysis of ownership options
- Detailed Cost modelling
- cost benefit analysis
- Analysis of funding option
- Analysis of Governance requirements
- Environmental requirements
- The on-going State Aid Notification process with EU DG Competition
- Development of Procurement documentation and delivery of a complex procurement process involving extensive dialogue with commercial telecoms operators.
- Establishing a Taskforce on mobile phone and broadband coverage
- Developing proposals for an entity to manage State telecoms contracts
- Liaising with the telecommunications regulator, ComReg, and the European Commission on regulatory measures relating to high speed broadband rollout.

Each strand of the NBP intervention strategy has been carefully designed and developed in consultation with industry and other stakeholders in order to deliver the highest level of broadband access in the most effective and cost efficient way.

The NBP Team works across all strands of this major policy area, and comprises approximately 20 full-time equivalent personnel, including expert staff seconded from the telecoms regulator, ComReg. The Team is fully supported by external professional expertise including technical, commercial, economic, legal, environmental and financial, to assist in the delivery of the project. A dedicated Steering Group and Procurement Board is also in place to provide input on the overall strategy and on the procurement process. The size of the team varies from time to time, according to the specific needs of the project and is scaled up or down as necessary.

The delivery of the procurement phase of the NBP involves input from all team members working on the project phases which includes: -

- **Step 1:** Publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire – this step was launched on 22 December 2015.

- **Step 2:** Five responses were received to this stage of the process, by the deadline of 31 March (which was extended by one month, from 29 February to 31 March at the request of

bidders).

- **Step 3:** Qualified bidders will be invited to commence dialogue (Invitation to Participate in Dialogue). This is scheduled to commence over the coming weeks and will take a number of months;

- **Step 4:** Bidders will be invited to submit detailed solutions for further dialogue (Invitation to submit detailed solutions);

- **Step 4a** Bidders will then submit detailed solutions for evaluation;

- **Step 5:** Bidders will be invited to submit final, formal tenders following further dialogue

- **Step 5a:** Bidders submit formal tenders;

- **Step 6:** Formal tenders submitted by qualified bidders will be evaluated.

- **Step 7:** Preferred bidder(s) identified

- **Step 8:** 25 year contract awarded – June 2017.

The timing of each stage of the procurement is dependent on a number of factors including the number of bidders short-listed and the complexities that may be encountered during the dialogue process. It is expected that contract(s) will be awarded in June 2017.

As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network rollout plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

This ambitious project aims to conclusively address broadband connectivity issues across Ireland and the procurement process aims to secure contractor(s) to build a network that will cover 100,000km of road, and 96% of the land area of Ireland, most of which comprises rural areas. A project of this magnitude needs to be resourced appropriately and I am confident that my Department has put in place an experienced, and appropriately skilled team to manage the ongoing strategy development and procurement process, both of which are inextricably linked.

## Driver Licences

197. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will change the terms of reference for the tendering of the licence for the processing of driving licences in order that the post office network could apply for the contract; if this would fit in with the Government's aim to promote the post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18570/16]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service (NDLS) is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

The NDLS consists of a central unit in the RSA and three outsourced providers, a card producer, a front office for engaging with the public, and a back office for processing applications. All three were opened for tender by the RSA during the establishment of the NDLS, and my

Department had no role in the process.

I understand that An Post did tender for the front office service during the last tender process but was not successful. An Post may also apply in any future tendering process.

### **Roads Maintenance**

198. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of repair works to roads, bridges and public property in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18753/16]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded from these monies is a matter for each local authority.

In addition to the 2016 regional and local road allocations announced in January this year, my predecessor announced a further €85m in additional funding for regional and local roads in February this year as part of the Tranche 1 funding to local authorities to remedy damage caused by severe weather. On 27 May I approved a further allocation under Tranche 2 of the severe weather funding to local authorities as notified through Circular RW 9/2016. All available funding for 2016 has now been allocated.

When allocating grant funding my Department has emphasised that the commitment of local authorities to contribute significantly from their own resources towards the cost of improving and maintaining the regional and local roads network is essential and that full consideration needs to be given to utilising the Local Property Tax to boost own resources expenditure on regional and local road maintenance and renewal.

### **Road Safety Strategy**

199. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18600/16]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** While the Road Traffic Act 2004 sets default speed limits for national roads (both within and outside built up areas), local authorities, in this case Clare County Council, may, in consultation with the Garda Commissioner and with the consent of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), make bye-laws to set Special Speed Limits for such roads in their administrative areas.

Under section 9 of the Act, local authorities have the necessary statutory powers to provide for Special Speed Limits outside of schools if they deem such limits to be appropriate and necessary. A Special Speed Limit may also include a periodic speed limit which can be designed to apply and operate at specified periods, for example when children are arriving at, or leaving a school during term time.

To assist local authorities in the application of Special Speed Limits, my Department's *Guidelines for Setting and Managing Speed Limits in Ireland*, published in March 2015, provides detailed guidance on the application of Special Speed Limits outside of schools and is available to all local authorities. These Guidelines reiterate that the making of Special Speed Limit bye-

laws is a matter for the Elected Members of local authorities, subject to following Department Guidelines and to the consent of TII in the case of national roads.

### **Road Signage**

200. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the policy of Transport Infrastructure Ireland for granting permission to erect signs on motorways that provide information on facilities available in towns bypassed, that is, brown signs; and why permission is granted in some cases for towns to put up these information signs but not in other cases. [18636/16]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national roads, including issues relating to signage, are matters for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting this, 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.

### **Road Improvement Schemes**

201. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set out the status of works and the expected finish date of the Coonagh to Knockalisheen road scheme, which was approved an allocation of €1.4 million in May 2014 and was expected to proceed to construction by the end of 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18652/16]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads within its area 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 the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

As regards the proposed Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road Scheme I understand that Limerick County Council intends to submit to the Department, in the near future, contract documents for the advance earthworks contract and certain other works. When these documents are received my officials will continue to liaise with officials from the Council in relation to the project, including in respect of the timescale for the implementation of this advance contract.

### **State Bodies Data**

202. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that Sport Ireland acted in accordance with its legal advice when it withheld the existence of an additional 24 documents from the Information Commissioner during the processing of a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18667/16]

203. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline his views on whether it was proper for documents (details supplied) to be withheld from the Information Commissioner by Sport Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18668/16]

204. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that the handling of a file (details supplied) by Sport Ireland was in the best interest of the taxpayer and lawful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18670/16]

205. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set down the amount of taxpayers' money spent on correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18672/16]

206. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set out the status regarding the procurement of legal advice (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18673/16]

207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline his views regarding indemnity, refund or compensation sought by Sport Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18675/16]

208. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline his views on the conduct of Sport Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18676/16]

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline his views on a matter (details supplied) in relation to full confidence in the Judiciary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18677/16]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 202 to 209, inclusive, together.

I refer the Deputy to the replies given by my predecessor to various previous questions on this matter, most recently on 6 April 2016. As the Deputy has already been informed, the processing of the Freedom of Information request and the decision of the Information Commissioner mentioned by the Deputy are a matter for Sport Ireland. I have no role in the process.

As this is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred the Deputy's questions to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

### **Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements**

210. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware of the difficulties experienced by American citizens to legally drive here when visiting the country for a period of time to carry out business transactions; if he will consider a new approach to this issue for persons who hold a full American driving licence by facilitating a theory-only examination to issue an Irish licence noting the practical exam of driving a motor car has been awarded by the American authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18791/16]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Holders of American driving licences may drive in Ireland for up to a year, on a visitor basis, under international road traffic conventions.

Under EU law, we may issue a driving licence only to a person who is normally resident here. If a person has not taken up residence, we cannot issue them with a licence.

Where a person from a non-EU country takes up residence in Ireland, there are two possibilities. If the person holds their licence from a country with which we have a bilateral agree-

ment on exchange of driving licences, they may exchange their licence for the Irish equivalent. If their licence is issued by a country with which we do not have an exchange agreement, they are treated as a learner and must go through the driver learning process.

The Road Safety Authority (RSA), as the body responsible for driver licensing, has explored the possibility of an exchange arrangement with the US. However, American driver licensing operates at State rather than Federal level, with 50 different driver licensing systems, with widely varying standards. Arranging exchange would require 50 separate agreements, each of which would have to take account of the arrangements between that State and each of the other 49, and the RSA found that this was not feasible.

Driver licensing exists so that we can have some guarantee of the qualifications of people permitted to drive on our roads. Exchange arrangements are made only after detailed comparison of the two licensing regimes, so that both sides can be sure that they are compatible. Given the range of the driver licensing systems in the US and their interrelations, this is unfortunately not possible at present.

### **Ombudsman's Reports**

211. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she is satisfied that the Ombudsman has excused her Department from the need to act regarding the audit-related complaint made to her Department and its agents by a person (details supplied) following the explicit judgment of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ireland in July 2012, namely that audited accounts had been changed. [18680/16]

212. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she is satisfied that regarding the disclosures by the European Union Commission to a person (details supplied) in February 2009 and again in July 2013, the Ombudsman has excused her Department of the need to correct the record of Dáil Éireann. [18681/16]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 and 212 together.

My Department, and previous Ministers, have been in receipt of correspondence from the individual concerned over many years in relation to the issues raised by the Deputy in his Questions. There have been a number of Departments and statutorily independent Offices involved in considering different aspects of the issues raised and insofar as my Department is concerned a complaint was lodged several years ago with the Ombudsman's Office in relation to how my Department had handled the matter. My Department has also repeatedly responded to Freedom of Information requests related to the questions raised and provided information to the individual concerned.

The Information Commissioner, along with the Ombudsman, accepted after a lengthy and comprehensive investigation that my Department had acted appropriately with the individual concerned.

### **Child and Family Agency**

213. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will arrange for a social worker to be assigned to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18651/16]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The issue referred to by the Deputy is a matter for the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. I have asked Tusla to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Youth Guarantee**

214. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans in regard to the Youth Guarantee in Ballymun, Dublin 11, which was a pilot scheme; and her plans to roll it out elsewhere in the country. [18571/16]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Department of Social Protection coordinates the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. I have referred the Deputy's question to the Minister for Social Protection for a direct response.

### **Preschool Services**

215. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will re-examine regulations recently introduced by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency which will compel childminders to complete Fetac level 5; if she is aware that this change in regulations may compel many persons who are providing childminding services in their own homes to discontinue this practice; if she is further aware that this will be a serious inconvenience to parents who prefer this arrangement rather than sending their children to a crèche; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18574/16]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** When the Early Years Quality Agenda was introduced in 2013 to further improve quality in early years services, one of the items to be progressed was the introduction of a requirement that all staff working with children in pre-school services must hold a qualification in early childhood care and education at a minimum of Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or equivalent. Under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, this requirement will come into effect on 30 June 2016 for newly-registering services and on 31 December 2016 for existing services.

Under the Child Care Act 1991, childminders who care for more than 3 children of different families in the childminder's own home must be registered with Tusla and will be required to meet the minimum qualification requirement under the Child Care Regulations. Childminders who care for 3 or fewer children of different families, who care for one or more children of the same family and no other children, or who work in the child's own home, are exempt from the provisions of the Act and from the Regulations.

Existing registered childminders may access the Learner Fund, which was introduced to support childcare staff seeking to upskill to meet the new regulations.

The new qualification requirement is based on international evidence that says that increasing the qualification levels of staff in childcare increases the quality of the service and therefore improves the outcomes for children using the service. I have no plans, therefore, to review the Regulation governing minimum qualifications.

The Regulations include provision for an exemption for persons who intend to retire from the sector within the next few years and who do not wish to complete a course of study leading to a major award at Level 5. Persons who are granted this exemption will not be permitted to

work in the pre-school sector after 1st September 2021. Registered childminders are entitled to apply for this exemption. Any such applications must be made through the local City/County Childcare Committee before 30th June.

### **Area Based Childhood Programme**

216. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to continue to fund a programme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18659/16]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is a joint prevention and early intervention initiative led by my Department and The Atlantic Philanthropies. It is a time bound co-funding arrangement with resources of €29.7m from 2013 to 2017. The aim of the ABC Programme is to test and evaluate prevention and early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children and families living in poverty in 13 areas of disadvantage.

The ABC Programme was preceded by the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) (2007-2013) in which three sites participated: Preparing for Life Programme, Darn-dale, Youngballymun and the Childhood Development Initiative Tallaght. Preparing for Life received €6m as a participant in the Prevention and Early Intervention programme. The total funding for Preparing for Life under the ABC programme is €3.34m bringing the total funding received by Preparing for Life under both programmes to €9.34m.

I want to acknowledge the excellent research undertaken by Preparing for Life in recent years including in respect of its home visiting programme which is showing promising results. I should emphasise that each of the ABC sites are engaged in research and evaluation of their programmes, approaches and interventions. A number of sites who were previously funded under PEIP, National Early Years Access Programme or other philanthropic-funded programmes have produced detailed high quality evaluations with many promising results being identified across the sites and individual programmes. My Department is working to ensure that we take full account of the learning from all the interventions across the 13 ABC sites including Preparing for Life. This will offer a clear illustration of the interventions that work best, and will inform our plans to embed prevention and early intervention in services for children.

The current contract for Preparing for Life was due to conclude in August 2016. My Department worked with Preparing for Life in April to agree the extension of this contract together with that of the two other PEIP sites to July 2017. This will bring them in line with the other 10 ABC sites. To ensure continued provision, my Department and The Atlantic Philanthropies have sanctioned an additional €400k to each of the three original sites. Preparing for Life welcomed the additional funding and have indicated that it allows them to embed their work in mainstream services and contribute to the learning and evaluation of the ABC Programme.

I look forward to the continued engagement of the 13 ABC sites with my Department as we work towards the implementation of quality prevention and early intervention initiatives in order to achieve our shared goal of improving the lives of children and families throughout the country.

### **Departmental Programmes**

217. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the skills training

and the selection of participants under the Defence Forces' linked programme with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18732/16]

**Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny):** In line with the Government's commitment to a strengthened approach across the economy to social responsibility, the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to introduce a pilot employment support scheme with the direct involvement of the Defence Forces. This commitment was also reflected in the White Paper on Defence, published in August 2015, which sets out the policy framework for the Defence Organisation for the next ten years and beyond.

The scheme and the programme content have been developed through detailed consultation involving the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces, the Department of Social Protection and the Dublin and Dun-Laoghaire Education and Training Board. A work group which includes representatives from each of the aforementioned organisations has developed the detail of the initiative with key stakeholders.

The objective of this Scheme is to help develop a path to economic independence for participants, aged between 18 and 24 years, who are at a serious disadvantage owing to their current socio-economic situation. The Scheme is designed with the specific aim of equipping participants with life and other marketable and certifiable skills which will assist them both in their capacity to participate fully in society as well as their ability to enter the workforce and or to pursue further education for this purpose.

The Department of Social Protection identified suitable participants for participation in the pilot scheme. The basic selection criteria applied were that the person must:

- be aged between 18 and 24,
- be unemployed,
- want to take part in the programme, and
- be healthy and physically able to take part in outdoor activities.

Potential candidates were then interviewed by a member of the Defence Forces and an official from Department of Social Protection. Candidates who were successful at interview were then required to pass security vetting and be medically certified as fit to undergo the programme of training by their own civilian GP, prior to the commencement date of the pilot scheme.

The pilot scheme commenced on Monday 20th June 2016 for 28 participants in Gormanston Camp for 10 weeks. On successful completion of the programme, participants will receive some certificates which should improve their prospects of securing employment. These will include:

- A joint certificate from the Defence Forces and the Department of Social Protection that the participant has successfully completed the course;
- A reference from the Defence Forces Officer leading the course outlining the participant's performance on the course;
- A Basic Medical Training certificate;
- A Manual Handling Training certificate;
- A Certificate on Food Safety Management;

- A City and Guilds Credit for Word Processing, Using the Internet and for Using E-mail;
- A SOLAS Safe Pass. Safe Pass is a one-day safety awareness programme which is required of all construction site workers.

*The following revision was received from the Department on 14 July 2016*

The written reply stated that there were 28 participants taking part in the pilot scheme. The Department would like to clarify that in fact the number of participants is 25.

### **Defence Forces Medicinal Products**

218. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he accepts the World Health Organization malaria unit figures of approximately 130,000 worldwide malaria deaths annually in patients over the age of five. [18601/16]

219. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he accepts that as per Food and Drug Administration and European Medicines Agency literature, Lariam can cause neurologic side effects that can last for months, years and can become permanent; and if not, if he will produce fully referenced analysis that proves otherwise in each case. [18602/16]

220. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he accepts that unlike doxycycline and Malarone, Lariam adverse drug reactions are predominantly neuropsychiatric in nature and that Lariam is the only one of the three drugs that carries a boxed safety warning, the most serious type of warning. [18603/16]

221. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the director of the medical corps accepts that according to the Health Products Regulatory Authority's Malarone licence, the drug can be prescribed for periods of six months. [18604/16]

222. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the director of the medical corps accepts that as per the World Health Organization International Travel and Health 2015, mefloquine, doxycycline and Malarone are all effective malaria chemoprophylaxis options for the various countries of Defence Forces deployments in sub-Saharan Africa. [18605/16]

223. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the director of the medical corps accepts that the absorption of Doxycycline is not notably influenced by simultaneous ingestion of food or milk. [18606/16]

224. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the official antimalarial policy for sub-Saharan Africa is still Lariam or unfit to travel; and if so, if he will cite as many examples as possible of other armies who have the same Lariam or unfit to travel policy for that region. [18607/16]

225. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Lariam or unfit to travel is no longer the policy, if he can supply a copy of the new malaria chemoprophylaxis policy for sub-Saharan Africa or individual country policies for that region; and when the changes were first implemented. [18608/16]

226. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will request the director of the medical corps to state the year from which prescribing doctors individually screened soldiers for Lariam suitability; and if he will provide all documentation in support of that answer. [18609/16]

227. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason some troops, including those who subsequently took their own lives, were prescribed mefloquine despite clear written contraindications already recorded on their medical files. [18610/16]

228. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the percentage of troops the director of the medical corps expects to be contraindicated from being prescribed Lariam; and to list the medical studies or other data used in support of this figure. [18611/16]

229. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the percentage of the remaining troops not contraindicated to Lariam, the director of the medical corps expects to then experience adverse drug reactions which mandate discontinuation of the drug as per the Health Products Regulatory Authority safety instructions and to list the medical studies or other data used in support of this figure. [18612/16]

230. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the director of medical corps accepts that Lariam can be associated with suicide. [18613/16]

231. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence to release the study or the raw data and methodology if no formal study exists, which shows a decreased risk of suicide in the period when Lariam was being prescribed by the Defence Forces, so that it can be subjected to independent scrutiny. [18614/16]

232. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will instigate an independent study to establish if, as per an analysis (details supplied), there was a three to five times increased risk of suicide in Irish soldiers prescribed Lariam in comparison to a similar group who also served overseas but did not take the drug. [18615/16]

233. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the working group on malaria prophylaxis been reconvened in the original context of current and future litigation, or if it is now instead tasked with examining best practice malaria prophylaxis in a military population with a view to making policy recommendations purely in the context of future overseas missions to sub-Saharan Africa. [18616/16]

234. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he or any of his officials contacted persons (details supplied) with a view to them contributing to the reconvened working group on malaria prophylaxis after their very generous offer. [18617/16]

235. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the resources are available to check individual personnel files relating to the prescription and use of Lariam in the Defence Forces, thus releasing crucial information previously requested in a number of different parliamentary questions on the subject. [18618/16]

**Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 to 235, inclusive, together.

As I have made clear, the health and welfare of the Defence Forces are a priority for me and this informs my approach to the issue of Lariam.

I have noted from the World Health Organisation (WHO) publication regarding the number of deaths from malaria that there has been a 60 % reduction in Malaria mortality since 2000. The WHO reports that in 2015 the number of deaths was 438,000 of which deaths in children under 5 years was 306,000. However, the key issue remains the fact that malaria is a significant killer on the world stage.

It is acknowledged that Lariam can cause, inter alia, neuropsychiatric side effects. How-

ever, it is more difficult to comment on the duration. Conventional thinking is that side-effects are directly related to blood levels of the product, and as Lariam has a relatively long half-life, the side effects, even by conventional wisdom, could be expected to remain to some degree until the product is 'washed out' of the system, and this could take several weeks.

With regard to overseas military service, there are numerous confounding factors that may contribute to the patient's symptoms, and it is difficult if not impossible to determine which symptoms are due to any specific entity. Stress can present in many guises and can result from overseas deployment through absence of usual support mechanisms, operational tempo, fears, worries and concerns related to the family back home, exposure to different climate and culture etc. Consequently, it is objectively very difficult to attribute symptomatology to any specific cause.

Lariam can have, inter alia, neuropsychiatric side-effects in certain individuals. Malarone, as listed on the Summaries of Product Characteristics (SPC) (June 2015 edition), can cause certain patients to suffer from similar neuropsychiatric side-effects such as nightmares, depression, (both listed as 'common') and anxiety in addition to dizziness and insomnia. The SPC (June 2015 edition) warnings on Lariam are more emphatic than those contained on the Malarone SPC, although neuropsychiatric side-effects are listed. Doxycycline is not associated with neuropsychiatric side effects. It is important, however, to place all warnings in context. The fact that a medication can exhibit adverse reactions in certain individuals does not, nor should it, prevent its use where the overall benefit to hazard ratio remains positive. It is vital to follow all the manufacturer's advice and guidance with regard to its use.

The Director Medical Branch (DMB) is fully aware of the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) recommendations with regard to Malarone. The DMB has commented in various fora, including with the HPRA, on the changes which have occurred in recent times with regard to Malarone's SPC. On the one hand, the 'embargo' on its prescription for periods in excess of 28 days was removed, but it was replaced with the information that "in non-immune subjects, the average duration of exposure in clinical studies was 27 days" (SPC June 2015 edition). This raises questions related to its efficacy, side effect and adverse reaction profile when used for longer periods.

The DMB accepts that the three medications mentioned above have malaria chemoprophylactic effects. The precise efficacy of one over the other depends on many factors, including local sensitivity of the particular species to the individual drug (this can vary over time and over location), proposed exposure of the patient, as well as patient compliance, to name a few relevant factors. Patient compliance in turn is related to the dosing regimen, the availability of the medication, and the individual's tolerance of any side effects etc.

The manufacturers report that absorption of Doxycycline is impaired by calcium, zinc, magnesium or iron salts irrespective of whether the calcium is contained in an antacid or in a dairy product.

The DMB's current advice, guidance, and policy in relation to malaria chemoprophylaxis is that, in the case of Sub Saharan Africa, Lariam is the agent of first choice. In special circumstances the other agents may be used. For example, if for operational reasons it was imperative that an individual deploy immediately without the normal 'lead-in' time which is required for Lariam, then one of the other alternative medications should be used. Equally, if an individual who had a specific skill set which was fundamental to mission success and either had previously demonstrated sensitivity to Lariam, or had a contraindication to its use in the first place, then that individual would receive derogation from the 'normal' policy and be placed on another medication. If during the course of deployment, an individual developed sensitivity to Lariam,

he/she would desist from Lariam and be placed on an alternative. In all the examples above, the basic principle remain the same – it revolves around the balance struck between mission success and patient safety. In the case of immediate deployment, mission success dictates that an alternative is used. In the case of the individual who cannot take the first choice medication, mission success dictates that he/she deploys on an alternative. In the case of the late manifestation of sensitivity, an alternative medication is substituted for Lariam, the individual remains under medical supervision and continues to contribute to mission success.

As a result of its extended half-life in the blood, Lariam is taken on a weekly basis rather than on a daily basis. This has two direct and significant consequences. Firstly, a weekly medication facilitates compliance. Secondly, even if a dose is missed by 24 hours, there is still a residual quantity of the active ingredient in the blood which gives a certain degree of protection. If, however, one of the daily medications is missed by 24 hours, the patient is immediately susceptible to malaria. Prevention of disease for military personnel serving overseas is of the utmost importance. In addition, a peace keeping or peace enforcing military force has to prepare for all eventualities. The military activity of a force is dictated, not so much by a clock or calendar, but by the operational tempo at any given time. Such a reality creates difficulty in abiding by a daily dosing regimen. With the best will in the world, unforeseen circumstances can arise. A daily medication may be overlooked, misplaced, forgotten, left in another location etc., as a result of a change in operational demand and tempo. This is a fact of life which differentiates the civilian office worker or tourist from the deployed soldier. Thus the weekly medication provides some mitigation against the unforeseen and unpredictable aspect of overseas service. This is one of the reasons why Lariam remains the medication of choice in malaria chemoprophylaxis for Defence Forces personnel deployed to Sub Saharan Africa. While there are other agents available, their use is associated with an increased risk of contracting malaria as indicated above. Therefore, subject to the special circumstances listed above, an individual who can take Lariam is selected in preference to one who cannot take Lariam because of the lesser risk to the individual and, by extension, to the mission. There are, however, circumstances when the demands of the mission justify this increased risk.

It is the policy of the Irish Defence Forces that personnel are individually screened for fitness for service overseas and medical suitability. I am advised by the Director Medical Branch that this has been the policy since the Defence Forces first embarked on overseas service.

It is not appropriate for the DMB to comment on any individual case raised in the Deputy's question both for reasons of medical confidentiality and professional ethics, especially without in-depth knowledge of the particular case and the consent of all concerned. It should however be noted that it is totally contrary to DMB policy to knowingly prescribe medication to a patient who has a contraindication to that medication.

In relation to side effects, the literature varies on the overall percentage of side effects as a result of each of the three malaria chemoprophylactic agents, and each has its own relatively specific spectrum of side effects with Lariam and Malarone sharing certain groups of symptoms and Doxycycline having largely different (mainly gastro-intestinal related) symptoms. The numbers of Defence Forces personnel who have actual contraindications to the use of Lariam can be anticipated to be smaller than that in the civilian population because certain cohorts of individuals are precluded from joining the Defence Forces because of a past medical history which would also preclude the use of Lariam. Of course, there are individuals who, despite having no apparent contraindication contained within their past medical history, can develop sensitivity to Lariam. There is no way to predict in advance who will develop such sensitivity, once those with an already known contraindication have been excluded. In the same way it is impossible to predict who will be sensitive to penicillin before administering the drug.

There are individuals who are unsuited to Lariam either because they have a contraindication to its use, or have developed sensitivity to it. If the former group are prescribed Lariam, they are at an increased risk of suffering a severe adverse reaction, but the latter group also could, unpredictably, also suffer an adverse reaction. The spectrum of serious adverse reactions to Lariam includes neuropsychiatric disorders such as anxiety, depression and psychosis.

In a small study within the Defence Forces, the incidence of death by self-harm was greater during a period where overseas deployment was to non-Lariam type missions than during a period where deployment was on missions where Lariam was prescribed. The study involved an examination of individual files and therefore, it would be inappropriate to disclose the raw data for reasons of medical confidentiality. The death rate in the Defence Forces from self-inflicted injuries in the period 2000 to 2010, when Lariam was being prescribed, was 0.24%. The death rate from self-inflicted injuries in the period 1989 to 1999, when Lariam was not being prescribed, was 0.32%.

As I have indicated to the Dáil, I am currently awaiting the second report of the Malaria Chemoprophylaxis Working Group and until I have had the opportunity to review it, I have no plans to commission any separate studies. The purpose of the re-convened Malaria Chemoprophylaxis Working Group is to review issues arising in relation to the use of Lariam, particularly in the context of the current and potential litigation. The Working Group has invited the doctors referred to the Deputy's question, Dr. Nevin and Dr. Croft, to provide information to the group and information from those doctors has been received and is being reviewed by the Group.

As the original report of the Working Group was produced in the context of current and potential litigation it is, therefore, legally privileged. Any further report prepared by the re-convened Group will also be produced in the context of current and potential litigation and will, therefore, be legally privileged also.

The information requested in relation to individual files is contained on confidential medical files and would require review by medical personnel. There are currently approximately 9,137 personnel serving in the Defence Forces, a significant proportion of whom may have served on a Lariam mission. In addition, there are probably many hundreds of other personnel who served on Lariam mission but who have now retired, and whose files have been archived. In that context, it is therefore not considered feasible to carry out such a review of all individual files.

### **Defence Forces Representative Organisations**

**236. Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Defence Forces management has engaged with the representative associations on the findings of the organisation climate survey; and if not, his views on whether such engagement is essential in light of the clear recommendation in the third report of the independent monitoring group that the representative associations were to be engaged in the design and the findings of such surveys. [18754/16]

**Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny):** The Independent Monitoring Group (IMG) was established in May 2002 to oversee the implementation of recommendations arising from a report on the interpersonal relationships within the Defence Forces. The first IMG report was published in 2004. The Third IMG report was published in September 2014. RACO and PDFORRA are represented on the IMG.

This survey was commissioned on foot of a recommendation from the Third IMG report (a

similar survey was conducted in 2008). The purposes of the climate survey is to support the identification of the ongoing human resource and strategic needs of the Defence Forces. As with the 2008 survey, approximately 11% of the workforce was sampled.

This report was recently received in the Department and I am sure the Deputy will appreciate that given its importance and wide ranging subject matter, I would like to have the opportunity to discuss and consider the findings of the report in the first instance. I can confirm to the Deputy that the Department will engage with the Defence Forces' Representative Associations in relation to the Defence Forces Climate Survey 2015 in the near future.

I have corresponded with the Defence Forces Representative Bodies offering to meet them to discuss concerns that they may wish to raise with me.

### **Defence Forces Personnel**

237. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is aware that the introduction of lifetime community rating in health insurance has meant that those over 34 years of age are now being forced to purchase indemnity health insurance plans they do not require for the sole purpose of negating the future impact of age levies imposed by these new regulations when they retire from the Defence Forces (details supplied); and the engagement he has had with the Department of Health to examine how this issue may be addressed. [18755/16]

**Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny):** Lifetime Community Rating (LCR) Regulations, S.I. No. 312 of 2014, became applicable with effect from 1 May 2015. Under LCR, community rating is modified to reflect the age at which a person takes out private health insurance. Late entry loadings are applied to the premiums of those who join the health insurance market at age 35 or over. The LCR Regulations stipulate that no loading is applied to an insured person if, on 1st May 2015, the person had a continuous period of cover in an in-patient indemnity health insurance scheme prior to that date. The primary purpose of introducing LCR is to encourage people to purchase health insurance at a younger age.

The regulation governing the LCR loadings applies equally to all citizens of the State irrespective of the nature of any health care provided by their employer. Many employers provide a range of health benefits to employees and not necessarily as part of a regulated healthcare insurance product. It is a matter, therefore, for each citizen to decide whether they wish to take out private health insurance in order to avoid additional loadings for taking out insurance after the age of 34.

Commissioned Officers are currently provided with private health care by the State, i.e. they can be referred by the Defence Forces for private/semi-private treatment in civilian hospitals or private consultant's rooms, where it is deemed necessary.

The position of members of the Defence Forces with regard to the LCR Regulations has been raised with the Department of Health, both at official and Ministerial level. Meetings have been held between officials from the Department of Defence and the Department of Health on 30th April 2015 and 8th January 2016 to discuss the issue.

The Department of Health stated that the Irish private health insurance regulatory system is based on the key principles of community rating, open enrolment, lifetime cover and minimum benefit. Community-rated insurance markets depend on a continuing entry of younger people to help keep premium prices down for everybody. The Department of Health considered that the arrangements in place for Defence Forces personnel do not comply with health insurance legislation or its key principles. It considered that there has been no impediment to member of

the Defence Forces purchasing indemnity health insurance as a means to avoid loadings similar to any other citizen. It stated that no waiver provision exists in the regulations and that any fair and equitable consideration of a waiver for one group requires consideration of other groups whose employers provide similar health benefits separate to indemnity contract arrangements. Even if such an arrangement was deemed appropriate, a waiver provision would require to be enacted in primary legislation. The Department of Health cannot see any basis or mechanism for a waiver to be put in place such that officers could avoid loading when they come to purchase health insurance on retirement from the Defence Forces.

The Department of Health has undertaken to forward to the Health Insurance Authority the concerns of the Defence Forces regarding LCR for consideration as part of a planned independent review of the operation of the LCR Regulations scheduled for 2017.

### **Defence Forces Representative Organisations**

238. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the engagement he has had with the Defence Forces representative bodies in an attempt to progress and deal with the concerns raised by them, particularly in respect of systemic failures of the current Defence Forces conciliation and arbitration scheme, internal organisation consultation practices and national level pay talks engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18763/16]

**Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny):** As the Deputy is aware the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) provides a formal mechanism for the PDF Representative Associations, RACO and PDFORRA, to engage with the Official side. The purpose of the scheme is to provide a means for the determination of claims and proposals from the Associations relating to remuneration and conditions of service. Since 1993, there have been significant developments and improvements in the pay and conditions of military personnel. The Representative Associations have been to the fore in advancing the interests of their members in this regard, bringing them in line generally with the pay and conditions available in other public service employments. My Department does not accept that there are systemic failures in the current Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme.

The Deputy will be aware that the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009-2015 and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018 (Lansdowne Road Agreement) define current pay policy.

I have corresponded with the Defence Forces Representative Bodies offering to meet them to discuss concerns that they may wish to raise with me.

### **EU Issues**

239. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the implications for the implementation of Irish defence policy following the British decision to leave the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18767/16]

**Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny):** The Government has adopted a contingency framework to deal with all issues arising in respect of the UK vote to leave the EU, and any issues arising, including those within the Defence area, whether bilateral, or in respect of developments in CSDP or our wider international multilateral defence engagements will be addressed within that framework.

While the outcome of the vote in the UK will have implications across all aspects of the business of the European Union, our current analysis is that the vote does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations, or Defence Policy in relation to the UK/IE defence relationship or for Ireland's continuing engagement within the EU in CSDP. However, all consequences of the Vote are the subject of ongoing consideration in my Department.

Within the EU, Defence issues are a national competence and any decisions require unanimity. Ireland will continue to have a strong and equal voice on defence issues within the EU institutions. The treaties require that the EU respects the specific and different policies of Member States in the area of security and defence and that will not change.

We have many defence connections with the UK, not least in the area of personnel training and information exchanges on capability development, tactics and procedures. These are of a bilateral nature and are reflected in our Memorandum of Understanding with the UK on Defence and Security Cooperation and will thus be unaffected by the referendum.