

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 5, inclusive, answered orally.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

6. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to his comments (details supplied) in April 2017, the local authorities that have received commitments with regard to affordability from housing developers availing of the local infrastructure housing activation fund; the number of affordable units he expects this fund to generate within each of these local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25027/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages in order to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites in urban areas with high demand for housing.

On 28 March 2017, Minister Coveney announced funding of €226.5 million for 34 projects under the LIHAF to build essential public infrastructure, including roads and bridges. These public infrastructure projects will be key to the early delivery of 23,000 housing units over the next four years. There is further potential for approximately 46,000 additional homes on these 34 sites in the longer term, bringing the projected yield up to 69,000 homes once sites are fully built out.

LIHAF will facilitate additional social housing of 2,300 housing units in the short term through the 10% Part V social housing dividend, with a further potential of 4,600 housing units in the longer term. Furthermore, a number of the projects, such as those which include lands in local authority ownership, will deliver more than the mandatory levels of social housing under Part V. For example, in relation to the 36 hectare site at Kilcarbery which is owned by South Dublin County Council and where LIHAF funding will support essential public roads and a pumping station, the tenure mix is anticipated to be 30% social and affordable housing and 70% private housing.

In addition to the accelerated and increased supply of housing generally and increased levels of social and affordable housing in some cases, the Government is also seeking an increased affordability dividend for the eventual purchaser of private housing. As part of the application process, local authorities were asked to secure commitments from developers in this regard, for example, through identifying the consequent price reduction, arising from the State-funded enabling infrastructure, for the house purchaser, or through selling a proportion of the homes at below market rates. The specific approach in individual cases will vary according to the scale

and ownership status of each site.

Local authorities that have secured LIHAF funding for selected sites are currently engaging with relevant landowners and housing developers to conclude specific agreements in relation to finalising timelines for delivery of the housing units and the required affordability commitments. I expect that final agreements will be in place by the end of June to facilitate the signing of formal grant agreements with each Local Authority in respect of LIHAF funding. This will pave the way for work to proceed on procuring the infrastructure involved and, crucially, advancing the delivery of the badly needed associated housing.

Questions Nos. 7 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

13. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason for the considerable delays in accelerating and expanding the rapid build housing programme listed in Action 1.1 of Rebuilding Ireland which provided for 200 units in quarter 4 of 2016 and 800 units in 2017, in view of the fact recent replies indicate less than 200 units of accommodation under this scheme will be complete in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25017/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): My Department is committed to the accelerated delivery of social housing and is working closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of a range of social housing programmes and supports, including rapid build/delivery homes.

At the end of 2016, a total of 350 rapid build homes were advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction, with 22 such homes being delivered and occupied in 2016. Over 500 rapid build homes are now advancing through the planning design, procurement and construction stages, and work is underway to ensure that a further 500 units are advanced in the coming months, bringing the number of units in the programme to 1,000 by end year. An additional 500 units are targeted for delivery in 2018.

The Deputy can be assured that local authorities are working to deliver the maximum number of units possible during 2017. Of particular note is the establishment of a framework of rapid build contractors by the Office of Government Procurement, which means that local authorities across the country will be able to run quicker procurement competitions and advance rapid build projects to site more efficiently and effectively.

It is important to note that the rapid build programme needs to be viewed in the context of the wider range of social housing build, acquisition and leasing programmes, which are being advanced by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs). In relation to the construction programme more generally, an updated Construction Status report was published last week showing that, at end Q1 2017, the pipeline of projects had expanded to in excess of 600 projects, involving over 10,000 units, an increase of some 1,600 units in the first quarter of the year alone. Projects continue to be added to the pipeline on a weekly basis.

Questions Nos. 14 and 15 answered orally.

Private Rented Accommodation Provision

16. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding his commitment to develop and roll out an affordable rental model; the model of affordable rental being examined by his Department; and the timeframe for the publication of this scheme. [24808/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): As set out in the Strategy for the Rental Sector published in December 2016, the commitment to develop an affordable rental model contained in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan is now to be progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones. Lands held by local authorities in such zones are to be brought to market on a competitive tendering basis, with a view to leveraging the value of the land to deliver the optimum number of units for rent, targeting middle income households, in mixed tenure developments.

In this regard, an important policy intervention in the delivery of new housing supply under Pillar 3 of Rebuilding Ireland is the development of State-owned lands for mixed-tenure housing, particularly in the major urban areas, where demand is greatest. On 27 April 2017, details of some 2,000 hectares of land in public ownership were published, with the potential to deliver up to 50,000 homes nationally.

I have asked all local authorities to be innovative and proactive in developing these sites. The final model for each site, including the affordable rental element, will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, the elected members included, who are best placed to know and provide for the housing need in their area. Indeed, the Dublin local authorities are well advanced in bringing large-scale sites forward for mixed tenure housing, with projects advertised that can deliver circa 3,000 mixed-tenure homes in the Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council areas alone.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

17. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to increase income limits for local authority house loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24804/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): There are currently two housing loan finance offerings available from local authorities for first time buyers unable to get adequate loan finance from a building society or bank. In the case of the House Purchase Loan, the gross income (before tax) is €50,000 or less for a single income household or €75,000 or less in the case of a double income household. To avail of the second option, the Home Choice Loan, applicants need to earn over €35,000 as a single applicant and over €45,000 combined income as joint applicants. No maximum income limits apply in the case of the Home Choice Loan.

When the loan products were introduced, careful attention was given to the terms and conditions that should be applied to it. Decisions on all loan applications must be made in accordance with the applicable statutory Credit Policy in order to ensure lending prudence and to assist local authorities across the sector to engage consistently in responsible mortgage lending, in the best interest of borrowers and local authorities as lenders alike.

Minister Coveney is currently examining the Home Choice Loan scheme and is also considering how local authority mortgages can be better publicised to ensure that creditworthy households who may be unable to source adequate loan finance from commercial lenders but

could be eligible for one of the local authority mortgages, are made aware of the opportunity.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

18. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether one of the main barriers holding back the provision of social housing is the inability of local authorities to build construction projects of scale due to an overly rigid application of sustainable communities criteria, in view of the fact that of the 276 social housing projects that have passed pre planning, just 15 include 50 or more individual houses or apartments. [25038/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Government policy, as set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, is to deliver sustainable communities with an appropriate tenure mix for all our citizens, irrespective of the method of housing provision. An appropriate and balanced mixture of tenures in new developments is necessary in order to avoid the significant effects of social isolation and limiting of opportunities that can occur with large mono-tenure estates, frequently necessitating their regeneration and remediation at a later stage with considerable cost exposure to the State, as well as a well documented negative legacy for the residents involved.

Local authorities are tasked with the provision of social housing for which approval is sought from my Department. The decision in relation to the size of development is made by the local authority on the basis of local need, available lands, permissible densities and what is considered locally appropriate, taking account of the 2007 policy document, “Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities”. In this regard, my Department provides guidance on the scale of social housing which would be suitable in a particular context or area. This guidance is based on the size of the host town or city and the proportionate nature of the development to ensure good social integration and cohesion.

The achievement of scale in the overall social housing construction programme does not require excessively large individual projects. Less than one year since the launch of Rebuilding Ireland, over 10,000 social housing dwellings in more than 600 developments nationwide are now in the social housing construction projects pipeline, showing already that scale of overall delivery and the achievement of sustainable communities are not mutually exclusive.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

19. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the level of social and affordable housing that is required for developers availing of the local infrastructure housing activation fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25030/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages in order to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites in urban areas with high demand for housing.

On 28 March 2017, Minister Coveney announced funding of €226.5 million for 34 projects under the LIHAF to build essential public infrastructure, including roads and bridges. These public infrastructure projects will be key to the early delivery of 23,000 housing units over the

next four years. There is further potential for approximately 46,000 additional homes on these 34 sites in the longer term, bringing the projected yield up to 69,000 homes once sites are fully built out.

LIHAF will facilitate additional social housing of 2,300 housing units in the short term through the 10% Part V social housing dividend, with a further potential of 4,600 housing units in the longer term. Furthermore, a number of the projects, such as those which include lands in local authority ownership, will deliver more than the mandatory levels of social housing under Part V. For example, in relation to the 36 hectare site at Kilcarbery which is owned by South Dublin County Council and where LIHAF funding will support essential public roads and a pumping station, the tenure mix is anticipated to be 30% social and affordable housing and 70% private housing.

In addition to the accelerated and increased supply of housing generally and increased levels of social and affordable housing in some cases, the Government is also seeking an increased affordability dividend for the eventual purchaser of private housing. As part of the application process, local authorities were asked to secure commitments from developers in this regard, for example, through identifying the consequent price reduction, arising from the State-funded enabling infrastructure, for the house purchaser, or through selling a proportion of the homes at below market rates. The specific approach in individual cases will vary according to the scale and ownership status of each site.

Local authorities that have secured LIHAF funding for selected sites are currently engaging with relevant landowners and housing developers to conclude specific agreements in relation to finalising timelines for delivery of the housing units and the required affordability commitments. I expect that final agreements will be in place by the end of June to facilitate the signing of formal grant agreements with each Local Authority in respect of LIHAF funding. This will pave the way for work to proceed on procuring the infrastructure involved and, crucially, advancing the delivery of the badly needed associated housing.

Local Authority Boundaries Review

20. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans for the administrative boundary between counties Waterford and Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24975/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The report of the Waterford Local Boundary Review Group is one of four such review processes initiated under the previous Government. The groups were asked to carry out a review of the boundaries between the relevant local authorities and to make recommendations with respect to those boundaries and any consequential matters that they consider necessary in the interests of effective local government.

Minister Coveney will address all relevant issues arising from this report and from other recent and forthcoming reports on local government arrangements, as part of an overall report on local government matters which he will be submitting to Government and the Oireachtas pursuant to the Programme for Partnership Government. However, the Minister has indicated, without prejudging the submission to Government and the Oireachtas or ongoing reviews, that he will not be proposing the implementation of the recommendation to change the county boundary between Kilkenny and Waterford and that appropriate alternative arrangements will be developed to address the issues identified in the review.

Work on the preparation of the report to Government and the Oireachtas is continuing in my Department with a view to its completion later in the Summer.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

21. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has considered the proposals from a group (details supplied) which proposes municipal led mixed income public housing; if he has met with the group with a view to progressing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24784/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am open to considering all options for innovative approaches to funding additional social and mixed tenure housing. Representatives acting on my behalf have met with the group in question and the proposals referred to will now be considered by my Department.

The Programme for Government provides that we will examine the possibilities for new and innovative roles for local authorities in housing provision, via means such as Municipal Housing Companies and arm's length management organisations. Work to examine the potential for such structures commenced in the second half of 2016. A key consideration in this regard is the question of whether any such structures would be on or off the Government balance sheet. A determination on the possible application of these new structures is expected by the end of 2017.

Diaspora Issues

22. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the implementation of the diaspora voting in future presidential elections. [17993/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government decided in March of this year to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution to give the right to vote at presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State, including Northern Ireland.

In order to inform public discourse on the significant policy change proposed, I published an Options Paper on 22 March 2017, which is available on my Department's website at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/voting/presidential-elections/voting-presidential-elections-citizens-resident>. The Options Paper sets out the range of options available to give effect to the recommendation in the Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution. It also provided a basis for the discussion on voting rights which took place at the Global Irish Civic Forum in Dublin earlier this month.

These discussions will inform the Government's decision on a preferred option to be put to the people in a referendum. While a decision has not yet been made on the timing of a referendum, even if a referendum was held immediately and passed, it would not be feasible to have comprehensive arrangements in place for an extension of the franchise to have effect for the presidential election to be held before 11 November 2018 as this will require modernisation of the voter registration process and the introduction of arrangements to facilitate those eligible to vote to exercise their franchise from outside the State. In this regard, the Government has agreed that my Department should commence work to effect improvements in the process for the registration of voters.

Housing Policy

23. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn a proposal by an organisation (details supplied) to set up a national housing company of Ireland; and his plans to develop this type of policy for up to 700 sites owned by local authorities and other State owned land, particularly the DCC land initiative plan at St Michael's, O'Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor Road. [24791/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The recent NERI report *Ireland's Housing Emergency: Time for A Game Changer* is to be welcomed as an important addition to the debate on housing in Ireland. I note that there is considerable common ground between the NERI report and the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan and the Strategy for the Rental Sector.

For example, and in line with Rebuilding Ireland, the NERI report concludes that:

- Supply is the most significant challenge at present;
- There is a need to increase public investment in new permanent social housing stock;
- Traditional patterns of demand are changing: increased labour market mobility and wider economic factors are encouraging a lesser reliance on home ownership;
- A significant proportion of the required new stock needs to be provided specifically for rental;
- The State needs to create the right conditions for investment in the delivery of rental accommodation;
- Local authorities, approved housing bodies and the Housing Finance Agency all have a key role to play in the delivery of housing.

Through Rebuilding Ireland, the Government is progressing a range of actions to meet these challenges. Over the lifetime of the Plan, the overall social housing stock will be increased by providing 47,000 social housing units through local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies using €5.3billion in capital funding and Housing Finance Agency loan finance.

In addition, under the Strategy for the Rental Sector, a range of supply side measures are being progressed including:

- build to rent models;
- use of State-owned lands to deliver affordable rental in areas of high demand;
- measures to increase the supply of dedicated student accommodation to free-up units in the general rental market;
- supports to bring vacant stock into use;
- consideration of tax and fiscal incentives to encourage additional supply.

In addition to the commitment to advancing projects to deliver additional rental accommodation, the Strategy for the Rental Sector noted that the Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to develop a "cost rental" option, taking account of work already completed in this area, including by NESC and others. This is also the central recommendation in the report by NERI.

In line with this commitment, Action 12 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector provides that my Department will lead an expert group to develop a cost rental model for the Irish rental sector, addressing issues such as funding mechanisms, the need to grow the necessary institutional capacity, particularly within the AHB sector (whether through mergers, new entrants or strategic partnerships), the households to be targeted and the appropriate regulation mechanisms. The expert group will consider the proposals put forward by NERI - including the proposal to establish a semi-State company to progress the cost rental model - in the course of its work, a report on which is scheduled to be delivered by Q4 2017.

I am committed to supporting the development of mechanisms that can deliver funding for social housing in a manner that is off-balance sheet and does not negatively impact on the general government balance. Action 2.4 of Rebuilding Ireland provides that the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) will work with the private sector to establish a funding vehicle capable of facilitating off-balance sheet investment in delivering social and private housing. Work on developing the new funding vehicle is underway within the NTMA.

Planning Issues

24. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether national planning standards should be set to increase the height of apartment buildings, in view of high break even costs of building apartments and the absence of supply for new apartment buildings despite the high demand. [25039/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department routinely monitors the planning process and acts to ensure it facilitates appropriate multi-unit housing developments to meet the broader housing requirements of society.

My Department's 2009 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas encourage local authorities to bring about high quality and sustainable urban development, using their development planning and management functions to deliver quality homes and neighbourhoods where people want to live, work and raise families. In particular, the Guidelines outline a range of densities appropriate to different location types, from lower densities at the edges of smaller towns through to densities in the range of a minimum of 50 dwellings per hectare in larger urban areas along public transport corridors.

However, the Guidelines do not set out specific policy advice in relation to height of buildings alone, in isolation from broader location, design and layout considerations nor would it be appropriate to do so, given variability in urban contexts and the inappropriateness of a "one size fits all" height policy for very diverse urban areas. Rather, it is a matter for local authorities to ensure the appropriate application of the Guidelines in their statutory development plan and development management processes.

Notwithstanding the above, my Department is currently in the final stages of completing a cost review of multi-unit and apartment developments, which is due to be finalised later this Summer. This review is examining the key aspects of viability issues, including building height limitations, and will inform further policy development in relation to this matter. In light of the review outcomes, the intention is to engage further with relevant local authorities like Dublin City Council to address any building height issues arising.

Local Authority Housing Provision

25. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that the local authorities immediately adjoining Dublin city and County are in a position to deliver housing in line with requirements within the next three months having particular regard to the preparatory work already undertaken in the past 12 months; the number of persons in need of immediate housing and recognising the need to meet the requirements of those that have been on local authority waiting lists for several years; the option he will consider as a matter of urgency in the event of an inability to deliver sufficiently to meet such requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25018/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland has put in place both the targets and funding resources to accelerate the delivery by 2021 of 47,000 social homes. This work is already well underway and we are increasingly seeing new social housing construction projects move onto site. I recently published the latest update of the *Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects*, which now includes over 600 social housing construction projects, delivering over 10,000 social housing units. This is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017>.

The construction projects listed in the Status Report are either on site, at different stages of planning and design or have recently been completed. As would be expected, given housing need, the Dublin area local authorities and those adjacent to Dublin feature very strongly in this construction programme. The same is true in relation to the delivery in the wider greater Dublin area of social housing through other means, which are also being vigorously pursued through the resources available under Rebuilding Ireland. This includes the acquisition of houses and apartments, the long-term leasing of homes by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, including via the National Asset Management Agency's Special Purpose Vehicle, and the accelerated roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.

Further new social housing projects are being added to the delivery pipeline on a continuous basis. This delivery will continue to be aligned with housing need and this is evident particularly in relation to the rapid delivery programme, where a number of build projects are on site in the greater Dublin area that will deliver 200 new social homes over the coming months, with work already underway at advancing a further round of projects. I am keen that all local authorities advance their projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that the necessary funding is available.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

26. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of house building projects and the number of units involved in those projects that are in the process of being built or at the planning stage under the control of local authorities and that will deliver local authority owned and run social housing in the next period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24811/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details in respect of the substantial pipeline of new social housing construction projects that is now in place are set out in the Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, the latest update of which I published last week and which is available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/coveney-publishes-details-further-progress-social-housing-schemes>.

Details of all the social housing construction projects being implemented across the 31 local

authority areas are set out in the Report, including the number of new social homes covered by each separate project.

The Report covers over 600 projects, delivering over 10,000 new social homes, including some projects completed in 2016 and in the 1st quarter of this year, and others that are on site or at various stages of advancement through planning and design. The scale of the construction pipeline as at end-quarter 1 2017 represents a major escalation in the social housing build programme and more projects are being added on an ongoing basis, to ensure we deliver on the ambitious targets set in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

27. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the pilot mortgage to rent scheme involving private equity firms including the lease arrangements in place; the level of security of tenure provided for home owners and tenants; and if it is designed to meet the needs of distressed mortgage holders who do not qualify for social housing. [24805/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The review of the Mortgage to Rent scheme published in February 2017, concluded that the current financial model of the Mortgage to Rent scheme may not, in its current configuration, be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time.

In order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency is working with a number of financial entities who have come forward with an interest in working with the Mortgage to Rent scheme to progress a number of pilot alternative long-term lease arrangements. In advance of these pilots, a targeted market testing exercise was undertaken by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), to test the suitability of the proposed enhanced leasing arrangements to ascertain if they would be viable for a mortgage to rent cohort, taking account of the necessity to provide a long-term stable solution for eligible households. The comments received from interested parties are being reviewed by my Department and the Housing Agency.

The next step is to issue a formal call for Expressions of Interest from institutions interested in taking part in the pilot operating models. It is anticipated that the Housing Agency will manage the evaluation process on behalf of my Department and make recommendations on the make-up of the pilots. The drafting of the content of the Expression of Interest is currently underway.

The Mortgage to Rent scheme is a social housing option, and therefore, is only open to borrowers who qualify for social housing support. The recently launched Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, Abhaile, is available to assist borrowers to explore their options. The Abhaile communications campaign currently underway is aimed primarily at securing engagement and solutions for those in the longest arrears and who are not engaging with their lender and seeks to overcome the fear and anxiety associated with such circumstances, and to ensure that borrowers are made aware of the range of supports available to them.

Alternative Energy Projects

28. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has reviewed the planning guidelines to be put in place for the construction of solar energy farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21920/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments. Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Under the Planning and Development Act, each planning authority's development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, inter alia, objectives for the provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure, including energy facilities, and many local authorities have developed renewable energy strategies for their areas in this context.

In making decisions on planning applications, planning authorities and the Board must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the local development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any relevant guidelines issued by my Department. Planning authorities must then make their own decisions based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments. However, the matter will be kept under review, in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, and his Department - which leads on renewable energy policy - in the context of the Government's White Paper on Energy Policy, published in December 2015, the development of a Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework, as well as the finalisation of a new support scheme for renewable electricity by that Department, expected in late 2017.

Community Development Initiatives

29. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funds in place for county councils for the development of community centres and other social facilities in growing towns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25029/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The importance of creating sustainable communities is recognised in the National Planning Policy Statement published in 2015. In addition, national-level policy approaches in relation to residential densities in urban areas are set out in my Department's Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas. These place a heavy emphasis on the importance of provision of public infrastructure, such as public transport, community and sports facilities.

Furthermore, progression of the forthcoming National Planning Framework, to be titled

“Ireland 2040: Our Plan”, will further clarify and enhance urban development policy in this area, including in relation to identifying the potential to sustainably build up the economic vitality, population levels and supporting social and physical infrastructure of town centre and inner urban areas. These areas have, in many cases, witnessed a sustained movement of people outwards to suburban and wider settings.

In terms of funded programmes, my Department provides funding to support social inclusion and for social cohesion in communities. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The Programme was rolled out in April 2015, and will run until 31 December 2017. Its aim is to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders. SICAP is a key intervention for the harder to reach, with delivery in each area (or Lot) overseen and managed by the relevant Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in each local authority area.

The SICAP funding allocation for 2017 for front-line delivery nationally is €37.5m, which includes an allocation of €3m under the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

Furthermore, my Department recently launched the national €2 million Communities Facilities Scheme which is under the remit of my colleague, Catherine Byrne T.D., Minister of State for Communities and the National Drugs Strategy. The Communities Facilities Scheme is targeted at both urban and rural areas and will fund projects that seek to enhance communities, address disadvantage and improve social cohesion at a local level. The Scheme is being managed at a local level by the LCDCs in conjunction with the Municipal Districts, under the remit of the local authorities.

The Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to launch a recast RAPID programme which will provide €2 million this year, in capital funding, for projects in disadvantaged urban areas and provincial towns. My Colleague, Damien English, T.D., Minister of State for Housing and Urban Renewal, intends launching the recast programme shortly.

Housing Data

30. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied with the accuracy of official figures for housing completion here; the reason for the disparity between his Department’s figure of 14,932 completions in 2016 with the number of building energy ratings certificates issued in that year which was in the region of 3,500; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25023/17]

33. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason his Department does not use the details on compliance certificates from the building control management system to count annual completions of new build housing units, rather than or in addition to connections to ESB supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24790/17]

57. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of his Department’s official 2016 housing completion figure of 14,932 under the categories public and private units, approved housing bodies units, local authority refurbished voids and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25021/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon

Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 30, 33 and 57 together.

The recording and reporting of statistics on housing activity is complex and involves tracking a range of different indicators, including planning permissions, construction commencement notices, ESB connections and several others, from various sources, each of which measure different aspects of housing activity. Each dataset represents part of the overall housing activity but none of the datasets were specifically designed to count new house construction.

Since the 1970's, my Department has published ESB data on residential properties connected to the ESB grid as a proxy for house completions, as it represents the best available indicator that a residential unit is ready and becoming available for occupation. This dataset includes recently completed once-off homes, multi-unit scheme developments and apartments. It also includes some re-connections to the grid, where properties that have been unoccupied for over two years are being brought back into use.

In this context, my Department has published data indicating that, based on ESB connections, 12,666 homes became available in 2015, 14,932 homes in 2016 and, based on current trends, it is anticipated that this figure will rise to 18,000 homes in 2017. My Department does not have a breakdown of the 14,932 homes connected to the ESB Grid during 2016 in the categories requested. My Department is working closely with the ESB to obtain additional and more granular data from its dataset to gain a deeper understanding of the various components of the overall connection dataset.

In relation to the Building Control Management System (BCMS), it is important to note that the BCMS was introduced with effect from 1 March 2014 to facilitate building control authorities, building owners, builders and construction professionals in discharging their responsibilities under the Building Control Act 1990, as amended. The building control process includes a requirement, in certain circumstances, to lodge a statutory Certificate of Compliance on Completion (CCC) in respect of buildings, including dwellings. While this represents another useful source of data on residential completions, it also has a number of limitations.

Firstly, CCCs apply only to works commenced on or after 1 March 2014 so would not apply to homes completed recently but which were subject to a commencement notice submitted prior to 1 March 2014. Secondly, one-off houses were given the facility to opt out of the statutory CCC process from 1st September 2015, so not all single homes constructed will appear in these returns. Finally, a CCC may cover multiple buildings or works, so the number of CCCs registered on the BCMS does not correlate to the number of building units completed. My Department is actively engaging with the Local Government Management Agency, which hosts the BCMS, with a view to developing its potential further as an additional source of data in relation to house building activity.

In relation to building energy ratings (BERs), I understand that, in line with the European Union (Energy Performance of Buildings) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 243 of 2012), a BER Certificate must generally be obtained before a new dwelling may be occupied or offered for sale or letting. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), which comes within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, is the statutory agency responsible for the day-to-day administration of the BER Scheme. Local building control authorities are responsible for enforcement of the obligation to obtain BER certificates, in line with the 2012 Regulations. My Department is examining the potential of BER records to act as a further statistical input to the suite of housing activity data, and will continue to work with this and all other available datasets.

The Central Statistics Office, which is the State's authoritative voice in relation to the provision of high quality and independent statistical information supporting evidence-based deci-

sion-making, established an independent group in January 2017, chaired by an Assistant Director General, to examine housing statistics: my Department is a member of that group. This Group is considering the best analytical approaches to reconciling and combining datasets in this area and will have oversight of, and a direct involvement in, the examination of any output arising from the variety of analyses currently underway.

My Department has also established a new Housing Data Analytics Group, with membership from the CSO, Central Bank, local authorities and others to examine this complex area and to monitor and review the various sources of data collected nationally to provide a comprehensive and coherent suite of statistics relating to housing matters.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

31. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to increase income limits for local authority housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24803/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, 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 the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

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

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda originally set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, a review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports is scheduled to commence later this year.

Private Rented Accommodation Costs

32. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether the policies of his Department could be contributing to rises in rents in view of the CSO's finding that there was a 30% increase in rents in Dublin city over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25024/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is well understood that under-supply is the fundamental cause of the significant challenges in the housing sector. The Government's attention has been very much focused on addressing this, as is clear from the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, published in July 2016, and the Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December

2016, which lay out a range of measures to accelerate supply. These include the use of public land, changes to the regulatory and planning processes, funding for housing related infrastructure, schemes to get vacant properties back into use, a significantly increased social housing programme and an examination of the tax treatment of the rental sector.

The Rental Strategy also recognises that high and rapidly rising rents is the most significant and immediate threat to the accommodation security of many households. For this reason the Government introduced the Rent Predictability Measure and established the system of Rent Pressure Zones to moderate the rise in rents in the parts of the country where rents are highest and rising. In these areas, for a period of three years, rents will only be able to rise by a maximum of 4%, which is less than one third of the rate of rent inflation reported recently by Daft. ie. The measure will have a substantial impact. The practical effect of the measure is that for the next three years rents for more than 186,000 households who currently rent their homes in these areas, will be lower than they would have been if market rents had continued to apply.

My Department also continues to monitor the impact of Rent Pressure Zones in relation to social housing supports that operate in the private rental sector, for example, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). Each of these schemes is different in their operation and specific advice has been provided by my Department to local authorities in that regard. One of the benefits of the introduction of the Rent Predictability measure in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) is that it will assist local authorities and tenants to secure units within the private rental market at a more sustainable and predictable cost.

A review of the Rent Predictability measure will take place next month. At that point, the provisions will have been in place for 6 months, we will have rent data from the Residential Tenancies Board for quarter 1 of 2017, and it will be possible to ascertain the effectiveness of the Rent Predictability Measure and whether any changes need to be made.

Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 30.

Housing Policy

34. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans for a policy to assist persons who are paying rent in excess of an average mortgage for a similar property but are unable to afford to buy due to deposit restrictions and an inability to save due to their high rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24793/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): A range of measures are being taken under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to increase housing supply overall, with the aim of creating a functioning and sustainable housing system which can meet housing demand at more affordable prices.

The plan is divided into five pillars, with each targeting a specific area of the housing system. Pillar 3, entitled Build More Homes, has a key objective of increasing the output of private housing to meet demand at affordable prices.

Action 4.6 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan provided for the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. As set out in the Strategy for the Rental Sector published in December 2016, the commitment on affordable rental is to be progressed through kick-starting supply

in rent pressure zones. Lands held by local authorities in rent pressure zones are to be brought to market on a competitive tendering basis, with a view to leveraging the value of the land to deliver the optimum number of units for rent, targeting middle income households, in mixed tenure developments. The cost of providing rental units is to be permanently reduced by lowering the initial investment and development costs for providers - AHB or private - allowing the rental units to be made available at below market prices without the need for ongoing rental subsidies.

In this regard, an important policy intervention is the identification of State-owned lands for mixed tenure housing, particularly in the major urban areas, where demand is greatest. On 27 April 2017, I published details of some 2,000 hectares of land in public ownership, which has the potential to deliver up to 50,000 homes nationally. Full details of these sites can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

I have asked all local authorities to be innovative and proactive in developing these sites. The final model for each site will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, the elected members included, who are best placed to know and provide for the housing need in their area. Indeed, the Dublin local authorities are well advanced in bringing large-scale sites forward for mixed tenure housing, with projects advertised that can deliver circa 3,000 mixed tenure homes in the Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council areas alone.

Housing Policy

35. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the expected publication date for a new national vacant housing reuse strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24789/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Pillar 5 of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is specifically focused on Utilising Existing Housing Stock, with a key objective of ensuring that the existing vacant housing stock throughout the country and across all forms of tenure, in both the public and private sectors, is used to the optimum degree possible. In this regard, Action 5.1 of Rebuilding Ireland commits to the development of a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy, informed by Census 2016 data, to

- inform the compilation of a register of vacant units across the country,
- identify the number, location and reasons for longer-term vacancies (i.e. over 6 months) in high demand areas, and
- set out a range of actions to bring vacant units back into reuse.

To this end, the Housing Agency, which has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the Strategy, established a working group comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities and from the Housing Agency itself to inform the Strategy. As the deliberations of Working Group were nearing completion, it was agreed to await publication last month of 2016 Census data on housing so as to ensure the Strategy would be informed by the most up-to-date and comprehensive data available.

It is now anticipated that the Strategy will be published in the coming weeks.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

36. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way in which under the new land bank plan it is ensured that there will be a significant dividend for social housing and for affordable housing; and if he will address concerns that there are no mechanisms in place which will ensure that the disposal of public sites for private developments will be reinvested in social housing elsewhere. [25040/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Question No. 5 on today's Order Paper which sets out the position in this matter.

Housing Provision

37. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if large scale housing funding projects proposed to his Department by local authorities, approved housing bodies or the Housing Agency, including acquisitions or new builds which were deferred in 2016 have been deferred in 2017; if so, the projects concerned; the amounts requested and deferred; and the reasons for these decisions. [24809/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer to the reply to Question Number 232 of 16 May 2017, which sets out the position in this matter.

Private Rented Accommodation

38. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to advertisements for accommodation in which sex is being sought in lieu or in addition to rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25043/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of reports relating to advertisements of the kind referred to. As there may be criminal activity involved in some instances, I would urge people to report any concerns in this regard to An Garda Síochána.

Approved Housing Bodies

39. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has engaged with the housing associations and local authorities in ensuring that there will be drug-free accommodation for those in recovery from addiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24788/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), funding of up to 100% of project costs may be advanced by housing authorities to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to provide accommodation for various target groups, including specific categories of housing need such as accommodation for the elderly, homeless people and people with a disability. Applications to deliver new social housing under CAS are made by AHBs to the relevant housing

authority and, as with all social housing projects, it is a matter for the housing authority to prioritise projects on the basis of how they meet the area's housing need.

Responsibility for policy development in relation to addiction and rehabilitation issues rests with the Minister for Health and the delivery of services in this regard is managed through the Health Service Executive. Under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Department of Health and the HSE are committed to addressing the rehabilitation needs of homeless people with addiction issues through the forthcoming new National Drugs Strategy, which will include increased drug and alcohol detoxification facilities, and enhanced associated programmes, to support long-term recovery.

Housing Data

40. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason for the disparity between his Department's official figure of 15,951 housing completions during the past census period with the findings of the CSO that during the same period the housing stock increased by just 8,800; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25022/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Census of Population and Housing collected and published by the Central Statistics Office produces a wide range of different housing statistics, none of which maps precisely to the measurements which are disseminated by my Department. Amongst the most important of those measures are the net change to the total housing stock, the net change to the occupied housing stock and the numbers of units occupied which the residents report were constructed since 2011. All measures of stock are subject to additions as well as removals and there is no accepted measure at this time of the level of removals between Census waves, whereas my Department has provided an estimate of the additions to the stock for many years. In relation to the net increase in the total housing stock it should be noted that this increase represents a net gain over the period and so will exclude dwellings which will have fallen out of the housing stock through dereliction and depreciation.

In regards to the 33,436 properties declared by Census respondents as having been constructed since 2011, it should be noted that 114,122 respondents did not provide any response to this question. Furthermore in respect of the 57,246 vacant properties where a reason for vacancy was collected by enumerators, some 2,180 were recorded as being new build.

My Department is working with colleagues in the Central Statistics Office and across other interested Government Departments and Agencies, along with the continuing assistance of the ESB, to develop methodologies to refine and improve the measurements of housing related activity. In this context my Department recently convened a Housing Analytics Group to monitor and review the various sources of housing data collected nationally to provide a comprehensive and coherent suite of statistics relating to housing matters. In collaboration with data owners and stakeholders, the Group will work to refine and improve existing data sources, and identify potential data gaps and new data sources, with a view to ensuring that public policy continues to be informed by the best possible housing data.

In addition, the Central Statistics Office, which is the State's authoritative voice in relation to the provision of high quality and independent statistical information supporting evidence-based decision-making, established an independent group in January 2017, chaired by an Assistant Director General, to examine housing statistics and my Department is a member of that group. This group is considering the best analytical approaches to reconciling and combining

datasets in this area and will have oversight of, and a direct involvement in, the examination of any output arising from the variety of analyses currently underway.

Rent Controls

41. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will review of the provisions in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 that relate to rent pressure zones, in view of the evidence that rent levels are rising substantially; the effect on excluded areas in view of the fact that the onus is on vulnerable tenants to report breaches of the rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24785/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The existing rent pressure zones were designated because they meet the criteria required under the Act, which are: (i) that rents are above the national average, and (ii) that rent price inflation has been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters. Other areas, including those adjoining and surrounding rent pressure zones, do not meet the criteria for designation and therefore have not been designated. The Housing Agency will continue to monitor the situation and may recommend further areas for designation. If future rent rises mean that new areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as rent pressure zones.

The pressures in the rental market are borne out by the data published recently by Daft.ie, showing that rent asking prices rose nationwide by an average 13.4% in the year to March 2017. However, the report also shows that rent inflation in Dublin has slowed over the last quarter. This is an early indication that the Rent Predictability Measure is having the desired effect.

A review of the Rent Predictability Measure will be carried out next month. At that point, the provisions will have been in place for 6 months, data from the Residential Tenancies Board’s Rent Index Report for Quarter 1 2017 will be available, and it will be possible to ascertain the effectiveness of the Rent Predictability Measure and whether any changes need to be made.

Emergency Accommodation Data

42. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons in hotel and bed and breakfast emergency accommodation as of 20 May 2017; the number of persons that are in hotels; the number in bed and breakfast accommodation; and the locations in which these families will be housed on 1 July 2017. [24792/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is my intention that homeless families be transitioned from hotel arrangements as quickly as possible and to limit the extent to which hotel accommodation has to be used for new family presentations, and my Department continues to work closely with housing authorities to realise this objective. The use of hotels for emergency accommodation is a much more significant issue in the Dublin Region than in the rest of the country. At the end of March, a total of 870 homeless families were housed in commercial hotels and B&B’s in the Dublin Region. At end-April this figure has fallen to 695, of which 592 were in commercial hotels and 103 in bed and breakfast accommodation. Data for May is not yet available.

In order to meet the Rebuilding Ireland target that, by mid-2017, hotels will only be used in limited circumstances to provide emergency accommodation for homeless families, the accom-

modation needs of families currently in emergency accommodation in hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation are being addressed by the housing authorities through a mix of social housing solutions, such as tenancies under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and general social housing allocations. Housing authorities are also putting in place new supported emergency accommodation facilities which will provide homeless families with a greater level of stability, services and supports than are available in hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. The detail arrangements regarding the locations in which families will be housed are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Departmental Reports

43. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the findings of the expert panel set up to review the mica issue; the details of those findings; the timeframe for a decision on putting a redress scheme in place to provide financial assistance to affected home owners following on from the panel's report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24781/17]

63. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when he will publish the expert panel's report into defective blocks; the timeframe for a decision on putting a redress scheme in place to provide financial assistance to affected home owners further to the panels report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24782/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43 and 63 together.

An expert panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in April 2016 to investigate the problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Donegal and Mayo. The panel have the following terms of reference: -

(i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;

(ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

(iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

The expert panel on concrete blocks met on twelve occasions since it was first established and a similar number of meetings have taken place with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, the elected members of Donegal and Mayo County Councils, local authority officials, industry bodies, academics, public representatives and other interested parties. A substantial volume of information has been provided by affected homeowners in both counties, as well as from Donegal and Mayo County Councils; additional information was also provided

through the consultation process.

The panel has now concluded its meetings and is in the process of finalising its report which is undergoing legal proofing by the Attorney General's Office, which will be completed shortly. In this regard, I 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.

Social and Affordable Housing

44. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the detail of the definition of affordable housing; the nature of the affordable housing; if affordable housing will be for rent or for sale; and the mechanism for designing, building and allocating such housing in view of the fact that of the 3,500 units 450 or 15.7% in the Poolbeg SDZ are to be affordable housing. [25025/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In relation to the Poolbeg Strategic Development Zone, it is intended that of the 3,500 new homes permissible on the site under its Planning Scheme, 900 will be delivered as social and affordable units. Of this, 350 (10%) will be delivered as social housing in accordance with the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). It is also intended that a commercial agreement, with confirmed funding, will be entered into prior to commencement of development, between Dublin City Council, my Department and the owners/developers of the residential element of the overall SDZ area, for a further 550 new homes, the majority of which will be affordable rental housing and the balance provided as social housing with a particular focus on housing for older people.

This objective takes account of and implements Government policy as set out in the Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness: Rebuilding Ireland, including Actions 2.4 and 2.8 (delivery of additional social housing over and above Part V through a variety of means); 2.16 (housing for older people, including assisted living); 3.1 (Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund or LIHAF); and 4.6 (affordable rental), together with policy promoting tenure diversity in the City Council's Housing Strategy.

As set out in the Strategy for the Rental Sector published in December 2016, the commitment to develop an affordable rental model contained in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan is now to be progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones. Lands held by local authorities in rent pressure zones are to be brought to market on a competitive tendering basis, with a view to leveraging the value of the land to deliver the optimum number of units for rent, targeting middle income households, in mixed tenure developments.

In this regard, an important policy intervention in the delivery of new housing supply under Pillar 3 of Rebuilding Ireland is the development of State-owned lands for mixed tenure housing, particularly in the major urban areas, where demand is greatest. On 27 April 2017, I published details of some 2,000 hectares of land in public ownership, which has the potential to deliver up to 50,000 homes nationally.

I have asked all local authorities to be innovative and proactive in developing these sites. The final model for each site will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, the elected members included, who are best placed to know and provide for the housing need in their area. Indeed, the Dublin local authorities are well advanced in bringing large-scale sites forward for mixed tenure housing, with projects advertised that can deliver

circa 3,000 mixed tenure homes in the Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council areas alone,

The question of the criteria to apply to determine eligibility for affordable units is currently under consideration.

Planning Issues

45. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the obligations on Irish Rail to seek planning permissions for the maintenance, development and improvement of the rail systems. [25026/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires planning permission.

Section 4 of the Act and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, set out various exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission. Any such exemptions are subject to compliance with any general restrictions on exemptions set out in the Act or the Regulations and to the specific conditions set out in each class of exempted development in Schedule 2 of the Regulations.

In this regard, for example, Class 23 of Part 1 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations, provides that ‘the carrying out by any railway undertaking of development required in connection with the movement of traffic by rail in, on, over or under the operational land of the undertaking, except—

(a) the construction or erection of any railway station or bridge, or of any residential structure, office or structure to be used for manufacturing or repairing work, which is not situated wholly within the interior of a railway station, or

(b) the reconstruction or alteration of any of the aforementioned structures so as materially to affect the design or external appearance thereof’

shall be exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission under the Act.

In addition, other enactments may provide for specific exemptions, such as section 38(1) of the Transport (Railway Infrastructure) Act 2001, as amended, which provides that ‘each of the following shall be exempted development for the purposes of the Act of 2000:

(a) development consisting of the carrying out of railway works, including the use of the railway works or any part thereof for the purposes of the operation of a railway, authorised by the Board and specified in a railway order or of any incidental or temporary works connected with such development;

(b) development consisting of the carrying out of railway works for the maintenance, improvement or repair of a railway that has been built pursuant to a railway order.’

Any question as to whether development is or is not exempt from the requirement to obtain planning permission is a matter for the relevant local authority, or An Bord Pleanála on referral, to determine.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Eligibility

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to increase the income limits for the mortgage to rent scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24973/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Mortgage to Rent Scheme is a social housing option and is therefore targeted at borrowers in mortgage arrears, who qualify for social housing support as prescribed by the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011.

A review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, is scheduled to commence later this year.

Local Authority Housing Provision

47. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of developments that have been approved by his Department under which local authorities built 15, or fewer, homes using only one approval stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24786/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To date, two social housing capital construction projects have been advanced by local authorities via the single stage approval process for projects with a maximum all-in budget of less than €2m and no more than 15 units. The uptake under the single-stage approval option was considered in a process and procedures review that was recently completed on ‘Social Housing Design, Approval and Delivery’ and which is available at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social-Housing_Approval-Processes-Procedures-Review-1.pdf.

This review looked at the use of the single stage process, noted its poor take-up to date by local authorities and identified the need to undertake further work with individual local authorities with a view to improving take-up. This work is now happening via quarterly on-site meetings that my Department is now having with each individual local authority.

Given the process improvements overall in relation to social housing approvals, under which the overall pipeline of social housing construction projects has been expanded significantly to encompass over 10,000 units, it will be a matter for each local authority to decide as to how to advance each individual project. However, the regular technical meetings with the local authorities mean that the option to use the single-stage process can be actively examined on a project-by-project basis.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

48. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the planned timeframe for the existence of homeless hubs for homeless per-

sons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25033/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As part of the response to the commitment contained in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness that, by mid-2017, hotels will only be used as emergency accommodation in limited circumstances, housing authorities are delivering a number of family-focused, supported temporary accommodation facilities. These custom-developed facilities will offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation 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 including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services, cooking and laundry facilities and appropriate family supports.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, while my Department's role involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. It will therefore be a matter for the relevant housing authorities to consider the ongoing need for such facilities in their areas within the overall context of their social housing delivery programmes.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

49. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of recipients of the housing assistance payment, HAP, who are 18 to 24 years of age by county, in 2016 and to date in 2017; the steps he is taking with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to address recent reports of a 78% increase in homelessness in the 18 to 24 year old age group since 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24798/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 22,000 households in receipt of HAP, including 7,000 households that were previously supported by Rent Supplement. There are currently more than 17,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the HAP scheme. Approximately 315 to 350 new households are being supported by HAP each week.

My Department does not hold information on the age demographic of HAP recipients. However, a summary of the household classes supported by the HAP scheme at 31 March 2017 is set out below:

- Single / Single Sharing - 31%
- Couple / Couple Sharing - 4%
- Lone Parent with Children - 39%
- Couple with Children - 26%

The Homeless Pilot of the HAP scheme has been operational since February 2015, across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region, and is being implemented through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The focus of this pilot remains the transitioning of qualified households from emergency accommodation, including hotels, into private rented tenancies. To qualify for HAP under the homeless pilot scheme, a household must generally be ac-

cepted as homeless within the meaning of section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 by one of the four Dublin local authorities. The Homeless HAP support has also been used to prevent households from entering homelessness and homeless services.

While eligible homeless households may source accommodation for themselves, a dedicated placement team, the Dublin Place-Finder Service, has also been established to engage directly with property owners and support qualified households to find suitable tenancies and to ensure that any additional supports that may be needed are put in place. This is a particularly important service for households currently residing in emergency accommodation in the Dublin region.

The implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness is being advanced across a number of Departments and agencies, including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, under the oversight of the Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach. The long-term solution to the current homelessness issue is to increase the supply of homes. Accordingly, Rebuilding Ireland is designed to accelerate all types of housing supply – social, private and rental. During the lifetime of the Plan some 47,000 new social houses will be provided, supported by Exchequer investment of over €5 billion, and housing output generally will be progressively increased towards the target of producing 25,000 houses per year through all channels.

It is intended that housing needs of those currently homeless, including young people, will be met through housing supports such as HAP, the homeless HAP scheme, and general social housing allocations. Significant outputs are being achieved in this regard, with over 3,000 sustainable exits from homeless accommodation into independent tenancies delivered during 2016, a record level of exits in a calendar year. This includes more than 800 homeless households supported by HAP during 2016. A target of 1,200 additional households to be supported through the Homeless HAP pilot scheme has been set for 2017, and more than 600 such households have already been supported by the scheme this year.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with its operation and I consider HAP to be a key support in providing sustainable exits from homeless accommodation, meeting housing need and contributing to the delivery on the ambitious programme outlined in Rebuilding Ireland.

State Properties Data

50. Deputy Jan O’Sullivan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of publicly owned land in each local authority area that is under consideration to offer to developers for housing construction in tabular form; the way in which a fair return to the State will be ensured in these proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24783/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 27 April 2017, I published the first phase of the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, as committed to under Action 3.5 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. This a vital initial step in the new State Housing Land Management Strategy being developed within the context of the National Planning Framework, to be titled “Ireland 2040: Our Plan”.

The map is the result of a significant amount of work carried out by my Department, local authorities, the Housing Agency and other State and semi-State bodies. The datasets published on the map include details of over 700 local authority and Housing Agency-owned sites, totalling some 1,700 hectares, including location and size, as well as 30 sites (comprising some 200

hectares) owned by State or semi-State Bodies, situated in major urban centres. The map also shows the locations of 144 active private construction sites, encompassing some 5,200 new dwellings, which are under construction in the Dublin region.

The map is freely accessible on an interactive portal at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/> and data on sites can be extracted in a number of forms, including on a local authority basis.

The opening up of State-owned lands for the development of mixed tenure housing is a key objective under Rebuilding Ireland. I want to see the supply of high quality social and affordable homes, to buy or rent, delivered as quickly as possible from key sites, particularly in the major urban areas where demand is greatest. I have asked all local authorities to be innovative and pro-active in developing these sites.

In the first instance, the specific approach to housing delivery on each site, including the optimum tenure mix, is a matter for the local authority concerned, including the elected members, who best understand the housing needs in their area. Already, South Dublin County Council and Dublin City Council are well advanced in bringing large-scale sites forward for mixed tenure housing, with projects advertised that can deliver around 3,000 mixed tenure homes on 4 key sites, located in Kilcarbery (South Dublin) and Infirmaroy Road, Emmet Road, and Oscar Traynor Road (Dublin City). I expect other local authorities to follow suit.

Mixed tenure development on State-owned land provides a strong opportunity to provide social and affordable housing quickly in a fully integrated and sustainable community. Importantly, it allows for risk-sharing and far quicker delivery of social housing and housing more generally as part of the full development of each site. For example, in relation to a major site in Dublin City at O'Devaney Gardens, I have already announced Stage 1 funding approval of almost €18 million for 56 social homes on the site. Only building social houses on the rest of the site would mean slower delivery, over a 10- or 15-year period, as capital funding becomes available.

I am committed to ensuring that the State extracts the most beneficial use of its currently under-utilised assets for much needed housing in the shortest possible timeframe, and maximises the social dividend, in particular by increased and speedier delivery of high-quality social and affordable homes, to buy or rent. My Department will continue to work with local authorities and other State agencies to this end.

Housing Policy

51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if further legislative provisions are required in order to ensure a more rapid response to the housing crisis including the immediate provision of modular housing as and when required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25019/17]

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which the construction and provision of modular housing of a high quality has been perfected with a view to early impact on homelessness and local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25144/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51 and 123 together.

The publication of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness has

seen a new level of ambition in respect of tackling the challenges in the housing sector and I am confident it represents a well-judged and comprehensive response to the urgent need to increase housing supply generally and to accelerate the delivery of social housing.

To support the ambitious target of 47,000 new social housing units, I have secured €5.35 billion in exchequer investment over the period to 2021. This comprises some €4.5 billion in capital funding and €844 million in support of programmes funded from current expenditure. Under Pillar 2 of Rebuilding Ireland, my Department is working closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of a range of social housing programmes and supports, including rapid build homes.

Over 500 rapid build homes are currently advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction, and a further 500 rapid build homes will be advanced in 2017, with another 500 units to be delivered in 2018. Sites for rapid build schemes are currently being identified in Louth, Wicklow, Kildare, Meath, Cork, Waterford, Galway and Limerick.

Local authorities have been responding positively to the need for a ramp-up in rapid build delivery. The establishment of a framework of rapid build contractors by the Office of Government Procurement means that local authorities across the country will be able to run quicker procurement competitions and advance rapid build projects to site more efficiently and effectively. In addition, the Part 8 planning procedures have been revised to facilitate the acceleration and delivery of local authority own development proposals, including social housing projects and infrastructure servicing housing development.

Other actions are underway by local authorities to respond to housing need and meet the needs of homeless people within their areas. These include targeted acquisitions, the new Repair and Leasing initiative and the range of current-funded programmes, such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme, Housing Assistance Payment and various leasing arrangements under my Department's Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme. Again, properties sourced under these programmes are used to accommodate persons on the local authority housing waiting lists, including those in emergency accommodations or at risk of homelessness.

Building on the early actions taken to make affordable housing more viable through reaffirming apartment guidelines and reforming the development contribution regime, a number of other actions are underway to make residential property delivery viable, at a far greater scale, and at more generally affordable prices and rents. For example, the announcement, on 28 March 2017, of €226 million funding for housing infrastructure on 34 high-impact sites, through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), will act as the catalyst for the delivery of some 23,000 homes by 2021 and an overall figure of up to 70,000 homes in the longer term in areas of greatest supply constraints. Details of the projects approved under LIHAF can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/local-infrastructure-housing-activation-fund-announced/>.

Through the range of actions currently being progressed under Rebuilding Ireland to increase the supply of homes across all tenures, the Government will create the conditions required for the restoration of a more sustainable and normally functioning housing market, capable of providing homes, to buy or rent, at more affordable price points, where and when they are required.

Housing Policy

52. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and

Local Government if new policy responses are likely to be forthcoming in the short to medium term for persons who purchased houses and or apartments that are no longer suitable for their needs and that cannot for financial reasons move on; his plans for new loan options; his further plans to relax the clawback on homes purchased on the affordable loan scheme or in circumstances in which shared ownership schemes are an impediment to overcoming such issues as overcrowding; if no policy responses are planned, if he will consider developing a new policy in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24796/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Affordable Housing Schemes helped qualifying applicants, who would not have otherwise been in a position to purchase a home, to become home owners through the purchase of designated affordable units. Houses sold to first time buyers under the various affordable housing schemes were priced at a significant discount from their market value. Buyers were free to sell their properties at any time. However, in order to prevent short-term profit-taking on the resale of the houses to the detriment of the objectives of the schemes, the schemes contained a clawback provision.

Under the clawback provisions, as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002, as amended, where the purchaser proposes to sell the unit within 20 years of the date of purchase, he/she must refund to the local authority a percentage of the proceeds of the sale of the unit. The percentage of the proceeds to be repaid will be related to the proportion of discount from the market value originally received from the local authority. A full refund must be paid if the unit is sold within the first 10 years of occupancy. A reduction of 10% per annum is given for each full year of occupancy between 10 and 20 years and after 20 years of full occupancy no refund would be due to the local authority.

However, where a person is selling an affordable home and the clawback amount payable would reduce the proceeds of resale below the initial price actually paid, the legislation provides for the amount of the clawback payable to be reduced to the extent necessary to avoid that result.

I have no plans to amend these provisions, which I consider to be equitable and reasonable.

In relation to local authority loans, these are for first-time buyers only, and I have no plans to amend the position.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Expenditure

53. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to raise the limits for costs associated with the pyrite remediation scheme such as alternative accommodation to reflect current market values. [24799/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the Pyrite Remediation Scheme and while the Act provides that the scheme can be amended, replaced or revoked, this can only be done in accordance with the scope of the Act. In this regard, any proposal to revise the pyrite remediation scheme is ultimately a matter for the Pyrite Resolution Board and would require detailed consideration of the evidence to support the case for an amendment to the scheme.

The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage at-

tributable to pyritic heave established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol . In addition, applicants under the scheme must be able to demonstrate to the Pyrite Resolution Board that they have no practicable options, other than under the scheme, to secure the remediation of their homes.

The scheme provides for the recoupment of the vouched cost of alternative accommodation, furniture removal and storage subject to limits of €3,000 and €2,500 (inclusive of VAT) respectively. However, where a scheme participant can satisfy the Housing Agency, who will be making the payments, in advance that suitable rental accommodation cannot be obtained for €3,000 or less the expenses for the accommodation and furniture removal can be combined, subject to the overall limit of €5,500. In addition, earlier payment in part or in whole may be made where a scheme participant can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Housing Agency that payment of these costs only on completion of the works would cause financial hardship.

My Department is in regular contact with the Pyrite Resolution Board and the Housing Agency with regard to the implementation of the scheme and is satisfied that the arrangements that are currently in place provide the necessary flexibility to enable scheme participants to meet their alternative accommodation needs while their homes are under remediation.

An Bord Pleanála

54. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the arrangements and additional staff that have been put in place in An Bord Pleanála in view of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 for planning applications in excess of 100 housing units; the date on which new arrangements will be in place; the fees that have been decided for applications and objections; the guidance that has been given to local authorities regarding engagement with the new process; the guidance that will be available to the public; the way in which they may interact with the process; the way in which developments that are subject to masterplans or in circumstances in which phasing is required will be dealt with; if An Bord Pleanála has to be in compliance with city, county and local area plans respectively; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24794/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (the Act of 2016) provides for new streamlined arrangements to enable planning applications for strategic housing developments, of 100 housing units or more or student accommodation developments of 200 bed spaces or more, to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No. 2) Order 2017 brought section 19 of the Act into operation on 2 February 2017, for the purpose of enabling the Board to fulfil the requirements of section 144 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (the Act of 2000), as amended, in relation to setting the fees payable to the Board in respect of applications for, and other matters relating to, proposed strategic housing developments. It also brought section 3 of the Act into operation on the same date to the extent required to enable the partial commencement of section 19 to have effect.

Section 144 of the Act of 2000 enables the Board to determine such fees, subject to Ministerial approval, and once approved, requires that the Board to give public notice of new fees

for a period of at least 8 weeks prior to coming into effect. On foot of the commencement of these provisions, I approved the Board's proposed fee schedule for strategic housing developments on 8 March 2017 and the Board undertook the necessary public notice arrangements on 15 March 2017. A copy of the fee schedule is available on the Board's website at the following link: <http://www.pleanala.ie/about/Fees/SHDFeesNotice.pdf>.

The Act of 2016 also provides for the establishment of a dedicated Strategic Housing Division in the Board to make determinations on planning applications in respect of strategic housing developments, assisted by additional dedicated technical and administrative support resources which the Board has been given approval to engage with the necessary arrangements now being progressed in this regard.

A separate Commencement Order will be required to bring the substantive strategic housing development provisions in Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Act into operation. In conjunction with this, section 12 of the Act of 2016 enables me as Minister to make regulations to provide for matters of procedure and administration to support the operation of the strategic housing development provisions. The drafting of the supporting Regulations and Commencement Order is at an advanced stage and I expect to be in a position to approve and sign these shortly. My Department will then issue a Circular letter to the Board and planning authorities advising of the commencement of the provisions and providing any additional guidance required with regard to the operation of the new arrangements. Once commenced, applications for large-scale housing developments as defined in the Act of 2016, including qualifying residential development that forms part of a larger development scheme but is capable being carried out on its own, will be made to the Board.

The Board already has powers, in limited and specific circumstances, to grant planning permission on appeal for a proposed development in the case where a planning authority has refused permission on the grounds that the proposed development materially contravenes the development plan. Where it grants planning permission in these circumstances, the Board must indicate the main reasons and consideration for its decision.

Under the new arrangements, planning applications in respect of strategic housing developments may be made to the Board only in respect of lands that have already been zoned for such purposes by the local elected members in the development plan or local area plan for the area. The Act of 2016 empowers the Board to grant planning permission for a strategic housing development that materially contravenes the development or local area plan and requires the Board to set out the main reasons and considerations for doing this. However, the Board cannot grant permission where the proposed development would materially contravene the zoning objective of the relevant plan.

Importantly, members of the public will continue to be able to make submissions and observations to the Board about applications for strategic housing developments in the same manner as currently applies in respect of planning applications submitted to the local planning authority or appealed to the Board. Applications will be notified to the public by way of site and newspaper notices in the normal manner and a copy of the application will be available for inspection at the offices of the Board and the planning authority for the area concerned.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Eligibility

55. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will extend the terms and conditions of the mortgage to rent scheme to include local authorities as part of the review process of the scheme as an action in the rebuild-

ing Ireland action plan for housing and homelessness in view of the very low level of engagement from housing agencies with the scheme in its current form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24976/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme for borrowers of commercial private lending institutions, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the scheme in order for it to work better for borrowers. It also concluded that the current financial model of the scheme may not be capable of delivering the scale of cases that could benefit from the scheme over time.

In parallel, Rebuilding Ireland acknowledges the scale of the current pressures in terms of new social housing supply and proposes more direct intervention by local authorities to expand and accelerate overall social housing supply particularly in the short term. An expansion of the MTR scheme whereby the local authority, as opposed to an Approved Housing Body, would acquire the property would impact on the capacity of local authorities to meet the ambitious targets around social housing supply.

The Government has been actively exploring potential mechanisms that would facilitate investment in social housing, including the off-balance sheet potential of private institutional investment. A number of private equity firms have expressed an interest in purchasing mortgage debt portfolios from commercial banks with a view to exploring the potential for them to access the MTR scheme model for the borrowers in occupation of the mortgaged property. They are seeking an alternative arrangement that would see the mortgaged property staying in the funding firm's ownership and the property itself leased back to the local authority in circumstances where the borrower is eligible for MTR and the borrower would therefore remain in their own home.

One of the outcomes of the Review is that in order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency will work with a number of financial entities who have come forward with an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a number of pilot alternative lease arrangements. In advance of these pilots, a targeted market testing exercise has been undertaken by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), on behalf of my Department, to test the suitability of the proposed enhanced leasing arrangements to ascertain if they would be viable for a mortgage to rent cohort. The objective is to explore what is available within the current market and to determine if this alternative model will benefit a greater number of households.

A detailed financial assessment of the structure of the funding of the MTR scheme will be undertaken in advance of the budgetary process for 2018. The assessment will be informed by the early impact of the other actions proposed by the review, as well as the outcome of the experience with the pilot lease arrangements, and the availability of financial resources overall.

Animal Breeding Regulations

56. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the dog breeding establishment guideline review; his views on the submissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24787/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In late 2015, my Department agreed to begin a process of review of the current Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines, under the auspices of the

County and City Management Association Dogs Working Group. The work undertaken to date has been to produce a first draft revision of the Guidelines.

It was considered essential to broaden the review of the Guidelines to a more formal public consultation, both for quality assurance and to address the need for openness and inclusiveness. A wide-scale formal public consultative process commenced on 1 December 2016 and closed on 28 February 2017.

My Department is currently reviewing the feedback and data received through the process before submitting the findings to me.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 33.

Traveller Accommodation

58. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he will take to ensure allocated funding is spent in order that quality accommodation is available to Traveller families in all local authority areas in view of the lack of spending of allocated funds to local authorities for traveller accommodation; [25032/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in April 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for Traveller accommodation.

Local authorities submit proposals for individual Traveller specific projects and developments which are assessed on a case-by-case basis in my Department, in advance of allocations being made. The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs. Funding is recouped to local authorities on eligible expenditure incurred and, where it is likely that an allocation to a local authority may be unspent or under-spent, my Department engages with local authorities to reallocate the funding to another scheme in order to ensure that drawdown is maximised before year-end. I am anxious that local authorities make full use of the increased levels of capital funding available for traveller accommodation in 2017 and my Department will continue to engage proactively with local authorities in that regard.

In addition, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to establishing a special working group to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authorities' TAPs and consult with stakeholders on key areas of concern. This commitment has been underpinned in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, which provides for the commissioning by the Housing Agency of an expert, independent review of expenditure on, and delivery of, Traveller accommodation to underpin the work of the special working group.

The review, which has regard to the targets in the local authorities' TAPs, is due to be com-

pleted very shortly. It will provide factual information and this will provide a key platform for the special working group to progress its work effectively. The working group will be established by the statutorily appointed National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) immediately after completion of the review. I expect the working group to complete its work in an expeditious manner and, as provided for in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, the NTACC may then advise me in relation to any appropriate measures for improving the provision and management of accommodation at local level.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

59. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the actions he will take to assist persons following a fire at a development (details supplied); his plans for assistance to be put in place for future fires resulting in homelessness for significant numbers of persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25031/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The inter-Agency response to support families affected by the fire at Verdemont, Blanchardstown, is being led by Fingal County Council.

I understand from the Council that a range of accommodation arrangements are in place to meet the immediate housing needs all households affected by the fire, and there is on-going contact between the Council, the insurance agent and the management company in this regard. Also, the Council has allocated a temporary tenancy to a number of households pending their assessment for long-term social housing support, and Threshold has provided housing advice and support clinics.

I understand that the Department of Social Protection's Community Welfare Service, in tandem with the Council and Citizen's Information, have put in place an emergency multi-Agency clinic offering advice and support to affected households, and that the Community Welfare Service has been offering financial assistance, where appropriate based on each household's needs, through the Exceptional Needs Payments and Urgent Needs Payment schemes.

The response to any major fire, and managing consequences arising therefrom, is provided in accordance with the Framework for Major emergency Management (2006). This was put in place to support effective response by the Principal Response Agencies, including inter-agency coordination, to major emergencies resulting from events such as fires, transport accidents, hazardous substance incidents and severe weather.

National Spatial Strategy

60. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to review the Dublin and mid-east regional planning guidelines in advance of the new national spatial strategy in view of the recent publication of the 2016 census of population and the stated desire to achieve a balanced regional development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24795/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The new National Planning Framework (NPF), titled Ireland 2040 - Our Plan, will act as the successor to the National Spatial Strategy 2002 (NSS) and will serve as the Government's strategic 20+ year strategic planning and development

framework for the co-ordination of a range of national, regional and local authority policies and activities, planning and investment. On foot of the finalised Census 2016 results, my Department will review and analyse all of the statistical data provided and ensure the most recent and accurate data is considered and reflected in any evidence-based proposals that may form part of the draft NPF and subsequent Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs).

The NPF will form the top-level plan which, in turn, will inform the new RSEs which are to be prepared by the three Regional Assemblies established under the Local Government Act 2014. Their regional strategies, which will replace the current Regional Planning Guidelines, will be prepared to reflect the new Regional Assembly structures. The RSEs will support the implementation of the NPF and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term planning and economic development framework to guide action at local government level, such as the statutory development plan process and the Local Economic and Community Plans also provided for under the Local Government Act 2014.

Until such time as both the NPF and the RSEs are adopted later in 2017 and 2018, respectively, the existing NSS and existing Regional Planning Guidelines will remain in place.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

61. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to reintroduce affordable housing schemes of the type suspended in 2012 for owner-occupiers and or renters rather than providing public land subsidies to developers in the hope that they will provide cheaper housing to home buyers as appears to be the model proposed in the land bank initiative. [25036/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Questions Nos 1,4 and 5 on today's Order Paper.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

62. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the plan to move homeless persons from hotels to industrial premises; the reason these buildings are being exempted from planning permission rules; if he has satisfied himself that the decision to exempt them is in compliance with building control legislation; if these buildings will be converted in compliance with BCAR regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25020/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness includes the objective that, by mid-2017, hotels will only be used in exceptional circumstances as emergency accommodation for families. The long-term solution to the current homeless issue is to increase the supply of homes; accordingly, Rebuilding Ireland is designed to accelerate all types of housing supply. During the lifetime of the Plan some 47,000 new social houses will be provided.

It is intended that the long-term housing needs of homeless households, including those families currently accommodated in hotels, will be met through housing supports such as the enhanced Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and general social housing allocations. Significant outputs are being achieved in this regard; housing authorities achieved over 3,000 sustainable exits from homeless accommodation into independent tenancies during 2016, a record level of delivery in a calendar year.

Housing authorities, working with the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, are also pursuing a range of supported temporary accommodation initiatives to provide accommodation for homeless families with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotels, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support, including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services and appropriate family supports.

It is the responsibility of the relevant local authority to comply with all legislative requirements in relation to building works, including the provision of accommodation for homeless families and individuals and related services. Planning permission is required for certain alterations and material changes of use of existing buildings. However, the Chief Executive of a local authority may exercise emergency planning powers under Section 179 (6)(b) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Building Regulations apply to a wide range of works to existing buildings, including material alterations, changes of use etc. A Building Control Authority may, if it considers it reasonable having regard to all the circumstances of the case, grant a dispensation from, or a relaxation of, any requirement of building regulations in respect of buildings or works which are situated within the authority's functional area.

A Fire Certificate is required for certain works to existing buildings to which the requirements of Part B of the Building Regulations apply. This triggers the provisions set out in the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (SI 9/2014) for certificates of compliance and an assigned certifier.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 43.

Land Transfers

64. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of residential zoned land in the ownership of Galway City Council and Galway County Council and/or transferred under the land aggregation scheme by either, or both, local authorities; the location of these lands; the quantity of this land which cannot be used pending the proposed new road under the N6 project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24801/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 27 April 2017, I published the first phase of the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, as committed to under Action 3.5 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. This a vital initial step in the new State Housing Land Management Strategy being developed within the context of the National Planning Framework, to be titled "Ireland 2040: Our Plan".

The map is the result of a significant amount of work carried out by my Department, local authorities, the Housing Agency and other State and Semi-State bodies. The datasets published on the map include details of over 700 local authority and Housing Agency owned sites, totalling some 1,700 hectares, including location and size, as well as 30 sites (comprising around 200 hectares) owned by State or semi-State Bodies, in major urban centres, including Galway city. The map also shows the locations of 144 active private construction sites, encompassing some 5,200 new dwellings, which are under construction in the Dublin region.

The map is freely accessible on an interactive portal at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/> and data on sites can be extracted in a number of forms, including on a local authority basis.

With regard to lands held by the Housing Agency under the Land Aggregation Scheme, this is only one such site in Galway, details of which are set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Location	Value of Loan accepted in LAGS (capital and interest)	Size of site (hectares)
Galway City Council	Ballymoneen Road, Ballyburke	€7,006,412	2.5

As committed to under Rebuilding Ireland, the Housing Agency is developing a Strategic Management Plan for each Land Aggregation Scheme site, in order to advance housing development from these sites at the earliest opportunity.

In addition local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and my own Department have been advancing a suite of social housing projects, through a range of delivery mechanisms and programmes. A strong construction pipeline of over 10,000 new social houses is now in place, some of which have already been completed in 2016 and in the first quarter of this year. Progress on the status of these social housing projects, including those in Galway City and County, can be found at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>.

The issue of land being assigned to the N6 project is not a matter for my Department.

Housing Data

65. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the recent figures released by the CSO with regard to housing in the context of the Rebuilding Ireland targets. [20060/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland is a multi-stranded, action-oriented approach to achieving the Government's housing objectives, as set down in the Programme for a Partnership Government. At its heart it aims to increase housing supply, across all tenures, to 25,000 homes per year by 2021. The 25,000 target was the ESRI estimate of the housing requirement based on demographic change, household formation and a level of obsolescence of existing stock.

An additional 47,000 social housing units will be delivered by 2021, from a budget of €5.35 billion. In this context, the recent publication by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Census 2016 data relating to Housing in Ireland is a very useful information resource that will inform the ongoing implementation of Rebuilding Ireland, while also assisting with the further development of housing and planning policy in a variety of ways, including in the context of better understanding household formation patterns generally and responding to specific needs such as, for example, those of an ageing population or of persons with disabilities, etc.

New data added to Census 2016 in respect of vacant units is particularly useful as my Department finalises the draft National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy, which I will bring to Government in the coming weeks, in order to advance the work on bringing vacant homes back into use, as envisaged under Pillar 5 of Rebuilding Ireland.

Garda Deployment

66. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of personnel in An Garda Síochána who have long-term arrangements with restricted lighter station duties or assignments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25053/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the allocation of all resources, including personnel, and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am advised by the Garda Commissioner that employees of An Garda Síochána are facilitated, when necessary, with accommodations in workplace arrangements following periods of absence, on medical advice. Such accommodations may include adapted patterns of working time and modifications of duties which are afforded to employees to facilitate their reintegration into the workplace.

I am further advised that An Garda Síochána is committed to supporting all employees for medical or recuperative reasons following injury or a period of illness and will continue to afford all reasonable accommodations to employees as deemed necessary in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer.

I am informed that as of 31 March 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the number of Garda members, being facilitated with light duties or restricted hours on the recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer, was 476. This figure is subject to change on a daily basis.

Citizenship Applications

67. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter regarding a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25099/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a request for a Statement of Non-Acquisition of Irish citizenship from the person referred to by the Deputy. It is open to the person concerned to contact Citizenship Division (details available at www.inis.gov.ie) to complete the necessary documentation.

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

Naturalisation Applications

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if documentation required in the case of a person (details supplied) has been received by the relevant section of her Department with particular reference to the updating of their stamp 4 status; if the process of their application for naturalisation can now continue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25127/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am ad-

vised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion. I understand the person recently renewed their permission to reside in the State, which is now extended to 20 March 2018.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most cases are now generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Immigration Status

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 57 of 11 May 2017, if the case of a person (details supplied) can be reviewed with a view to family reunification; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25130/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a valid Deportation Order made on 20 June 2002. The Deputy might wish to note that persons the subject of a Deportation Order are obliged to remove themselves from the State and it is only when they do not do so that the State is obliged to intervene.

Representations were received from the person concerned, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, the Deportation Order was affirmed on 25 April 2016.

Further representations have now been received from the legal representative of the person concerned, again pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting the revocation of the Deportation Order. This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so. The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request is that the existing Deportation Order will be either 'revoked' or 'affirmed'. Once such a decision has been made, this will be notified in writing.

I am advised that the position in the State of the spouse of the person concerned is not such as would carry any entitlement to family reunification.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail

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

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Staff

70. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the two investigators seconded to the Charleton tribunal from GSOC have been covered by alternative recruitment; if not, the way in which she envisages the shortage of GSOC resources would be covered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25226/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In response to a request from the sole member of the Disclosures Tribunal and with the agreement of the Chairperson of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission two investigators were seconded by GSOC to the Disclosures Tribunal in March. I am grateful to the Chairperson of GSOC for her assistance in this matter. In consequence of this secondment I obtained the sanction of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for GSOC to recruit two investigators to fill the two seconded posts. GSOC were informed of this sanction in early March.

Courts Staff

71. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the secondment of two researchers from the Supreme Court to the Charleton inquiry will cause administrative problems for the courts. [25227/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has confirmed that two judicial researchers have been seconded to the Tribunal of Inquiry into Protected Disclosures. It is not anticipated that their secondment will give rise to any administrative difficulties for the courts as judicial researchers generally do not undertake administrative functions.

Independent Review Mechanism

72. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to consider the cases that went before the independent review mechanism due to the fact that the process was undermined by the failure to allow applicants engage orally with the panel team or to have input into the setting of the terms of reference regarding same and that no further action was taken in most cases. [25236/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, in May 2014 the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) was established to consider allegations of Garda misconduct or deficiencies in the way that Gardaí had carried out investigations. A panel consisting of two Senior and five Junior Counsel was established for the purpose, all selected on the basis of their knowledge of the criminal justice system. Recom-

mendations were returned in all of the 320 complaints referred to the Panel and the process of issuing decision letters to the complainants largely concluded in February 2016.

I have repeatedly emphasised that the IRM was not established to act as a Commission of Inquiry or Investigation. Nor was it designed to make findings. The purpose of the review was to triage the various complaints to establish whether there was any action which I, as Minister, could take to further a resolution of that complaint. The Review did not therefore involve interviews or meetings with complainants or any other form of investigation. Counsel were required to consider the matters raised by the complainants and any corroboration offered by them and to take into account any actions already undertaken in relation to the complaint. Counsel were then required to use their knowledge and experience of criminal law to recommend whether further action was either possible or appropriate and if so to recommend to me, as Minister, the relevant action to take. It was open to the panel to make whatever recommendation they considered appropriate.

It is correct to say that the majority of the recommendations were that I should take no further action insofar as I had no role or function in relation to the matter under complaint. The reasons for this include cases where the complaints fell outside the remit of the review and ongoing matters either before the Courts or by way of investigations by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC).

I appreciate that some complainants were disappointed with the outcome of the review but it is important to note that the review mechanism was fully independent and came to its own conclusions in all cases.

Road Traffic Offences Data

73. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 40 of 15 November 2016 (details supplied) the progress reports of this working group which can be shared with Dáil Éireann; if the group meets regularly; if improvements are being implemented; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25252/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Síochána Inspectorate recommended in its report ‘The Fixed Charge Processing System – A 21st Century Strategy’ (February 2014) that a review of the summons serving process be undertaken by An Garda Síochána to ascertain the reasons for the significant level of unserved summonses and to make recommendations to provide a more effective summons serving process. An Garda Síochána’s review process for improving summons service is broken down into three goal types:

The short-term goals included immediately raising the profile of summons service within An Garda Síochána. I am informed by the Garda authorities that, in June 2014, a new process was put in place, focussed on improving the rate of summons service achieved by An Garda Síochána. The process was overseen by an Assistant Commissioner at national level and an Inspector was given responsibility to put processes in place to improve service rates at Divisional Level. A standard structure was developed across each division of An Garda Síochána, pending the delivery of the ICT facility required. In 2014, the rate of service of summonses in each Garda Region was placed on the agenda for meetings held by the Divisional Officer and District Officer as part of the Accountability Framework in An Garda Síochána. In addition, each Regional Assistant Commissioner directed that every effort is made to serve all summonses received in each Garda Division, Garda members are made accountable for their

service of summonses and also each member should be made aware of their responsibilities to record both service and non-service details on PULSE and the importance of accurate recording of this information. Guidance on summons service was made available on An Garda Síochána's internal portal page. An Garda Síochána has completed implementation of the short-term goals.

The medium-term goals involved the establishment of a standardised reporting structure with regard to monthly summons service rates. A template was introduced for reporting on the number of summonses on hand at the beginning and end of each calendar month. The number of summonses received, served and unserved is also recorded for each calendar month. These figures are used to calculate an approximate service rate and this rate is used as a base line to identify increases or decreases in summons service over time. This system allows for managers to assess the effectiveness of the summons service process in their respective Divisions and allows National summons service rates to be monitored.

As a consequence of these initiatives, the service rate for summonses increased from an average of 57% in 2014 to 69% in the first half of 2016. An Garda Síochána indicated at the most recent public meeting with the Policing Authority on 27 April 2017, which focussed on roads policing, that follow-up action is carried out when summonses are returned and that an average of 20% of those summonses not served on the first occasion are subsequently served.

It is also important to note that payments were received for 73% of Fixed Charge Notices issued in 2016, which constitutes a high payment rate and a high level of acceptance of penalty points, in the case of penalty point-offences.

The Garda authorities have indicated that meetings take place with the Courts Service on a regular basis in relation to a wide range of service related issues, including summons service. While progress on the service rate has improved, the Garda Commissioner has directed every effort should be made to build on the increased service rate achieved to date while also examining other options in terms of the outsourcing of summons service. Challenges remain in relation to effecting service of summons in certain circumstances, relating to such matters as inaccurate address data, persons moving address, or living in multi-occupancy dwellings or other settings which make service difficult. In addition, certain persons will take steps to evade service. Similar difficulties are experienced by many other police forces.

The Criminal Justice (FCPS) Working Group has been monitoring the Garda review of summons service since its establishment and has included this review in the Working Group's Work Programme, which oversees a number of priority items for implementation in the context of the FCPS. An Garda Síochána will make a presentation on its summons service review process at the next meeting of the Working Group, scheduled for 14 June 2017.

It is anticipated that the intended commencement of the third payment option on 1 June 2017 will lead to a further increase in fixed charge amount payment rates, as a result of the provision of an additional / third opportunity to pay the fixed charge amount. As regards the impact of the third payment option on summons service, it is anticipated that the volume of road traffic offence cases proceeding to court will reduce, given that the new third payment option will be affixed to and issued with the summons itself.

With the completion of the medium-term goals relating to the review, the focus of the Garda authorities is now on the long-term goals, which include reviewing the legislation to allow for different methods of service, such as reviewing the possibility of outsourcing summons service in conjunction with the postal codification of addresses which took place in 2015, and considering e-summons service as part of the future vision of summons service.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Assessment

74. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which existing incentives for first-time house buyers is assisting those who are eligible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25150/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the Help to Buy (HTB) incentive, which assists with funding the deposit required to purchase or self-build a new home to be used as the individuals principal private residence. The scheme is open to both those who are purchasing new builds from a developer, and those who self-build. By restricting it to new builds and new self-build homes only, it is anticipated that the resulting increase in demand for affordable new build homes should encourage the construction of an additional supply of such properties.

Broadly, the relief takes the form of a rebate of income tax, including DIRT, paid over the previous four tax years. The maximum possible rebate is 5% of the purchase price, or 5% of the valuation for a self-build. Although relevant properties valued at up to €500,000 can qualify, the maximum relief is capped at €20,000 per property, subject to the applicant having paid sufficient income tax and DIRT over the previous 4 years. Where more than one individual is involved in purchasing or building a new home, all of the individuals must be first-time buyers.

There are additional conditions of the scheme that must be met, including that the mortgage taken out to purchase or build the home must be a minimum of 70% of the purchase price or 70% of the value of the property in the case of a self-build.

The HTB scheme assists first-time buyers in making up the deposit to go towards their first home. The recent changes to the Central Bank's macro prudential rules means that such buyers must be in a position to fund a deposit of a minimum of 10% of the purchase price, or property value in the case of a self build. The HTB scheme can assist with the provision of up to half of this deposit, where the conditions of the scheme are met. I am firmly of the view that the scheme is of great value for those who may have difficulty in saving for such a deposit. Particular individuals who may be encountering such difficulties include those who are paying substantial rents, and those who incur significant childcare costs. I would also point out however, that first-time buyers must continue to meet the loan to income requirements of the macro prudential rules.

Given the level of interest and uptake of the scheme, data on which are updated regularly on the Revenue Commissioners website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/htb-incentive-stats.html>, I consider that the scheme is operating as intended.

Tax Rebates

75. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide an annual rebate similar to the med 1 on toll fees paid by persons commuting to and from work; the estimated upfront cost to the Exchequer of a 20% rebate; his views on whether the cumulative effect of tolling on certain routes is anti competitive and anti worker; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25065/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Employees may claim a tax deduction in respect of (a) the cost of travelling expenses necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of their employment or office; and (b) the cost of other expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment. However, these

deductions do not ordinarily include the cost of travelling to and from a principal place of work.

In order to encourage the uptake of more sustainable and environmentally friendly transport options the Deputy may wish to note that persons commuting to work can already avail of the TaxSaver scheme in respect of public transport and the cycle to work scheme.

Given the information provided by the Deputy, and on the assumption that he is proposing a rebate of income tax paid, it is not possible to provide a cost for his proposal. Notwithstanding the above, the Deputy appears to be suggesting a broad based relief rather than a targeted tax incentive. In this regard, I would draw the attention of the Deputy to the tax expenditure guidelines issued by my Department, which stipulate that “the key rationale for Government intervention in a market...by way of a tax expenditure...should be the existence of a market failure” and that a tax-based incentive should be more efficient than a direct expenditure measure. A measure such as the one proposed by the deputy does not appear to address a clear market failure in circumstances where alternative taxation based measures are already available. Therefore, I have no plans to introduce a rebate along the lines proposed by the Deputy.

State Banking Sector

76. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans regarding the proceeds of the sale of shares of a bank (details supplied); and if he will use those proceeds for public investment rather than debt servicing. [25074/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Program for a Partnership Government allows for the sale of not more than 25% of any bank before the end of 2018 (plus any over-allotment option). I have not yet made any decision to proceed with a sale of shares in AIB. In order to proceed with an IPO I would need to be satisfied that the market is prepared to put a fair and reasonable value on the bank’s equity, bearing in mind the bank’s current performance, its future prospects and the outlook for the Irish economy. I will do so on the advice of my officials in my Department and our financial advisors.

As I have outlined previously, the sale of financial assets, such as bank shares are transactions which do not result in a beneficial impact to the General Government Balance (GGB) under EUROSTAT rules. This is due to the fact that this type of disposal is classified as a financial transaction whereby it is essentially the exchange of one form of asset (such as shares, equities, loans) for another kind (cash). Consequently, the sale of any shareholding in AIB would not count as general government revenue. Therefore, there would not be increased capacity to spend on capital projects as a result of the sale of shares in AIB without affecting the general government balance.

While not improving the deficit, cash proceeds arising from any sale of shares would result in a reduced requirement for Exchequer borrowing which ultimately results in lower debt. A lower debt level is not only beneficial in terms of the fiscal sustainability of the State but would also lead to reduced interest payments in future years.

As public indebtedness rose partly due to the recapitalisation of the banks, the appropriate way of treating one-off revenue from divesting the State of its banking assets is to use these proceeds towards debt reduction. These disposals would also help contain contingent liabilities for the State.

As a further comment, though unrelated to banking policy, I have previously acknowledged the need for increased public investment. The current Capital Plan sets a baseline from which this Government intends to increase investment in critical infrastructure, and in areas such as

housing and health, as the Deputy has identified into the future. As outlined in the 2017 Estimates, gross voted capital expenditure will increase to €4.5 billion in 2017. This represents an increase of almost €400 million in comparison to the 2016 outturn. By 2021 it is envisaged that Gross Voted Capital Expenditure will reach €7.3 billion, an increase of over 100 per cent in comparison to its level in 2014. Based on my Department's GNP forecasts, Ireland's Exchequer public investment will reach 2.7% of GNP by 2021. These increases in investment over the coming years will be allocated to identified priorities on the basis of the outcome of the review of the Capital Plan currently underway.

State Banking Sector

77. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will proceed with the sale of shares in a bank (details supplied) despite a vote by Dáil Éireann to place preconditions on the sale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25078/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have not yet made any decision to proceed with a sale of shares in AIB. I have consistently stated that any decision to proceed with an IPO of the bank will be based on advice from my officials and advisers, and depend on favourable market conditions which would support our objective of achieving an attractive valuation for the business. As we are well into May at this juncture, I will make a decision whether to proceed or not in the coming weeks.

As I indicated previously, the Programme for a Partnership Government allows for the sale of up to 25% (plus a standard "greenshoe" or over-allotment option) of AIB before the end of 2018. The Labour Party brought a Private Members Motion before the Dail two weeks ago which called for increased capital expenditure, which I spoke on and tabled an amendment to. I was very clear that our desire to exit and de-risk our banking exposure and issues regarding the EU Fiscal Rules, are completely unrelated and should not be conflated.

State Aid

78. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the steps Ireland has taken to collect the sum specified by the European Commission in its state aid ruling regarding a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25079/17]

79. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason Ireland has not collected the sum specified by the European Commission in its state aid ruling regarding a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25080/17]

80. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if Ireland has requested more time to collect the sum specified by the European Commission in its state aid ruling regarding a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25081/17]

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe for the collection of payment due to the State arising from the European Court of Justice judgment on a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25196/17]

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the European Commission has been in contact with his Department with regard to the collection of payment due to the State arising from the European Court of Justice judgment on a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25197/17]

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has assessed the use of interest arising from the escrow account due to hold the payment due to the State arising from the European Court of Justice judgment on a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25198/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 to 80, inclusive, and 87 to 89, inclusive, together.

Notwithstanding the appeal in the Apple State Aid case and the difference in view between Ireland and the Commission on the issue, the Government is committed to complying with the binding legal obligations the Commission's Final Decision places on Ireland.

Apple therefore must be deprived of the benefit of the alleged aid and this involves two actions:

1. The calculation of the amount of aid
2. The process by which Apple are denied this amount of money

The Commission have estimated that this will amount to €13bn but the precise sum is to be calculated using the methodology set out in the Decision, which is then subject to interest as set out in EU Regulations on the recovery of State Aid.

These sums will be placed into an escrow fund with the proceeds being released only when there has been a final determination in the European Courts over the validity of the Commission's Decision. Given the scale and bespoke nature of such a fund, the precise terms are still being negotiated and are subject to confidential and commercially sensitive deliberations.

The Government is fully committed to ensuring that recovery takes place without delay and have committed significant resources to this matter. This work is being led by my Department but also involves officials from a range of State organisations including the Revenue Commissioners, the National Treasury Management Agency and the Attorney General's Office as well as external expertise.

Irish officials are continuing this intensive work to ensure that the State complies with all our recovery obligations as soon as possible, and remain in regular contact with the Commission and Apple.

Although the formal deadline has now passed, it is not unusual or uncommon for Member States to require more time for recovery and the Commission have acknowledged the complexity involved in our case.

State Banking Sector

81. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the safeguards he will put in place to protect the rights and conditions, including pension entitlements of persons (details supplied) or other State backed banks following a sale. [25083/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Any potential IPO of AIB, or sale of shares in the State's other investments, will make no change whatsoever to the rights of employees or pension holders in those institutions.

As the Deputy is aware, as Minister for Finance I have no role in the day-to-day operations of any of the banks in which the State is a shareholder. Staff pension entitlements and related

matters are a matter for the Board and management of each institution, in keeping with their obligations under relevant industrial relations agreements or in cooperation with pension fund trustees, where such obligations exist. Further information on the rights of pension holders can be accessed from the Pensions Authority: <http://www.pensionsauthority.ie/en/>

I requested that AIB comment on the Deputy's question and they have offered the following response:

“AIB closed all of its defined benefit pension schemes to future accrual from 31st December 2013. From 1st January 2014, all AIB staff accrue pension benefits on a defined contribution basis.

AIB agreed funding plans with each of its closed defined benefit schemes and has met its funding obligations for each plan.

Any potential AIB IPO would not impact on these pension arrangements.”

Tax Data

82. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue raised from tobacco product tax by product type in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [25089/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that the revenue raised from Tobacco Product Tax by product for 2007 to April 2017 is provided in the following table. Please note that receipts for 2017 are provisional and maybe subject to revision.

Year	Fine Cut Tobacco€m	Cigars€m	Cigarettes€m	Other€m
2007	22.6	9.5	1,155.0	5.2
2008	25.1	10.2	1,131.5	4.2
2009	46.5	9.6	1,155.4	5.0
2010	45.2	9.2	1,100.9	4.3
2011	56.1	9.4	1,056.8	4.0
2012	71.0	7.8	989.6	3.9
2013	97.7	7.9	955.2	3.1
2014	91.3	7.7	881.3	3.3
2015	133.9	7.6	937.6	3.2
2016	113.1	8.1	973.2	3.3
2017 (to April)	16.5	1.9	229.6	0.6

Tax Data

83. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide clearance data for roll-your-own tobacco products cleared from tax warehouses in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [25090/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that clearances data for roll your own tobacco products (Fine Cut Tobacco) for the years 2003 to 2015 are published on the Revenue statistics website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/excise-volumes-commodity.html>.

The 2016 and 2017 data are provided in the following table. Please note clearances for 2016 and 2017 are provisional and maybe subject to revisions.

Year	Fine Cut Tobacco (Kg)
2016	353,330
2017 (Jan -Apr)	53,257

Insurance Industry Regulation

84. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding taxi insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25091/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to review individual cases nor to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in particular cases.

However, I do accept that it is possible for the State to play a role in helping to stabilise the market and deal with factors contributing to the cost of insurance. Consequently, I established the Cost of Insurance Working Group and appointed Minister of State Eoghan Murphy as Chair. The Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was finalised in December 2016, approved by Cabinet on January 10th 2017, and subsequently published. It contains 33 recommendations and 71 actions which are detailed in an action plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation. Work on carrying out these recommendations is well underway and I am confident that the report's 71 action points will be implemented by the end of 2018, with 45 due for completion this year. The Working Group continues to meet regularly and will report on a quarterly basis detailing its progress.

With regard to the taxi sector in particular, I understand that it made representations to my Department and the Cost of Insurance Working Group and these were taken into consideration during the review. The position of the taxi sector, which serves a social as well as an economic purpose, particularly in rural areas where public transport is less readily available, was acknowledged by the inclusion in the Report of a recommendation for the Advisory Committee on Small Public Vehicles (commonly referred to as the Taxi Advisory Committee (TAC)) to enter regular discussions with Insurance Ireland in order to explore solutions for drivers in the sector.

The TAC met with Insurance Ireland on May 22nd to explore solutions for drivers in the sector and will report to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport on that engagement. The Cost of Insurance Working Group will also be updated on this meeting and review the action on the basis of that update.

It should be noted that the issues raised by the taxi sector were in the main similar to those affecting consumers generally, notwithstanding that there are risks that are specific to the sector. While there is no silver bullet to reduce the cost of insurance, I believe that with the cooperation and commitment of all parties, fairer premiums for consumers, including taxi drivers can be

delivered over the implementation period of the Cost of Motor Insurance Report.

Illicit Trade in Fuel and Tobacco Products

85. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if additional measures will be introduced to deal with the problem of fuel smuggling and trading in illicit diesel products due to recent dumping of sludge south of the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25124/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware of reports of a recent incident involving the illegal dumping of sludge close to the border with Northern Ireland and recognise the serious threat that fuel fraud poses to legitimate business, consumers and the Exchequer. I am advised by Revenue that tackling fuel fraud has been one of their priorities over recent years.

While it is very disappointing that incidents such as this still occur, I am advised that the level of this illegal dumping is greatly reduced. I understand that a total of 40 illegal bulk containers of mineral oil waste were detected in County Louth to date in 2017, while 500 such containers were detected there in 2013. This improvement reflects the success Revenue has in tackling this problem and the impact of legislative changes that I introduced over a number of Finance Acts to strengthen Revenue's powers in tackling fraud in the fuel sector. The measures implemented by Revenue to tackle the problem included the introduction of stringent new supply chain controls and reporting requirements for fuel transactions to minimise the scope for fraud. It also included a rigorous programme of enforcement action by Revenue. In addition, Revenue and HM Revenue and Customs in the United Kingdom undertook a joint initiative to find a new fiscal marker for use in marked fuels, which was introduced in Ireland and the United Kingdom from the beginning of April 2015.

I understand that the industry view is that the measures implemented to date have been successful in significantly curtailing fuel fraud in Ireland. This view is supported by a significant increase in tax revenues from road diesel over the past three years. I am also advised that Revenue conducted a National Random Sampling Programme in January 2016, with a view to obtaining an updated picture of the extent of the fuel laundering problem. The programme involved selecting a random sample comprising nearly one in every ten of the 2,500 holders of Auto Fuel Trader Licences (any trader that produces, sells, deals in, or keeps for sale or delivery road diesel is legally obliged to hold such a licence). Road diesel samples were taken from all traders in the programme and tested for the presence of the new marker. No evidence of the new fiscal marker was found in any of the samples tested. The random sampling programme was repeated in January 2017 and again, no evidence of the fiscal marker was found. This provides very persuasive evidence that the strategy undertaken in recent years has been successful in addressing and significantly curtailing the laundering problem.

I am satisfied that Revenue's work against fuel fraud has achieved a considerable level of success, and I am assured that action in this area will continue to be a high priority. In addition, I assure the Deputy that I will fully consider any further proposals for legislative change that may be brought forward by Revenue which would enhance its capacity to deal effectively with fraud and criminality in this area.

Tax Credits

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the updated entitlement in

terms of tax credits or allowances in the case of a person (details supplied); the extent of adjustment in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25134/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that for 2013 to 2017 inclusive, the person concerned is in receipt of both the Personal Tax Credit and the PAYE Tax Credit. A PAYE/USC Balancing Statement (P21) for each of years 2013 to 2016 issued to the person concerned on 5 May 2017 setting out her earnings and deductions for each of those years and any overpayment due has been refunded.

Questions Nos. 87 to 89, inclusive, answered with Question No. 78.

Property Tax

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the implementation of the Thornhill report on local property tax; his plans for the further review of the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25199/17]

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the revaluation date of the local property tax; the timeframe for LPT charges to be changed arising from that revaluation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25200/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 90 and 91 together.

I engaged Dr. Don Thornhill in 2015 to conduct a review to consider and make recommendations on the operation of the Local Property Tax, in particular, any impacts on LPT liabilities due to recent property price developments. Dr. Thornhill made a number of recommendations in his report on his review of the Local Property Tax. His central recommendation is for a revised system whereby a minimum level of LPT revenues in each local authority area would be determined by Government, ideally having regard to the apportionment between local authority areas of the historic yield. This in turn would allow for the estimation of LPT rates for each local authority area and the application of these by taxpayers and Revenue. Local authorities could adjust this rate upwards by a factor of up to 15%. This new system was recommended by Dr. Thornhill with a possible interim deferral of the next valuation date until November 2018 or November 2019.

In my Budget 2016 statement, I said that I would be proposing to Government that the revaluation date for the LPT be postponed from 2016 to 2019. This postponement meant that home owners were not faced with significant increases in their LPT in 2017 as a result of increased property values. The postponement also gives sufficient time for the other recommendations in Dr. Thornhill's report to be considered fully by the Government and there are no proposals to change this.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2015 gave effect to the postponement of the revaluation date of residential property for LPT purposes, and also to two of the recommendations in Dr. Thornhill's report, involving LPT relief for properties affected by pyrite and relief for properties occupied by persons with disabilities.

My Department will be considering issues relating to the implementation of other recommendations in the Thornhill Report in due course in line with the 2019 timeline. I also note that in accordance with the Programme for a Partnership Government a series of reports is currently in preparation for Government and for the Oireachtas, on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff resources allocated to tax audit and investigation activities as announced in budget 2017; the extra amount spent on information technology systems capacity; the amount of extra tax taken in as a result of this initiative; the amount of extra tax he expects to be taken in over 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25212/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In strengthening our commitment in tackling non-compliance, the 2017 Estimates provided an additional €5 million to Revenue for an additional 50 staff (full time equivalent) for audit and investigation activities, including tackling offshore tax evasion, as well as enhancing ICT systems capacity for data matching and data analytics in tax and duty compliance interventions. It was estimated that the total yield in 2017 from this additional resource and tackling offshore tax evasion would be €80m.

Revenue continually invests in systems capacity to support a wide range of taxation processing and compliance activity across both their internal and external systems. Therefore any additional spend on systems capacity will not only facilitate data matching and data analytics but will also ensure the performance across a range of systems. As such any extra spend cannot be directly attributable to individual functions.

I am advised by Revenue that they have recruited over 100 Executive Officers to date in 2017, 65 of whom went into a comprehensive two-year audit training programme. The balance went into an accelerated audit training programme, as they were already sufficiently qualified. It is anticipated that these staff will commence full time audit and compliance activities from mid-2017. It is too early to say what the final yield will be from tackling offshore tax evasion, audit & investigations arising from additional resources in 2017.

I am advised by Revenue that they projected that approximately 500 audit staff will retire over the next five years. They currently have c.400 at various stages of audit training. It is noted that the investment in the training and development of a Revenue auditor or investigator can take up to three to four years, depending on previous relevant experience. Revenue plans to recruit c. 150 Executive Officers per annum over the next five years with the majority of these going into audit training based on current resource provision.

Excise Duties Yield

93. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of extra excise duties received in 2016 and to date in 2017 on cigarettes as a result of the increase of 50 cent in excise announced in budget 2017; the amount he expects to take in for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25213/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Excise Duty on a packet of 20 cigarettes was increased by 50 cents (including VAT) with effect from midnight on 11 October 2016. I am informed by Revenue that the additional Excise and VAT received since 11 October 2016 to end April 2017 is €20.1m. This calculation is based on provisional tobacco clearances and may be subject to revision.

The forecast yield in 2017 from the increase announced in Budget 2017 is €65m.

Tax Yield

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax revenue received as a result of the section 110 and other fund changes made as part of budget 2017; the amount he currently expects to receive as a result of the changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25214/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that in relation to the Budget 2017 measures, a yield of €50 million was included in Budget 2017. This yield was both conservative and prudent at the time. To estimate the yield from these amendments into the future requires predicting changes in property prices as well as behavioural changes. It is too early for the Department or Revenue to revise the final amount expected in 2017 or beyond, however based on receipts received to date it is likely that the projected yield will be exceeded.

I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to identify separately any element of the combined yield from the two measures in the tax yield.

Banking Sector

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that the main banks are making adequate resources available to facilitate the urgently required house building programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25219/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, Government policy is focused on ensuring that all viable small and medium sized businesses have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources. The Deputy will also be aware that, in my role as Minister for Finance, I have no direct function in the relationship between the banks and their customers. Also, I have no statutory function in relation to the banking decisions made by individual lending institutions at any particular time and these are taken by the board and management of the relevant institution. This includes decisions in relation to products as determined by the banks.

All viable businesses operating in Ireland should have the opportunity to access sufficient finance to meet their enterprise needs in a manner that supports growth and employment in the economy. As the Deputy will be aware, Chapter 3.5 (Ensuring Finance for Growth) of the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 (APJ) sets out a range of commitments to ensure viable SMEs can access appropriate finance at a reasonable cost from both bank and non-bank sources.

In line with Action 62 of the APJ 2017, officials from my Department collate and examine data from AIB and Bank of Ireland on a monthly basis, including data pertaining to the various sectors. Furthermore, my officials meet the banks on a quarterly basis to ensure an informed understanding of the wider SME bank lending environment which assists the development and implementation of policies aimed at ensuring SME access to finance and increased competition in the SME lending sector.

I note that the data published by the Central Bank of Ireland in its Quarterly Trends in Business Credit and Deposits series shows that new lending to Property Investment/Development enterprises for 2016 totalled €1.3 billion in drawdowns, a growth of €589 million when compared to 2015.

The Deputy may also wish to note that in the social housing market, in line with the commitment contained in “Rebuilding Ireland”, the NTMA and key Government Departments are examining the feasibility of establishing a funding vehicle in conjunction with the private sector, which could facilitate investment in social housing.

Separately, ISIF is making a very substantial contribution to new private housing supply which is critical in terms of meeting the pent up demand for housing across all sectors of the market. In line with its double bottom line mandate, ISIF has already invested in a number of significant financing platforms and projects in the construction sector, and is actively examining other investment opportunities.

The Government remains committed to the SME sector, including those involved in Property Investment/Development, and sees it as the key engine of ongoing economic growth.

School Equipment

96. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a piece of equipment will be provided to a school (details supplied) in County Kerry. [25056/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2016 the school in question applied to my Department for funding for the piece of equipment to which the Deputy refers. This equipment is not routinely grant-aided by my Department and the application was unsuccessful at that time on that basis.

Departmental Properties

97. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department received a valuation report for the Harold's Cross greyhound stadium site prior to purchasing it; if the amount paid matches the valuation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25057/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): No payment has been made by my Department to Bord na gCon at this point.

The current status is that a formal offer of €23million has been made, and accepted by Bord na gCon. The matter is subject to contract and the acquisition will be subject to the satisfactory completion of the conveyancing process.

The sale is subject to the approvals required from the Minister for Agriculture Food and the Marine, and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

A valuation report was compiled by the Valuation Office in accordance with the RICS Valuation – Professional Standards ('The Red Book', effective January 2014) and the International Valuation Standards as issued by the International Valuation Standards Council.

The market value of the property set out in the report was €23 million.

Pharmacy Regulations

98. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the policy change regarding payment to fifth year pharmacy students on work placement; his plans to intervene to reinstate payments to students; the reason tuition fees have increased for fifth year students in view of the fact that the students spend three months teaching and the remaining eight months on unpaid placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25058/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The education and train-

ing of pharmacists to first registration is specified in EU legislation (Article 44 of Directive 2005/36/EC) and consists of a five-year education and training programme, which must include a minimum of six months' practical training under the supervision of a pharmacist.

In Ireland, the Pharmacy Act 2007 conferred responsibility on the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI), the pharmacy regulator, with respect to pharmacy education and training.

The PSI is an independent statutory body and is responsible for defining and ensuring the standards of education and training for pharmacists qualifying in Ireland. This includes developing standards, policies and carrying out accreditation of pharmacy degree programmes.

The changes in the degree programme structure arise from the recommendations of the Pharmacy Education and Accreditation Reviews project and implementation has been overseen by the National Forum for Pharmacy Education and Accreditation which includes representatives of PSI, Department of Health, Higher Education Authority, community, hospital and industry pharmacists, patient, student and international expertise.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Education and Training) (Integrated Course) Rules were signed by the Minister for Health in 2014.

These Rules underpin the implementation of the new five-year fully integrated Master's degree programme in pharmacy which evolved from significant review of the previous training pathway, and international best practice assessment in this area. They also gave effect to new accreditation standards that were developed by the PSI and place the Core Competency Framework for Pharmacists on a statutory footing.

In that context, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in the changes to the Pharmacy programmes.

Departmental Records

99. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps his Department is taking to secure and audit all files and documents in its possession relating to the treatment of children detained in industrial schools; and his plans to allow access to those files for the relevant persons and families of those that were incarcerated in the institutions. [25066/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department maintains records on former residents of Industrial and Reformatory Schools who were placed there by way of a Court hearing. The original files are held in a secure location in the Departments Offices. The files have been scanned onto a Document Management System. This system is used to carry out the necessary searches for any personal records which may exist for former residents who apply to the Department for a copy of such records. Such applications are made to the Department under Freedom of Information legislation and Data Protection legislation.

For the sake of completeness I should point out that legislation is at an advanced stage of drafting to provide for the retention of the records of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, the Residential Institutions Redress Board and the Residential Institutions Review Committee. It is intended that those records of the bodies which are of archival value will be retained in the National Archives and completely sealed for a period of at least 75 years.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

100. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve class sizes pupil-teacher ratios at primary level for the 2017-2018 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25096/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2016 provided for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by 1 point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils for the 2016/17 school year and it should be noted that the current staffing schedule of 27:1 for primary schools has restored it to the position it was at prior to the fiscal crisis.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

My focus in Budget 2017 was on obtaining additional funding to provide for demographic growth, and additional special education and school leadership resources for our schools.

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools in the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools in the coming school year.

The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

Departmental Funding

101. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will prioritise funding for primary education in his 2018 Estimates discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25097/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's overall funding for first level education increased by €161m in 2017. Increasing demographics is a key driver of this increased funding given that this results in a requirement for additional teachers, Special Needs Assistants, capitation payments etc. Funding requirements for primary education in 2018 will be dealt with as part of the 2018 Estimates process.

It is important to note that there are limited funds available in Budget 2018 to meet a wide range of needs across all areas of Government.

My focus will be on ensuring that any available funding for education is aimed at delivering on our goal of making the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026.

Schools Building Projects Data

102. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and secondary schools announced as new builds in 2012 that are still in temporary accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25105/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise that nine of the newly established schools as referred to by the Deputy are currently in interim temporary

accommodation. Of these, permanent buildings are currently under construction for three of the schools. In the case of the remaining six schools, sites have recently been acquired for two of the schools and the acquisition process is currently in train to secure sites for the other four schools.

Institutes of Technology

103. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans for a proposed third level campus on a 35 acre site on the outskirts of Wexford town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25115/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Institute of Technology Carlow (IT Carlow) already has a campus based in Wexford town, which offers an extensive range of award qualifications from Level 6 through to postgraduate Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

My Department is supportive of the proposed acquisition by Carlow IT of a site in Wexford for development of a new purpose-built campus. Funding has been allocated to enable IT Carlow to acquire this site.

More broadly, there are plans in place for the development of a Technological University for the whole South-East region consisting of a consortium involving IT Carlow and Waterford Institute of Technology.

Schools Building Projects Status

104. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be approved for the new purpose school at a school (details supplied); when the project will move to stage one of the process; and when the new school will be complete. [25116/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that a building project for the school in question was included in the Department's 6 Year Capital Programme (2019 - 2021).

In this regard, my Department has requested information from the school and this is awaited. When this is received and considered, my Department will engage further with the school relating to the building project.

Departmental Staff Retirements

105. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions that exist for Department employees such as special needs assistants to continue to work beyond the age of 65 years of age if they wish to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25153/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In accordance with the superannuation scheme for Non-Teaching Staff operated by my Department special need assistants, who have had continuous employment which commenced prior to the 1st April 2004 must retire at the end of the school year in which they reach age 65. Special Needs Assistants who commenced employment between 1st April 2004 and 31st December 2012 are considered

“new entrants” under the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 and do not have a compulsory retirement age. Special Needs Assistants who commenced employment on or after the 1st January 2013 are members of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme which specifies a maximum retirement age of 70 years.

There is a provision in Circular 41/2011 which enables a retired SNA to be employed by a school post retirement: ‘Where an SNA who is retired and is in receipt of a pension returns to the position of an SNA on or after 1 January 2011, s/he will start on the first point of the post 1 January 2011 incremental salary scale’. Where a Special Needs Assistant retires on reaching mandatory retirement age, and is subsequently re-employed within a period of 26 weeks after retirement this new employment will be in a non-pensionable capacity. If however the person had retired on a voluntary basis before reaching mandatory retirement age and returns within a period of 26 weeks s/he will return to the pension scheme of which they were a member (unless they reached mandatory retirement age in the interim). If a Special Needs Assistant who retires either voluntarily or on reaching mandatory retirement age and is subsequently re-employed but has a break in service of more than 26 weeks s/he will become a member of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme (unless they reached age 70 in the interim).

Teaching Council of Ireland

106. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he received the Teaching Council report on teacher supply; the reason he has not published the report to date; when he will do so; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many primary schools are reporting great difficulties in filling vacancies when teachers are absent due to illness and other reasons; and the way in which his Department proposes to assist schools with these difficulties. [25181/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy is referring to the report of the Technical Working Group (TWG) which was set up by the Teaching Council to formulate advice on teacher supply. The Report focusses on the development of a model of primary teacher supply, while outlining the work which will be required to establish a model of post primary teacher supply. The report was submitted to my predecessor, Minister Jan O’Sullivan.

The aim of my Department’s policy is to achieve a balance between the supply of, and demand for, teachers. The Deputy will see from the Report that this is complex, particularly at post primary level, and it was important that the report was given careful consideration by officials of my Department and that suitable supporting actions were identified before publication. I intend to publish the TWG’s report shortly.

The report sets out an approach to planning which scopes out the work necessary to develop models for teacher supply in the medium to long term. It is of value in relation to building data models for predicting future requirements in the long term. However it does not address current issues.

In overall terms my Department does not have evidence of a recent or current general shortage of primary teachers, including for substitute positions. However, I am aware that some schools are experiencing difficulty in recruiting substitute teachers, and I am committed to examining all possible means of addressing this issue.

In that regard, officials in my Department have been giving consideration to the short term measures that might be implemented to increase the supply of teachers and, in conjunction with

the publication of the report, I intend to outline these measures, including the employment by schools of retired teachers and an increase in the number of days per school year that a teacher on career break may work as a substitute.

Minor Works Scheme Data

107. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the grants for school improvements which are made available to school boards on an annual basis; the reason in some cases schools are uncertain with regard to the continuation of a scheme until late in the school year; if he will inform schools at the start of a school year regarding such grants and when they will be paid; the cost of the minor works grant; and if it will be paid annually to schools as a matter of policy. [25182/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The conditions governing the Grant Scheme for Minor Works to Primary School properties are outlined in Circular Letter 0062/2013. The grant must be used on the physical infrastructure of the school or on items of furniture and equipment for educational use including IT related equipment.

The Circular Letter states that the grant will only be paid in future years as funding permits. Consequently, it is advisable that schools do not commence any capital works until the Minor Works Grant is lodged to their bank account. The grant which first came into operation in 1997 has issued in all school years since then with the exception of the 2012/2013 school year.

My Department's 2017 capital allocation for the school sector funds the Large Scale Projects Programme, the Additional Accommodation Scheme, Site Acquisitions, the Emergency Works Scheme, the Summer Works Scheme, furniture and equipment grants and other smaller programmes. The overall 2017 capital position, and in particular expenditure levels, will be assessed in the late autumn. Resulting from this exercise the issue or otherwise of the 2017/2018 Minor Works Grant at that time will be determined.

When the Minor Works Grant was issued for the 2016/2017 school year last November, the total cost of the grant amounted to €27.8m

School improvements are also delivered under the Summer Works Scheme and the Emergency Works Scheme but these are application based and only involve certain schools in any given year.

Schools Inspections

108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post-primary schools in which departmental inspectors carry out inspections on a yearly basis; the nature of such inspections; his views on the concerns expressed by teachers regarding excessive paper checking associated with his Department's supervision of schools; and the number of schools at each level which are in the school improvement programme. [25183/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2016, the Inspectorate carried out a total of 779 inspection visits and 197 school self-evaluation advisory visits in primary schools and 752 inspection visits and 77 school self-evaluation advisory visits in post-primary schools and centres for education.

Since 2010, the Inspectorate has developed a range of inspection models varying from short

one-day, unannounced inspections to more detailed and thorough inspections of schools. All of these models were developed following extensive collaboration and consultation with schools and the education partners. The full range of new and revised inspection models came into effect on 1 September 2016. A key issue that was addressed in the development of these inspections was to ensure that a greater focus is placed on classroom observation and less attention paid to the examination of documentation. In response to comments from the education partners, a single simplified guide to inspections was published for primary schools and a similar guide prepared for post-primary schools. These guides provide full details of the range of inspections used in schools, and they contain a list of the small number of documents that are required of schools during inspections. The majority of the documents required should be readily available in schools as they are part of the normal planning that would be expected in schools.

The range of inspection models in use includes the following:

Short, unannounced “incidental” inspections are carried out in a large number of primary and post-primary schools each year. They focus on the quality of classroom work and provide an opportunity to offer advice and feedback to individual teachers and to the school principal. These inspections are also used to collect information about the school, and the Inspectorate uses this information to plan a proportion of its other inspections.

Subject inspections/curriculum evaluations evaluate the quality of teaching and learning of a curriculum area in primary schools or a subject in post-primary schools.

DEIS evaluations evaluate the quality of action planning for improvement in both primary and post-primary schools included in the DEIS scheme, and the impact that this has on the learning of students.

Inspections of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Provision are conducted in primary and post-primary schools. Specialised inspections are also conducted in schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children detention Centres.

Programme evaluations examine the quality of programmes such as Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Junior Certificate School Programme in post-primary schools.

Whole-School Evaluations evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of the leadership and management in primary and post-primary schools.

Evaluations of Centres for Education are conducted mainly in Youthreach centres that provide “second-chance” educational opportunities for young people who have dropped out of mainstream schooling.

Follow-Through inspections take place in a proportion of schools in which inspections have occurred previously. These inspections, introduced in 2012, seek to establish the extent to which earlier recommendations have been implemented and act as an encouragement to boards and teachers to advance improvement in schools.

The current suite of inspection models means that short inspections occur more frequently in schools; schools in which there is a greater risk to the learning of students are identified more quickly; and a proportion of more intensive inspections can be conducted where the need for improvement is likely to be greatest. Follow-through inspections also provide added flexibility that helps to increase the impact of inspection for improvement.

In addition to the inspection models listed above, inspectors currently carry out inspections of the work of conditionally registered teachers at primary level on behalf of the Teaching

Council. These inspections help to inform the Council's decisions on teachers' registration. In the school year 2015/16, a total of 3 222 inspection visits were made to conditionally registered teachers for this purpose.

There are currently 26 primary and 7 post-primary schools in the school improvement process.

Teachers' Remuneration

109. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to end pay inequality between teachers appointed after 2010 and those appointed earlier specifically by reversing the decision of 2010 to impose pay cuts on new entrants in the same way as the withdrawal of the universal qualification allowance from entrants after February 2012 is being reversed. [25184/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. A previous Government reduced the salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. This decision also required that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale, which in the case of teachers had the effect of reducing their starting pay by a further 4-5%. Later in 2011, the Government placed a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers altogether. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers. The agreements also provide for earlier permanency for younger teachers, new promotion opportunities and new flexibilities in working hours.

The agreements have restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced service for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for Higher Education and for apprenticeships.

It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all areas of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated current full year cost would be in the order of €85 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

However there are other types of equality that we must also bear in mind, for example equality between public servants and people who work elsewhere or don't work at all. It would

also not be equal or fair for us to do unaffordable deals with particular groups of public servants that mean that we do not have the money left in the public purse to provide increases in social welfare payments for vulnerable groups, tax reductions for people at work, or investments in improvements in public services that people rely on.

In education, there is a well-established increment system. Teachers are not paid equally. For example, the pay scale for teachers appointed prior to 2011 ranges from €32,009 to €60,155 depending on the date that the individual began teaching. Part of the negotiation to date has secured a convergence of the scales of recruits at different periods.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the recently published analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission. The Government established the Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

I accept that the teacher unions have outstanding pay demands and that the new entrant deal does not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it does represent significant progress, and the door is not closed to the trade union movement seeking to advance the issue further in the context of public service pay talks. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, invited the Public Services Committee of ICTU to discussions on public service pay and a continued approach to the unwinding of the FEMPI legislation and these discussions are now underway.

Apprenticeship Data

110. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 166 of 16 May 2017, if the ten new apprenticeships planned to commence in 2017 are the first apprenticeship categories to be rolled out under category 1 as identified by the Apprenticeship Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25206/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): There are currently five new apprenticeship programmes that have been developed by the Apprenticeship Council following its first call for proposals in 2015. Last year the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launched in September and the Industrial Electrical Engineering Apprenticeship got underway in November. Three further new programmes are currently recruiting apprentices and will commence in May and June of this year, two in the medical devices area and one in polymer processing. Subject to successful validation, ten further new programmes are scheduled to commence in 2017 in various sectors including hospitality, accounting and financial services. All fifteen of these programmes were originally categorised by the Apprenticeship Council as category 1.

The Apprenticeship Council continues to work closely with consortia in developing proposals arising from the first call into sustainable apprenticeships. Details of all statutory apprenticeships currently operational or in development can be found on the new apprenticeship website www.apprenticeship.ie

Earlier this month, a second call for proposals was issued to refresh the pipeline of apprenticeship proposals established through the first call. The second call will remain open until 1st September.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

111. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the circumstances raised in correspondence about a person (details supplied) have been considered under the review of the student grant scheme; the steps that have been put in place which will allow this person avail of the special rate of maintenance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25238/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Student Grant Scheme provides that in order to qualify for the special rate of grant, an applicant must meet the following conditions:

1. The applicant must qualify for the standard rate of grant.
2. Reckonable income must not exceed €22,703; and
3. On the 31st December of the relevant period, the reckonable income must include an eligible long-term payment prescribed in the Student Grant Scheme.

The applicant referred to by the Deputy did not have an eligible lone-term payment on 31st December and therefore did not qualify for the special rate of maintenance. However, the applicant did secure student support at the 100% grant level.

The current system of student support is underpinned by the Student Support Act 2011. A review of the Act has commenced, with a view to ensuring that student supports continue to effectively target those most in need of assistance. All relevant issues, including an examination of the qualifying criteria for the special rate of grant, will be considered as part of this review.

Apart from the Student Grant Scheme, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Schools Refurbishment

112. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason refurbishments to a school (details supplied) in Trim, County Meath, have been delayed; the expected start date for these refurbishments; when his Department will be in contact with the patron; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25250/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is my Department's intention to relocate the school in question to the property referred to in the details supplied to meet the school's permanent accommodation needs.

The property in question transferred to the Minister's ownership last year. This building is a listed structure that requires extensive refurbishment to make its facilities fit for modern school purposes. In that regard, a significant financial investment will be required and this has to be considered within the overall available capital envelope. I am not, therefore, in a position at this stage to indicate when the refurbishment works will be undertaken. My Department will be in further contact with the Patron when any further update is available.

In the interim period, my Department will be making arrangements to extend the school's current lease on its temporary premises until June 2018.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

113. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when he expects the submission for funding for the Aghancon and Clareen group water scheme in County Offaly to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25052/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department's new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018 includes funding for group water schemes, through Measure 1(b), where rationalisation / amalgamation of such schemes can ensure a more sustainable supply of water and enhance compliance with the water quality standards of the Drinking Water Regulations 2014.

Aghancon and Clareen group water schemes in County Offaly were approved by my Department under the programme in August 2016, with funding confirmed to Offaly County Council in November 2016, as a pilot amalgamation project in order to better inform the amalgamation process under the programme. The Aghancon and Clareen group water schemes should engage with Offaly County Council and proceed under its advice and guidance.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

114. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funding for the pyrite remediation scheme to cover the remediation of pyrite damaged homes for each year since its inception to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24797/17]

115. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to broaden the terms of the pyrite resolution board to include level one homes as a matter of urgency. [24800/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 115 together.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of "last resort" and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board's website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

The scheme is applicable to dwellings, which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established, in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

Some €2.2 million was provided to the Housing Agency in 2014 to meet expenditure incurred under the scheme in respect of design work, contractors, expenses to homeowners, operational costs, the administrative costs to the Housing Agency and the remediation of 5 dwellings in the final quarter of that year.

An additional sum of €10 million was made available in Budget 2015 to fund the operation of the scheme in 2015. A further 148 dwellings had remedial works completed under the scheme in 2015.

An allocation of €19 million was provided for the pyrite remediation scheme in Budget 2016 to meet activity under the scheme in 2016. Sanction for a further €7.6 million to support additional activity under the scheme last year was granted in late August 2016. Some 400 dwellings were remediated under the scheme in 2016.

A sum of €22 million was announced under Budget 2017 to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme in 2017. This allocation will facilitate the remediation of some 400 additional dwellings this year and is a clear signal of the continuing importance attached by Government to addressing the issue of significant pyritic damage in private dwellings. As at end April 2017 an aggregate total of 701 dwellings were completed since the scheme was first introduced.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the degree to which he expects to meet the imminent demand in respect of housing following the displacement of tenants from private accommodation for a variety of reasons and the immediate needs of such tenants as of now; if he is satisfied that the various local authorities can meet this need as required and, at the same time, deal with those who have been on local authority waiting lists for several years and keeping in mind the lack of appropriate emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25137/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In line with a commitment given under the Social Housing Strategy 2020 (published in 2014) the Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) is now being carried out on an annual basis from 2016 onwards. The preparation of the SSHA every year will assist in providing a more comprehensive picture of the dynamic numbers applying for social housing supports and of emerging trends. This will enable housing authorities and my Department to ensure that the pipeline for social housing delivery over time matches the profile of those in most need. The Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness sets ambitious targets to deliver a range of housing across the public and private sectors and the data obtained from the SSHA is of crucial importance in ensuring that the right type of housing is delivered in the right areas.

Pillar 2 of the Action Plan aims to accelerate social housing delivery and provides that over the period of the plan (2016-2021) 47,000 homes will be delivered under the various social housing programmes. Together with an expansion of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme nationwide, this will ensure that the supply of appropriate social housing supports meets demand.

19,055 social housing supports were provided in 2016, supported by expenditure of €935 million. This exceeded the target of 17,240 for 2016, giving a very positive start to the challenge of meeting the ambitious targets in Rebuilding Ireland. I am confident that the robust system of monitoring of the Plan's progress that has been put in place at every level should help to ensure

that the early progress made can be maintained and built upon in the coming months and years.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which he has received notification or information from the local authority in County Kildare regarding provision of emergency housing on a large scale such as modular housing units; if sufficient sites have been identified in or adjacent to existing centres of population with a view to meeting the combined demands of those already on local authority waiting lists and those being displaced from private rental accommodation for a variety of reasons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25138/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The social housing construction projects currently underway by Kildare County Council are included in the recently updated Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, which is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>.

This includes 17 construction projects delivering 301 new social homes for the county, which are at various stages of advancement including on site, undergoing planning and design, and projects recently completed.

I expect that Kildare County Council will continue to bring forward new projects which will continue to be focussed on their areas of greatest need. This may include projects under the rapid delivery programme where, I understand, the Council is examining options in relation to suitable sites.

I have assured Kildare County Council that funding is available to support them in the delivery of all such projects, both those already in train and further projects that they develop through the range of delivery streams.

Local Authority Housing Provision

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the degree to which he continues to have discussions with the various local authorities adjacent to Dublin with a view to meeting the emergency needs of persons being displaced from their homes through no fault of theirs who find themselves in need of emergency accommodation; if his attention has been drawn to the serious shortage of such accommodation in counties such as Kildare; his plans to meet this challenge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25139/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department continues to work closely with housing authorities in the areas most affected by deficits in housing supply to ensure that they are making every effort possible to meet the emergency accommodation needs of households presenting to them.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. One of the five pillars of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness is focused specifically on addressing homelessness and sets out a range of integrated measures through which local authorities, other public bodies,

approved housing bodies and other relevant organisations are responding to the homelessness challenge. Ultimately the solution rests in achieving a significant increase in housing supply, particularly in relation to social housing in respect of which 47,000 units of accommodation are to be provided over the period to 2021, supported by €5.35 billion in funding.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual local authorities. The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. The funding needs of the various housing authorities are kept under review on an ongoing basis. In Budget 2017, the Government approved funding of almost €98 million for homelessness, compared to an initial provision of €70 million last year, €53 million in 2015 and €45 million in 2014.

Local Authority Housing Provision

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which the local authority housing building programme is being augmented in the counties adjacent to Dublin in order to ensure the availability of adequate housing support in the short term for those on local authority waiting lists over a long period and those now coming onto such lists as a result of bank repossessions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25140/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland has put in place both the targets and funding resources to accelerate the delivery by 2021 of 47,000 social homes. This work is already well underway and we are increasingly seeing new social housing construction projects move onto site. I recently published the latest update of the Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, which now includes over 600 social housing construction projects, delivering over 10,000 social housing units. This is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>.

The construction projects listed in the Status Report are either on site, at different stages of planning and design or have recently been completed. As would be expected, given housing need, the Dublin area local authorities and those adjacent to Dublin feature very strongly in this construction programme. The same is true in relation to the delivery in the greater Dublin area of social housing through other means, which are also being vigorously pursued through the resources available under Rebuilding Ireland. This includes the acquisition of houses and apartments, the long-term leasing of homes by local authorities and AHBs for social housing use, including via the National Treasury Management Agency's Special Purpose Vehicle and the Repair & Leasing Initiative, and the accelerated rollout of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.

Further new social housing projects are being added to the delivery pipeline on a continuous basis and I am keen that all local authorities advance these projects as speedily as possible. This delivery will continue to be weighted in line with housing need and this can be particularly seen in relation to the rapid delivery programme, where a number of build projects are on site in the greater Dublin area that will deliver 200 new social homes over the coming months, with work already underway on advancing a further round of projects.

Housing Data

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of houses and new housing starts in each of the counties immediately adjacent to Dublin city and county over the past 12 months; the expectation in this regard in the next six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25141/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department publishes a range of datasets relating to housing market activity on the statistics area of its website. Details of commencement notices received by each of the 31 local authorities are published as a monthly series which can be accessed through the following weblink:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-starts>.

In respect of completions data, since the 1970's, my Department has published ESB data on residential homes connected to the ESB grid as a proxy for house completions, as it represents the best available indicator that a residential unit is becoming available for occupation. This dataset includes recently completed once-off homes, multi-unit scheme developments and apartments as well as some re-connections to the grid, where properties that have been unoccupied for over two years are being brought back into use. This dataset is also published as a monthly series, broken down by local authority, and can be accessed through the following weblink -

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-completions>.

Returns up to and including February 2017 are currently available in respect of both datasets and data in respect of March 2017 will be published shortly.

Both datasets show that the pace of house-building activity is gathering momentum. Driven by the strong supply side measures provided for under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, including an expanding social housing programme and the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund, housing supply should continue to strengthen in 2017 and beyond. The ESRI's Spring Quarterly Economic Commentary forecasts that national housing output will grow to 18,500 units during 2017, which would be an increase of 23.89% on the 14,932 in 2016.

Urban Development

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which progress is ongoing in regard to the resolution of issues affecting stalled development at Naas town centre; if adequate plans are in hand to enhance the profile of the town by way of a specific development strategy culminating on the development of the various available sites in the town including the town centre development with a view to encouraging increased footfall in the town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25142/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The management of certain issues relating to the stalled Naas town centre development is primarily a matter for Kildare County Council in the first instance, and I have no function in the matter.

However, as I have previously outlined, the securing of a satisfactory conclusion to the development of the site in question - which is of significant strategic importance to the town of

Naas - has been a particular focus of the Council's efforts over the last number of years. In this regard, I am informed by the Council that it continues to actively engage with NAMA - which has a controlling interest in the site - on the issue of the site being offered for sale as soon as possible, with a view to facilitating the completion of the development. The Council will continue to support and work in partnership with any stakeholders involved in the site. Subject to satisfactory planning approval, there is no impediment to accessing the site, or to appropriate development of the site.

The Council has also advised that during the last 18 months, it has initiated and supported a number of projects with the strategic objective of ensuring that the social and economic development of Naas is protected and enhanced, underpinned by the work of the Naas Roads and Transport Steering Group, the URBACT Group and the Naas Regeneration Group. The Council has also received the approval of the National Transport Authority to prepare a Traffic Management Study of Naas which will form an important element in the development of a Strategic Social and Economic Plan for Naas.

Local Authority Housing Provision

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if, in view of the urgent need to meet public housing demand throughout the country, all efforts might concentrate on the provision of a targeted number of local authority housing in each local authority area within the next 12 months and postpone further auditing of numbers on local authority waiting lists until at least 25% of the existing need is met thereby enabling local authority officials to concentrate on the priority of meeting the existing needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25143/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy may know, the Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) was traditionally carried out every three years. A commitment was given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 (published in 2014) to move to producing the SSHA on an annual basis from 2016 onwards. This commitment has been advanced, as it was felt that it was imperative that the SSHA be carried out every year because the provision of housing is a demand led service and it is vital to have regularly updated information on the scale and nature of demand.

The undertaking of the SSHA on an annual basis will assist in providing a more strategic picture of the dynamic numbers applying for social housing support and emerging trends. This approach will ensure that vulnerable groups in particular are accurately reflected within the assessment process, particularly in light of their additional support requirements. It will also ensure the changing formulation of households, with the increasing number of older people and people with special needs living independently in our communities, is reflected in the SSHA.

A key issue is to ensure that housing needs can be broken down into sub-groups, so that social housing delivered matches more closely the profile of those in need. Rebuilding Ireland has ambitious targets to deliver a range of housing across the public and private spectrum and the data obtained from the SSHA is of crucial importance in ensuring that the right type of housing is delivered in the right areas for the right people.

Question No. 123 answered with Question No. 51.

Housing Provision

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which facilities are available to meet the housing needs of the indigenous rural population throughout rural Ireland by way of ensuring an adequate number of houses in keeping with good planning principles to facilitate in so far as is possible the indigenous needs of those living in rural areas thereby reducing the impact on housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25145/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Based on ESB connections data, around half of the 15,000 new homes completed last year were one-off houses, mainly built in rural areas, which account for less than 40% of the national population. The high proportion of overall national house-building taking place in rural areas points to the degree to which indigenous communities in rural areas are being facilitated in meeting their housing needs in those rural areas, with a degree of overspill development from cities and towns as well.

In addition, my Department's Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing (2005) are designed to ensure that planning authorities strike a balance between managing the future of rural areas from a development perspective and at the same time enabling housing requirements of rural communities to be met. The Guidelines set out how planning authorities should frame their development plan policies for the different types of rural areas which may exist within the development plan area, which range from rural areas close to cities and towns at risk of overspill development and remoter areas with low levels of development pressure and consistent patterns of population decline. The Guidelines also set out policy advice on issues such as access to appropriate wastewater treatment facilities, potential impacts of the development on groundwater, landscape, natural and cultural heritage and addressing road safety issues (e.g. frontage onto national roads).

I am satisfied that a sufficiently flexible and robust policy framework is in place to ensure that rural communities can meet their housing needs.

I also recognise that the major shortfalls in housing provision are in our larger cities and towns and that it is in and around these key locations that we must focus our efforts to boost supply, as outlined in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, to avoid driving unsustainable overspill development in rural areas as a result of undersupply in urban locations.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will urgently examine the need to install a robust local authority housing loan system, similar to that available in the 1980s, with the objective of ensuring that persons who do not qualify for local authority housing on income grounds can at least apply for a loan to buy or construct their own houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25146/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are currently two housing loan finance offerings available from local authorities for first time buyers unable to get adequate loan finance from a building society or bank. When the loan products, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, were introduced, careful attention was given to the terms and conditions that should be applied to them. Decisions on all loan applications must be made in accordance with the applicable statutory Credit Policy in order to ensure lending prudence and to assist local authorities across the

sector to engage consistently in responsible mortgage lending, in the best interests of borrowers and local authorities as lenders alike.

Information on the number of local authority loans approved and issued is available on my Department's website <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>

I am currently examining the Home Choice Loan scheme and am also considering how local authority mortgages can be better publicised to ensure that creditworthy households who may be unable to source adequate loan finance from commercial lenders but could be eligible for one of the local authority mortgages, are made aware of the opportunity.

Local Authority Housing Data

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses directly under construction by the local authorities to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25147/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details in respect of the substantial pipeline of new social housing construction projects that is now in place are set out in the Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, the latest update of which I published last week and which is available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/coveney-publishes-details-further-progress-social-housing-schemes>. Details of all the social housing construction projects being implemented across the 31 local authority areas are set out in the Report, including the number of new social homes covered by each separate project.

The Report covers over 600 projects, involving over 10,000 new social homes, and includes projects completed in 2016 and in the 1st quarter of this year, and others that are on site or at various stages of advancement through planning and design. The scale of the construction pipeline as at end-Quarter 1 2017 represents a major escalation in the social housing build programme and more projects are being added on an ongoing basis, to ensure we deliver on the Rebuilding Ireland targets. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Local Authority Housing

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that adequate suitable and serviced building lands remain available in each local authority area to facilitate house building in line with requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25148/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department, in conjunction with local authority planning departments, carried out a national survey of all lands zoned for residential development in statutory local authority development plans and local area plans across Ireland. This exercise, the Residential Land Availability Survey 2014, published in February 2015, determined the location and quantity of lands that may be regarded as being undeveloped and available for residential development purposes at 31 March 2014 in each local authority area. This survey measured the total amount of lands, whether owned privately or by the local authority, that have been identified for housing

development in the various local authority development plans and that are the highest priority for development.

The area of such lands amounts to 17,434 hectares which, given a range of densities appropriate to whether the areas are in small villages or larger towns and cities and as determined by the relevant local authorities, could theoretically enable the construction of over 414,000 dwellings. I am therefore fully satisfied that adequate lands are available to facilitate residential development in line with the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

The Residential Land Availability Survey 2014 is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/planning/residential-land-availability/residential-land-availability-survey>.

A further Residential Land Availability Survey will be undertaken in due course.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if NAMA may again be approached with a view to the possible availability of extra housing to meet the pressing needs of local authority housing applicants throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25151/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To end Quarter 1 2017, the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) had identified 6,947 units, associated with the security for loans that NAMA has acquired, that could be made available for social housing. Many of these units were in unfinished housing developments or developments that required significant remediation work. All of the units identified by NAMA, regardless of their condition, location or circumstance were offered to local authorities in the first instance.

To date, demand has been confirmed by local authorities for 2,780 of the properties that NAMA has identified as potentially available. Local authorities have confirmed that 2,423 of the properties are considered unsuitable by reference to sustainable planning and housing policy, or are located in areas with no social housing demand. A further 1,744 properties have been sold or privately let by the owners or receivers since the initial offer was made to the local authority.

General information in relation to NAMA delivery for social housing is available on the website of the Housing Agency at the following link:

[https://www.housingagency.ie/Our-Services/Housing-Supply-Services/NAMA-\(1\).aspx](https://www.housingagency.ie/Our-Services/Housing-Supply-Services/NAMA-(1).aspx).

In consultation with my Department, the Housing Agency and local authorities, NAMA continues to work through its portfolio with a view to identifying units that could be made available. The local authorities and the Housing Agency have been working systematically through the units with NAMA to determine if there is a social housing demand for the properties identified as potentially suitable for social housing. However, many of these units may be in private rented use and it is not appropriate or desirable that such private tenancies would be displaced.

Where a demand is identified by a local authority, this information is provided to NAMA and efforts are made to secure as many of the suitable properties as possible for social housing.

This process is ongoing, however, is unlikely to yield a significant number of further properties.

Private Rented Accommodation

129. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to establish a rental property price register run by the Residential Tenancies Board, as recommended by a person (details supplied); and his views on whether making information publicly available on rental levels for various property types in different areas would improve market information for renters and landlords alike. [25185/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Compiled by the ESRI and based on the RTB's own register of over 300,000 tenancies, the RTB Rent Index is a valuable source of information and provides standardised average rent data at Local Electoral Area level based on the actual rents being paid for rented properties throughout the State. The rent index is updated quarterly and shows the percentage change in rents over the previous quarter and over the previous twelve months.

When the Rent Predictability Measure was introduced in December last year, I made a commitment that my Department would work with the RTB to ensure that more refined data was available to enable more specific targeting of the measure to smaller areas where severe pressures were being experienced. Close collaboration between the RTB and the ESRI has resulted in the revision and development of the methodology for producing the RTB's Rent Index so that RTB data can now be used to calculate and monitor changes in average rents at the level of Local Electoral Areas. On 29 March 2017, the RTB published the Rent Index Report in relation to Quarter 4 2016, which includes a summary of the data used as the criteria for designating rent pressure zones in relation to all Local Electoral Areas in the country, allowing all interested parties to see exactly where their area stands in relation to rents and possible designation.

The RTB website (www.rtb.ie) also contains an Average Monthly Rent Report which enables people to check the average rent being paid for five different categories of dwelling types throughout the country, in both urban and rural areas. This enables people to check what is the actual rent being paid for, say, a semi-detached house or a two-bed apartment in their neighbourhood, and in other parts of the country.

We have taken measures to improve transparency when rents are being determined. In Rent Pressure Zones, when the rent is being set for a new tenancy, the landlord is obliged to inform the tenant of the previous rent paid for the property and the time at which it was set. This allows the tenant concerned to see any rent increase being proposed and assess whether the rent being asked is in line with the legislation.

The suggestion being put forward for an individualised publicly available register of rent prices for all tenancies, would place significant personal information, of both landlords and tenants, in the public domain and would undoubtedly raise significant data protection concerns.

The RTB's Rent Index Report and the Average Monthly Rent Report are publicly available on the RTB website and, while the RTB is continuously seeking to strengthen its registration and data collection function, there are no plans at this time to introduce the type of register proposed.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

130. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason there have been so few Part V social housing units delivered in 2016. [25186/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 made a number of amendments to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 following the outcome of an independent review, which included a consultation process. The amendments, effective from 1 September 2015, sought to maximise the contribution Part V can make to social housing supply and sustainable mixed-tenure communities across the country.

It is anticipated that over the lifetime of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, at least 4,700 new social homes will be delivered through the Part V mechanism. My Department will keep the position under review, through closely monitoring the supply of housing generally and the options housing providers use for delivering on their Part V obligations.

With regard to delivery of units under Part V in 2016, it should be noted that Part V applies only to developments of 10 or more houses, and therefore does not apply to one-off houses or schemes of 9 or fewer houses. It should also be noted that the provision of land rather than houses remains the default position if the developer wishes to exercise that option. In addition, some developments completed in 2016 will have been subject to older Part V agreements made before 1 September 2015, when other options - such as a financial contribution, the provision of fully or partially serviced sites or the provision of land elsewhere in the functional area of the planning authority - were available.

Planning Issues

131. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason local authorities are making it a stipulation of planning in rural areas that septic tank systems be desludged annually and be vouched in view of the fact that persons living in towns and serviced areas are receiving a free public water and sewerage service from the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25255/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): When making decisions on planning applications or appeals, a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála, as the case may be, is restricted to considering matters relating to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and the likely effects of the development on the environment and any relevant European site, as set out in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2016.

My Department's 2007 Development Management Guidelines, issued to planning authorities under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, state that it is inappropriate for planning authorities to attach conditions to planning permissions relating to matters that are subject to control under other legislation or regulation, unless there are particular circumstances, for example, that the matters are relevant to proper planning and sustainable development and there is good reason to believe they cannot be dealt with effectively by other means. The Guidelines give examples of cases where it may be appropriate to attach conditions relating to other codes, including conditions recommended by other Divisions within the local authority. As the Guidelines do not specifically refer to conditions that might be attached to planning permissions relating to septic tanks, the attaching of such conditions to relevant planning permissions is a matter for individual authorities to decide, in the light of the Guidelines referred to

above and the individual circumstances of the case in question.

Jobs Data

132. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of internships in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; if there is data available regarding the average internship period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25209/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The only internship programme that my Department has responsibility for is JobBridge. The number of people who commenced a JobBridge placement in 2015 and 2016 is listed in Table 1 below. JobBridge closed to new entrants in October 2016, so there were no new entrants in 2017. Over 700 participants remain on the scheme.

The duration of a JobBridge placement can 6 months (with an option to extend to 9 months) or 9 months. A robust external evaluation of the scheme conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants in 2016 found that 72% of participants completed the full duration of the placement and 28% finished early. Of those who finished early, over half (53%) indicated that they did so to take up paid employment either with the host organisation or another company.

The evaluation found JobBridge to be one of the most effective labour market programmes – increasing participants’ employment outcomes by 32%. It also found that while participants rated the scheme positively on 18 out of 20 aspects measured, most were dissatisfied with the level of payment and a sizable minority rated the scheme negatively on some aspects, for example the quality of training offered. Based on the findings, and taking account of the improvement in labour market conditions, Indecon recommended that JobBridge be discontinued in its current form and replaced with a new scheme. A copy of the full evaluation can be found at: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/JobBridge-Evaluation.aspx> .

The Labour Market Council welcomed the report and noted the positive employment impact of the scheme. A majority of the Council similarly recommended that JobBridge be replaced.

Having considered the evidence and the suggestions put forward by Indecon and the Labour Market Council, I announced the closure of JobBridge to new applications from 27th October 2016 and my intention to replace it later this year with a new work experience programme better suited to the much improved labour market and that addresses criticisms of the scheme.

I am very conscious that any new scheme would need the support, trust and confidence of employers, jobseeker’s and the public. That is why I instructed my officials to consult with key stakeholders before making a final decision on any potential replacement scheme. That process has recently concluded and a decision will be made shortly.

Table 1. Number of JobBridge Starts

Year	Number of JobBridge starts
2015	8,708
2016	4,167
2017	N/A

Pensions Insolvency Payments Scheme

133. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans for pay-

ment of compensation for unpurchased pension service for persons at a company (details supplied); the details of such compensation; the timeframe for this to be paid to the persons in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25054/17]

134. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of cases referred to the dispute resolution process for former workers of a company (details supplied) that subsequently made an appeal with regard to the calculation of their compensation offer vis-à-vis contract service. [25055/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 134 together.

The mediated agreement for former Waterford Crystal workers covers 1,774 members of the Waterford Crystal Pension Factory and Staff Schemes. The vast majority of former workers have agreed full and final settlements and are in receipt of their payments.

During the mediation process it was agreed by the parties that disputes in relation to individual cases would be referred to an independent dispute resolution process. The dispute resolution procedure is solely and exclusively for individual disputes concerning personal employment information particular to the individual used for the calculation of lump sums and monies in respect of pensionable service as set out in the letter of offer and/or deed of release including scheme service dates and calculations.

A number of the former workers referred to in the questions did make an appeal concerning the calculation of their offer vis. a vis. contract service. These matters raised complex legal and precedential issues. These were examined by the mediator who then made a determination in order to ensure a fair settlement.

I can confirm that my Department has written to all members who made appeals in relation to contract service to advise them of their offers under that mediator's determination. I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department is working actively to bring the matter to a resolution as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

135. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans for a derogation from the requirement of a 60% progression rate for participants of community employment schemes in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25059/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Work schemes offer opportunities for the long-term unemployed to gain valuable work experience and participate in training while they are paid an equivalent to their social welfare entitlement in addition to a top-up payment. Participants work for 19½ hours per week. Work opportunities are within communities and, in the main, support the provision of valuable community services in areas of disadvantage.

The Government strongly supports the work being done through Community Employment (CE) and the other employment programmes. I have seen first-hand myself, over recent months, the vital role such schemes are playing in local communities, including supporting social services, across the entire country.

With this in mind I plan to implement a number of changes to the terms and conditions of

participation on CE. The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on the programme.

It is also proposed that all CE places will be categorised into one of two strands, either activation, with a target progression rate set at 50%, or social inclusion, with a target progression rate set at 20%. This categorisation will be based primarily on the work experience element of the place. In considering the outcomes achieved by a particular scheme, consideration will be given to local labour market conditions and other factors impacting on progression opportunities.

My Department keeps all aspects of its employment programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants. As part of the implementation of these new measures, my Department is currently consulting with key stakeholders across the country.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

136. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a relaxation of the eligibility criteria will be considered for community employment schemes in rural areas that are experiencing difficulties in getting eligible participants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25060/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government strongly supports the work being done through Community Employment (CE) and the other employment programmes. I have seen first-hand myself, over recent months, the vital role such schemes are playing in local communities, including supporting social services, across the entire country.

With this in mind I plan to implement a number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on CE. The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on the programme.

The changes I am planning to introduce will see the general qualifying age for CE for those on the live register reduced from 25 to 21 years. It will also be easier for previous participants, who have exhausted their CE entitlement, to requalify as participation prior to the year 2007 will be disregarded. While participants between 21 and 55 years on CE will be entitled to one year on the programme, this can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment. All CE participants age 55 and over will be able to avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE scheme. There will be an overall limit of 6 years participation from 2007 (7 years if on a disability payment).

In addition I have also agreed to review the current participation limits for older people on CE within the next three months. As the Deputy will be aware, participation limits are necessary to allow for the utilisation of places amongst qualifying persons to ensure the benefits of CE are available to the widest possible number of jobseeker's.

As part of the implementation of the new measures, my Department is currently consulting with key stakeholders across the country. If any scheme is experiencing particular difficulties, they should contact their local DSP Intreo office for assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

137. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an allowance for a person (details supplied). [25072/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm an application for disability allowance (DA) was received from this gentleman on 1 February 2017. He is currently in receipt of jobseeker's allowance (JA).

The person concerned was advised that there is an entitlement to DA at a reduced rate. Means were derived from his spouse's employment. As his entitlement to DA is less than his current entitlement to JA, my department issued a letter outlining the various options for his consideration. We await his response.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

138. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the method of calculation used by the Jobpath providers (details supplied) in calculating the amount of money paid to persons who claim travel costs if travelling by car; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25076/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Both JobPath providers, Seetec and Turas Nua, provide immediate reimbursement for travel expenses upon production of a ticket / evidence of travel. This includes bus routes and where no suitable public transport is available, mileage costs will be paid. The amount payable is calculated on the basis of the most direct route from their home address to the office of the JobPath provider. Travel expenses may also be paid on the same basis by the JobPath companies for costs incurred by jobseeker's attending job interviews.

The current rates payable are in line with the AA published average running costs per kilometre for a car.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding clerical positions in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25087/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Staff that are recruited on a temporary basis are recruited on a fixed-term or fixed purpose contract basis, neither of which carries entitlement to permanency. Once the term has elapsed, or the purpose for which the person is recruited no longer exists, my Department is obliged to end the temporary employment in order to comply with the relevant employment regulations.

Permanent Clerical Officer posts in my Department are filled either by transfer of permanent staff or recruitment of new staff. Where a post falls to be filled by recruitment, assignments are

25 May 2017

made in order of merit from panels established on foot of competitions administered by the Public Appointments Service.

Question No. 140 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Applications

141. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if all arrears in respect of their disability allowance have been paid in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25129/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This gentleman submitted an application for disability allowance on 7 November 2016.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 19 April 2017 and of his rights of review and appeal. No request for a review or an appeal has been received to date.

If the person in question believes they may qualify, it is open to him to reapply by completing and submitting to the Department the relevant application form (DA1).

The person concerned is not in receipt of Rent Allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position with regard to an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25131/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's benefit from the person concerned on 12 January 2017.

Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 31 January 2017, 4 April 2017 and again on 23 May 2017.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a disability benefit allowance is payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25132/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is payable to persons who are unable to work due to illness and who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions.

A claim to Illness Benefit was received from the person concerned and as the applicant is originally from a non-EEA country, it was found necessary to make some further enquiries as to their permission to work in this country. These enquiries have now been completed and as it transpires that the person concerned has an Irish passport, the claim to illness benefit has been approved. Payment to the latest date of work incapacity has gone into their bank account today.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the correct level of entitlement and current payment in the case of a person (details supplied); the extent to which a previous alleged overpayment has been discharged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25133/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned is not currently in receipt of a payment from this department and there is no record of a claim having been recently submitted. An overpayment of €331.57 occurred in 2009 and there is currently €158.24 outstanding on this debt.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Widow's Pension

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) currently on widow's pension can qualify for a higher level of payment, such as an invalidity pension including free schemes, having particular reference to the fact they worked part time up until recently but is medically no longer in a position to do so. [25135/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned is currently in receipt of a widow's contributory pension at €198.50 per week, the maximum rate payable to a person under 66 years of age. The person is also in receipt of fuel allowance in the amount of €22.50 per week for the fuel season.

The weekly rate of invalidity pension is also €198.50. Additional benefits may be payable to qualified recipients of invalidity pension, including an increase for living alone, fuel allowance and the household benefits package, depending on the person's circumstances.

It is open to the person concerned to have their entitlement to invalidity pension assessed by completing an application form and returning it directly to Invalidity Pension Section, Social Welfare Services Office, Ballinalee Road, Longford. A deciding officer will examine the person's entitlement and notify them of their decision in writing.

Full information in relation to invalidity pension, including an application form, is available on the Department's website at <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Invalidity-Pension.aspx> .

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if rent support

was restored in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25136/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I refer the Deputy to PQ Ref No: 34273-16 of 9/11/2016. The Rent Supplement for the person concerned was closed in 2015 as documentation requested by the Department in a review was not provided. The person concerned has not, to date, provided the Department with a new Rent Supplement application. On receipt of same, entitlement can be assessed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

147. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will have a decision on their review for carer's allowance. [25152/17]

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 20 January 2017. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

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

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that neither condition was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 10 March 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal. The person concerned submitted a review request on 29 March 2017.

Following a review, the application was awarded to the person concerned on 24 May 2017 and the first payment issued to their nominated bank account on 1 June 2017.

Arrears of allowance will also issue.

The person concerned was notified on 24 May 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 148 withdrawn.

Pensions Reform

149. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans for an auto enrolment pension system; the progress made to date on developing such a system; the cost implications of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25240/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have made pension reform a priority for my term as Minister for Social Protection. To this end I can confirm my intention to publish and commence the implementation of an Action Plan for the reform of pensions over the coming months.

In Ireland there is a significant retirement savings gap which sees just 35% of private sector workers with retirement savings to supplement the State pension. Therefore, and in addition to a range of other long term reform measures, this Action Plan will detail proposals for a transition from the current and purely voluntary supplementary pension system to one which will automatically enrol eligible employees into a quality assured retirement savings system. This reform, where the saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out, will encourage long term saving and asset accumulation amongst those who may otherwise suffer a reduction in living standards at retirement and will increase the well-being, financial security, and independence of future retirees.

Following the publication of this Action Plan and in order to guide future Government decisions, the detailed evidence building and consultation required to deliver automatic enrolment will be undertaken over an initial project planning phase. To this end, and to develop an understanding of potential future expenditure requirements, this evidence building will provide a basis for fundamental choices regarding the preferred operational structure and organisational governance for the system. Decisions around design parameters such as the required contributions, financial incentives and target membership will also impact on expenditure requirements. Correctly positioning/designing each of these parameters will be fundamental to the success of any system.

Subject to any Government decision regarding the manner in which this project should be progressed, it is my objective that first members would be enrolled in the new system in 2021. This project timeframe reflects the scale of such a programme and its importance as being the most fundamental reform of the Irish supplementary pension system in generations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

150. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to develop a pension tracing system; the preparatory work required to develop such a system; the cost implications of implementing such a system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25241/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department has arrangements in place to assist with member tracing. Where the administrator of a pension scheme or a life company is unable to trace a member using their own resources they can use my Department’s host mailing service. Following discussions between my Department, the Pensions Authority and the Irish Association of Pension Funds, a revised protocol was put in place in October 2013. The protocol sets out the Department’s requirements for organisations using the host mailing service. The pension provider must have made an unsuccessful attempt to contact the scheme member. The Department will forward letters to the last known address of the member based on its records if this address differs from that which the pension provider has.

From 2013 (relating to the 2012 tax year), P35 returns from employers are collecting the Pensions Authority reference number of any scheme operated by the employer to which the employees contribute. The collection of this data will, in time, facilitate a linkage of an em-

ployee's PPSN with the reference number(s) of the scheme of which they were a member.

There is currently no tracking service in Ireland that will allow deferred scheme members to trace their pension entitlements. Such a system is likely to be costly to establish. My Department's meetings with industry have indicated that in many cases they can find owners of funds through their own searches or by utilising the Department's host mailing system. As such, they may be reluctant to take on the costs of providing information and maintaining data in a tracking service at this stage.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

151. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing jobseeker's allowance for those from 18 to 24 years of age from its current rate of €102.70 to €105.00, €110.00, €120.00, €130.00, €140.00, €150.00, €160.00, €170.00, €180.00, €190.00, €193.00 and €200.00, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25242/17]

152. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing jobseeker's allowance for persons who are 25 years of age from its current rate of €147.80 to €150.00, €160.00, €170.00, €180.00, €190.00, €193.00 and €200.00 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25243/17]

156. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing each working age payment by €3.00, €4.00, €5.00, €6.00, €7.00, €8.00, €9.00 and €10.00 respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25247/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151, 152 and 156 together.

The costings sought by the Deputy are detailed in the following series of tables.

Table 1: Cost of increasing the reduced rate payable to Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance recipients aged 18 to 24 years of age

Increasing the weekly rate of €102.70 (payable to 18 to 24 year olds) to:	Cost €m
€105.00	2.80
€110.00	8.80
€120.00	20.80
€130.00	32.90
€140.00	44.90
€150.00	56.90
€160.00	68.90
€170.00	81.00
€180.00	93.00
€190.00	105.10
€193.00	108.70

Table 2: Cost of increasing the reduced rate payable to Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance recipients aged 25 years of age

Increasing the weekly rate of €147.80 (payable to 25 year olds) to:	Cost €m
€150.00	0.45
€160.00	2.50
€170.00	4.50
€180.00	6.50
€190.00	8.60
€193.00	9.20
€200.00	10.60

Table 3: Cost of increasing all working age payments (i.e. weekly payments for those under 66 years of age) by varying amounts

Scheme	Full year cost of a €3 increase €m	Full year cost of a €4 increase €m	Full year cost of a €5 increase €m	Full year cost of a €6 increase €m	Full year cost of a €7 increase €m	Full year cost of a €8 increase €m	Full year cost of a €9 increase €m	Full year cost of a €10 increase €m
Social Insurance Schemes								
Widow/er's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Con) Pension	4.79	6.39	7.98	9.58	11.18	12.77	14.37	15.97
Deserted Wife's Benefit	0.65	0.87	1.08	1.3	1.52	1.73	1.95	2.17
Invalidity Pension	9.53	12.71	15.88	19.06	22.24	25.41	28.59	31.77
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	0.19	0.25	0.32	0.38	0.44	0.51	0.57	0.63
Disability Pension	0.92	1.23	1.53	1.84	2.15	2.45	2.76	3.07
Illness Benefit	8.70	11.60	14.50	17.4	20.30	23.20	26.1	29.00

Scheme	Full year cost of a €3 increase €m	Full year cost of a €4 increase €m	Full year cost of a €5 increase €m	Full year cost of a €6 increase €m	Full year cost of a €7 increase €m	Full year cost of a €8 increase €m	Full year cost of a €9 increase €m	Full year cost of a €10 increase €m
Social Insurance Schemes								
Injury Benefit	0.21	0.28	0.35	0.42	0.49	0.56	0.63	0.70
Incapacity Supplement	0.17	0.23	0.28	0.34	0.40	0.45	0.51	0.57
Job-seeker's Benefit	5.49	7.32	9.15	10.98	12.81	14.64	16.47	18.30
Carer's Benefit	0.42	0.56	0.70	0.84	0.98	1.12	1.26	1.40
Health and Safety Benefit	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03
Maternity & Adoptive Benefit	3.27	4.36	5.45	6.54	7.63	8.72	9.81	10.90
Paternity Benefit	0.16	0.21	0.27	0.32	0.37	0.43	0.48	0.53
Total Social Insurance Schemes	34.51	46.01	57.52	69.02	80.52	92.03	103.53	115.03
Social Assistance Schemes								
Blind Person's Pension	0.21	0.28	0.35	0.42	0.49	0.56	0.63	0.70
Widow/ers or Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Con) Pension	0.23	0.31	0.38	0.46	0.54	0.61	0.69	0.77
Deserted Wife's Allowance	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.07

Questions - Written Answers

Scheme	Full year cost of a €3 increase €m	Full year cost of a €4 increase €m	Full year cost of a €5 increase €m	Full year cost of a €6 increase €m	Full year cost of a €7 increase €m	Full year cost of a €8 increase €m	Full year cost of a €9 increase €m	Full year cost of a €10 increase €m
Social Insurance Schemes								
One-Parent Family Payment	6.37	8.49	10.62	12.74	14.86	16.99	19.11	21.23
Carer's Allowance	5.51	7.35	9.18	11.02	12.86	14.69	16.53	18.37
Half Rate Carer's Allowance	1.51	2.01	2.52	3.02	3.52	4.03	4.53	5.03
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	0.08	0.11	0.13	0.16	0.19	0.21	0.24	0.27
Jobseeker's Allowance	32.94	43.92	54.90	65.88	76.86	87.84	98.82	109.80
Job-seeker's Allowance (€102.70 rate)	1.90	2.53	3.17	3.8	4.43	5.07	5.7	6.33
Job-seeker's Allowance (€147.80 rate)	0.48	0.64	0.80	0.96	1.12	1.28	1.44	1.60
Pre-Retirement Allowance	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.1	0.12	0.13	0.15	0.17
Disability Allowance	21.05	28.07	35.08	42.1	49.12	56.13	63.15	70.17
Farm Assist	1.64	2.19	2.73	3.28	3.83	4.37	4.92	5.47
Back to Education Allowance	1.71	2.28	2.85	3.42	3.99	4.56	5.13	5.70
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance	2.02	2.69	3.37	4.04	4.71	5.39	6.06	6.73

Scheme	Full year cost of a €3 increase €m	Full year cost of a €4 increase €m	Full year cost of a €5 increase €m	Full year cost of a €6 increase €m	Full year cost of a €7 increase €m	Full year cost of a €8 increase €m	Full year cost of a €9 increase €m	Full year cost of a €10 increase €m
Social Insurance Schemes								
Community Employment Programme	4.11	5.48	6.85	8.22	9.59	10.96	12.33	13.70
TÚS - Community Work Placement Initiative	1.57	2.09	2.62	3.14	3.66	4.19	4.71	5.23
Rural Social Scheme	0.54	0.72	0.90	1.08	1.26	1.44	1.62	1.80
Gateway	0.26	0.35	0.43	0.52	0.61	0.69	0.78	0.87
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	2.77	3.69	4.62	5.54	6.46	7.39	8.31	9.23
Total Social Assistance Schemes	84.97	113.29	141.62	169.94	198.26	226.59	254.91	283.23
OVER-ALL TOTAL	119.48	159.31	199.13	238.96	278.79	318.61	358.44	398.27

It should be noted that the costings listed above include proportionate increases for qualified adults and for those on reduced rates of payment, where relevant. It should also be noted that these costings are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

School Meals Programme

153. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current expenditure on the school meals programme in 2017; the full year cost of increasing expenditure on this programme by 5%, 10%, 15% and 20% respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25244/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,460 schools and organisations benefiting over 200,000 children at a total cost of some €47.7 million in 2017. The funding for the scheme was increased this year, as part of Budget 2017, by an additional €5.7 million (almost 14% over the previous year's allocation) which will benefit over 50,000 children.

In recent years priority for new applications for funding had been given to schools which are part of the DEIS programme. From September 2016 additional funding is available to all DEIS schools to provide breakfast and lunch to the majority of pupils. Budget 2017 funding also provides for the inclusion in the scheme, from September 2017, of up to 245 new schools and 47,000 children. This includes support to schools being brought into DEIS and the extension of the scheme to breakfast clubs in non-DEIS schools, which is the first time in many years that increased funding for school meals is available to non-DEIS schools.

Based on the 2017 budgetary allocation of €47.7 million, the additional annual costs of expanding the school meals programme by 5%, 10%, 15%, and 20% are €2.4 million, €4.8 million, €7.2 million and €9.5 million respectively. Changes to increase the funding of any scheme administered by my Department would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Offices

154. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if all Intreo offices are fully accessible to persons with a disability; if not, the estimated cost of making all offices accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25245/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): When works were being carried out to existing buildings to convert them to Intreo Centres, universal accessibility was incorporated into the design where it was feasible. In a small number of situations it was not feasible to incorporate full universal accessibility as part of the Intreo roll out. My Department is in contact with the OPW in relation to these particular offices and identifying necessary works.

In relation to the request for an estimated cost to make all offices accessible, each project was costed individually as the works required, with the scale and complexity varying greatly from building to building. The OPW is our agent in respect of all such works and responsible for estimating the cost of the works and carrying them out.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

155. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the schemes and payments that fall under his Department's remit in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25246/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The following table details the various schemes operated by my Department and the financial allocations by scheme for 2017 (as published in the 2017 REV estimates):

DSP: DETAILED PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY SCHEME/SERVICE - [VOTE 37 + SIF]

-	Expenditure Breakdown	2017 Rev
	ADMINISTRATION	
A1	Administration - Pay	294,703
A2	Administration - Non-Pay	254,910
	Social Insurance Fund non-DSP administration	93,000
	TOTAL - ADMINISTRATION	642,613
	PENSIONS	
A3	State Pension (Non-Contributory)	971,980
	State Pension (Contributory)	4,844,500
	Widows', Widowers' / Surviving Civil Partners' Pension (Contributory)	1,444,400
	Widows', Widowers' / Surviving Civil Partners' Pension (Death Benefit)	8,230
	TOTAL PENSIONS	7,269,110
	WORKING AGE INCOME SUPPORTS	
A4	Jobseeker's Allowance	2,161,670
A5	One Parent Family Payment	501,980
A6	Widows' Widowers' / Surviving Civil Partners Pension (Non-Contributory)	13,690
A7	Deserted Wife's Allowance	1,290
A8	Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments	85,420
A9	Farm Assist	82,800
A10	Pre-Retirement Allowance	2,660
A11	Other Working Age Supports	
A11.1	Exceptional and Urgent Needs	31,500
A11.2	Other Supplements (including heating and light)	4,560
A.11.3	Humanitarian Aid	500
A.11.4	Direct Provision Allowance	3,700
A11	Total Other Working Age Supports	40,260
	Jobseeker's Benefit	342,910
	Deserted Wife's Benefit	71,150
	Maternity Benefit	266,400
	Adoptive Benefit	270
	Paternity Benefit	16,000

Questions - Written Answers

-	Expenditure Breakdown	2017 Rev
	ADMINISTRATION	
	Health and Safety Benefit	420
	Redundancy and Insolvency Payments	30,500
	Treatment Benefits	
	Treatment Benefits - Dental	30,335
	Treatment Benefits - Optical Benefit	10,025
	Treatment Benefits - Medical & Surgical Devices	8,000
	Total Treatment Benefits	48,360
	TOTAL WORKING AGE - INCOME SUPPORTS	3,665,780
	WORKING AGE - EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS	
A12	Community Employment Programme	353,000
A13	Rural Social Scheme	47,660
A14	Tús - Community Work Placement	124,820
A15	Job Initiative	19,270
A16	Community Services Programme	46,190
A17	Back to Work Allowance	119,560
A18	National Internship Scheme - JobBridge	15,000
A19	Back to Education Allowance	105,000
A.20	Gateway	7,250
A.21	Back to Work Family Dividend	14,400
A22	JobsPlus	20,400
A23	Wage Subsidy Scheme	25,900
A.24	Other Employment Supports	
A.24.1	Assistance towards training for BTW participants	4,300
A.24.2	Technical Employment Support Grant (funded from National Training Fund)	2,800
A.24.3	Credit Union loan guarantee scheme	20
A.24.4	Part Time Job Incentive	2,800
A.24.5	Activation and Family Support Programme (AFSP)	790

-	Expenditure Breakdown	2017 Rev
	ADMINISTRATION	
A.24.6	Special payments to long term unemployed and lone parents	10
A.24.7	Drugs Task Force	660
A.24.8	European and Other Initiatives	1,250
A.24.9	Local Employment Service	20,300
A.24.10	Jobs Clubs	6,000
A.24.11	EmployAbility Service	9,740
	Pre-Activation for people with Disabilities	2,000
A.24.12	Disability Activation and Employment Supports *	2,400
A24	Total Other Employment supports	53,070
	Partial Capacity Benefit	14,500
	TOTAL WORKING AGE - EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS	966,020
	ILLNESS, DISABILITY AND CARERS	
A25	Disability Allowance	1,416,170
A26	Blind Pension	13,480
A27	Carer's Allowance	694,000
A28	Domiciliary Care Allowance	138,000
A29	Carer's Support Grant	180,900
	Illness Benefit	589,700
	Injury Benefit	19,580
	Invalidity Pension	661,580
	Disablement Benefit	75,270
	Medical Care	350
	Carer's Benefit	33,970
	TOTAL - ILLNESS, DISABILITY AND CARERS	3,823,000
	CHILDREN	
A30	Child Benefit	2,091,530
A31	Family Income Supplement	422,500
A32	Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance	37,400
A33	School Meals	47,500
A34	Other Child Supports	

Questions - Written Answers

-	Expenditure Breakdown	2017 Rev
	ADMINISTRATION	
A34.1	Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	6,510
A34.2	Widowed Parent / Surviving Civil Partner Grant (Non-Contributory)	430
A34	Total Other Vote 37 funded Child Related Payments	6,940
	SIF Funded Child Related Payments	
	Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	12,660
	Widowed Parent / Surviving Civil Partner Grant (Contributory)	6,000
	Total SIF Funded Child Related Payments	18,660
	TOTAL - CHILDREN	2,624,530
	SUPPLEMENTARY PAYMENTS, AGENCIES AND MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES	
A35	Rent Supplement	252,600
A36	Mortgage Interest Supplement	4,120
A37	Household Benefits Package [Vote 37 + SIF]	
A37.1	Electricity Allowance	157,540
A37.2	Gas Allowance	19,500
A37.3	Free Television Licence	55,170
A37.4	Telephone Allowance	0
	Total Household Benefits Package [Vote 37 + SIF]	232,210
A38	Free Travel	80,000
A39	Fuel Allowance [Vote 37 + SIF]	229,060
A40	Grant to the Citizens Information Board	54,050
A41	Office of the Pensions Ombudsman	950
A42	Miscellaneous Services	
A42.1	Rent allowance (de-control of rents legislation)	430

-	Expenditure Breakdown	2017 Rev
	ADMINISTRATION	
A42.2	Recoupment of superannuation expenses to The Pensions Board	173
A42.3	Expenses incurred by Social Welfare Tribunal	1
A42.4	Grants - Information & Welfare rights	686
A42.5	EU Community Action Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (Progress) 2007 to 2013	0
A42.6	Social Inclusion Initiatives	80
A42.7	Ex gratia payments to women from Magdalen Laundries and other Institution	3,100
A42.8	Food Aid	4,000
A42.9	Training for Carers in areas of economic and social disadvantage (funded from the Dormant Accounts Fund)	1,500
A42	Total Miscellaneous Services Funded By Vote 37	9,970
	TOTAL - SUPPLEMENTARY PAYMENTS, AGENCIES AND MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES	862,960
	GRAND TOTAL DSP EXPENDITURE ON SCHEMES, SERVICES AND ADMINISTRATION	19,854,013

Question No. 156 answered with Question No. 151.

Departmental Staff Data

157. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons working in the social welfare appeals office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25248/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are currently 82 staff members (77.65 FTE) working in the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

My Department, like all Government departments and agencies is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and a commensurate administrative staffing budget, which for this Department has involved reductions in staff.

The staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed, taking account of workloads, management priorities and the ongoing need to respond to new increasing

demands in a wide range of services. This is to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

Appeal processing times are kept under constant scrutiny by the Chief Appeals Officer. The Deputy will be aware that significant effort and resources have been devoted in recent years to reducing the length of the time taken to finalise an appeal and that as a consequence processing times have improved quite considerably.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

158. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing each rate of the back to school clothing and footwear allowance by €10.00, €20.00, €30.00, €40.00 and €50.00 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25249/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The Government has provided €37.4 million for the scheme in 2017.

End of year records show that under the 2016 BSCFA scheme, payments were made to over 154,000 families in respect of some 283,000 children. The rate of payment was €100 in respect of children aged 4 to 11 and €200 for children over 12 years in second level education.

Using the total number of children covered by the scheme in 2016 as a basis, the additional cost to increase the BSCFA rates by the amounts listed per age group is set out in the attached tabular statement. Changes to increase the rate of payment of any scheme administered by the Department would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Full -Year Additional Cost to Increase BSCFA rates by amounts listed:

Age 4-11 years (166,000 Children)		Age over 12 years (117,000 Children)	
Increased Payment Amount	Cost of Increase	Increased Payment Amount	Cost of Increase
€10	€1.66 million	€10	€1.17 million
€20	€3.32 million	€20	€2.34 million
€30	€4.98 million	€30	€3.51 million
€40	€6.64 million	€40	€4.68 million
€50	€8.30 million	€50	€5.85 million

Rural Social Scheme Eligibility

159. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to revise the farm income threshold for persons wishing to take part in the rural social scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that due to the fact the current threshold is set very low at €409 per week, that those struggling to survive on low family incomes as in the case of a person (details supplied) are precluded from partaking in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25258/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) is a supplementary income support initiative which provides part-time employment opportunities in community and voluntary organisations for low-income farmers and fishermen/women who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and under-employed in their primary occupation. The Government is very committed to the RSS and this commitment was clearly demonstrated by the announcement of an additional 500 places in Budget 2017, the first increase in places since 2006. This measure, allied with my reversal of the previous cuts to Farm Assist, is evident of this Government's commitment to rural Ireland.

The Deputy will appreciate that my Department must ensure that only eligible customers benefit from its schemes. This also applies to people who are participating on the RSS. Eligibility for participation on the RSS remains limited to those in receipt of certain specified social welfare payments and all participants must be also actively engaged in farming or fishing whilst maintaining an underlying entitlement to Farm/Fish Assistance. One of the conditions of these payments is the requirement to satisfy a means test. Payments can be reviewed at any stage to ensure that participants continue to satisfy the underlying conditions.

In the case referred to by the Deputy, a review of means was carried out by the Local Intreo Office and it has been determined that the weekly means of the person referred to is in excess of the statutory limit for receipt of Farm Assist. As there has been no additional information received to warrant a further review of the household means, this decision still stands. Therefore, it is not possible to renew the RSS contract of the person concerned. I have no plans at present to further revise the income threshold applicable for RSS participants.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Passport Applications

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the means by which a person (details supplied) can get the required permission from the father of their child in view of the fact their child has qualified for entitlement to Irish citizenship in their own right; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25126/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Passport Service is obliged under the Passports Act, 2008 to obtain the consent of all guardians before issuing a passport to a minor. If a minor has only one guardian, the Passport Service can accept the consent of that guardian and a sworn Sole Guardian Affidavit. If a minor has two guardians but one guardian is unavailable or unwilling to provide consent, a court order is required dispensing with the consent of that guardian. In this particular case, the position is that the applicant has two guardians –the mother and father. Only the consent of the applicant's mother is given on the passport application form. The Passport Service cannot proceed with the application without either the father's consent or a court order dispensing with it. It should be noted that the requirement for the consent of guardians is in the interests of child protection. The issue of consent is separate as such to the citizenship of the child.

Public Sector Pensions

161. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to update the Civil Service pension scheme for new entrants (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25077/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Single Public Service Pension Scheme (Single Scheme) was introduced for new entrants to the public service, including the civil service, from 1 January 2013. The Deputy's question relates to the proposed establishment of a facility for the purchase of retirement benefits under the Single Scheme and for the transfer of certain retirement benefits to that Scheme.

There is no specific provision in the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 which established the Single Scheme, to provide for the purchase or transfer of additional pension benefits by Single Scheme members. Notwithstanding this, a commitment has been given that a purchase and transfer facility would be provided by way of Regulations under the Single Scheme Act.

Appropriate Regulations are being drafted and these will set out the rules of the new scheme. Consistent with the structure of the Single Scheme, it is intended that the Regulations will allow Single Scheme members to purchase additional pension and lump sum referable amounts to augment pension benefits accrued under the Scheme. Under the new facility, it is expected that each purchase agreement will be entered into and completed on an annual basis and paid for either by way of a lump-sum contribution or by periodic deductions from salary, where the Relevant Authority offers such a facility. The Regulations are also expected to provide for the transfer of pension entitlements accrued in certain other Revenue approved pension schemes to the Single Scheme. The pricing of purchased benefits will be based on the actuarially calculated cost of paying out those benefits at retirement and will operate on a cost neutral basis to the Exchequer.

The draft scheme is currently subject to detailed legal and other considerations and the intention is to bring forward Regulations on the new scheme as soon as these considerations are complete.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

162. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to extend participation in the public service up to and including the current and planned age of entitlement to the contributory State pension; if primary legislation is required for a change in the compulsory retirement age for public servants; his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25123/17]

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

The Group, whose Report was agreed by Government last August, considered policy around retirement age in both the public and private sectors, examining implications arising from retirement ages now and in the future. The Group identified a set of framework principles to underpin policy in the area and made a number of recommendations assigned to Government Departments and Employer bodies for follow-up in that regard. A copy of the Report is available online at <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/report-of-the-interdepartmental-group-on-fuller-working-lives/>.

On foot of one of the recommendations of the Report, my Department, with Public Service employers, was tasked to review the current statutory and operational considerations giving

rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension. This review is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the end of the current quarter. Future policy in this area will be considered by Government following the outcome of the review.

Any change to the compulsory retirement ages for public servants will require primary legislation.

Flood Risk Assessments

163. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if an address (details supplied) is mapped as a flood risk area; his views on the situation whereby persons cannot get insurance for a home they are looking to buy in these circumstances; and the options available for the persons involved. [25192/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland are developing Flood Maps as part of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme and in accordance with the requirements set out in the EU Floods Directive (2007/60/EC). The CFRAM Programme is focusing on 300 areas, including this area - called Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) - that were designated in 2012 as being at potentially significant future risk from flooding.

The OPW is over the coming months finalising the Flood Risk Management Plans that will include the final Flood Maps for the 300 AFAs and will be submitted to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for his approval. While the OPW Flood Maps do not designate individual properties as being at risk, the draft CFRAM flood extent mapping to date shows flooding along areas of Shannon Terrace predicted to occur in the 10%, 1% and 0.1% AEP events.

While the Minister for Finance has overall responsibility for the Government's flood insurance policy, to assist insurance companies assess the risk and take into account the protection provided by completed OPW flood defence schemes, the OPW has a Memorandum of Understanding with Insurance Ireland, the representative body of the insurance industry. This Memorandum sets out principles of how the two organisations work together to ensure that appropriate and relevant information on these completed schemes is provided to insurers to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the availability to the public of insurance against the risk of flooding. Insurance Ireland members have committed to take into account all information provided by OPW when assessing exposure to flood risk within these protected areas. To date OPW has provided details to Insurance Ireland on 17 completed schemes nationally and Insurance Ireland has advised that flood insurance cover is included in 83% of policies in these defended areas. The OPW has recently provided details on a further completed scheme to Insurance Ireland.

The decision on whether to offer insurance, level of premiums charged and the policy terms applied are matters for individual insurers. Insurance companies make commercial decisions on the provision of insurance cover based on their assessment of the risks they would be accepting on a case-by-case basis.

The insurance industry has its own flood modelling tools for assessing the level of risk to individual properties and it has highlighted to the OPW that it does not use the OPW Flood Maps to inform its flood modelling.

Any person with an insurance-related query or complaint can contact Insurance Ireland's Insurance Information Service (01 676 1914 or iis@insuranceireland.eu). In addition, the Fi-

nancial Services Ombudsman (1890 88 20 90) deals independently with unresolved complaints from consumers about their individual dealings with all financial service providers.

Following the severe flood events in Dublin of October 2011, the Camac catchment in the Eastern CFRAM, in which Kilmainham is situated, was accelerated through the process outlined above. While no overall cost-beneficial solution was found for the Camac catchment within the CFRAM study, OPW proposed to Dublin City Council (DCC) that DCC lead on a study to investigate whether viable options exist for more localised areas within the Camac catchment. This study is now being progressed by DCC and South Dublin County Council with assistance and funding provided by OPW.

In addition to this study, significant remedial flood works were carried out by DCC in 2014 on the Camac in Kilmainham under the Minor Flood Relief Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This work consisted of the construction of almost 100 metres of new reinforced flood defence walls and the strengthening of existing walls at the rear of properties in Kilmainham. This work has provided a high level of protection against flooding to the properties in this area.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

164. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) working in the public sector can have their contract of employment extended beyond 65 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25122/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The position with regard to the retirement age of the employee concerned is determined by his contract of employment.

With regard to mandatory retirement age in general, this is a public service wide issue. The terms and conditions of employees in the public service is generally a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. In this context an Interdepartmental Working Group on Fuller Working Lives, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, was established in early 2016 to examine issues from prevailing retirement ages for workers in both the public and private sectors.

The Report of this Group was agreed by Government in August 2016. The report identified a set of framework principles to underpin policy in the area and made a number of recommendations assigned to Government Departments and employer bodies for follow-up. On foot of the recommendations in this report the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has been tasked with reviewing the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current and planned age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pensions. This work is currently underway and expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2017. Any future proposals will be considered in the context of the outcome of the work of this group.

Disease Awareness

165. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the steps that will be taken by his Department to raise awareness of Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25061/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I refer the Deputy to my reply to question numbers 192 & 213 on 18 May 2017 which sets out the actions taken to raise awareness of

Lyme disease.

Disease Management

166. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the supports in place for persons diagnosed with Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25062/17]

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

Disease Management

167. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of Lyme disease tests carried out that have given negative results and subsequently proved positive following tests in Germany and UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25063/17]

168. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the Lyme disease test carried out here is in line with international standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25064/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 and 168 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to question numbers 209 to 211 on 17 May 2017. As I stated in my reply, all clinical (and other) laboratories in Ireland must undergo continuous quality assurance to ensure that the quality of the diagnostics they provide is maintained to the highest international level for human diagnostics. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on testing for Lyme borreliosis in other EU Member States who may use different standards for testing to those used in Ireland. As testing and treatment for Lyme borreliosis is widely available in Ireland there is no requirement for people to travel to other EU Member States to access these services.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

169. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of speech and language therapy for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25069/17]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

170. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when additional orthopaedic surgeons will be recruited to Croom Hospital, County Limerick, in view of the required number in place and the fact that half the procedures for joint replacements appropriate to the catchment area are being carried out. [25070/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25075/17]

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

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

Treatment Abroad Scheme

172. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a treatment abroad scheme application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25084/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE operates a Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS), for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland under EU Regulation 883/04, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulation 987/09, and in accordance with Department of Health Guidelines. Patients apply to the HSE TAS seeking access to public healthcare outside the State through model form E112. The application requires the patient's Irish-based public referring hospital consultant, following clinical assessment, to certify, among other things, that the treatment is medically necessary and will meet the patient's needs. The treatment must not be available within the State or not available within a time normally necessary for obtaining it.

The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

173. **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. [25085/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient

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

Hospital Appointments Status

174. **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. [25092/17]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

175. **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. [25095/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

176. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the concerns expressed by a group (details supplied) regarding an appointment at consultant level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25101/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Appointments Status

177. **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. [25107/17]

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

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

National Lottery Funding Data

178. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the funding that was provided to community and voluntary groups from his Department's national lottery discretionary fund in each of the years 2008 to 2016 in tabular form; the allocation to be provided in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25117/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department administered a National Lottery Discretionary Fund during the years 2008 to 2016 from which once-off grants were paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. The funding provided amounted to €3.985m per year in 2008 and 2009, €3.786m in 2010, and €3.286m in each of the years 2011 to 2016. A list, in tabular form, of all the organisations that received lottery funding in each of these years is available on my Department's website at:

<http://health.gov.ie/about-us/lottery-funding-2008-2016/>

My Department no longer operates a National Lottery Fund. However, the HSE operates a similar scheme and continues to provide grants to health agencies and other organisations from National Lottery funds.

Hospital Equipment

179. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when the nuclear imaging equipment at University Hospital Limerick will be functioning (details supplied) again in order to save the round trip cost for treatment for those concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25118/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products

180. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if the drug translarna was reviewed at the last drugs committee meeting on 18 May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25125/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications Data

181. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for aids and appliances in County Limerick; the amount of time they have been waiting; the details of the waiting lists for each of the items that come under aids and appliances such as orthopaedic footwear and referrals for self-propelling wheelchairs with back rest; and the reason for the long delays. [25193/17]

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

Medical Card Applications

182. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25195/17]

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

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Tobacco Control Measures

183. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to address the use of disposable tins by tobacco companies to bypass upcoming plain packaging laws; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25202/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Act 2015 provides that cigarette packs must be made of carton or soft material. This particular provision is transposed from the EU Tobacco Products Directive (2014/40/EU) and was commenced on 20th May 2016. The legislation permitted non-compliant packages to be sold until 20 May 2017. Therefore, cigarette packs

for retail sale since 20 May 2017 must be made from carton or soft material.

The remaining provisions of the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Act 2015 will commence in September, 2017. From that time all retail packaging for tobacco products manufactured for retail sale must comply with the Act, for example, all packaging will have the same colour and the use of images, logos or text on packs, except health warnings and brand names, will be prohibited.

The Deputy raises the issue of the possible reuse of non-compliant tins by smokers to hide or disguise the standardised packaging and the newly increased sized health warnings. Research has shown that where smokers displayed such behaviours in terms of efforts to hide the warnings using a case, these smokers were just as likely as others to subsequently attempt to quit smoking and report benefits from health warnings. The study goes on to state that “avoidance behaviour might be more reasonably interpreted as a measure of effectiveness: if the warnings were ineffective in communicating the threatening consequences of smoking there would be no reason to avoid them”.

Specifically in relation to standardised packaging, a study in Australia found that after the introduction of standardised or plain packaging, there was a slight increase in the use of external cigarette cases for a short period of time before returning to pre-standardised packaging levels.

Tobacco Control Measures

184. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to address tobacco companies rapidly increasing the production of products affected by plain packaging laws prior to the 30 September 2017 deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25203/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As the Deputy has stated, all the provisions of the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Act 2015 and the regulations made under the Act will commence on 30 September 2017. Tobacco products manufactured and placed for sale prior to this date can continue to be sold until 30 September 2018. Therefore, from the 1 October 2018 all tobacco products on sale in Ireland must be in standardised packaging as set out in the legislation. Tobacco products in older, non-compliant packaging cannot be sold from 1 October 2018 regardless of any increased production of tobacco products which may take place prior to September, 2017.

In relation to tobacco manufacturers stocking up on tobacco products prior to the commencement of the standardised packaging legislation, the Department of Finance via the Revenue Commissioners has an overview of such activities and as such I have brought the Deputy's question to their attention.

Departmental Communications

185. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of media notifications issued by his Department's press office since 6 May 2016; and the number issued in the year to 5 May 2017. [25215/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am taking the question to refer to the number of press releases issued and published on my Department's website. The number issued since 6 May 2016 to 5 May 2017 is 265 press releases. The number issued this year to 5 May

2017 is 79 press releases.

Obesity Strategy

186. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to comments made at an event (details supplied) the detail of the commitments made for the reduction of sugar in still and carbonated soft drinks by 10% over the next five years; if data is available for the way in which this will be achieved in terms of the volumes of drink and reformulation targets; if details are available by country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25220/17]

187. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to comments made at an event (details supplied), his views on whether the pace of sugar reduction in soft drinks is sufficient; the actions his Department is advocating to increase and broaden efforts of reformulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25221/17]

188. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to comments made at an event (details supplied), if his attention has been drawn to data from the Cork children's lifestyle study presented to the European Congress on Obesity which found that sugar sweetened drinks contributed to an average 6% total calorie intake and almost a quarter of total sugar intake; if he has satisfied himself that sugar reduction and reformation efforts by the soft drinks industry are sufficient to tackle consumption and obesity issues in view of the fact that the study found that sugar sweetened drinks contributed to 5.8% and 7.6% of total daily calories for normal and overweight and obese children respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25222/17]

189. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to comments made at an event (details supplied), the details of the national reformulation technical working group to be set up to agree targets for reducing fat, sugar and salt; the persons or bodies that will sit on this group; if he will invite representatives from health organisations to sit on same in addition to seeking engagement with industry; if there will be a consultation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25223/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 to 189, inclusive, together.

The World Health Organisation recommends that the total energy intake from free sugars should be less than 5%. In Ireland sugar-sweetened drinks alone contribute 5% of the total energy intake in the diet of children. In high consumers, this can be as much as 13-14% of the energy intake.

In order to help halt and prevent obesity, last September on behalf of the Government, Minister Harris and I launched *The Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025*. This Policy sets a short-term target for a sustained downward trend in levels of excess weight in children and a reduction in the gap in obesity levels between the highest and lowest socio-economic groups by 10%.

The launch of the *Healthy Food For Life* programme in December was one of the early actions achieved in the Obesity Action Plan. My Department uses the Food Pyramid as our nutrition education tool and this programme particularly addresses foods and drinks on the Top Shelf of the Food Pyramid. Sugar sweetened drinks are included with other foods high in fat, sugar and salt on the Top Shelf of the Food Pyramid. The key message is that these foods and drinks are not needed for good health and we advise having smaller portion sizes and not having these everyday - only a maximum of once or twice a week. The *Healthy Food For Life* pro-

gramme has a suite of 23 resources to facilitate adults and children over 5 years make healthy food choices.

The European soft drinks sector has committed to reduce added sugars by a further 10% thereby tripling the pace of sugar reduction by 2020. The commitment will be rolled out across Europe. This initiative responds to changing consumer preferences regarding sugar and calorie intake and calls from the European Commission for a coordinated approach to reformulation and sugar reduction across the food industry.

The commitment supports the EU Roadmap for Action on Food Product Improvement and the Annex on Voluntary Reduction of Added Sugars with its 10% sugar reduction target agreed between Member States and the European Commission. Ireland is playing a lead role in the EU discussions on the reduction of added sugars in sugar-sweetened drinks.

The industry will achieve its target through increasing its efforts on reformulation and new product innovation - including by using low and no calorie sweeteners - and increasing the availability of smaller pack sizes to allow portion control and moderation. In addition, soft drinks producers will invest in the promotion of beverages with reduced or no sugar to actively encourage consumer choice towards low and no calorie products. Independent third party research will monitor progress, which will be shared with stakeholders.

My Department is requesting that the industry broaden and deepen their efforts on reformulation, now, as time is of the essence in the fight against childhood obesity. A National Reformulation Technical Working Group to agree Irish targets for reducing fat, sugar and salt is being established and will publish a roadmap for action at the end of the year. Once targets are agreed, the industry will be invited to engage fully with the process.

Services for People with Disabilities

190. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the situation regarding a residential home (details supplied) as a result of issues identified relating to safeguarding and governance by HIQA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25228/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The safety and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the State is paramount. This Government's primary concern is that the needs of the residents are being prioritised and addressed.

As the particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

191. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the situation regarding the 19 adults resident at a residential home (details supplied) as a result of an official closure notice with a two-week stay issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25229/17]

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

people with disabilities.

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

HIQA Inspections

192. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will obtain an extension on the closure order to allow staff of an organisation (details supplied) sufficient time to ensure all requirements are met as a result of issues identified relating to safeguarding and governance by HIQA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25230/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Health Act 2007 provided for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), its inspection and regulation of designated centres, and the framework for registration of these designated centres. The Act sets out the provisions for service providers to respond to decisions made by HIQA and to appeal decisions to the District Court if required. There is no provision in the Act for me as Minister to intervene in decisions made by HIQA or the District Court in these matters.

As the Deputy will be aware, HIQA is a fully independent authority charged with ensuring high-quality and safe care for people using our health and social care services in Ireland. I am assured that HIQA takes a proportionate and measured response to issues arising during the inspection and regulation process, and only takes escalated action where significant concerns are present.

The safety and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the State is paramount. My Department will remain in close contact with the HSE to ensure that all necessary actions are now taken in respect of the centre in question to ensure that its residents are cared for appropriately.

Services for People with Disabilities

193. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the environment in which persons with profound disabilities and very challenging behaviours are able to live, based on community living in a non-medical type setting, in view of the fact they can struggle with the more regimented HIQA requirements based on nursing home criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25231/17]

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

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

HIQA Inspections

194. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the issues relating to a facility (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that HIQA has undertaken three audits of the facility over the past 12 months; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that HIQA has advised that if identified issues relating to safeguarding and governance are not carried out in the next two weeks, it will have to close this facility; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that HIQA has already released an official closure notice with a two week stay; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 19 persons are at risk of losing their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25232/17]

195. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans for obtaining an extension on the closure order to allow staff in a facility (details supplied) sufficient time to ensure all requirements are met; his further plans to ensure the funding is forthcoming to the facility to allow required qualified persons to be employed there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25233/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 and 195 together.

I am aware of the facility to which the Deputy refers and the recent decision of the independent regulator HIQA to issue a notice of determination to cancel the registration of this facility.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Health Act 2007 provided for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), its inspection and regulation of designated centres, and the framework for registration of these designated centres. The Act sets out the provisions for service providers to respond to decisions made by HIQA and to appeal decisions to the District Court if required. There is no provision in the Act for me as Minister to intervene in decisions made by HIQA or the District Court in these matters.

HIQA is a fully independent authority charged with ensuring high-quality and safe care for people using our health and social care services in Ireland. I am assured that HIQA takes a proportionate and measured response to issues arising during the inspection and regulation process, and only takes escalated action where significant concerns are present.

The safety and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the State is paramount. My Department will remain in close contact with the HSE to ensure that all necessary actions are now taken in respect of the facility in question to ensure that its residents are cared for appropriately.

The issue of any additional funding requirements in this regard is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's second question to the HSE and have asked that the Executive reply directly to the Deputy on the matter.

Nursing Home Services

196. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the financial situation in a rest home (details supplied) with 37 persons in Lismore, County Waterford, with a view to allaying the fears of the voluntary board of management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25234/17]

197. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if funds will be provided for the relocation of a laundry room in a rest home (details supplied) with 37 persons in Lismore, County Waterford, as requested by HIQA request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25235/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 and 197 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Supply

198. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the situation whereby persons who were receiving Respreeza for alpha 1 on a monthly basis will now only receive it on a weekly basis; and the status of his negotiations with the pharmaceutical companies to bring clarity and hope to these persons. [25237/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

199. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of the financial proposal in County Louth which will see the care of 30 persons with disabilities being cared for by a group (details supplied); the details of the proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25239/17]

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

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

European Health Insurance Card

200. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 218 of 30 March 2017, the timeframe for a response from the HSE on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25251/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have sent a further request to the HSE asking them to reply directly to the Deputy as a matter of urgency.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

201. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a consultant specialising in headache and migraine pain management will be appointed to Beaumont Hospital

in view of the fact that there are approximately 2,500 persons on the waiting list to see such a specialist and in further view of the fact that these persons have been left some 18 months without progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25256/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the impact of this on people's lives. Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities.

The National Clinical Programme for Neurology (NCPN) Model of Care document recommends an increase in the number of consultant neurologists, nurse specialists, including clinical nurse specialists, and other health care professionals which would address waiting time issues. The programme also proposed implementation of these recommendations over a period of 5 years. This will significantly improve the access for all Neurology patients.

The Model of Care was launched by the Director General of the HSE on the 27 September 2016 and the HSE is now working towards its implementation.

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

Health Services Provision

202. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive BHE treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25257/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Supply

203. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if there is a contingency plan in place in order that smaller hospitals that do not have compounding capabilities and do not run out of chemotherapy drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25261/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The vast majority of anti-cancer medications are made in the Aseptic Compounding Units (ACUs) in hospitals. There is one external manufacturer in Ireland who supplies approximately 15% of compounded chemotherapy preparations to hospitals in Ireland. This licensed manufacturer is subject to regulatory oversight by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

Should there be an issue in relation to the supply of anti-cancer medications, contingency plans can be implemented under the direction of the National Cancer Control Programme. Contingency measures include: the compounding of chemotherapy in the hospitals which have ACUs, inter-hospital cooperation within hospital groups, the ordering of medications from licensed manufacturers outside of the country, or the preparation of certain medications at ward level or in the pharmacy department in hospitals.

The recent chemotherapy supply issues relate to manufacturing problems experienced by the Irish supplier of compounded chemotherapy preparations. Under the direction of the NCCP, hospitals implemented the above contingency measures in order to minimise the impact on patients.

The production of chemotherapy products resumed on Monday 22 May. Contingency plans will remain in place in affected hospitals until full service is resumed. The NCCP will continue to monitor the situation closely over the coming days to ensure that any disruption to patients is minimised.

The HSE has also indicated it intends to conduct a needs assessment for local compounding requirements at the hospitals providing chemotherapy services. This will inform the options on improving internal HSE resilience in the short, medium and long term.

Medicinal Products Supply

204. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider pharmacists prescribing nicotine replacement therapy the way in which the morning after pill is prescribed (details supplied); if he will adopt the HIQA recommendation of a review of dispensing rules for nicotine replacement therapy on the general medical scheme and that this takes place without delay in order that operational structures can be developed to provide nicotine replacement therapy without a prescription to general medical scheme patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25262/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Prescriptions Charges

205. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost of abolishing the prescription charge on a phased basis over five years, beginning in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25263/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Prescriptions Charges

206. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the 50 cent prescription charge reduction for medical card holders over 70 years of age to the entire general medical scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25264/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medical card holders are required to pay a prescription charge of €2.50 per item for medicines and other prescription items supplied to them by community pharmacies under the General Medical Services scheme. This charge is subject to a monthly cap of €25 for each person or family.

Under Budget 2017, I announced a reduction in the charge to €2, subject to a monthly cap of €20, for medical card holders aged 70 and over and their dependants. This reduced charge took effect from 1 March 2017.

Any future change to the prescription charge is a matter which I intend to consider in the context of the implementation of the health commitments in the Programme for Government and having regard to the funding available.

Drugs Payment Scheme Threshold

207. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of reducing the drugs payment scheme reimbursement threshold on a phased annual basis from €144 per month to €132 per month, €120 per month, €100 per month and €85 per month respectively, beginning in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25265/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Expenditure

208. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the programme for Government commitment to reduce the cost of medicines by reducing the annual required co-payment on the drugs payment scheme; his plans to amend reimbursement of the scheme from a monthly to annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25266/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 a month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines.

This Government is committed to reducing the cost of medicines. This includes ongoing price reviews of approved products under the 2016 pricing and supply agreement with industry and the promotion of greater use and availability of generic medicines. As part of this process, and in line with the commitments given in the Programme for Partnership Government, I intend to consider the Drugs Payment Scheme threshold, in the context of the Health commitments in the Programme for Government, and having regard to the funding available.

Hospital Charges

209. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the cost of abolishing statutory public inpatient charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25267/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health (Amendment) Act 2013 governs the area of Statutory In-Patient Charges (SIC). The current SIC for public patients for overnight and day in-patient services is €80 per day up to a maximum of €800 in one year.

I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy with the latest figures regarding the amount of income generated by this charge in 2016.

Health Promotion

210. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his Department and Healthy Ireland will implement the WHO international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes in full (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25268/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): My Department and the Health Service Executive (HSE) implement the World Health Organisation International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes. The Infant and Follow on Formulae regulations are enforced by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland in partnership with the HSE Environmental Health Officers.

A key policy priority for Irish Government and the Irish health service is to increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life through the implementation of the Healthy Ireland Framework, Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025 (Department of Health, 2013).

This involves addressing risk factors and promoting protective factors at every stage of life, including the period from the pre-natal stage and through childhood, to support health and wellbeing.

The HSE Healthy Ireland in the Health Services National Implementation Plan 2015 – 2017 has prioritised breastfeeding through the inclusion of key actions under the Policy Priority Programme Healthy Childhood.

Last year, the HSE published its plan to improve breastfeeding rates. Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland Health Service Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016 – 2021 sets out the priority areas to be addressed over the next 5 years to support more mothers in Ireland to breastfeed and to contribute to increases in breastfeeding rates. The HSE Action Plan includes a target of an annual 2% increase in breastfeeding duration rates between 2016 and 2021, exclusive and not exclusive.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

211. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for an aquaculture licence by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal. [25073/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's records indicate that an incomplete application for an Aquaculture Licence was received by my Department from the person referred to by the Deputy in November 2016. As the application form was incomplete and as the necessary supporting documents were also missing the application form was returned to the applicant for completion.

A completed application form, together with the necessary supporting documentation, has not yet been received by my Department.

GLAS Payments

212. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25082/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person

named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1st October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process issues were identified with the Low input permanent pastures action. Department officials are actively working to resolve these issues with a view to further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

TAMS Payments

213. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a grant payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25088/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved, carried out work and submitted a payment claim under the Young Farmer's Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS 11. Under the provisions of the scheme a reduction must be applied before payment. The payment claim will be processed as quickly as possible.

GLAS Payments

214. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25094/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process issues were identified with the Commonage action. Department officials have resolved these issues and the 85% payment for 2016 is currently being processed.

TAMS Payments

215. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a TAMS grant payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25098/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved, carried out work and submitted a payment claim under the Dairy Equipment Scheme of TAMS 11. Under the provisions of the scheme a reduction must be applied before payment. The payment claim will be processed as quickly as possible.

TAMS Payments

216. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a TAMS 2 grant payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25100/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved, carried out work and submitted a payment claim under the Young Farmer Scheme of TAMS 11. Under the provisions of the scheme a reduction must be applied before payment. The payment claim is being processed as quickly as possible.

TAMS Payments

217. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a TAMS grant payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25102/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved, carried out work and submitted a payment claim under the Dairy Equipment Scheme of TAMS 11. Under the provisions of the scheme a reduction must be applied before payment. The payment claim is being processed as quickly as possible.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

218. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an AEOS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25103/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Payment issued in respect of the 2011-2015 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As 2016 is the final scheme year of payment for the person named, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payments can be processed. This process is on-going and payments are issuing on a weekly basis in cases where the final checks has been successfully completed.

Control of Horses

219. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the local authorities which have been in discussions with his Department regarding the implementation of by-laws by local authorities in respect of the control of horses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25104/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The City and County Managers Association representing the Local Authorities made a submission on the bye-law issue as part of the Review into the operation of the Control of Horses Act 1996.

They stated in this that replacing bye-laws with a single piece of national legislation would be appropriate and might allow the Control of Horses Act to operate more efficiently. This Review has now been completed and legislative change will be considered in due course.

GLAS Applications

220. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision to reject a GLAS application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed in view of the correspondence sent to his Department; if he will rectify the error; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25114/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full for the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases concerning the Wild Bird Cover action and the declaration made on the 2016 BPS application in respect to this land parcel. Department officials are reviewing the issue in light of the additional correspondence and this review is expected to be completed shortly.

GLAS Data

221. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 who have received 85% of their total 2016 payment by county in tabular form; the number of persons who have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the number of GLAS recipients who have yet to receive payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25154/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is set out in the following table on a county by county basis for GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 applicants who have received a payment to date or will be paid in the next payment run by the Department in the coming days. In total this represents just under 95% of all applications received.

In addition there are just over 1,000 applicants from whom further documentation is awaited before their application can be considered further. The Department has notified these applicants of the documentation which is required and it is now a matter for these applicants to submit the required information if they wish to proceed.

This leaves 1,100 applicants whose cases are being reviewed by the Department and every effort is being made to advance these as quickly as possible.

County	No. of applicants paid to date	No. of applicants cleared for payment
Carlow	379	4
Cavan	1284	8
Clare	2198	15
Cork	2955	29
Donegal	2803	29
Dublin	71	0
Galway	4057	59
Kerry	2520	25
Kildare	300	3
Kilkenny	601	8

County	No. of applicants paid to date	No. of applicants cleared for payment
Laois	531	6
Leitrim	1365	8
Limerick	1285	10
Longford	820	5
Louth	206	2
Mayo	3569	33
Meath	578	5
Monaghan	680	12
Offaly	712	6
Roscommon	1978	20
Sligo	1253	4
Tipperary	1530	18
Waterford	436	7
Westmeath	856	14
Wexford	907	8
Wicklow	442	5
Total	34316	343

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

222. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied for AEOS that have received their total 2016 payment by county in tabular form; the number of persons who have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the number of AEOS recipients who have yet to receive payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25155/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place before payments are made. As 2016 is the final year for AEOS 2 participants re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. This process is on-going and payments are made on a weekly basis as cases are finalised.

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Processing
Carlow	49	44	5
Cavan	244	212	32
Clare	556	488	68
Cork	428	368	60
Donegal	1360	1,196	164
Dublin	9	9	0
Galway	1245	1,098	147
Kerry	568	492	76
Kildare	39	34	5
Kilkenny	109	95	14

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Processing
Laois	80	63	17
Leitrim	430	382	48
Limerick	224	183	41
Longford	89	75	14
Louth	41	33	8
Mayo	1399	1,275	124
Meath	83	74	9
Monaghan	151	120	31
Offaly	110	100	10
Roscommon	478	432	46
Sligo	335	298	37
Tipperary	245	193	52
Waterford	82	72	10
Westmeath	122	94	28
Wexford	84	57	27
Wicklow	80	67	13
Totals	8640	7,554	1086

Questions Nos. 223 and 224 withdrawn.

Teagasc Research

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the recent report by Teagasc, Competitiveness of Irish Agriculture. [25158/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has considered the report published by Teagasc which provides a baseline analysis of the competitiveness of the Irish agricultural sector during the period 2005-2015, and against which future developments may be measured.

Ireland's competitive position within the EU across all the dairy, beef, sheep and cereal sectors was positive for the period 2009-2013 when measuring cash costs as a percentage of total output (including allocation of decoupled payments). Irish dairy and cereal producers also had lower cash costs as a percentage of market based output, relative to the averages of all countries examined.

My Department continues to engage with stakeholders to address competitiveness challenges at farm and processing level, particularly through the Food Wise implementation process. Competitiveness is one of the key themes of the Food Wise strategy, which includes detailed recommendations aimed at building on Ireland's comparative advantages in terms of our sustainable, grass-fed production system, our positive business environment, our reputation in science-based innovation and product development and access to a young well-educated population.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme

226. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a map indicating the areas classified and the various designations of

mountain, more severely and less severely handicapped areas, for each county currently in the ANC scheme. [25159/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Disadvantaged agricultural area was first introduced in Ireland in 1975 and was based on a range of socio-economic factors. At present, over 5 million hectares are designated as disadvantaged under the scheme. An official from my Department has forwarded a copy of the current map of designated land directly to the Deputy.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Funding

227. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the Government's commitment to increase the funding allocation for ANCs for the 2018 scheme. [25160/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out the commitment to increase the budget for the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme by €25m in Budget 2018. This commitment will form part of the Budget 2018 discussions, in parallel to the ongoing redesign of the scheme required by EU regulations.

Rural Development Programme

228. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to make a proposal to amend aspects of the RDP as part of the annual amendment. [25161/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am currently considering plans to submit minor changes to the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 as part of the annual amendment process. These proposed changes are minor technical amendments to certain existing schemes under the RDP. My Department will in any case be consulting with stakeholders here through the RDP Monitoring Committee in advance of the formal submission of these proposed amendments to the European Commission.

Brexit Issues

229. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of full and part-time staff respectively hired since 1 January 2017 to work directly on Brexit related issues on a Department-wide basis and in each State agency under his auspices in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25162/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, my Department established a dedicated Brexit and Co-ordination Trade Division which is currently comprised of 4 experienced staff. The Division co-ordinates the ongoing analysis, consultation and engagement activities being undertaken by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff, through an internal Brexit Response Committee comprised of 16 people drawn from the wide range of Divisions affected by Brexit (including, for example, Meat and Milk Policy, Animal Health and Welfare, Food Industry Development, Economics and Planning, and Seafood Policy and Development). Of course, Brexit also occupies a considerable amount of my own time and that of Minister of State Doyle,

as well as the Secretary General and other senior officials in the Department. The Brexit Co-ordination Division also feeds into the whole-of-Government co-ordination being undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach. A dedicated Market Access Unit has also been established within the Meat and Milk Policy Division with 3 staff. Staffing requirements for Brexit associated functions are constantly under review and my Department is currently in the process of recruiting/assigning additional resources to a number of areas including the Brexit Division, the fisheries area and to functions associated with product certification to support trade. To date in 2017, my Department has hired 92 full time staff to work on a variety of issues including Brexit although, in the main Brexit issues are being dealt with by experienced DAFM staff.

Staff hires within State agencies under my Department's auspices are a matter for the State Bodies themselves once they remain within their budget set in their Delegated Sanction.

Brexit Issues

230. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of Brexit funding specifically allocated to each such agency in budget 2017 on a Department-wide basis and in each State agency under his auspices in tabular form; the amount of this Brexit funding that has been expended to date in each State agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25163/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2017 budget for Bord Bia, the State Agency responsible for marketing and promotion of agri food and drink, is almost €61m. Bord Bia's activities in this area are all directly relevant to expanding market penetration and diversifying outlets for Irish food and drink against the background of Brexit. This budget includes an additional €2 million for Bord Bia to expand its programmes and activities in response to Brexit. Some €433,894 of this amount was spent in the period January to April.

My department will also be resourcing a market profiling exercise to be carried out by Bord Bia in 2017. This will be an invaluable tool for companies wishing to export food and drink and to my Department and its agencies in the context of prioritising their market access and development activities.

I am keeping the Department's response in relation to Brexit, including resource allocations, under close review as the negotiations proceed.

Brexit Issues

231. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of times including dates that the Brexit consultative committee has met since the UK Brexit referendum. [25164/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of the steps I undertook in the immediate aftermath of the UK's decision to leave the EU was to establish a Consultative Committee of Stakeholders in order to ensure a full exchange of information on the potential implications of a UK exit from the EU for the agrifood sector in Ireland. The working arrangements of the Committee are to meet as required rather than according to a pre-determined schedule.

Building on more informal consultation arrangements that had been in place in the months

leading up to the referendum, I convened the first formal meeting of the Brexit Consultative Committee of Stakeholders on 7 July 2016. A comprehensive and very useful discussion on the sectorial impacts took place, and this was followed by a further meeting of the Committee on 20 October 2016.

The next stage of the consultation process took place in the context of the All-Island Civic Dialogue, which commenced in November 2016. Three sectorial meetings for the agrifood and fisheries sectors took place between December 2016 and February 2017. The first, which comprehensively examined the potential impacts and potential solutions for the cattle and sheep, dairy, and pigs and poultry sectors, took place on 15 December 2016. The second, dealing with issues in the fisheries sector, took place on 1 February 2017. The third addressed the implications for the forestry, horticulture, prepared consumer foods and cereals/animal feed sectors, and took place on 8 February 2017.

This first stage of the All-Island Civic Dialogue concluded with a plenary discussion in Dublin Castle on 17 February 2017 which addressed, among other things, the agrifood and fisheries issues that had been raised during the sectorial meetings.

I then held a further meeting of the Stakeholder Consultative Committee on 11 April 2017.

A second phase of the All-Island Civic Dialogue has now commenced. As part of this, I have hosted a further sectorial dialogue for the alcohol, beverage and distilling sector on 3 May 2017, and arrangements are currently being made for a similar gathering for the equine and greyhound sectors on June.

All of these consultations are helping to further inform my approach and that of my Department to the challenges presented by Brexit for the agrifood and fisheries sectors, and the Brexit Consultative Committee of Stakeholders will continue to play a vital role in this regard.

Brexit Issues

232. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to protect fishing interests at upcoming Brexit negotiations if the British Government leaves the Common Fisheries Policy and the London Fisheries Convention of 1964 in view of the large percentage of landings made from the UK exclusive economic zone. [25165/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At this stage it is impossible to say with certainty what effect Brexit will have on the Irish fishing industry. We don't know yet what changes the UK may seek to the current arrangements.

In theory, the UK could indeed restrict access to their waters and or seek to gain larger quota shares at the expense of others. However, that could only happen if the UK were content to ignore the potential repercussions that would certainly arise from the EU side.

On average, 35% of Irish landings are currently taken from UK waters. However, for some of our most important stocks the figures are even higher.

Limitations on access and, more worryingly, any attempt by the UK to increase its current quota share at the expense of Ireland and others must, and will be, resisted strenuously. These twin threats, could also lead to increased activity by other EU vessels in the waters around Ireland threatening the long term sustainability of our stocks.

Earlier this year, I hosted a dedicated Civic Dialogue on the potential impacts of Brexit for the seafood sector as a whole. This was very well attended by stakeholders from across the industry and gave a clear insight into the real dangers that a ‘hard’ Brexit presents for our fishing communities.

I will remain in close contact with fisheries stakeholders as the issues develop and work with them and my fellow fisheries Ministers in the EU to ensure that we are all fully prepared for what are likely to be extremely complex negotiations.

I am also continuing to work closely with all of my European colleagues to ensure that fisheries remain a top priority in the negotiations to come.

As both I and An Taoiseach have stated before, we intend to ensure that fisheries remains high on the Brexit agenda in the EU and that Ireland obtains the best possible outcome from the negotiations. Last week (11 May), as part of Chief Brexit Negotiator, Mr Michel Barnier’s visit to Ireland, I met him and discussed the issues arising for the agrifood sector. On fisheries, I explained Ireland’s perspective and that it was shared by a number of EU partners. I am satisfied that Mr Barnier understands the issues and significance of BREXIT for Ireland’s fisheries sector. He supports my view that fisheries negotiations must be progressed in the context of trade and will fall into the second phase of negotiations. I also made clear that transitional arrangements are likely to be important for the seafood sector.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that I will be unequivocal in opposing any dilution of our existing EU quota shares, including protecting the benefit to Ireland of the Hague Preferences, and any limitations on our existing rights of access.

Basic Payment Scheme Administration

233. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he is taking to ensure innocent victims of illegal burning will not be subjected to penalties on their 2017 BPS applications and payments. [25166/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department’s “Guide to Land Eligibility” document clearly states that land which has been burned is not eligible as it is not in a state suitable for grazing or cultivation and therefore not eligible for payment under the Basic Payment and the various other area-based schemes. The EU regulations governing these schemes prescribe that land being submitted for payment must be in an eligible state.

All applicants under the Basic Payment Scheme and other area-based schemes who have submitted their 2017 applications to my Department should review their applications and identify if the application includes land which has been burned in the closed period and consider removing this land from their application. The withdrawal of such land from their application can be undertaken by using the Department’s On-line facility or by downloading an Amendment Form from the Department’s website and posting it to the Department’s Office in Portlaoise.

The relevant European regulations allow for penalties not to be imposed where the applicant can demonstrate that he or she is not at fault for the non-compliance. The regulations also provide for exceptions in relation to land eligibility requirements in the case of force majeure and exceptional circumstances. However the Department is constrained by European law which requires these exceptions to be interpreted narrowly. In the case of eligibility requirements it would be for the applicant to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Department that such exceptional circumstances arise. This may require, where appropriate, the applicant to demonstrate

that all reasonable measures have been taken to prevent such damage. My Department will examine every such case on an individual basis to determine if these exceptions are applicable.

Beef Exports

234. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of beef exports to Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017. [25167/17]

235. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total volume and value of beef imports from Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017. [25168/17]

236. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of beef exports to the UK excluding Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25169/17]

237. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of beef imports from the UK excluding Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25170/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 to 237, inclusive, together.

The following tables have been provided to my Department by the Central Statistics Office;

Volume and value of beef exports to NI

2015		2016		Jan-Mar 2017	
€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes
133,468	33,429	110,850	31,283	28,008	7,968

Volume and value of beef imports from NI

2015		2016		Jan-Mar 2017	
€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes
17,991	4,233	14,374	3,968	2,215	505

Volume and value of beef exports to Britain

2015		2016		Jan-Mar 2017	
€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes
999,192	211,897	1,002,598	234,014	247,388	56,790

Volume and value of beef imports from Britain

2015		2016		Jan-Mar 2017	
€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes
90,952	20,435	84,243	22,002	19,621	4,392

While these figures reflect the strong position Ireland occupies as a major net exporter of beef and also the existing relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom in the export and import of beef, it is clear that Brexit will pose a challenge to the continued strong performance of Irish beef exports.

One of the key elements in coping with this challenge is ensuring there is a market for the export of Irish beef. There is a strong global demand for meat, including beef, and figures from the European Commission's most recent Short Term Outlook for meat markets show a projected growth of per capita beef consumption of 2.1% for 2016. Whilst Ireland exported approximately 97% of our beef exports in 2016 to EU (including 50% to the UK), I am very conscious of the importance of growing third country markets as a valuable outlet for any increased Irish beef production, and indeed this is a crucial component of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Significant progress has been made in this context in recent years and my Department is currently in the process of attempting to secure beef access to a range of Third Countries including China, South Korea, Ukraine, Thailand and Vietnam. This builds upon the opening of some major markets in the last two years including the US, Canada and Japan. This is a vital means of providing our beef sector with as many commercial opportunities as possible for Irish beef, in addition to our existing EU markets.

Aquaculture Development

238. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 539 of 9 May 2017, if compliance by the operator with local authority requirements on fresh water intake and outflows or any other State imposed requirements is mandatory for organic certification. [25188/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the governing EU Organic Regulations, there is no specific reference to State-imposed requirements for the purpose of granting organic certification. However, depending on the circumstances, any breach of such requirements may possibly impact on the organic certification of an operator. Such breaches would have to be assessed on a case by case basis by the Organic certification body in the first instance.

Aquaculture Licences

239. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 542 of 9 May 2017, if his Department or the operator pay the organic control body for certifying the aquaculture operation in question. [25189/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department, as the Competent Authority, delegates the task of certifying and operating the inspection system to which organic operators producing, preparing, storing or importing produce from third countries are subject. This is in accordance with the governing EU regulations. Since 2005, the associated services and obligations of the Organic Control Bodies were formalised by service agreements between the Department and the Organic Control Bodies concerned.

Every organic operator pays a certification fee to its respective Organic Control Body. In addition, under the aforementioned service agreements, a subvention is paid by the Department to the Organic Control Bodies in respect of the annual inspection which is undertaken of every organic operator.

Aquaculture Licences

240. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to parliamentary question number 543 of 9 May 2017, if the attention of organic control body that certified a hatchery (details supplied) as organic was drawn to the overstocking at the site; and if so, the reason organic status was awarded. [25190/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): This issue has been brought to the attention of the Organic Control Body concerned. The matter is currently under examination to determine whether the requirements of the organic regulations were met. It would be inappropriate for me to comment any further at this stage in the process.

Aquaculture Licences

241. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 540 and 541 of 9 May 2017, if the review group will examine the conflict of interest at the centre of his Department's licensing system in view of the fact that his department's sea fisheries policy and management division is responsible for the governance of ALAB thus compromising the real and perceived independence of that body. [25191/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sea Food Policy and Management Division has a range of responsibilities involving sea fisheries policy and management, corporate governance of marine State agencies and implementation of Departmental responsibilities in harnessing our ocean wealth. That Division has responsibility for corporate governance of Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board involving oversight of that body in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016.

Responsibility for aquaculture policy and the independent review group for aquaculture licensing is with the Marine Programmes Division.

The terms of reference of the independent review group for aquaculture licensing were published in December 2016 and I anticipate receipt of the group's report in the coming weeks. As stated on 9 May 2017, I am satisfied that the Group's terms of reference provide the Group with appropriate scope to address issues arising with the licensing system.

Live Exports

242. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a response will issue to an interim reply (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25218/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are strict protocols governing the export of live animals to Turkey, which include a 21-day isolation period on approved premises in Ireland, during which cattle being exported are monitored by Irish and Turkish official veterinarians. The isolation period is set by agreement between the EU and Turkey. A considerable amount of testing is carried out during the isolation period, and only animals with negative results are allowed to travel. It would not be possible under any circumstances to load animals onto a boat for export to Turkey in advance of all test results being available. Therefore it would not be possible for the journey from Ireland to Turkey to be considered part of the isolation period.

Basic Payment Scheme Administration

243. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if illegally burnt land must be withdrawn from 2017 basic payment scheme applications in the event that the farmer of the land is not the responsible party; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25253/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's "Guide to Land Eligibility" document clearly states that land which has been burned is not eligible as it is not in a state suitable for grazing or cultivation and therefore not eligible for payment under the Basic Payment and the various other area-based schemes. The EU regulations governing these schemes prescribe that land being submitted for payment must in an eligible state.

All applicants under the Basic Payment Scheme and other area-based schemes who have submitted their 2017 applications to my Department should review their applications and identify if the application includes land which has been burned in the closed period and consider removing this land from their application. The withdrawal of such land from their application can be undertaken by using the Department's On-line facility or by downloading an Amendment Form from the Department's website and posting it to the Department's Office in Portlaoise.

The relevant European regulations allow for penalties not to be imposed where the applicant can demonstrate that he or she is not at fault for the non-compliance. The regulations also provide for exceptions in relation to land eligibility requirements in the case of force majeure and exceptional circumstances. However the Department is constrained by European law which requires these exceptions to be interpreted narrowly. In the case of eligibility requirements it would be for the applicant to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Department that such exceptional circumstances arise. This may require, where appropriate, the applicant to demonstrate that all reasonable measures have been taken to prevent such damage. My Department will examine every such case on an individual basis to determine if these exceptions are applicable.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

244. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend the deadline for submission of applications for the knowledge transfer scheme as has been requested by agricultural consultants due to ongoing issues in completing applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25254/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Knowledge Transfer Programme is included in Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020, and aims to provide high quality training and upskilling for farmers across a number of sectors. Last week, I announced that the original 31st May deadline for completion of Year 1 of the Programme will be extended until 31st July, 2017. This extension will provide additional time for the completion of Year 1 requirements under the Programme.

Waste Disposal Charges

245. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on bin collection companies introducing a pay by weight system on waste over a certain weight; and if this been agreed with him and the waste industry. [25111/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation. My Department is currently reviewing, together with the regulatory authorities and industry representatives, the introduction of an incentivised system which encourages people to prevent, reduce and segregate their waste. This approach is in line with Government waste policy to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill for waste disposal and will also facilitate the provision of a range of options for people to manage their waste costs. As the review has yet to conclude, the introduction of an incentivised system has yet to be agreed.

Waste Management Regulations

246. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the records to be held by persons or companies engaged in waste activities as required under section 18(3)(b) of the Waste Management Act 1996. [25204/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The purpose of Section 18 of the Waste Management Act 1996 is to ensure that the Minister, local authorities and the Environmental Protection Agency can obtain information necessary for the performance of their functions under the Act. It also provides for the exchange of specified information between local authorities and the Agency. Subsection (3) specifically requires the Minister to make regulations requiring

(a) a specified class or classes of person carrying on a specified class or classes of waste recovery or disposal activity, or

(b) a specified class or classes of holder or producer of a specified class or classes of waste,

to maintain specified records over a specified period and to furnish specified details to a local authority, the Agency or other specified person.

The records to be held by persons or companies is dependent upon the nature and scale of the waste activity that person or company is engaged in and in accordance with the Regulations made regulating that activity utilising the provisions of this Section of the Act.

For example, under the Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration) Regulations 2007, S.I. 821 of 2007, as amended, a permit holder is required to compile and maintain specified records in a specified format for a period of not less than 7 years in relation to the activity to which the waste facility permit relates of:

the types and quantities of waste dealt with in the course of business,

the treatment, recovery or disposal activities to which the waste is subject, including the compilation of commercial documentation for all collected waste deposited at the facility, and

not later than the 28th day of February in each year, to furnish to the local authority an Annual Environmental Report containing summary information in relation to the preceding calendar year or part thereof.

A complete list of Statutory Instruments made under the provisions of the Waste Management Act, can be accessed from the electronic Irish Statute Book at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/>

Broadband Service Provision

247. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the requirements in order to obtain high speed broadband in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25128/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

There has been significant progress in relation to broadband rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

In April, eir signed an agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas. Eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period, with an average of 500 premises passed per day. My Department will be monitoring this rollout to ensure that eir meets its obligations under the Agreement. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my website www.dccae.gov.ie. The decision by eir to invest in infrastructure to deploy high speed broadband services to an additional 300,000 premises in rural Ireland was taken purely on commercial grounds. Neither I nor the Department have a statutory authority to direct eir in this regard.

I also published in April an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie which finalises the State Intervention area. The updated Map shows the following categories of areas for delivery of broadband:

The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

It is intended that all premises will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

The map shows that the entire townland of Corkeragh in County Kildare is in the AMBER area and will require State Intervention. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie

A formal procurement process is in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. The finalisation of the

State Intervention Area for the procurement process is an important milestone as it means that bidders can progress their business plans and the Department can move to the next stage of the procurement. The three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The State Intervention network will be a wholesale network and retail service providers will be able to use the network to provide enhanced broadband services to their customers.

The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders, during the procurement process. During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP once contracts are in place.

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 and a prioritisation programme.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded.

In this regard, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force in July 2016 together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available at the following link: <http://www.dcae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>.

In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers. The work of the Task Force will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In 2016, I signed regulations which allowed ComReg to proceed with an auction of the 3.6 GHz radio spectrum band. This has resulted in the successful assignment earlier this week of all 350 MHz of spectrum to five winning bidders. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services .

I have secured an €8 million provision for RTE in my Department's Estimates for 2017 to allow it to free up the 700 MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances. These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland and particularly in rural Ireland.

Brexit Issues

248. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has corresponded with the European Commission with regard to the potential impact of Brexit on the upcoming implementation of free mobile phone roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25201/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My officials and I take every opportunity to discuss the potential impacts of Brexit with our EU and UK colleagues, including with the European Commission Article 50 Task Force. The EU Roaming Regulations aim to abolish retail roaming charges within the EU on 15 June 2017, subject to Fair Use Policy. At that point in time, the UK will still be a member of the EU and will thus be required to abide by EU law in place at that time.

It is not yet possible to say what impact Brexit will have on cross border roaming charges once the UK formally leaves the Union. This will be largely dependent on the future relationship between the EU and UK.

The UK Government White Paper on Brexit sets out that the UK wishes to ensure that the UK telecoms companies can continue to trade as freely and competitively as possible with the EU.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to engage with the key stakeholders on this matter both domestically and at EU level and has identified this policy area as a priority.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

249. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to ensure that Ireland will meet its commitments to provide 40% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25259/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter transport target also being legally binding. Provisional figures provided by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) indicate that more than 26% of our electricity came from renewable sources in 2016. This progress, while welcome, will need to accelerate in pace in the coming years. To date, wind energy has been the largest driver of growth in renewable electricity. At end April 2017, the total amount of renewable generation connected to the grid was 3,174 MW of which circa. 2,850 MW was wind. Eirgrid estimates that a total of between 3,900 and 4,300 MW of onshore renewable generation capacity will be required to allow Ireland to achieve 40% renewable electricity by 2020.

The Government has adopted a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy. The primary support mechanism in the electricity sector is the Renewable Energy Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes, which support the development of a range of renewable electricity technologies including hydro, biomass combustion, biomass combined heat and power, landfill gas and onshore wind.

With regard to future policy initiatives, my Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) designed to assist in meeting our renew-

able electricity target. The introduction of any new scheme - including the overall costs and technologies to be supported - will be subject to Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

Alternative Energy Projects

250. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason no coherent Government strategy or guidelines on the development of solar energy farms have been provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25260/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy in Ireland. This builds on the 2015 Energy White Paper and recognises that solar has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby also enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future. My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. Analysis is on-going on a range of technologies to be included. This analysis includes an assessment of the cost of supporting Solar Photovoltaics - both rooftop and ground-mounted.

The new scheme design requires detailed economic analysis on the viability and cost effectiveness of supporting several renewable technologies at various scales. This analysis is currently underway. Once this work is complete, my Department will publish a final public consultation on the design of the new support scheme. Details will be advertised on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie. There will be several decisions to be made on this new scheme with regard to scale, technologies and, in particular, how communities will have a greater involvement than in previous schemes.

Before any new scheme is introduced, it will need to secure Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission. Subject to this, it is expected that the new scheme will become operational in the first half of 2018

In relation to spatial planning, any decision to introduce Solar Planning Guidelines are ultimately a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

Noise Pollution

251. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make a statement regarding his reply to Parliamentary Question No. 45 of 10 May 2017, when he stated that he would be happy to request that the IAA meet with community representatives from an organisation (details supplied) in the context that he had previously stated on 21 March 2017 that such an action would be undertaken and such a meeting set up. [25068/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As stated in my previous responses on this matter, I intend to ensure that there will be ample opportunity for community representatives, living in the vicinity of Dublin airport, to be consulted before any final decisions are made on aircraft noise management. However, before any consultation can take place, the Competent Authority will firstly need to be appointed under statute. In that context, the Office of the Attorney General is currently finalising the legalities of the implementation of Regulation 598/2014 relating to aircraft noise management. In the meantime, I have in-

formed the Irish Aviation Authority of the commitment I have made and advised that this meeting should take place as soon as possible following their appointment as Competent Authority under Statutory Instrument.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

252. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a capital sports grant application by a club (details supplied); when an announcement of funds allocated is expected under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25071/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme. All of the 2320 applications received will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process with allocations not expected until September.

National Car Test

253. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce the NCT test for tractors from 2018; the criteria in this regard; the details of the penalties as set out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25086/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Directive 2014/45/EU on periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and their trailers, requires, from 20 May 2018, the mandatory periodic testing of tractors with a maximum design speed exceeding 40 km/h (category T5), and which are used mainly on the public road for commercial road haulage purposes. There is however, no requirement on Member States to introduce compulsory testing for T5 tractors when being used for agricultural, horticultural, forestry, farming or fishery purposes mainly on the terrain where such activity takes place. The RSA is currently working toward fulfilling the State's mandated obligations under the Directive, and will engage with affected stakeholders to provide them with guidance in relation to the practical implementation of its requirements.

The penalties for failure to have a certificate of roadworthiness when using a commercial vehicle on the public road are set out in the RSA (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Act 2012, and are enforced by An Garda Síochána. On conviction in Court a person is currently liable to 5 penalty points, a Class A fine (not exceeding €5,000) and/or imprisonment of up to 3 months. It is expected that T5 tractors required to be tested under the Directive will be considered as commercial vehicles, and therefore similar penalties will apply.

Driver Test

254. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a driving test for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25093/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have there-

fore referred the Question to the Authority for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.

Brexit Issues

255. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to assist the haulage sector regarding the challenges that will arise from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25120/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The focus of the Government in the upcoming Brexit negotiations is to protect Ireland's interests and to advance our priorities. The draft EU guidelines for the Brexit negotiations include strong acknowledgement of Ireland's unique circumstances and the importance of maintaining bilateral arrangements with the UK such as the Common Travel Area. In the context of both the haulage sector and the wider economy, it is vital to minimise the impact of Brexit by maintaining close trade between the UK and EU/Ireland, minimising regulatory burden for goods transiting the UK and pursuing trade and investment opportunities arising from Brexit. I can assure you that I and other Government Ministers will continue to work with our EU counterparts, both in EU capitals and within the EU institutions, to advance Ireland's interests in this regard. In relation to the potential impact of Brexit on the road haulage sector, my officials have maintained a close working relationship with their counterparts in the UK and Northern Ireland and regularly interact to discuss issues of mutual interest. This working relationship is ongoing and will undoubtedly be valuable in the coming months as we consider the potential effects of Brexit and how they might be mitigated. My officials also continue to meet regularly with representatives of the Irish road haulage industry and will take account of their concerns in engaging with the EU and UK authorities.

Haulage Industry

256. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to designate the licensed haulage sector as a special category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25121/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue of the designation of the licensed haulage sector as a special essential user category is a matter for the Minister for Finance, as it relates to the rebating of fuel and road toll charges. I understand that the haulage industry has made a budget submission in this regard to the Minister for Finance for his consideration.

National Driver Licensing Service

257. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the renewal of the contract for the driving licence service centres in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25194/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Questions - Written Answers
Railway Stations Upgrade

258. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Bray DART station refurbishment plan and the funding for same; if a call for tender has been issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25216/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area. This includes the planned works to the environs of Bray DART Station. Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Regional Airports

259. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will seek funding from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to invest in Waterford Airport (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25224/17]

260. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met with the board of management of Waterford airport to date in 2017; if he has had recent discussions with the board in relation to securing routes and negotiating deals with a suitable carrier; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25225/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 and 260 together.

I met with representatives of the Board and management when I visited Waterford Airport on 13 February 2017. The securing of routes and negotiations with airlines for the provision of services are matters for the Board and management of the Airport. In that regard, I am aware from Waterford Airport that commercial discussions with a potential new airline operator are currently at a very advanced stage. It is hoped that positive news on scheduled air services will be forthcoming in the near future.

Waterford Airport has received substantial Exchequer support under the Regional Airports Programme - almost €20 million over the past 10 years. This Programme also supports the other three regional airports in Counties Donegal, Mayo and Kerry with funding to assist them with implementing necessary safety and security related projects and activities, including measures in these two areas that are requisite to comply with regulatory requirements. We will not be in a position to consider further Exchequer support for Waterford until air services are resumed.

In relation to the recent amendment to the EU General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), this Regulation exempts certain categories of state aid from the requirement of prior notification to the Commission, if these are unlikely to distort competition in the Single Market. This will have limited impact for our regional airports since Ireland has already received State-aid clearance from the EU Commission in 2015 for our current, five-year, Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019.

There is one new concession (for airports that handle less than 200,000 passengers annually) in the revised GBER regime that would be relevant to Waterford, and that is that they would be eligible for aid towards operating losses, if incurred. In practice, however, Waterford is already eligible for this kind of operational support under our current Regional Airports Programme.

Brexit Issues

261. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the funding allocated to State agencies in 2017 to hire additional staff as a result of Brexit; the number of staff that will be hired by agency; the numbers hired to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25108/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): An additional €3million was secured in respect of Pay in Budget 2017 and is being targeted specifically to assist in our response to the evolving Brexit scenario. It is enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies recruit some 40 to 50 additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers. These numbers may grow as Agencies allocate additional Own Resource Income, by agreement with the Department, to recruit further staff to work on “Brexit-related” activity.

The additional €3m has been allocated across

- Enterprise Ireland (€1,700,000)
- IDA Ireland (€750,000)
- Science Foundation Ireland (€150,000)
- The Health and Safety Authority (€150,000), and
- The Department itself (€250,000)

In terms of the Agency numbers, additional Brexit resources are being put in place in response to the €2.750m allocated for extra staff. This sum is anticipated to allow for additional Brexit staffing in Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, SFI and the HSA (with a number of specific posts sanctioned and recruitment under way).

In relation to Enterprise Ireland, we have sanctioned an additional 39 posts with EI supplementing the “Brexit” pay allocation with additional Own Resource Income. 12 of the 39 posts have been filled. The remaining 27 are actively being sourced through recruitment processes.

IDA Ireland has sought 21 additional staff resources in order that it can meet the jobs and investment targets set out in its Strategy – “Winning Foreign Direct Investment 2015 – 2019” - and to meet the global challenges of 2017 and beyond with Brexit key among the identified challenges. The Agency also submitted a staff resourcing strategy to the Department in July 2016 which sought sanction for retention of the 35 staff hired on 3-year fixed term contracts under the Winning Abroad Programme. IDA has also sought to reinstate its Graduate Recruitment Programme on a three year contract basis. These latter two requests are still under consideration. Currently, IDA has official sanction to recruit 10 additional “Brexit” staff members. One of the Brexit staff members has been recruited with one other post close to being finalised.

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) have designated three new posts to have specific Brexit related responsibilities and duties. These posts have been enabled by an increase in the Foundation’s pay allocation in 2017 for Brexit specific recruitment. While these posts have yet to be filled, recruitment is currently underway.

The Health & Safety Authority has identified a need for an additional 2 “Brexit” staff and while formal approval for one of the posts has been obtained, approval for the remaining post is still awaited at Departmental level”

In respect of these Agencies, it must also be borne in mind that all these Agencies will have

prioritised the Brexit implications arising for them in their individual work plans for 2017 and beyond which serving staff will contribute to as part of their day-to-day work. In this regard the staffing of these Agencies is set out below.

- EI had 575 staff in 564 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of upwards of 39 staff takes effect.

- IDA had 268 staff in 259 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of upwards of 21 staff takes effect.

- SFI had 47 staff in 46.5 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of 2 additional staff takes effect.

- HSA has 167 staff in 159 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of 2 additional staff takes effect.

The €250,000 allocated to my Department's pay budget has funded the establishment of our dedicated Brexit Unit, which currently has a staff complement of four - 1 Principal, 1 Assistant Principal, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer.

Brexit Issues

262. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has examined the way in which Brexit may potentially contribute to greater regional imbalance in terms of employment here; the specific measures she plans to implement to mitigate against this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25109/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Brexit poses significant challenges to the development of Irish owned industry and in particular to the regions which can be more dependent on Irish-owned medium and large businesses.

The regions are often heavily dependent on a small number of larger Irish companies and these companies can be found in traditional, labour intensive but very competitive sectors such as Food, Construction and Manufacturing/Engineering. There are a number of industry subsectors and major employers where exports to the UK make up in excess of 40% of total exports. The Construction Products, Construction Services, Engineering, Agriculture Machinery, Timber, Furniture and Food are all sectors that have a high level of sales to the UK and are very regionally dispersed sectors.

The regional spread of the Enterprise Ireland cohort of companies is very much to the forefront of my strategic planning for Brexit. For the longer term, it is important that we intensify our supports to build the competitiveness of individual companies that have the ambition and the capability to compete on world markets.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Local Enterprises Offices are the main vehicles for channelling Government support to start ups and business expansion in the regions. Some 84% of LEO client jobs are outside of Dublin and Cork urban areas and 62% of EI client employment is located in the regions. In 2016, 65% of payments by Enterprise Ireland were to companies located outside of Dublin.

Both regional balance and Brexit are significant components of the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs, the Regional Action Plans and the Rural Development Action Plan.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs initiative is a concrete example of the targeted approach

we are undertaking to boost regional employment and to support each region to achieve its economic potential. We are seeing progress. The most recent QNHS figures show that over 77% of the new jobs added in the year to Q1 2017 were outside Dublin, with the unemployment rate falling across all regions in the same period.

As well as being a top priority at Government level, the implications of the Brexit vote on Irish enterprises are, and will continue to be, an important item on the agenda of meetings of the 9 Regional Implementation Committees that are charged with overseeing and monitoring the Regional Plans.

On Monday 29 May, I will launch a €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund with Minister of State for Employment and Labour Pat Breen TD. The Fund will support major new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development and job creation in the region/across regions or nationally. The competitive process for funding will be managed by Enterprise Ireland.

Through this €60m fund, the Government will be backing local stakeholders to drive their own futures by putting forward their own proposals to deliver sustainable employment.

Investing in Regional Enterprise Infrastructure is a crucial response to building the resilience of our regions to cope with any external challenge. By strengthening the infrastructure at local, regional and national levels, we aim to stimulate a new generation of entrepreneurs, support and grow established enterprises and encourage their ambition, and scale more businesses with global potential.

As the situation evolves, we will monitor the potential and real impacts of Brexit on each Region.

Action Plan for Jobs

263. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of progress on the development of the M1 digital payments fin tech corridor, as recommended under the regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative; the actions IDA and Enterprise Ireland have taken to date to develop and promote the concept; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25180/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor): The M1 Payments Corridor (M1PC) is an industry group of payments and online transacting companies aimed at promoting regional Fintech development in the North-East.

To progress this initiative, a specific action was included in the IFS2020 2017 Action Plan. The FinTech & Payments Association of Ireland is cooperating closely with the M1PC group to develop the project further.

This initiative is also included in the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (APJ) for the Border Region. IDA Ireland, together with Enterprise Ireland and other stakeholders, are working actively to take this forward and are providing updates through the North East Regional APJ Implementation Committee.

Brexit Issues

264. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if an

additional €3 million has been allocated by her Department in 2017 to the evolving Brexit scenario; the number of full-time and part-time staff hired since 1 January 2017 under this budget allocation; the amount allocated to each State agency to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25205/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): An additional €3million was secured in respect of Pay in Budget 2017 and is being targeted specifically to assist in our response to the evolving Brexit scenario. It is enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies recruit some 40 to 50 additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers. These numbers may grow as Agencies allocate additional Own Resource Income, by agreement with the Department, to recruit further staff to work on “Brexit-related” activity.

The additional €3m has been allocated across

- Enterprise Ireland (€1,700,000)
- IDA Ireland (€750,000)
- Science Foundation Ireland (€150,000)
- The Health and Safety Authority (€150,000), and
- The Department itself (€250,000)

In relation to Enterprise Ireland, my Department has sanctioned an additional 39 posts with EI supplementing the “Brexit” pay allocation with additional Own Resource Income. 12 of the 39 posts have been filled. The remaining 27 are actively being sourced through recruitment processes.

IDA Ireland has sought 21 additional staff resources in order that it can meet the jobs and investment targets set out in its Strategy – “Winning Foreign Direct Investment 2015 – 2019” - and to meet the global challenges of 2017 and beyond with Brexit key among the identified challenges. The Agency also submitted a staff resourcing strategy to the Department in July 2016 which sought sanction for retention of the 35 staff hired on 3-year fixed term contracts under the Winning Abroad Programme. IDA has also sought to reinstate its Graduate Recruitment Programme on a three year contract basis. These latter two requests are still under consideration. Currently, IDA has official sanction to recruit 10 additional “Brexit” staff members. One of the Brexit staff members has been recruited with one other post close to being finalised.

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) have designated three new posts to have specific Brexit related responsibilities and duties. These posts have been enabled by an increase in the Foundation’s pay allocation in 2017 for Brexit specific recruitment. While these posts have yet to be filled, recruitment is currently underway.

The Health & Safety Authority has identified a need for an additional 2 “Brexit” staff and while formal approval for one of the posts has been obtained, approval for the remaining post is still awaited at Departmental level.

Finally, in respect of these Agencies, it must also be borne in mind that all these Agencies will have prioritised the Brexit implications arising for them in their individual work plans for 2017 and beyond which serving staff will contribute to as part of their day-to-day work. In this regard the staffing of these Agencies is set out below.

- EI had 575 staff in 564 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of upwards of 39 staff takes effect.

- IDA had 268 staff in 259 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of upwards of 21 staff takes effect.

- SFI had 47 staff in 46.5 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of 2 additional staff takes effect.

- HSA has 167 staff in 159 Full-Time Equivalent posts before Brexit-specific recruitment of 2 additional staff takes effect.

In respect of my own Department, the additional resources have funded the establishment of our dedicated Brexit Unit at present comprising 4 staff at Principal, Assistant Principal, Higher Executive and Clerical Officer levels.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

265. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies greater than and fewer than 250 employees that have drawn down EFSI funding to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25207/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) is a joint initiative of the European Investment Bank, European Investment Fund and the European Commission, established to help overcome the current investment gap in the EU by mobilising private financing for strategic investments. While the Minister for Finance is responsible for the Irish political and policy input on the shape of EFSI, including its ongoing review, it is in fact EFSI itself which is charged with day to day operations independent of all EU Governments including the Irish Government. EFSI does however publish project lists on its website, and, in this regard, I would direct the Deputy's attention towards this information which can be filtered by country and by sector, including under the heading of 'smaller companies

Departmental Funding

266. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the 2017 budget allocation for InterTradeIreland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25208/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The 2017 budget allocation from my Department for InterTrade Ireland is €7.96m.

I fully understand how important it is that InterTrade Ireland has a sound and strong financial footing. This is especially the case given the important work the Body will play in helping SMEs address the challenges that Brexit will present. That is why I made additional funding available to InterTrade Ireland for both 2016 and 2017. I will also keep its requirements under review as we move forward.

Employment Rights

267. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the regulation of persons employed in the gig economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25210/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Rapid technological advances have given rise to new ways of working which may challenge our traditional view of the world of work including the employer-employee relationship. On 12 May last I hosted a major conference organised by my Department in Dublin Castle on the Future of Work involving government, employee representatives, employers and academia to address the challenges posed by the new world of work. Rapid technological advances have given rise to new ways of working. The conference had a particular focus on the impact of technology on the traditional employer/employee relationship.

This new world presents opportunities and challenges. While the flexibility and competitive advantage offered by new technologies is to be welcomed, a balance must be struck with the need to ensure continued employment rights protections. One of the messages coming from the conference was that care needs to be taken in any desire to regulate so that genuine innovation is not stifled and, equally importantly, that what might ultimately be found by employment rights adjudication bodies both here and abroad to be simply rebranding of workers performing work does not drive the regulatory agenda.

In most cases it will be clear whether an individual is employed or self-employed. Where there is doubt in relation to the employment status of an individual the relevant Departments and Agencies will have regard to the Code of Practice for Determining Employment or Self-Employment Status of Individuals. This Code was drawn up and agreed in 2007 by the relevant Government Departments with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (Ibec).

Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees they may refer a complaint to the WRC where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication leading to a decision that is enforceable through the District Court. WRC inspectors can also be asked to investigate certain breaches. As indicated earlier a number of what are loosely termed gig economy arrangements are only recently finding their way into adjudicatory processes for adjudication across the EU.

It is important to remember that some working in the gig economy are correctly categorised as self-employed. However, the Deputy will also be aware that the Department of Finance and Department of Social Protection have conducted a joint public consultation on the Use of Intermediary-Type Structures and Self-Employment Arrangements . It is important that individuals are correctly designated as regards employment status, so that those who ought to be designated as employees are not deprived of employment rights. This is particularly the case for vulnerable workers who may not feel in a position to object to certain arrangements.

Research and Development Funding

268. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the latest findings by the EU's research and innovation observatory (details supplied) which indicates that research and development funding here is largely focused on multinationals rather than SMEs and that research and development here is below that of average spends by firms in other EU nations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25211/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I presume the Deputy is referring to business expenditure in research and development.

It is recognised that Ireland's business expenditure on R&D as a percentage of GDP is less than the EU average.

However improving the innovative capacity of enterprise (in particular Irish SMEs), and encouraging private investment in R&D are given a high priority in government policy strategies such as Enterprise 2025, Innovation 2020 and in the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs. Supporting research is a key pillar of Ireland's enterprise policy given its role in driving productivity, competitiveness and thereby the creation and maintenance of jobs.

It should be noted that, as indicated in the most recent European Innovation Scoreboard, Ireland leads Europe in economic success stemming from innovation in terms of employment, revenue and exports. We have consistently improved our innovation performance over the last four years moving from 10th place in 2013, to 6th place in 2016. Year on year, Ireland has successfully built up research capacity, a significant reputation for research excellence and has an increasing base of enterprises engaging in R&D and innovation activity.

Continuing to build on this performance, Innovation 2020 (Ireland's cross-government strategy for research and development, science and technology) outlines a range of policy responses aimed at increasing the number of indigenous enterprises engaged in R&D activities as well as increasing their R&D expenditures. The following key actions are aligning the public effort to maximise R&D activity in SMEs:

- Support for knowledge transfer and commercialisation has been stepped up.
- The refresh of research prioritisation exercise is reviewing the priority areas for publicly funded research and will target new areas where enterprises could build a competitive advantage.
- New policy tools have been developed to encourage private participation in R&D both in their own right and in collaboration with publically funded research programmes.
- The R&D tax credit was made more accessible and improvements to the credit have catalysed increased private investment in R&D.
- The Knowledge Development Box was introduced to act as a further incentive for companies engaged in R&D, allowing them to claim tax relief on profits arising from qualifying IP.
- A review of the current suite of RDI supports for enterprise is currently underway to ensure that supports use public resources efficiently, that they are readily accessible by enterprise and that they are aligned with enterprise needs.

Furthermore, Enterprise Ireland is proactively working with Irish SMEs to improve their R&D capacity and has developed an initiative to optimise their suite of RDI supports to enable them to respond to changes in the market.