

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 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Aviation Policy

7. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of his plans to create a single national aviation regulator; and when the legislation and logistics of this plan are expected to be introduced. [51989/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Government has approved a proposal to separate the Irish Aviation Authority's air navigation service provision functions from its aviation safety and security regulatory functions, and merge these regulatory functions with the Commission for Aviation Regulation. The objective is to have a single aviation regulator responsible for economic, safety and security regulation and a standalone air navigation service provider. This is in line with emerging best international practice. It provides a sounder governance and organisational basis for enhancing regulatory functions into the future, which is needed to match the ever growing regulatory demands – particularly in aviation safety and security - emanating from the EU and ICAO.

As regards the current status, I can advise the Deputy that a high level project management board has been established, comprising senior officials from my Department, the Chief Executive Officer of the IAA and the Aviation Commissioner. Project governance and implementation structures have also been established, including numerous working groups, which have been charged with carrying out due diligence on matters such as finance, international/ EU regulations and law, and HR matters. This work – which is detailed and in some areas highly technical in nature – is on-going. Once the due diligence is complete, I expect the high level project management board to consider the outcome of that process, examine options arising and make recommendations to me.

The overall approach to the reform is wholly in accordance with established practice for structural reform processes within the Irish public sector. There will be appropriate staff consultation throughout the process. There has already been engagement with the main staff representative body – FORSA – and in all eventualities the commitment is that staff will transfer to the new structures on no less favourable terms and conditions, unless otherwise negotiated.

Recognising that such reform has a number of complex components, I am mindful of the need to manage the transition to the proposed new arrangements for aviation regulation in a careful and methodical manner. That includes in relation to the eventual enactment of supporting legislation. While good progress is being made, there are still a number of stages to navigate on the way to the production of a draft Bill that can be put forward to the House for

consideration.

This is an important project for the future of aviation regulation in Ireland. While the changes involved may be complex they also provide a new opportunity for enhancing existing provisions. Throughout the change process, senior management in both organisations will ensure that business as usual continues for all external stakeholders.

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

Driver Licences

13. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether a greater emphasis should be placed on disqualified drivers surrendering their licences and the enforcement of same by the Road Safety Authority; the reason there are so many driver vehicle databases; the differences between each; his views on which database is the most comprehensive for the road safety needs associated with such a database; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51959/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The requirement for a disqualified driver to surrender his or her licence is set out in the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 537 of 2006). Failure to comply with the requirement to surrender the licence is an offence in itself. As Deputy Broughan is aware, enforcement of the law is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

Drivers who are disqualified are required to return their licences to the Road Safety Authority, however, very few do. This is completely unacceptable, but it is not correct to give it the importance sometimes attached to it. The real problem is not disqualified drivers failing to return their licences, it is disqualified drivers who continue to drive.

I do not believe that the non-return of licences, unacceptable and illegal though it is, is the central issue. The number of disqualified drivers not returning their licences is not a proxy for the number of people who drive while disqualified. As I've said some people will return their licences and still drive, others will not return their licences but not drive. What we need is strong enforcement of the law against people driving while disqualified. In this context, the crucial legislative step was taken in the Road Traffic Act 2014, which empowered An Garda Síochána to arrest a person where they have reason to believe that the person is driving while disqualified.

The penalty for driving while disqualified is fine up to a maximum of €5,000 and or a prison term of up to 6 months. The penalty for non-return of a driving licence is the general penalty under the Road Traffic Acts, namely a fine of up to €1,000 for a first offence, up to €2,000 for a second offence, and up to €2,000 and/or up to 3 months in prison for a third or subsequent offence in a 12 month period.

The Driver and Vehicle Computer Services Division (DVCS) of my Department manages the computer records of all vehicles and drivers in the State, referred to collectively as the National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF). This data is the definitive record in the context of motor tax collection, the issuance of driving licences, as well as enforcement initiatives and legal outcomes associated with these functions including the application of penalty points.

I am aware that Garda authorities are working to improve communication so that detail of specific drivers who are disqualified are readily available to the Garda on the ground and I understand that an initiative to that effect will be rolled out shortly. In addition the Garda Mod-

ernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 sets out a pathway so that each Garda has the technical tools that will give them direct access to all the information they need as they interact with the public on the ground.

Military Aircraft Landings

14. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the recently released figures which show that there has already been an increase in applications to allow civil flights carrying weapons to land in Irish airports; his further views on the impact on Ireland's neutrality; his views on the need for more transparency regarding the items being taken through Shannon Airport and the locations the troops and weapons are going to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48013/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport my functions in relation to the use of Shannon Airport and Irish airspace are limited. Questions relating to Irish foreign policy, including Ireland's policy on neutrality, are for the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In accordance with the provisions of S.I. No 224/1973 - Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order- my Department operates a procedure under which airlines wishing to carry weapons or munitions through Irish airspace or airports must apply for each individual flight at least 48 hours in advance. In processing these applications, my Department seeks the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to foreign policy issues and the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to security issues.

My Department publishes statistics on its website summarising the number of applications processed on a monthly basis. I am not aware of any reasons as to why the number of applications may have increased this year.

An internal review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders, 1973 and 1989, is currently being finalised by my Department.

Rural Transport Services Provision

15. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the delivery of rural transport nationally; the way in which the existing system can be expanded and enhanced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52203/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. I do not have responsibility for the day-to-day operations of public transport services.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of Local Link services funded under the Rural Transport Programme.

Public transport in rural areas of the country is primarily provided by bus and coach services, as well as rail and small public service vehicles (SPSV) services, which include Taxi, Hackney and Local Area Hackney services.

The bus and coach services include Public Service Obligation (PSO) services operated by Bus Éireann and other operators, Bus Éireann Expressway services, licensed services provided by commercial operators and Local Link services.

These services comprise conventional fixed services with regular routes, stopping places and timetables and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services which respond to local demands and which constitute the vast majority of Local Link services.

I am committed to the further development of bus services in rural areas and that is why funding has been increased over the past number of years, for both PSO and Local Link services in rural areas.

The increased funding has enabled the introduction of 66 new commuter services into the Local Link network, operating five, six or seven days per week, as well as demand-responsive services. Key features of these new services include greater integration with existing public transport services and better linkage of services between and within towns and villages.

Furthermore, as the Deputy will be aware, following my engagement with key stakeholders last year, I tasked the NTA to examine how to extend existing Local Link services to provide additional services in the evenings. Subsequently, the NTA approved funding for 65 new pilot evening and late night Local Link services to operate on a 6 months trial basis to the end of this year. The results of the trial are currently being assessed by the NTA and the continuation of these services will be considered in the light of those results and the availability of funding in 2019. I wish to again acknowledge the Deputy's commitment to the development of these services.

The NTA is continually working with Bus Éireann to provide improvements on its contracted services across both its urban and non-urban networks. Changes already implemented this year or planned for 2019 include improvements in the regional cities of Cork, Galway and Limerick and town services in Sligo, Navan, Athlone and Drogheda, as well as to Bus Éireann networks in rural areas including to corridors in Mayo, Galway, Clare, West Cork, Kerry, Wicklow and Westmeath.

More generally, the Programme for a Partnership Government undertakes to examine how best to improve integration of services in the rural bus network within regions. This matter is being examined and developed by my Department in the context of the wider work on which it has embarked around a review of public transport policy, which is another commitment in the Programme for Government.

Road Projects Status

16. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Bonagee link road project in County Donegal; when the project will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51949/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I would like to explain that, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. However, under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, construction and development stages of individual road projects is a matter for

(a) the relevant road authority (i.e. local authorities in whose functional area a road development is situated) in relation to local and regional roads, or

(b) Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Overview

Consequently, it is an operational matter for a road authority and TII to give an account of how a project is progressing within their functional areas of responsibility. However, having consulted with the relevant authorities, I can provide the following information and update to the Deputy on the Bonagee Link Road project, also referred to as the Letterkenny Inner Relief Road.

- In Co. Donegal the Trans European Network-Transport (TEN-T) Comprehensive road network runs from the Leitrim County Boundary in the South of the County (on the outskirts of Bundoran) to the Northern Ireland Border with Derry in the Northeast of the County at Bridgend (on the outskirts of Derry City) and involves Sections of the N13, N14 and N15.

- In 2016 Donegal County Council commissioned a Corridor Needs Study on the TEN-T Comprehensive network within Donegal. The study identified projects in Donegal necessary to improve the TEN-T Comprehensive network to the required standard in compliance with the TEN-T regulations. The outcome of the Study identified a priority list of schemes. It recommended three projects for immediate advancement through Phases 1 to 4 of the Project Management Guidelines:

- N15/N13 Ballybofey – Stranorlar Bypass

- N56/N13/N14 – Letterkenny Bypass and Letterkenny to Manorcunningham Dual Carriageway

- N14 Manorcunningham to Lifford Realignment Scheme including the N14/N15 link to the A5 Western Transport Corridor in Northern Ireland

The Bonagee Link Road, or the Letterkenny Inner Relief Road, forms part of the proposed N56/N13/N14 scheme.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has provided an allocation of €2.4m in 2018 to Donegal County Council to progress planning work on priority national road improvements projects that were identified in the 2016 needs study report on the TEN-T Comprehensive Network in County Donegal, as I have just mentioned.

These projects are identified as Strategic Investment Priorities in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP)

Current Status

TII has advised my Department of the current status of the projects, which is, technical advisors are continuing to develop the schemes through phases 1 to 4 of the project Management guidelines. Public consultations of identified route options for all these priority schemes were held in April and May this year in Letterkenny, Lifford and Ballybofey. In addition it is anticipated that the preferred routes will be presented to the public in early 2019. The preferred routes will then be brought forward for further design and appraisal during 2019.

Timetable

The construction timetable is estimated to be in the region of approximately 36 months with an estimated completion date of end 2027. However, I would like to stress that any time frame is dependant on obtaining the necessary consents at various critical stages including at the route

selection, detailed design and tender stages. The necessity to meet the requirements of the public spending code and planning consent from An Bord Pleanála along with a continued adequate capital budget are also critical to delivering the project.

Integrated Ticketing

17. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to expand the use of the Leap card nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52206/18]

45. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allow for commuters to use the Leap card to avail of discounts on journeys on expressway services which fall within a Leap card travel zone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52207/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 17 and 45 together.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware the Leap Card is currently available on Public Service Obligation, or PSO, services in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Sligo and Athlone. The Leap Card is a convenient and cheaper way to pay for public transport services and I would encourage people in those areas to make the switch to Leap.

The benefits of using the Leap Card are obvious -

- It provides fares that are up to 31% cheaper than cash equivalent single tickets;
- It avoids the need to have change ready as you take your journey; and
- It helps ease delays for all users of public transport as boarding and paying for tickets is so much easier and quicker.

In addition, Leap Card users in the Dublin area also benefit from features such as Capping and the Leap 90 Discount.

But I recognise there are areas outside of those already mentioned which currently are not served by Leap enabled services. However, I am pleased to say that the National Transport Authority is continuing to support the enablement of Leap Card on regional Bus Éireann services nationwide.

This year a considerable number of newly purchased Leap compatible ticketing machines were introduced across PSO bus services operated by Bus Éireann on behalf of the NTA. In that regard the emphasis will be on providing Leap Card on PSO services that until earlier this year have not been able to accept Leap Cards due to a shortage of suitable ticketing equipment.

I am now informed that all Bus Éireann PSO services will be able to accept Leap Cards within weeks, with some occasional exceptions where services are operated by contractor vehicles.

This will be of benefit to people all across the country and will no doubt be welcomed by the Deputy, as I welcome it myself.

As well as these PSO services, the NTA also works with commercial bus operators to make Leap compatible ticketing equipment available to those operators who wish to accept it. A total

of 14 commercial bus operators now accept Leap and that means that passengers on commercial services in places such as Galway, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, and Wexford are all able to make their journey using Leap.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, Expressway is a commercial bus service rather than a PSO service and it is a matter for Bus Éireann, in its capacity as the commercial operator of Expressway services, to engage with the NTA if it wishes to allow Expressway passengers use their Leap Card and what ticket price might apply.

I very much welcome the extension of Leap enabled services across all of Bus Éireann's PSO services and as already mentioned would encourage all public transport users to make the switch to Leap where possible.

Public Service Vehicles

18. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the ongoing review of small public service vehicles; and if he will consider changing regulations in order to permit executive hire vehicles to use bus and taxi lanes. [52199/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, under the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*, the NTA is the independent regulator of the taxi, hackney and limousine sector. Technically, these are known under the legislation as small public service vehicles, or SPSVs. As the regulator, the NTA is responsible for the development and operation of a regulatory framework for this sector.

In line with that responsibility the NTA is undertaking a review of key aspects of taxi, hackney and limousine operations with the intention of developing a five year strategy for the SPSV industry that will guide its regulatory development over that timeframe.

With the assistance and input of the Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles, the NTA review is considering a variety of issues including issues like vehicle licensing, vehicle standards, driver licensing, wheelchair accessible vehicles, fixed payment offences and technological developments.

The NTA intends to conduct a public consultation process in the first half of 2019 in relation to the proposals emerging from the review process. As part of that procedure, public representatives will have the opportunity to submit their views. If any recommendations emerging from the review involve a significant revision of a policy nature or if they require legislative change, then these would clearly be subject to full consideration by the Department and final decision by me.

To answer the second part of the Deputy's question, the starting point for considering access to bus lanes is that they were created - at some expense to the public - to provide on-street priority for bus-based public transport. Their goal is to make bus transport faster and more reliable, thereby encouraging more people to switch from private cars to public transport. This will achieve the twin goals of reducing congestion and reducing pollution.

In addition to buses, bus lanes may also be used by cyclists who, as vulnerable road users, are safer in bus lanes than in general traffic. The lanes may also, of course, be used by the emergency services. Finally, after the lanes were originally introduced it was decided to allow only one category of SPSV - namely taxis - to use them. This was a concession based on the fact that taxis are a form of public transport available for on-street hire.

Since bus lanes were first introduced, there have been many requests to allow other classes of traffic to use the lanes. These have included requests on behalf of motorcyclists, multi-occupancy vehicles, electric vehicles, hired limousines, hackneys, and animal ambulances, among others. My predecessors and I have always rejected these requests. Any addition to the categories of vehicle permitted to use the lanes would inevitably reduce their efficiency for performing their original purpose of prioritising bus-based public transport.

Road Network

19. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if discussions have taken place in his Department on providing funding for the east-west link road and rural roads in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49202/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo. As regards the regional road aspect of the proposal which are the subject of this PQ, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design.

This year I gave an allocation to Cavan County Council to enable the Council to undertake a preliminary appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Investment Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the route. The aim of this appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for development post 2021. Preparation of the appraisal is the responsibility of the Council.

Public Transport Fares

20. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policy of his Department on equitable fare structures on publicly subsidised transport across the country; if it is policy as part of the national planning framework implementation to maintain fares at a much higher level per kilometre outside of the main urban conurbations compared to urban areas to discourage persons from living outside of the cities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51963/18]

22. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether it is advisable that public transport fares are increased in view of Ireland's obligations under climate change agreements and the need to see an increase in the number of persons using public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51953/18]

24. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has modelling on the impact on demand for public transport of fare increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51962/18]

36. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the decision of the NTA to sanction a fare increase in public transport; his views in relation to same; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that cash fares have risen in some cases by 87% since 2011; and the way in which this decision is in line with measures to tackle climate change. [52103/18]

56. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the recent changes to the fare structures in Dublin Bus which means that the shortest trip of 1-3 stages has increased to €3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51952/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 20, 22, 24, 36 and 56 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has the statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services.

The NTA also has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of public transport services contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable.

The funding of those services comprises fares paid by passengers and subvention payments from the Exchequer. The main purpose of the subvention payment is to meet the gap between income from fares and the cost of operating services.

The BusConnects programme for Dublin will see the transformation of Dublin's bus system, so that journeys by bus will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable. Part of this programme is to simplify the fares structure, to encourage interchange between services and modes of travel and to reduce boarding times. A revised fare structure is required for transport in the city which will easily allow seamless movement between different transport services without financial penalty.

The NTA points out in its recently published Fares Determination document that its fares determination adjusts fares both upwards and downwards, ensuring that the travelling public pays a fare relative to the distance they travel, such that the operators are in a position to provide a safe and reliable service.

The National Planning Framework commits to provide public transport infrastructure and services to meet the needs of smaller urban centres and rural areas. It also commits to provide a quality nationwide community-based public transport system in rural Ireland which responds to local needs under the Rural Transport Network and similar initiatives.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 was published alongside the National Planning Framework. While the NDP is a capital investment plan, it recognises the importance of investment in public transport services outside of the cities and commits to continued investment in such services over the lifetime of the NDP. Subject to the availability of operational funding support, it is intended to introduce new town bus services in certain large towns to enable their development growth and provide a public transport option for residents and visitors.

Modal shift from the private car to sustainable means of transport remains central to the transport sector's response to climate change. Investment in public transport led to an increase of almost 31 million journeys on subsidised public transport and commercial bus service since 2013, with an increase of 16 million passengers in 2017 (a 7% rise on 2016 figures) with a further increase of 6.2% to 4 November 2018, across all public transport services.

As Deputies are aware, in order to reduce the prevalence of the private car and encourage a shift to more sustainable forms of transport, a number of key policy measures to increase public transport capacity will be progressed over the next decade. The National Development Plan has earmarked €8.6 billion for investment in public and sustainable transport to 2027.

I have referred the Deputies questions to the NTA for reply in relation to those aspects where it has statutory responsibility. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Public Transport Provision

21. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions he has had with either Iarnród Éireann or Dublin Bus on the reduction in service to north County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51988/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The operation of public transport services by Iarnród Éireann and Dublin Bus is a matter for the respective companies, with oversight by the National Transport Authority (NTA).

In relation to bus services, the NTA recently advised that four more bus routes switched from Dublin Bus to Go-Ahead Ireland from Sunday, December 2nd, in a move that will provide improved services, not just on these routes, but in other parts of the network too.

In addition, the switchover of routes frees up resources, which has allowed the NTA to approve a programme of service improvements and modifications on Dublin Bus routes across the network.

Changes to the 33, which continue to be run by Dublin Bus, and the 33A, run by Go-Ahead Ireland, mean a combined 30-minute frequency all day every day between Skerries, Rush, Lusk and Swords. This represents a substantial improvement on the previous service level.

The frequency on Route 33A is significantly increased and for the first time connects Skerries, Rush and Lusk directly to Dublin Airport. Further interchange opportunities are available in Swords for onward travel to areas such as Donabate, Portrane and Malahide.

Route 33 continues south of Swords to provide direct services to destinations along Swords Road and Drumcondra Road to the city centre.

In relation to rail services, the NTA has advised that following changes to timetables in September, one commuter service in the morning peak period was subsequently re-timed to provide additional capacity in Portmarnock.

Further timetable changes, which were introduced on Sunday, December 9, provide for additional peak-time commuter services stopping at Portmarnock and new off-peak services on the northern line, the Maynooth line and Kildare line services through the Phoenix Park tunnel.

Question No. 22 answered with Question No. 20.

Bus Services

23. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the implementation of the BusConnects programme for the bus service in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52196/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware BusConnects is one of the flagship investments to be delivered under Project Ireland 2040 and the 10-year National Development Plan (NDP).

BusConnects Dublin is currently well underway and importantly the NDP also provides for the implementation of BusConnects programmes in the other cities over the NDP's lifetime.

BusConnects Dublin forms part of the statutory Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area and, as that Strategy notes, around two-thirds of all public transport trips in Dublin are taken by bus. Bus-based public transport is a key component of the planned approach to addressing our current congestion problem and to meeting our future transport needs.

BusConnects has been developed to do just that and will see –

- The introduction of next-generation bus corridors and Bus Rapid Transit routes;
- A redesign of bus network across the city;
- A new state-of-the-art ticketing system with a cashless payments and a simpler fare structure;
- The roll-out of new bus-stops with better signage and information;
- The provision of new park and ride sites;
- Cleaner technology through ending the purchase of diesel only buses; and
- A new integrated bus livery across the network.

Each of these measures is important in their own right while collectively they have the potential to significantly improve people's journey experience.

In relation to the Bus Corridors project, the NTA launched a public consultation process on the first 4 of the corridors on 14 November and this consultation will run until February. The 4 corridors are: Clongriffin to City Centre; Swords to City Centre; Blanchardstown to City Centre; and Lucan to City Centre.

The new bus lanes which will be developed along these corridors will improve journey times by up to 40-50% on each corridor and will greatly improve cycling infrastructure as well, through new, largely segregated, cycle lanes. The improvements will require some reallocation of existing road space and impacted property owners across these first 4 corridors have been contacted individually by the NTA and offered one-to-one meetings.

There are 16 corridors in total and it is envisaged that consultations on the next 6 will start in January and run until April, while consultations on the final 6 will start in February and run until May. Phasing the consultations in this way will allow for the appropriate level of engagement with property owners and communities along each route.

The NTA will also establish a community forum for each corridor as well as a city-wide business forum. It also plans to engage with relevant stakeholders throughout all the public consultation processes, including accessibility and disability groups, cycling groups, transport companies, business organisations and academics.

In terms of the Bus Network Redesign, we are all aware of the significant public consultation that has taken place in recent months. There was a huge response to that consultation and the NTA are currently considering all submissions received with a view to issuing a revised network design for further public consultation in 2019.

The objective of these proposals under BusConnects is to -

- improve bus journey times that will benefit many millions of passenger journeys each year,
- provide a bus service that is easier to use, understand and more attractive to customers and enable more people to travel by bus than ever before, and
- also provide a network of cycling infrastructure that will enable more people to cycle.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 20.

Traffic Calming Measures

25. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if electronic speed signs will be put in place in villages in local authority areas to measure effectiveness and changing driver behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51960/18]

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

Each year the Department invites applications from local authorities for safety improvement schemes. Under this programme it is open to local authorities to seek funding for works (including electronic speed feedback signs) which can assist in reducing vehicle speeds and improve road safety. In this context, it is a matter for each Council to determine and implement appropriate signage within its operational area.

In relation to national roads as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Bus Services

26. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider the policy of fully devolving to local authorities the role of providing bus shelters as provided in local government legislation. [51956/18]

51. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will allocate funding directly to local authorities to provide bus shelters in their functional areas in which they are deemed appropriate. [51957/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26 and 51 together.

The Deputy is probably aware that the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, as amended, provides that the National Transport Authority (NTA) ‘shall have the function to secure or provide public transport... infrastructure in the State in relation to bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, stands and bus fleets’. The Act also states that the NTA may enter into agreements with other persons for the purposes of achieving its function in this regard.

I believe that assignment of this function to the NTA is entirely appropriate given its central role in both the contracting and funding of Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus services and its regulatory role in relation to commercial bus licensing.

It is extremely important that our public transport network develop in an integrated and co-ordinated manner and the role of the NTA in providing bus shelters is entirely consistent with that ambition. Obviously I expect the NTA to work closely with local authorities in that regard and I am aware that it collaborates with local authorities in the performance of its function in relation to bus shelters across the State.

Military Aircraft Landings

27. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on reports that 423 planes carrying munitions have landed in Shannon Airport in 2018; if these reports are accurate; and if his Department retains such data. [48347/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Exemption permits for the carriage of munitions on board civil aircraft in Irish airspace are granted by the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport in accordance with the provisions of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders (1973, as amended). The Order applies to civil aviation only.

I can confirm that my Department recently released the figure that the Deputy is referring to on its website. This relates to the number of munitions of war applications granted to aircraft landing at Shannon Airport in accordance with the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders, 1973 and 1989.

My Department publishes statistics on its website summarising the number of applications processed on a monthly basis.

Transport Policy

28. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to promote the use of natural gas as a fuel source for the transport sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52109/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A transition away from conventional fuels to cleaner alternatives is a necessary step change if Ireland is to begin to decarbonise the transport sector. In transport, natural gas can offer a cleaner alternative to oil and biogas can offer a lower carbon emitting alternative.

Compressed natural gas (CNG) is an established source of transport fuel predominantly suited to larger vehicles, such as trucks and buses, travelling short to medium distances. Liqui-

fied natural gas is more efficient on longer road journeys with minimal start-stops such as trans-continental freight movement and in the shipping sector.

As outlined in the National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport, which my Department published in May 2017, natural gas, particularly CNG, is envisaged as a key alternative fuel in the heavy duty sector in Ireland. CNG is reported to emit few emissions, particularly NO_x, SO_x and particulate matter. Importantly, it is a pathway fuel to renewable biomethane which can dramatically reduce CO₂ emissions in transport.

Under the Programme for a Partnership Government, a Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) Taskforce was established to consider the range of measures and options available to Government to accelerate the take-up of low-carbon technologies in the road transport sector. The Taskforce is jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. It includes representatives from across the public sector and consults widely with industry, stakeholders and representative groups. Phase 1 of the Taskforce focused specifically on electric vehicles, while Phase 2, which began its work in September, is examining the role of other alternative fuel technologies including natural gas in both its compressed and liquefied states. Working Group 4 of the Taskforce is considering the range of incentives and infrastructure requirements to encourage the take-up of such low emitting fuels. I envisage that Phase 2 of the LEV Taskforce will report to Government next summer.

It is also important to note that a number of valuable measures are already in place to encourage uptake of gas vehicles in Ireland. In Budget 2015 the excise rate for natural gas and biogas as a propellant was set at the current EU minimum rate (€2.60 per GJ) and a guarantee given that this rate would be held for a period of eight years. This rate puts CNG in a competitive price position with diesel. Budget 2019 saw the introduction of an accelerated capital allowance scheme for gas-propelled vehicles and related equipment. This will enable businesses to write down the cost of such vehicles or equipment up-front in the year of purchase rather than spread over 8 years.

Finally, Gas Networks Ireland has received funding from the European Commission, under the CEF Transport Fund, to install 14 public CNG refuelling stations (including a station at Dublin Port which is due to open shortly) and a large scale renewable gas injection point under the “Causeway Project”. The provision of refuelling infrastructure will support greater uptake of gas vehicles while the installation of a biogas injection facility is essential to enable indigenous renewable gas to become part of Ireland’s future transport fuel mix.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

29. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of applications received from County Kildare for the sports capital programme; when he expects allocations to be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52202/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. Sanction has been received to make allocations with a total value of €40m under this round.

98 applications were submitted for projects in County Kildare seeking €7m in grants. A list of all applications submitted, including those from County Kildare, are published on my Department’s website <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>.

186 of the total applications relate to projects deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme who have now submitted corrected documents. These applications are being assessed first and I hope to make allocations to this category of application later this year or early in 2019.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of next year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

Traffic Management

30. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered the promotion of car sharing technology to reduce gridlock in Dublin city; and the policies he will implement to incentivise the take up of such technology. [52046/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area is the statutory framework for the development of public and sustainable transport in the Greater Dublin Area out to 2035 and it details the measures to be taken across all modes of transport.

The Strategy states that the National Transport Authority will support the implementation and expansion of car club schemes, car-pooling and car sharing. The NTA supports the development of car-pooling through the Smarter Travel programme, which is funded by my Department. The Deputy may be aware that there are currently two car-sharing operators already providing services in Ireland.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for implementation of the Transport Strategy, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Bus Services

31. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has been notified of ongoing difficulties and the failure to deliver the promised levels of service on the bus routes recently handed over to a company (details supplied) in Dublin; if the service failures are a result of revised and shortened travelling time allocated by the company on these routes; if the ability to operate these routes with reduced running times formed part of the winning bid by the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52104/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Projects Status

32. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the progress of the A5; the details of his engagement with his counterpart in Northern Ireland on this project; the funding that will be made available for this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51950/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. In this context it will be for the Northern Ireland authorities to consider how to proceed in light of the recent outcome of judicial review proceedings regarding the scheme.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional £25 million towards the cost of Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane).

The funding allocated to my Department as part of the Capital Plan Review last year includes financial provision for meeting the Government's commitment regarding the A5 in three tranches over the period 2019 to 2021.

In the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive, the Deputy will be aware that I currently do not have a counterpart and the North South Ministerial Council has not been meeting. However, the Senior Officials Group comprising Northern and Southern officials, including from my Department, established to oversee implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement, has been continuing to meet. Similarly, my Department attends the ongoing meetings of the North West Strategic Gateway Group.

Rail Network Expansion

33. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role of his Department in the decision-making process and consideration of the final route of the MetroLink project on the south side of Dublin city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51961/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including MetroLink.

The Deputy is aware that there is a statutory Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area. That Strategy was subject to a full public consultation, appropriate environmental assessment and appropriate programme level appraisals.

The Strategy provides a comprehensive and integrated framework for the development of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area out to 2035 and details the measures to be taken across all modes of public transport, including active travel. Its development, publication and status as a statutory document is a very welcome approach toward planning and implementing the improvements needed in relation to our transport network as a whole.

That Strategy noted and explained the required development of what it then termed as New Metro North and also what was then termed as Metro South. Under the National Development Plan these projects have been combined as MetroLink which will provide a 26km high-capacity

metro service between Sandyford and the Swords and which will benefit tens of millions of passenger journeys each year.

As noted in the Strategy, capacity on the current Luas Green Line will not be sufficient to deal with the forecasted growth in housing and employment along the corridor. The ongoing Luas Green Line Capacity Enhancement project will provide for extended trams across the Green Line but that is essentially an interim measure and a fundamental issue remains as regards the capability of a Luas type service to provide for the forecasted level of demand by 2027, hence the Strategy's provision for an upgrade to a higher-capacity Metro service.

Implementation of the Strategy's various projects is a matter for the NTA, in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) as appropriate; however, all public expenditure is of course subject to the Public Spending Code and my Department's Common Appraisal Framework for Transport Projects and Programmes.

The NTA and TII have already published an 'Emerging Preferred Route' for public consultation earlier this year and a further round of public consultation will take place in early 2019 on a 'Preferred Route' before any decision on a Final Route and later submission to An Bord Pleanála, at which stage statutory consultation periods will of course take place.

I look forward to the development of the Metrolink project by the NTA and TII, as provided for by the Transport Strategy and in accordance with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and the Common Appraisal Framework.

Traffic Calming Measures

34. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when variable speed limits will become operational on the M50; the progress to date on this issue; the remaining issues and associated timeline to complete the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51993/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, operation and development of individual road projects is a matter for

(a) the relevant road authority (i.e. local authorities in whose functional area a road development is situated) in relation to local and regional roads, or

(b) Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

This project falls under the remit of TII and noting the above position, I have forwarded the question to TII for a direct reply to you on an update on operational progress and timeline. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

I can advise, however, that appropriate legislative provisions will be required to implement and enforce the introduction of variable speed limits (VSL). The regulatory provisions needed to allow TII the powers to regulate VSL are to be provided by an amendment to Section 9 of the Road Traffic Act. The amendment is being progressed through my Department's Road Safety Division, in the context of a draft Bill, the Road Traffic Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, the general scheme for which I intend to bring to cabinet for approval next week.

Road Traffic Legislation

35. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce legislation in order to permit the use of CCTV to monitor the usage of bus lanes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52200/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The use of CCTV to monitor the use of bus lanes, both during their hours of operation and otherwise, for traffic flow purposes is entirely a matter of the local authorities in whose functional areas the bus lanes are located.

For the purposes of enforcing road traffic legislative requirements, on the other hand, there is already provision in the Road Traffic Acts for the use of cameras as an aid to such enforcement. Under section 81 of the Road Traffic Act 2010, electronic apparatus, including cameras, may be used to provide evidence in relation to offences under a number of the provisions of the Road Traffic Acts. Section 35 of the Road Traffic Act 1994 is one such provision, under which the Traffic and Parking Regulations are made and which set out the requirements governing use of bus lanes. Section 81 provides the *vires* for the use of cameras and other electronic apparatus to be used to provide evidence in relation to these offences.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 20.

Legislative Reviews

37. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date on which the review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders 1973 and 1989 will be published. [51967/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The internal review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders, 1973 and 1989, is currently being finalised by my Department. Work on the review was regrettably delayed during the year primarily due to other conflicting priorities.

Civil Aviation Regulation

38. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consideration given to the possibility of the Commission for Aviation Regulation being selected as the competent authority in relation to EU 598/14; and when that consideration took place. [51985/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Commission for Aviation Regulation was considered along with other options late last year when it became clear that the Irish Aviation Authority was no longer a viable option, for reasons which I have advised this House of on a number of occasions.

The Commission for Aviation is primarily an economic regulator, with some additional licensing functions related to the travel industry and some consumer rights responsibilities. It is a small public body - with a total current staff of 17- and its main business is its regulatory role in determining the maximum level of airport charges that can be charged by the daa at Dublin Airport. That job alone absorbs a huge amount of its capacity. The advice I have received is that the Commission simply does not represent a viable option in light of the nature of the work

demanded of a competent authority under Regulation 598/2014.

I understand that officials of my Department shared some briefing material with you and other members of this House last week, among which was a summary assessment of the merits of the various options. This summary assessment captures the outcome of deliberations which my officials undertook, and which included consulting with a number of other Government departments, to establish what option offered, in the round, the best alternative to the Irish Aviation Authority. It was determined that Fingal County Council was the best option, and that decision has been validated during the very detailed legal and policy work that has gone into producing the Aviation Noise (Dublin Airport) Regulation Bill, 2018.

I know that the Deputy has objections to the appointment of Fingal County Council as the noise regulator on a point of principle, and I respect the Deputy's position in that regard. However, I am satisfied that this is the best choice, and I have every confidence in Fingal County Council's organisational capability to deliver an independent, transparent and informed regulatory process.

Road Improvement Schemes

39. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for investment in the road infrastructure in County Meath. [51951/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (RLR) is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

Details of the regional and local road grant allocations and payments to local authorities (including those for County Meath) are outlined in the regional and local road grant booklets which are available in the Dáil Library. The 2019 RLR allocations will be notified to local authorities in the New Year.

In relation to national roads as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its annual budget, allocations to individual local authorities are a matter for TII.

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

Road Projects Status

40. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he plans to commence the upgrading of the N4 route from Roosky to Boyle in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51992/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities con-

cerned, in relation to national roads.

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

Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 6.

Road Projects Status

42. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the N5 bypass from Ballaghaderreen to Scramogue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51991/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. However, under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

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

Carbon Budget

43. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the projects supported and the amount spent by his Department to date under the available €5.5 million carbon reduction programme; the progress being made on trials for alternative low-emission buses which are due to conclude in early 2019 and which will replace diesel only buses from July 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51994/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Carbon Reduction Programme in my Department was allocated €5.5m in Budget 2018 to support measures which work towards decarbonising the transport sector. Funding is sourced from within this allocation for the Green Public Transport Fund to support the uptake of low carbon, energy efficient technologies within the public transport sector.

Following recommendations made by the Low-Emission Vehicle Taskforce ahead of Budget 2018, I launched two financial incentives this year to encourage the take-up of electric vehicles.

- The Electric Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) Scheme offers a grant of up to €7,000 or €3,500 towards a battery electric vehicle (BEV) or plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) respectively for vehicles in the taxi, hackney or limousine sector. €500,000 was made available for this scheme in 2018, and as of 4 December 2018, over €250,000 has been drawn down.

- Under the Electric Vehicle Toll Incentive Scheme, battery and plug-in hybrid vehicles qualify for 50% and 25% toll reductions respectively up to a maximum €500 annual threshold for private vehicles and €1,000 for commercial vehicles. €500,000 was also made available for this initiative in 2018. Between July and the end of October €166,000 was drawn down under this Scheme.

The alternatively fuelled bus trials referred to by the Deputy began this week, with support

from multiple agencies including the National Transport Authority, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann. The first bus undergoing trial is a diesel-electric hybrid bus. There are a broad range of fuels and technologies under consideration and scheduled for testing over the coming months, including electric, hydrogen, compressed natural gas/biogas and two diesel buses which have been retrofitted to Euro VI-class standard. I expect the trials will conclude in April 2019, results of which will further inform purchasing decisions in line with our commitment in the National Development Plan that no new diesel-only buses will be acquired after July 2019 for the urban public bus fleets. To date, over €120,000 has been spent on the bus trials.

Finally, funding is also being allocated to researching new and innovative mitigation measures. My Department is co-funding three research projects (two with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and one with the Environmental Protection Agency) examining subjects such as behavioural change and the decarbonisation of the freight sector. The Department expects to spend over €110,000 on this research by the end of this year.

Some projects did not generate the expected overheads in 2018; however, carried over expenses will be incurred in 2019 for projects including: the purchase of a limited number of alternatively fuelled buses for pilot schemes; expenses related to the Low Emission Bus Trial which commenced this week; and November and December invoices for the EV reduced tolling regime.

Olympic Games

44. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the recent decision by an organisation (details supplied) to suspend the boxing competition at the 2020 Olympics; and if he has made representations on the matter. [52204/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I am aware of the recent announcement by the IOC - the International Olympic Committee - to suspend planning for the Olympic boxing tournament at Tokyo 2020. This announcement was accompanied by a statement of the IOC’s intention to initiate a full inquiry into the internal governance arrangements of the International Boxing Association (AIBA). At the present time, it is my understanding that the IOC has not yet made a final decision in relation to the inclusion of boxing at the 2020 Olympics.

It is important to clarify that International Sport Organisations, such as the IOC, are independent, autonomous bodies that are responsible for deciding their own operational procedures and competition rules. No Government has a role or function in such decision making.

I am deeply concerned by the potentially adverse consequences of this emerging situation for our athletes within Ireland’s high performance boxing programme and in their preparations for Tokyo 2020. It is crucial that these athletes do not suffer and that their Olympic ambitions are protected. I welcome the positive commitment of both Sport Ireland and the Irish Athletic Boxing Association (IABA), with whom I have been in contact, to address this situation. Sport Ireland and the IABA are continuing to work collaboratively in preparing our Irish boxers for Tokyo 2020 and I will continue to monitor this situation closely.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 17.

Rail Services

46. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to dangerous congestion levels on DART and commuter trains which stop at all stations in north County Dublin; his plans to address the issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52208/18]

59. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has been in contact with Irish Rail regarding dangerous congestion levels on DART and commuter trains which stop at all stations in north County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52209/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 46 and 59 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for ensuring the development and delivery of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area including, in consultation with Iarnród Éireann, the provision of rail fleet. Iarnród Éireann is obliged at all times to ensure that the railway is managed and operated safely; it takes this obligation very seriously and in this regard it is closely supervised by the expert independent regulator, the Commission for Railway Regulation, in accordance with national and EU legislation.

Public transport passenger numbers have increased in recent years reflecting broader economic and employment growth. In rail, passenger numbers have similarly increased across the network and in particular on the commuter network in the Greater Dublin Area.

These increases are welcome; however, clearly they place pressure on the capacity of the network and the NTA and Iarnród Éireann have made, and are continuing to make, service and infrastructure improvements to address these pressures.

In light of the NTA's responsibility on this matter, I have referred the Deputies' questions to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Civil Aviation Regulation

47. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications for carriage of munitions of war refused after the exercise of ministerial discretion following a Departmental recommendation that permission be granted; and the air carrier involved in each case. [51987/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): During 2016, I exercised my ministerial discretion to refuse 10 applications made by Atlas Air, Inc. for the carriage of munitions of war through Irish sovereign airspace. Further statistics relating to the number of applications granted and refused are available on my Department's website.

Search and Rescue Service Provision

48. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he was requested to provide costings for an air search and rescue service; his plans to increase the capacity of the Air Corps to provide such a service; and the timeframe for same. [48349/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The aeronautical search and rescue service for Ireland is managed by the Irish Coast Guard, which is a Division of my Department. The service is currently delivered under a contract with CHC Ireland DAC. The 10 year contract runs to July 2022 with the possibility of an extension. Average annual costs of this service are in the region of €60m. Matters relating to the Air Corps are a matter for the Minister of Defence.

Road Network

49. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to facilitate necessary upgrading of major transport routes such as the M50 and M4, which are perceived to be incapable of dealing with the volume of traffic; when the projects will be advanced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52114/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

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

You may wish to note that the National Transport Authority's (NTA) 'Transport for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035' is the primary strategy document which is intended to deal with managing transport demand in the GDA. The overall aim of the strategy is to "contribute to the economic, social and cultural progress of the Greater Dublin Area by providing for the efficient, effective and sustainable movement of people and goods."

Addressing urban congestion and traffic volumes is a priority of the strategy and it is proposed to achieve this through the following:

- The provision of alternative sustainable transport infrastructure (heavy and light rail; bus; cycling; walking);
- Maintain, renew, manage and operate the road network infrastructure;
- The introduction of complementary demand management measures; and
- Developing a network of park and ride facilities.

A number of priority schemes which are outlined in the strategy have also been committed to under the National Development Plan 2018-2027. These include:

- Metrolink - a 26 kilometre metro route connecting Swords, Dublin Airport, the city centre and Sandyford, which will carry 50 million passengers per year;
- Bus Connects – A redesign of Dublin's bus network, complete with major investment in core bus corridors, cycle lanes, shelters, interchange areas, and ticketing and information technology; and
- The DART Expansion Programme – Extension of the current, electrified, DART network to Drogheda, Maynooth and Hazelhatch.

Sports Funding

50. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will be taking guidance or direction from organisations (details supplied) in respect of the funding of organisation related applications under the large scale sport infrastructure fund by indicating to his Department the projects to be supported and in particular a stadium. [52211/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund opened for applications on 19th November and the closing date for applications is the 17th April 2019. Full details of the scheme and application forms are available on my Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/large-scale-sport-infrastructure-fund-lssif>.

The aim of the fund is to provide Exchequer support for larger sports facility projects where the Exchequer investment would be greater than the maximum amount available under the Sports Capital Programme (SCP). Initially, the scheme will have a particular focus on National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and Local Authorities. New swimming pool projects will also be considered. All project proposals will be subject to appropriate economic analysis. It is a requirement of the scheme that all applicants can show a minimum own funding of 30% of the overall project cost. Furthermore all NGB's and local authorities will be asked to prioritise the applications which they submit. While many other factors will be considered in the allocation of funding (including the need to ensure a spread of sports and a geographic spread of projects if possible), the prioritisation by the NGB or local authority is likely to be a key factor in deciding which projects are ultimately supported.

The scheme outlines the types of projects that are eligible for assistance but is not prescriptive. Funds for the scheme are limited and applicants should be aware that it is a competitive process. Simply meeting the minimum criteria under the headings set out in the scheme will not guarantee funding.

Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 26.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he proposes to make further provisions under the sports capital programme to facilitate the ongoing needs of communities nationally in both urban and rural areas having particular regard to the population growth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52115/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) as operated by my Department provides funding to voluntary, sporting and community organisations for the provision of sports and recreational facilities. Over 11,500 projects have now benefitted from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocations in that time to close to €1 billion. The programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improvements in the quality and quantity of sporting facilities in virtually every village, town and city in the country.

The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19 October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. Sanction has been received to make allocations with a total value of €40m under this round.

186 of these applications are for projects deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that were allowed to submit corrected documents this year. These applications are being assessed first and I hope to make allocations to this category of application later this year or early in 2019.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of next year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

In relation to future rounds of the Programme, the National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027 contains a commitment to run a round of the Sports Capital Programme in every year of the policy. The policy also includes a commitment to run periodic national audits of sports facilities to help guide decision making in relation to future Government investments in sports facilities development.

Military Aircraft Landings

53. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 72 of 6 November 2018, the number of applications related to the transport of munitions of war categorised as dangerous goods, that is, munitions of war that contain material that is explosive, corrosive, flammable, toxic and so on; the meaning of the phrase very few; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52110/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Up to the end of November 2018, my Department has processed 43 applications for an exemption to carry munitions of war which were also classified as being ‘dangerous goods’ under Annex 18 of the Chicago Convention. Ten applications were refused and 33 were granted.

Statistics relating to exemptions granted for flights landing in Ireland with ‘dangerous goods’ are published on my Department’s website.

Public Transport

54. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the safety of public transport workers will be supported by creating a dedicated transport police resource that would have the powers of detention and arrest. [52117/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my replies to Priority Questions numbers 2 and 5, which I answered earlier.

Ministerial Meetings

55. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will visit Navan as promised on 30 November 2018 to discuss the Navan, County Meath rail project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52210/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I will consider a visit to Navan as part of my Ministerial itinerary in 2019.

Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 20.

Sports Organisations

57. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding provided to initiatives to increase women's participation in sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52195/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport. This includes responsibility for the development of strategies for increasing participation in sport and the funding of related programmes.

The Women in Sport programme was established in 2005 with the aim of increasing women's participation in sport, including non-participatory opportunities through volunteering and coaching. Since 2005, Sport Ireland has provided €19.5 million to National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sport and Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) under the Women in Sport Programme to increase participation in sport among women and girls.

In 2018, in addition to its usual funding of NGBs, LSPs, and other programmes which benefit female and male athletes and participants, Sport Ireland will invest approximately €1 million specifically to support Women in Sport initiatives. I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct reply on the initiatives funded. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Just over a decade ago, in 2007, there was a gap of almost 16% in active participation levels between genders. In the intervening decade, this gap has narrowed to just 4.5% in 2017 according to the most recent Irish Sports Monitor Annual Report. The Report also shows that 40.8% of women regularly participate in sport compared to 39.3% in 2015.

My Department's National Sports Policy 2018-2027, which was launched in July 2018, aims to increase the levels of participation in sport and physical activity across the population over the next ten years, with a specific focus on less active groups including women and girls.

When Minister Ross and I launched the National Sports Policy, we highlighted a number of priorities and indicated our intention to seek additional funding in 2019 to support certain measures, including doubling the funding provision for the Women in Sport Programme in 2019. I am pleased to say that an additional €1m has been provided for the Women in Sport programme in 2019, bringing the allocation for next year to €2 million.

While the gender gap in sports participation is narrower now than at any point over the past ten years, at just 4.5%, I am determined to eliminate that gap altogether. I am very pleased that the necessary funding is in place to begin that journey in 2019.

Bus Services

58. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the capacity and constituency issues associated with Bus Éireann services in County Meath will be

addressed [52213/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Bus Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to Bus Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 46.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

60. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his planned visits abroad in the next six months. [52102/18]

The Taoiseach: I intend to attend scheduled meetings, formal and informal, of the European Council in the coming six months, which currently include, 13 and 14 December, 21 and 22 March and on 20 and 21 June 2019, along with the scheduled informal taking place in Sibiu, Romania on the 9 May. EU regional engagements may also arise and I will give full consideration to attendance at these in due course.

I attended the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland earlier this year. I am pleased to have been invited again this year and will attend in January.

I would also envisage travelling to the US in March around the St. Patrick's day period.

I also hope to be a position to visit Africa in the New Year.

Other EU and international visits are also being given consideration, and I will update the House as appropriate.

Ongoing political engagement with our EU and international partners remains crucial, in relation to Brexit and other important EU and international issues.

Parliamentary Questions Data

61. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52248/18]

The Taoiseach: My Department answered 1,656 oral and 1,442 written Parliamentary Questions from December 2015 to November 2018. All questions were answered directly.

One member of staff has the role of Parliamentary Question coordinator amongst other duties, and staff from across my Department are involved in processing replies to Parliamentary Questions in addition to their routine duties.

Answers to Parliamentary Questions are composed by Departmental staff only, this includes political advisors.

Parliamentary Questions Data

62. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52238/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The number of Parliamentary Questions answered directly by my Department in the years 2016, 2017, and from 1 January 2018 to 22 November 2018, is set out in the following table.

Year	Number of Parliamentary Questions
2016	658
2017	1,134
1 January - 22 November 2018	969

My Department did not refer any Parliamentary Question to an external body or agency for direct reply.

My Department does not have a specific section to deal with Parliamentary Questions, rather replies are prepared in the first instance by departmental staff dealing with the matter which is the subject of each individual question. From time to time, one or both of my advisers may input into a reply to specific questions. However, questions are not referred to external bodies such as public relations companies.

Defence Forces Training

63. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there are enough instructors to train drivers of military vehicles in the Defence Forces; and if there are sufficient driving courses for all brigades. [52288/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As military driving is a technical skill across a wide variety of vehicles, with complex and differing operational profiles, the training needs are dynamic and are therefore constantly monitored by the responsible branches of the Defence Forces.

The Military Authorities have informed me that there are sufficient driving instructors and driving courses to meet current needs.

Parliamentary Questions Data

64. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-

or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52242/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department does not have a specific section to deal with Parliamentary Questions. Replies are prepared in the first instance by Departmental staff in the business unit dealing with the matter which is the subject of each individual question. From time to time, one of my advisers may input into a reply to specific questions. Questions are not referred to external bodies such as public relations companies. There are no state bodies or agencies under the aegis of my Department. The number of Parliamentary Questions answered by my Department over the last three years is set out in the following table:

Number of PQs Answered	2016	2017	2018*
Written	734	1,367	1,446
Oral	57	117	79
Total	791	1,484	1,525

* To end November 2018

Catalan Pro-Independence Prisoners

65. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has received representations from the Irish ambassador in Madrid regarding the recent decision by a number of Catalan pro-independence prisoners on pre-trial detention to go on hunger strike in protest against their trial being frustrated and their access to the ECHR being blocked by Spain; if he will raise or facilitate the matter in the ECHR; his plans to raise the matter with the Spanish Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52258/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Four Catalan prisoners currently held in prison on pre-trial detention are on hunger strike. As they are awaiting trial and their cases are due to be heard by the Spanish Courts, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further. I am kept informed of developments in Catalonia by our Embassy in Madrid on a regular basis.

Foreign Conflicts

66. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the protracted crisis in South Sudan; if he will engage in diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure the fragile peace in South Sudan holds; if he will continue to support humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that are addressing the root causes of the conflict; if he will continue funding and support for the conflict resolution and peace building efforts at community level by an organisation (details supplied) in partnership with INGOs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52303/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): South Sudan continues to endure a terrible humanitarian crisis, primarily the consequence of conflict. I am deeply concerned by the continued high level of violence, and by reports of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, which perpetuate the crisis and impact negatively on its scale. The current conflict began in 2013 and has had devastating consequences for civilians. The war, compounded by drought, has led to severe food insecurity and caused massive population displacement and suffering throughout the country,

with women and girls suffering the most. It is estimated that almost 400,000 people have died, and 7 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

On 12 September last, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, signed a peace agreement with the opposition. While this peace agreement has the potential to mark a new departure, it is critical that South Sudan's leaders implement it without delay. Achieving lasting peace will require sustained effort and commitment as well as a genuinely inclusive approach to building the future South Sudan.

Ireland strongly supports efforts to build peace in South Sudan. In November 2017, during his visit to Addis Ababa, the Tánaiste met representatives of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) and the African Union to discuss the situation in South Sudan. On that visit, the Tánaiste announced funding to the IGAD High Level Revitalization Forum, the process which delivered the revised peace agreement. Ireland will continue to support IGAD's work on monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the agreement in 2019.

Our Embassy in Addis Ababa, which is accredited to South Sudan, monitors the situation and engages with local, regional and international parties on an ongoing basis. The Irish Ambassador in Addis Ababa visits Juba frequently where she meets with key government, UN, NGO, Red Cross and diplomatic partners, including the EU Delegation. Her most recent visit took place in November.

We are committed to supporting efforts towards peace in South Sudan and have contributed to projects aimed at peacebuilding. In 2018, this has included supporting partners' meditation efforts and empowering civil society, in particular women's groups, to facilitate their engagement in peace processes. As well as our direct bilateral support, we are actively involved in the efforts of the EU to support peace in South Sudan. Two officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have been seconded to the EU Delegation in South Sudan, including one as head of Mission. The EU Delegation is strongly supportive of the peace process, in particular by providing support to the implementing and monitoring bodies of the peace agreement. The Tánaiste discussed these efforts with the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Alexander Rondos, when he visited Dublin on 7 November.

While a sustained resolution to the conflict is the ultimate goal, we have a duty now to deal with immediate humanitarian needs. Since 2012, Ireland has provided €61 million in direct humanitarian assistance to South Sudan. Over €10 million in Irish funding has been provided so far this year, including to Irish NGOs to assist them in reaching the most vulnerable. Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam, Trócaire and World Vision, with support from Irish Aid, are working in partnership with local organisations and NGO networks to provide lifesaving supplies to meet the basic needs of those suffering from the conflict.

As well as this direct bilateral aid, Ireland has also contributed significantly to humanitarian support in South Sudan through the multilateral system. Ireland is a significant contributor to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, which has allocated \$187 million to alleviate the crisis in South Sudan since 2011, as well as to the EU, which has provided more than €90 million so far this year.

With humanitarian needs likely to remain acute in 2019, Irish funding will continue to support both those in need inside South Sudan as well as South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

Brexit Issues

67. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on recent comments by the Advocate General to the European Court of Justice on Article 50; and his views on whether the UK could revoke its withdrawal without approval by member states. [51794/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 10 December, the European Court of Justice gave its judgement that the UK can revoke its Article 50 notification, unilaterally, at any point up to its withdrawal from the Union. The Court made clear that it would have to be an unequivocal and unconditional decision, taken in accordance with the UK's constitutional requirements. Were the UK to decide to revoke, the withdrawal procedure would be ended and the UK would remain an EU Member State. Ultimately, any decision to revoke its Article 50 notification would be for the UK, and it would not be appropriate to comment on what would be an internal matter for it. The EU and UK have agreed a withdrawal agreement and political declaration on the framework for the future relationship. Our focus is on seeing this deal ratified and implemented.

Brexit Negotiations

68. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his officials have assessed the advice of the UK Attorney General regarding the backstop provisions in the Brexit draft withdrawal agreement; and if he has sought legal advice on same. [52119/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Union and Legal Divisions of my Department have reviewed the UK Attorney General's advice on the "Legal Effect of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland", as published on 5 December, as well as the "Legal Position on the Withdrawal Agreement", presented to the UK Parliament by him on 3 December. The advice, including that on the backstop provisions, is consistent with the UK Government's "Explainer for the agreement on the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and North Ireland from the European Union", published on 14 November 2018, and the European Commission's fact sheets on the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol, also published on 14 November. It is also in line with our own understanding. The Withdrawal Agreement is a treaty between the EU and the UK. Should an issue of interpretation arise in the future, it would be for the Legal Services of the European Commission and the Council of the EU, to lead on the EU side.

While the legal advice is of interest, what is important is that the UK Cabinet agreed on 14 November that the draft text of the Withdrawal Agreement was an acceptable basis on which to proceed.

Parliamentary Questions Data

69. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52241/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The number of Parliamentary Ques-

tions which have been processed by my Department is 2,814 in 2016, 3,898 in 2017 and 3,316 to date in 2018. Accounting for transfers, disallowances and withdrawals of PQs, the following are the statistics for answered PQs: 2,528 in 2016; 3,434 in 2017; and 2,798 in 2018 (as of 6th December).

The Department does not refer PQs to Bodies or Agencies under our Aegis; in practice where a PQ response requires input from a Body under the Aegis, their input is sought and information in the Department's overall response is included for the relevant Body. This occurs either centrally in Corporate Affairs or at a Division level, depending on the nature of the question.

Currently there are three members of staff who are assigned to the administrative processing of Parliamentary Questions (amongst other duties), 1 HEO and 1 EO (FTE 80%) in the Parliamentary Questions Section and 1 CO in the Minister's Office.

Advisers to the Minister assist in the checking and processing of parliamentary questions as part of their normal duties.

Mortgage Book Sales

70. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to deal with the latest tranche of mortgages by a bank (details supplied) which are being passed on to companies in view of the resulting insecurity and stress being caused to homeowners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52306/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that a reduction in the level of non performing loans (NPLs) across European banks is a major priority for the banking regulator, the SSM. The Irish banks have made significant progress in this regard since the height of the crisis with NPLs at the banks in which the State has a shareholding reducing by 70% from €54bn to €16bn at end-June 2018. A major contributor to this has been the almost 136,000 mortgage restructures that have been put in place.

Despite this progress, the NPL ratios at the Irish banks remain at an elevated level and are well above the European average of around 4%. PTSB is a particular outlier and had a ratio of 16% even after the bank's loan sale – Project Glas – which was announced in July. Project Glenbeigh – PTSB's second NPL transaction of 2018 announced on 29th November, will achieve a further significant reduction in the bank's NPL ratio to below 10%.

It is important to reiterate that the protections in place for all borrowers before a sale, either by way of securitisation or otherwise, remain unchanged. Start Mortgages, who purchased the Glas portfolio in July, and Pepper, who now hold legal title to the Glenbeigh mortgages and who will act as servicer and administrator of the mortgages, are both regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. When dealing with borrowers, these firms are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct for Mortgage Arrears. Furthermore, it has been confirmed in the case of this latest transaction that the terms of an agreed restructure will continue to be honoured.

In addition, earlier this year I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. The result of this review was published in October and it is encouraging to note that the key findings included confirmation that for borrowers who engaged with the process, the CCMA is working effectively as it is intended in the context of the sale of loans by regulated lenders.

Finally, I wish to highlight that I cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks, which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally.

Banking Licence Applications

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of licence applications before the Central Bank by category; the number of approvals provided in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, by category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52348/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It was not possible for the Central Bank of Ireland to provide the information sought in the time available and, therefore, I will make arrangements to provide the Deputy with the information in line with Standing Orders.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

72. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the State has secondary security over moneys loaned by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to a company (details supplied) while the minority lender has a stronger fixed and floating charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52387/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The role of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the SBCI, is to provide effective financial supports to Irish SMEs and encourage competition and innovation in the SME finance market while also ensuring the efficient and effective use of available EU resources. The SBCI, as the Deputy is aware, does not provide financing directly to small businesses using an on-lending model. The SBCI operates through partner finance providers, known as on-lenders. The SBCI works with both bank and non-bank finance providers.

I am advised by the SBCI that it enters into facilities with its on-lenders on a commercial and market neutral basis. The SBCI will consider applications from all finance providers to be an SBCI on-lender on the basis of general criteria. The SBCI consequently avoids commenting on specific on-lenders and cannot reveal commercially sensitive information regarding their individual facilities. The same approach applies to prospective on-lenders. However, each on-lender is different in terms of size structure, financial strength, parental or group support etc.

The Deputy may rest assured that SBCI carries out due diligence and a thorough assessment of each prospective on-lender to ensure that the appropriate legal and corporate structure is put in place to ensure that the taxpayers' position is protected. I am informed this can include, where necessary, coming to arrangements with that on-lender's other creditors in relation to security over assets.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

73. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the reason €675 million of Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland funding has as of December 2016 gone to the pillar banks (details supplied) and only 11% of its drawn down lending has gone to working capital for SMEs in view of the fact that it was established to lend to SMEs; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [52388/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the SBCI, is Ireland's national promotional institution. Its strategic mission is to increase the availability of appropriately priced, flexible funding to viable Irish SMEs by delivering effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish credit market, while encouraging competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources. The SBCI does not provide funding directly to small businesses, rather it operates through partner finance providers, known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has three bank and three non-bank on-lenders.

The SBCI initially provided funding to pillar banks in order to take advantage of their broad existing customer bases and to enable as wide a distribution as possible of lower costs loans to SMEs.

Since December 2016 the SBCI has also provided to date over €250 million of funding to non-bank finance providers to help increase competition in the SME finance market in Ireland. The SBCI's funding is deployed across a variety of products, including working capital as well as asset financing, leasing and invoice discounting, to give a range of loan options for SMEs. Since it began its activities in March 2015, to the end of March 2018, a total of €952 million SBCI supported loans have been drawn down by eligible SMEs, 25% of which were for working capital purposes.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

74. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether a series of financial matters concerning a person (details supplied) is appropriate or a potential abuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52389/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the SBCI, is a Designated Activity CODY (DAC) under the Companies Act 2014 and has an independent Board of Directors.

In relation to the first part of the Deputy's question regarding members of the SBCI Board, the SBCI is a public body and is subject to the Revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016, which contains a number of provisions that boards of public bodies must follow to address actual and potential conflicts of interest of their Board members. The SBCI has informed me that it is satisfied it has complied with those requirements.

In relation to the second part of the Deputy's question, I am advised that the SBCI enters into facilities with its on-lenders on a commercial and market neutral basis. The SBCI will consider applications to be an on-lender from all finance providers. Consequently, the SBCI avoids commenting on specific on-lenders and cannot reveal commercially sensitive information regarding individual facilities.

However, I am informed that the SBCI engages in regular monitoring to ensure that new loans, equivalent to the amount it has provided to each on lender, is deployed to eligible SMEs. Each on-lender is different in terms of size structure, financial strength, parental or group support. The Deputy may rest assured that the SBCI thoroughly assesses each on-lender and carries out appropriate due diligence to ensure that the appropriate legal and corporate structure is put in place so that the taxpayers' position is fully protected.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

75. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance further to a freedom of information request, the reason on-lenders of SBCI moneys are not required to obtain a copy of current tax clearance certificates from their respective customers leaving the State exposed to tax losses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52390/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The purpose of the SBCI is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs. The SBCI does not provide funding directly to small businesses, rather it operates an on-lending model which involves working through partner finance providers, known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has three bank and three non-bank on-lending partners.

I take it that the Deputy is asking whether the SBCI makes it a requirement for its on-lenders to seek a tax clearance certificate from the SME borrowers that receive SBCI loans. I have been advised by the SBCI that seeking tax clearance certificates from borrowers is a matter for the on-lenders. They provide lending into SMEs in accordance with their normal credit policies and procedures.

Due to its on-lending model, the SBCI's direct relationship is with its on-lending partners. The SBCI enters into facility agreements with its on-lenders and these agreements set out the obligations in relation to the funding provided by the SBCI, including terms and conditions to protect taxpayers from potential losses.

Paradise Papers

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the work of the Revenue Commissioners on certain taxation matters revealed by documents (details supplied); the number of cases it is pursuing; the amount of tax involved; the amounts of tax, interest and penalties collected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52394/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that identifying and confronting non-compliance is a key focus for its work, and that this includes the use of offshore accounts, trusts or funds to evade tax. Revenue's work in this regard, including the Foreign Income and Assets Disclosure initiative last year, has yielded some €1.2 billion to the Exchequer to date.

I am also advised that in targeting and acting against failures to comply with tax obligations, Revenue seeks to make the best possible use of all available information through the use of data analytics, social network analysis and anomaly detection tools.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and their media partners internationally have, over recent years, made large disclosures of documents relating to offshore matters, known as the Panama and Paradise papers. While the volume of documents made available was substantial, it is understood that a considerable number were withheld from general release. I understand that Revenue approached the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and its Irish media partner asking whether further information could be made available, but did not receive a positive response.

I am advised that Revenue examined the published information to identify any cases with links to Ireland and identified offshore companies, individuals, addresses and intermediaries of possible interest. These cases were profiled and it was found that, in many instances, no further

action was required. There were instances also where the nature or age of the published information, or the current status of the entity concerned (liquidated, dormant or non-resident) meant that further action was not possible.

Enquiry letters were issued in over 100 cases, and a large majority of these have been closed with no Irish tax issues identified. Follow-up on remaining cases is proceeding. Settlements have been made in 6 cases, yielding €400,000.

In addition, I understand that Revenue wrote to two banks asking if they had any information, or records on the opening of offshore accounts or the depositing of funds in offshore accounts on behalf of Irish resident persons, not already disclosed to Revenue on foot of High Court orders under section 908 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Both banks responded that all information that had been encompassed by the terms of the High Court orders had been provided to Revenue.

Revenue worked closely with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Joint International Taskforce on Shared Intelligence and Collaboration (JITSIC) in relation to the Panama and Paradise papers and the experience gained by the countries that engaged in this process has established a basis for effective cooperation and information-sharing in the event of any future data disclosures of this kind. There is, also, increasingly close cooperation between tax authorities worldwide in targeting those who seek to hide profits or gains offshore. Significant quantities of information are becoming available to Revenue under arrangements for automatic exchange of information, including FATCA (an inter-Governmental agreement to share information with the United States of America), DAC (a number of EU Directives on Administrative Cooperation) and CRS (the OECD's Common Reporting Standard). All these mechanisms are providing tax authorities with greater visibility in relation to the offshore assets and income of their tax residents: I understand that Revenue has concluded some 190 interventions, with a yield of some €1.2 million, in cases involving previously undisclosed offshore assets.

I believe that Revenue's work against offshore evasion has been committed and effective and I am assured that action against those who attempt to use offshore means to escape their tax responsibilities will continue to be a high priority target of Revenue's compliance programmes.

Insurance Industry Regulation

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a mechanism in place in Denmark to pay outstanding claims when an insurance company goes into liquidation; if the mechanism will be applicable to Irish claimants as a result of the failure of a company (details supplied); if Irish claimants will receive 100% of compensation under this mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52448/18]

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the insurance compensation fund or the yet to be established motor insurers insolvency compensation fund will be needed to pay claimants as a result of the failure of a company (details supplied); if so, the fund which will be used; if Irish claimants will receive 100% of the compensation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52449/18]

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Irish claims yet to be paid in full by motor insurance, public liability insurance, employer liability insurance or other insurance headings regarding the failure of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52450/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 79, inclusive, together.

The Central Bank of Ireland announced on 28 November that it had received information that Qudos Insurance A/S, a Denmark-based insurer, had entered into solvent liquidation. On 4 December, Qudos Insurance A/S announced that it is currently not paying insurance claims. The Central Bank is actively monitoring developments and is liaising regularly with its Danish counterparts, the supervisory authorities of other affected member states and EIOPA.

Qudos Insurance A/S is a Danish-based insurance firm, and is subject to prudential supervision by the Danish Financial Supervisory Authority. Qudos Insurance A/S was selling non-life insurance policies, (mainly motor and home policies), in Ireland through the broker network on a freedom of services basis.

It is understood that there are approximately 50,000 policyholders, in Ireland that have been impacted by the developments with Qudos. Patrona Underwriting has issued a statement saying that policies remain valid and in force until their natural expiry date, however given the current Qudos position and in line with Central Bank recommendations they have provided brokers with options to replace all insurance covers with other providers at no extra cost to consumers. Qudos Insurance A/S has published a Q&A for policyholders on its website - <http://www.qudosinsurance.dk/qa/>.

Early indications suggest that there are in the region of 1,400 claims outstanding in relation to Irish policyholders, but this is subject to confirmation.

I understand that the Danish liquidators are currently continuing their review of the company with a view to determining its underlying financial position. Once this exercise is concluded they will be in a better position to determine whether the company can pay existing claims. It is expected that more information regarding this matter should be available within the next two weeks.

It should be noted that my officials have been in contact with the Danish Finance Ministry, who advise on the basis of information they have received from the Danish Financial Supervisory Authority, that as the company is in solvent liquidation, claims will be met. However, the Ministry also indicated that if ultimately Qudos is placed into bankruptcy, and this happens after 1 January 2019, that the Danish Insurance Guarantee Scheme will not be liable to meet these claims due to a legislative change in May 2018. In such a situation claimants may instead be eligible for cover from the Irish Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF), subject to its terms and conditions and the particular circumstances of the case. In the case of third-party motor insurance claims, 100% of the cost of a claim may be available in line with the changes made to the Insurance (Amendment) Act 2018. This will mean if used, an initial full pay-out from the Insurance Compensation Fund with a recoupment of 35% from the new Motor Insurers Insolvency Compensation Fund.

Mortgage Lending

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the specific type of SPV model used for the securitisation of mortgages by banks (details supplied); if the vehicle will be tax exempt; if the distributions from the vehicle will be taxed here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52451/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would like to advise the Deputy that I am not in a position to comment on the activities of individual taxpayers. I can however give

the following overview of Section 110 of the TCA 1997 as it relates to the securitisation of mortgages by banks .

Section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 sets out a regime for the taxation of special purpose companies set up to securitise assets. The tax provisions are intended to create a tax neutral regime for bona-fide securitisation and structured finance purposes.

The purpose of securitisation in this respect is to allow banks to free up capacity on their balance sheets to engage in lending. The ability to securitise is seen by the European Banking authority as essential to a properly functioning banking sector, and is a key part of the EU's capital market union action plan.

Finance Act 2012 introduced two key restrictions on the ability of a section 110 company to take a tax deduction for interest in respect of the "profit participating note" (PPN). The first is that where the interest is paid to a connected person, the Irish 110 company cannot take a tax deduction unless the recipient is in a country with which we have a double tax agreement and is subject to tax on that interest. The second is that a tax deduction is not available where there is a tax avoidance motive.

Additionally, further changes were made to Section 110 regime as part of the 2016 Finance Act. The purpose of the changes was to ensure that investors paid the appropriate tax on gains arising from the disposal of loans that were secured over Irish land: namely Irish mortgages. This was achieved by treating mortgages as a separate business in respect of the PPN.

Prior to the 2016 changes these profits were being removed from the Irish tax net through the use of the aforementioned PPN. The 2016 amendments restricted the ability of a qualifying company to take a tax deduction for interest on a PPN where it arose from gains on Irish mortgages.

When the 2016 amendments were introduced, an exception was included for securitisations carried out in line with the Capital Requirement Regulation of 2013 on prudential requirements for credit institutions and investment firms (CRR). CRR requires an originator to retain an economic interest of at least 5% in assets which it subsequently sells by way of a securitisation. There are two key differences between securitisations carried out in line with CRR and the transactions which gave rise to the amendments made as part of the 2016 Finance Act.

- Securitisations are not outright sales of loans.
- Securitisations must have tranching debt.

This exception to the general 2016 amendment is only available:

- where the securitisation is being undertaken by the original lender, or
- where the securitisation is not by the original lender, it is by a financial institution or credit institution, regulated in the EU or EEA.

In relation to the taxation of the vehicle named, as I have already stated I am not in a position to comment on individual taxpayers.

Mortgage Lending

81. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent Central Bank loan-to-income and loan-to-value mortgage rules review by the Governor of the

bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52474/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland has an overall and independent responsibility to promote and protect financial stability and the mortgage lending measures are an important tool available to the Bank for that purpose. As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank recently published its 2018 review of the residential mortgage macro prudential rules (available at this link) and the Bank indicated, following the review, that the mortgage lending limits would remain unchanged. I note in particular the Bank's position that the mortgage measures, as part of the wider macro prudential framework, are continuing to achieve the twin objectives of contributing to overall financial stability and protecting individual borrowers. Nevertheless, the Central Bank will continue monitor developments and it indicated that it will, if necessary at a future point, adjust its macro-prudential policy tools in order to continue to safeguard the stability of the financial system and to protect consumers from excessive debt burdens.

Licensed Moneylenders

82. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has contacted the Governor of the Central Bank regarding its policy on the granting of moneylending licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52475/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank is independent in the performance of its functions in relation to the granting of licences for regulated activities and it would not be appropriate for me to contact them in relation to the granting of a licence to a specific applicant.

The Register of Moneylenders, which is available to the public on the Central Bank's website, sets out details such as the maximum APR, maximum cost of credit and the collection charge (if any) of the loans that can be offered by individual moneylenders.

Earlier this year, the Central Bank engaged in a public consultation process in relation to a review of the Consumer Protection Code for Licensed Moneylenders and I understand that the Bank expects to finalise and publish Regulations under Section 48 of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 to replace this Code in 2019.

Economic and Monetary Union

83. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent comments on fiscal and monetary integration of the EU by the finance Minister of Germany; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52476/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I meet regularly with all my European Ministerial colleagues at the Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings to discuss the deepening of Economic and Monetary Union. I am also aware that German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz gave a speech at Humboldt University in Berlin last month, during which he touched on many of the elements we have been discussing in these meetings.

We have been working to an agenda set by EU Leaders at the June 2018 Euro Summit, when EU Leaders asked Finance Ministers to work on the terms of reference for the operation of the common backstop to the Banking Union's Single Resolution Fund, which exists to assist in the resolution of systemically important banks that are failing or deemed likely to fail. We were

also directed to develop a term sheet for our ongoing work on reform of the European Stability Mechanism, which is the euro area's crisis lending body.

In addition to these issues, the Eurogroup has also been discussing possible new budgetary instruments aimed at strengthening the euro area. This has included proposals put forward by the European Commission and France and Germany for the establishment of instruments for competitiveness, convergence and stabilisation. A proposal was put forward by France and Germany in the joint Meseberg Declaration released in June. This was followed by an outline of the proposal for a euro zone budget, to be part of the EU budget, which was released in November.

At the Eurogroup meeting on 3 December, my colleagues and I were able to agree a comprehensive package of measures to be put forward to Leaders at the 14 December Euro Summit. The Report to Leaders on EMU Deepening outlines what we have agreed. This includes a comprehensive terms of reference for the common backstop to the Single Resolution Fund and reforms to the European Stability Mechanism's toolkit of financial instruments and its role within programmes of financial assistance. In addition, Leaders are asked for guidance on the way forward on the French-German proposals, which are at a very early stage of discussions between Finance Ministers, relative to our work on completing Banking Union and ESM reform.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council Reports

84. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to meet with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council following its recent critical fiscal assessment of budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52477/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I assume the Deputy is referencing the Fiscal Assessment Report (FAR) as published on 28 November by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, in relation to Budget 2019. This publication is in fulfilment of the Council's legal mandate to assess and endorse the Government's macro-economic and budgetary forecasts.

Although I have no arrangements currently to meet with the Council, I am in the process of preparing my formal response to the FAR in which I will address a number of the key issues it raises. As has been the established practice in previous years, this will be published on my Department's website in due course.

Tax Agreements

85. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the so-called single malt tax avoidance loophole to be completely closed off by Ireland and Malta; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52478/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland's corporate tax residence rules were amended in Finance Act 2014 to shut down an aggressive tax planning structure referred to as the 'Double Irish'. Subsequently, reports emerged of a new alternative aggressive tax planning structure, known as the 'Single Malt' that sought to achieve a similar objective. I understand that the 'Single Malt' structure involves an Irish incorporated company relying on the fact it is tax resident in Malta, a country with which Ireland has a Double Taxation Convention, to prevent it from also being tax resident in Ireland. Tax was ultimately avoided in certain circumstances where payments from an Irish group company to the 'Single Malt' company were not ultimately received in Malta.

I understand that US tax reform should already have significantly reduced the potential tax advantages of using a ‘Single Malt’ structure. However, I asked my officials to examine what additional actions could be taken to remove any remaining concerns. This examination resulted in the agreement of a Competent Authority Agreement between the Revenue Commissioners and the Maltese authorities.

I am advised by Revenue that the recent Competent Authority Agreement gave notice that, with reference to the Ireland-Malta Double Taxation Convention, a specific result of the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (MLI) will be prevent the Irish-incorporated ‘Single Malt’ company from using its status as a Maltese tax resident to prevent it from being Irish tax resident under section 23A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. On their becoming Irish-resident for corporation tax purposes, the relevant provisions of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 will then render previously untaxed income of the companies concerned fully chargeable to corporation tax.

The timing of the change coming into effect will depend on the date at which both Ireland and Malta deposit their notices of ratification of the MLI with the OECD. The change will impact companies’ accounting periods beginning after the 9th full calendar month following the month in which both Ireland and Malta making the relevant deposit with the OECD. Ireland intends to deposit its notice of ratification with the OECD in January 2019, and accordingly, where Malta have also done so by the end of January, the changes will be in effect for periods from November 2019.

For companies that were incorporated in Ireland prior to 1 January 2015, the Irish corporation tax residency rules that were in place prior to Finance Act 2014 remain in effect until the end of 2020.

The action taken by Ireland in respect of this aggressive tax planning structure is another sign of Ireland’s commitment to tackling aggressive tax planning, as set out in Ireland’s Corporation Tax Roadmap.

Parliamentary Questions Data

86. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52246/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The number of Parliamentary Questions received by my Department is set out in the following table:

Year	PQs Received
2016	1,051
2017	1,424
2018	1,432

My Department is committed to answering Parliamentary Questions in a timely and consistent manner and almost all questions are answered directly.

The following table sets out the number of Parliamentary Questions that were referred to bodies under the aegis of my Department for direct reply:

Body	Number of PQs Answered Directly
National Shared Services Office	1
Public Appointments Service	1
Institute of Public Administration	0
Economic and Social Research Institute	0
State Laboratory	0
Office of the Ombudsman	0
Office of the Regulator of the National Lottery	0*

* The Office of the National Lottery Regulator responded directly to a Deputy as a follow up to a Parliamentary Question.

Please note that the Office of Public Works will respond to the Deputy directly in relation to the number of questions answered by them.

The Corporate Support Unit has responsibility for the allocation of Parliamentary Questions in my Department. The Unit has five staff but they have a very broad range of other roles, including, for example, in relation to FOI.

Advisers to the Minister assist in the checking and processing of parliamentary questions as part of their normal duties.

Finally, non-Departmental staff or external bodies have no involvement in the composition of replies to Parliamentary Questions in my Department.

Estimates Process

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of approved Supplementary Estimates in each of the years 2000 to 2017 and to date in 2018, for each Department in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52350/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Due to the scale of Government expenditure and the cash basis of Government accounting, the need for Supplementary Estimates can arise for a number of reasons, including policy decisions, timing issues and overspends. Supplementary Estimates are an important element of our expenditure management toolkit, allowing for the proper alignment of resources with allocations.

The attached document sets out the Supplementary Estimates by Vote for each year from 2000 to 2018. The tables for each year reflect the Vote structure that was in place in that year. Where two amounts are included in respect of a Vote in a particular year, this arises when a second Supplementary Estimate was provided to that Vote. There is an amount included for each year from 2000 to 2017 in respect of the net amount appropriated. This corresponds to net voted expenditure for each year and reflects the amount included in the Appropriation Act of that year.

The tables are available at the following link:

[Tables]

Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory

88. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if tenders have been reinvited from the short-list of building contractors for a laboratory (details supplied) in County Kildare; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders; when construction will commence and cease on the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52377/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is managing the delivery of the new Forensic Science Laboratory at the Backweston campus.

The Deputy should be aware that enabling works for Forensic Science Ireland that commenced in October 2017 have now been completed.

However, due to recent changes in international forensic laboratory standards, the merging of the Garda Technical Bureau with Forensic Science Ireland and changes to staff numbers, it was necessary to add further material to the tender documentation. Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) and the OPW design team are currently examining the issues involved, which relate primarily to laboratory interior finishes and mechanical and electrical adjustments.

Once this examination has been completed, the OPW will review all tender documentation and intends to re-issue a complete set of documents in Q4 2018. As this process is still ongoing, it is not possible at this stage to give exact timeframes for the procurement process for contractors. When the construction contract for the main building is placed, the estimated construction period is 24 months followed by a validation and test period prior to occupation.

Office of Public Works Projects

89. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 148 of 18 September 2018, if the engineering consultants have been appointed; when planning permission will be sought for a centre (details supplied); when tenders will be sought for construction; when construction will commence; the estimated construction time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52378/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Engineering consultant tenders were revived on the 10th September 2018. They are presently being assessed. Planning application is due to be lodged in Quarter 4 2018. The programme for the tender and construction stages of the project will be confirmed when the planning permission process is completed.

Flood Risk Assessments

90. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 72 of 9 October 2018, if consultants have been hired to complete the reassessment of the local hydrology of the area in question and the operation of the local drainage network; the expected date for completion of the studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52381/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A flood study of the Hazelhatch area of Celbridge, County Kildare, carried by consultants on behalf the local authority, highlighted the need for a re-assessment of the local hydrology for the area.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) and Kildare County Council have jointly developed the Project Brief for this further study that will be commissioned by Kildare County Council.

Schools Building Projects Status

91. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of progress on a new school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52232/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

The outcome of the pre-qualification process for the main contract has been notified to contractors who expressed interest in tendering for this project. Feedback and issues arising from same has resulted in a legal challenge to the pre-qualification process for the main contract from one unsuccessful contractor. This matter is being handled on my Department's behalf by the Chief State Solicitor's Office. The Deputy will appreciate that as there is an ongoing legal challenge in relation to the project it is not possible for my Department to comment further at present.

When the pre-qualification process for the main contract and reserved specialists contracts can be successfully concluded the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

Parliamentary Questions Data

92. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52239/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): For the Deputy's information, the following number of Parliamentary Questions were processed by my Department for the timeframe 2016 to end November 2018.

2016: 55 oral and 3,042 written Parliamentary Questions

2017: 94 oral and 4,927 written Parliamentary Questions.

2018: 78 oral and 4475 written Parliamentary Questions (end November)

As part of their duties, three Clerical Officers assigned to the Office of the Secretary General manage and co-ordinate the processing of Parliamentary Questions in my Department. Relevant officials who deal with the particular issues raised in Parliamentary Questions draft responses that are then submitted for approval. Parliamentary Questions are not referred to external companies nor are they referred to aegis bodies for direct reply.

The Deputy will note that my Department receives a significant number of Parliamentary Questions annually and this provides me, as Minister, with regular opportunities to report pub-

licly on matters for which I am accountable. On occasions, and when appropriate, advisers may input into a response on my behalf.

School Accommodation Provision

93. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to expedite an application by a school (details supplied) for AFD facilities and a science room which are urgently required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52259/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is currently considering the school's application for additional accommodation. My Department expects to be in a position to convey a decision on the application to the school authority shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

94. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location a school (details supplied) will be located; the type of premises it will occupy; the facilities that will be included; when the permanent school facilities will be put in place; when more information for prospective students and parents will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52285/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): April 2018 saw the announcement of the establishment of 42 new schools over the next 4 year period from 2019 to 2022. The 17 schools due to open in Sept 2019 including the school to which the Deputy refers remain on schedule.

A suitable permanent site for the school has been identified in the Belmayne/Clongriffin area and my officials are working to advance matters in that respect so that the school's permanent accommodation can be delivered at the earliest possible date.

In advance of that the school will be established in September 2019 in suitable interim accommodation pending delivery of its permanent school building.

My Department has appointed a Project Manager to assist in the procurement of interim school accommodation for the schools opening in 2019. Work is still ongoing in this regard and due to commercial sensitivities attaching to property matters generally my Department is unfortunately not in a position at present to provide further information on site locations etc. at this time.

However, once the interim location is secured the relevant school authorities will be informed and the details of the location can then be made public.

DEIS Eligibility

95. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52324/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware DEIS Plan 2017 was the culmination of more than 18 months of consultation and discourse

with education partners and other stakeholders to ensure that identification of schools and future delivery of interventions is fully informed by the practical experience of teachers, parents, students and non-governmental organisations working on behalf of children at risk of educational disadvantage and their families

My Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage.

The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal Haase Pratschke Deprivation Index (HP Index). The HP Index combines three underlying dimensions of affluence/disadvantage, identified as Demographic Profile, Social Class Composition and Labour Market Situation, to achieve a balanced measure of relative affluence and deprivation, which evenly applies across the urban-rural continuum. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, single parent rates, education levels, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. This data is applied uniformly to all schools in the country in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school.

The calculation of the level of disadvantage in each school is based on the socio-economic background of their pupil cohort using centrally held data as previously outlined and is not based on the location of the school but on the geographical CSO Small Areas where the pupil cohort resides.

A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process is available on the Department's website at

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

In order to achieve this, the current identification model needs to be as accurate as possible and this will be facilitated by the use of Eircode to ensure correct inputting of addresses. Further analysis is also required to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation.

Therefore, in order to ensure the quality of the address data and conduct further analysis, it is not intended to extend the DEIS Programme to any further schools until this work is complete.

School Transport Provision

96. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of private school transport contractors (details supplied) which have had their fleet sus-

pending by Bus Éireann while awaiting inspection by the FTA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52326/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Bus Éireann is finalising the information sought and I have requested that they forward the figures directly to the Deputy when they are finalised.

Teaching Qualifications

97. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special educational needs will be included as a core part of initial teacher training in all colleges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52352/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for professional standards and regulation of the teaching profession. Under Section 38 of the Teaching Council Act, all initial teacher education programmes are subject to review and accreditation by the Teaching Council, in accordance with the Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (published in 2011 and revised in March 2017). In accordance with these Criteria and Guidelines, inclusive education is a mandatory component for all students in ITE. Inclusive education encompasses education of children with special educational needs.

The learning outcomes of ITE programmes also reflect the need for the teacher to be able to conduct a systematic, holistic assessment of learner needs; to apply knowledge of the individual potential of students, their disposition towards learning and their backgrounds, identities and learning styles to their teaching; to set clear, challenging and achievable expectations for pupils; to evaluate learner progress; to act as an advocate for students, referring students for educational support as required and participating in the provision of that support, amongst other relevant outcomes.

The Teaching Council is currently carrying out a review of the impact of the current programmes, with a view to amending the Criteria and Guidelines before the next round of accreditation commences in 2020.

A recently published report from the National Council for Special Education on Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion: Phase 1 and 2 (NCSE Research Report No. 26), found that there is much good practice related to inclusive education in ITE, particularly in relation to the fostering of positive attitudes to inclusion, while also noting scope for further alignment between theory and practice, in particular as between student placement and the university experience. These findings will be considered by the Teaching Council in the course of its work.

Schools Building Projects

98. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an audit of accom-

modation and a programme of upgrading and refurbishment will be carried out over time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52353/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that the National Development Plan (NDP) provides for an €8.4 billion investment in school buildings over the period 2018 to 2027 to deliver on NDP and National Planning Framework objectives. It is intended that this will address the twin priorities of catering for demographic need as well as ensuring a strengthened focus on refurbishment of existing school stock at that point.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

99. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Garda vetting for special needs assistants and bus escorts will be centralised and streamlined in order that they can move more easily between schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52354/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Since the introduction in 2006 of the non-statutory Garda vetting arrangements the Teaching Council has played a central role in the vetting of registered teachers both for the purposes of registration with the Council and as a conduit for school employers for the purposes of the vetting of registered teachers for employment.

Under the non-statutory vetting arrangements, vetting of non-teaching staff (such as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)) and others was conducted via the relevant diocesan office or school management body which acted as the conduit for schools for this purpose. In the case of ETB schools, vetting of such persons was conducted via the relevant ETB.

In April 2016, the Minister for Justice and Equality commenced the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 (the Vetting Act) which put in place statutory requirements for the Garda vetting of persons involved in working with children and vulnerable persons.

The Vetting Act applies not just to schools but to any relevant organisation that employs, contracts, permits or places a person in relevant work with children or vulnerable persons. The Vetting Act provides that vetting is conducted by the National Vetting Bureau on foot of an application by a relevant organisation that is registered with it. The vetting legislation and the vetting procedures operated by the National Vetting Bureau fall within the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

When the vetting requirements were commenced in 2016, my Department issued circular 0031/2016 which set out the statutory vetting requirements applicable to schools along with the practical arrangements in place to support the vetting procedures. A Frequently Asked Questions document was also published by my Department to assist schools with queries in respect of the circular.

At the same time, the previous Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton T.D. commenced the vetting related provisions of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act, 2015 which, inter alia, enabled the Teaching Council to put in place a streamlined mechanism for school employers to meet the statutory vetting requirements in respect of registered teachers. The existence of the Teaching Council, as a statutory body with a statutory role in the registration of registered teachers, has enabled my Department to bring forward the relevant legislative provisions under the Teaching Council Amendment Act 2015 which have allowed for such a streamlined mechanism to be put in place in the case of registered teachers. However, it is not possible for my Department to put in place similar legislative arrangements in respect of non-

teaching staff, such as SNAs and bus escorts.

Under the new statutory vetting procedures, the vetting of SNAs and other non-teaching staff continues to be conducted via the relevant diocesan office or school management body as the relevant conduit organisation for the vetting of SNAs and other non-teaching staff employed by schools. In the case of ETB schools the relevant ETB is the relevant organisation for such vetting.

National Educational Psychological Service Administration

100. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if access for all pupils with SEN to the National Educational Psychological Service will be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52355/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments. (SCPA).

NEPS in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

This Government and my Department remains committed to maintaining a robust NEPS service and under Budget 2017 the approved number of NEPS psychologist posts was increased (from Sept 2017) from 173 to 184 whole-time equivalents (w.t.e.). Budget 2018 further increased NEPS numbers with 10 new posts being sanctioned from September 2018 bring total approved numbers to 194 w.t.e.

I can inform the Deputy that my Department and the Public Appointments Service (PAS), following the completion in the early autumn of a national recruitment competition and formation of regional recruitment panels, are actively pursuing recruitment up to this approved level.

Furthermore 10 new NEPS psychologists posts have been sanctioned for September 2019.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

101. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a clear pathway will be created for all families following an SEN diagnosis of their child from early intervention supports through to adult services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52356/18]

120. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce clear communication and co-operation between the HSE, his Department, special schools and service providers (details supplied) regarding multidisciplinary teams, respite, adult and residential services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52416/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 120 together.

My Department works with service-providing partners in the health and disability sectors to support and plan for the co-ordinated delivery of services to families of children with special educational needs across the disability sector, including children in special schools. Cooperation and coordination has progressively improved between the education and health sectors in providing the supports for children with special educational needs. This is being achieved through participation on the interdepartmental Cross-Sectoral Team, which is chaired at Assistant Secretary level and comprises of representatives of my Department, National Educational Psychological Service, Department of Health, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

My Department works in cooperation with management bodies of special schools, particularly the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) which is a representative and networking association which seeks to support Boards of Management of schools providing education for children with special needs in Ireland and is a recognised partner in the education process. Officials of my Department also meet with representatives of special schools and principal networks throughout the school year

The NCSE and NEPS work with HSE service providers at local level in the delivery of supports to children and young people with disabilities.

The provision of Health Services, including the provision of respite and residential services, is a matter for the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive.

Some people with a disability, over the age of 18, and who have complex needs, may require specialised support throughout their lives. Ongoing care and support services within the community, in a post school setting, are provided by voluntary or statutory organisations; responsibility for such care and support rests with the HSE.

Special school staff typically have extensive engagement with parents, HSE multi-disciplinary teams and the NCSE which involves planning for the child's future, including options for further education, training, employment or other placement options subject to the child's abilities, including the young person's transition to adult services when they reach the age of 18 years.

It is important to note that students who transfer to adult service settings can continue to participate in educational programmes through further adult educational programmes or in adult settings which are allocated resources towards educational provision.

Special Educational Needs Staff

102. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a review of the

role of special needs assistants in special schools will be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52357/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme, which set out to ensure that the Scheme is achieving the best outcomes possible for children with special educational needs, was published by the National Council for Special Education in May this year. This Review was conducted on the operation of the SNA scheme in all school settings, including special schools. The Review outlines a range of recommendations on how schools can be best supported to meet the needs of children with additional care needs. They include the provision of training for SNAs and a broader range of specialist supports for schools and students. Consideration is currently being given to the implementation of the Review's findings. There are no plans for a review of the role of SNAs in special schools at this time.

Schools Building Projects

103. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 241 of 18 September 2018, if the accommodation needs of a school (details supplied) have been agreed; when a design team will be appointed for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52369/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's Construction Programme. In the context of progressing the building project, my Department undertook a technical site visit to the school and my Department will be in contact with the school when the project brief has been completed.

In the context of the school's immediate accommodation needs, the school authority has been advised that my Department is willing to approve rental of temporary accommodation should this be required.

Schools Building Projects Status

104. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the pre-qualification report on the building of a school (details supplied); if the report has been received; if it has been approved; and when tenders will be invited for the project from the short-list of contractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52370/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 2b – Detailed Design.

My Department has been informed that the Design Team Leader published the contract notice inviting contractors to tender for Pre-Qualification on e-tenders on 2 August 2018 with a closing date for receipt of submissions of 10 September 2018. The Design Team is currently assessing the expressions of interest. A pre-qualification report will be compiled and forwarded to the Department once this exercise is complete.

Once the pre-qualification process is complete the Department will be in contact with the Board of Management with a view to progressing the project to tender stage.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

In March 2018 my Department issued a letter to the school and its Design Team outlining the projected timeframe for the progression of this project to tender and construction stage and the steps involved.

Schools Building Projects Status

105. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification process for a school (details supplied) has been concluded; if so, if tenders have been invited for the project from the short-list of contractors; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52371/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design which includes the application for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The outcome of the pre-qualification process has been notified to contractors who expressed interest in tendering for this project. Feedback and issues arising from same are currently being dealt with by the school and its Design Team. When this process has concluded the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

106. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification report for a college (details supplied) has been received; if the report has been approved; if tenders have been invited from the short-list of contractors; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders for the project; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52372/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved to the local Education and Training Board for delivery. The pre-qualification process for the project is currently being finalised and is expected to conclude shortly. Once this process has concluded, tenders will be invited from the short-listed contractors and further preparations in that respect are being made. The project will proceed to construction upon completion of the tendering process.

Schools Site Acquisitions

107. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the required clarifications have been received from the vendor of the site for schools (details supplied) in County Kildare; if satisfactory, if a design team will be appointed for both projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52373/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Engagement with the vendor is still ongoing in respect of outstanding aspects regarding the proposed school site acquisition. Progress continues to be made on a range of matters relating to the proposed site. At this juncture, it is still premature to appoint a design team. I can assure you that officials in my Depart-

ment are working to do so as soon as is possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

108. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 358 of 6 November 2018, if a school (details supplied) in County Kildare has been included in the projects to be progressed under the ADAPT 2019-2021 programme; if so, when an external project manager will be appointed to progress the school project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52374/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A building project which involves an extension to the school building for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme.

A project brief has been finalised and the project will be delivered via the ADAPT programme. The ADAPT programme uses a professional external Project Manager to coordinate and drive the respective design teams on each project.

In this regard, my Department will shortly commence the process of procuring a Project Manager for the programme and will be in further contact with the school authorities when this process has been completed.

I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department is committed to providing a new school building for the school in question.

Schools Building Projects Status

109. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification report for a school (details supplied) County Kildare has been received; if so, if it has been approved; when tenders will be invited for the project from the short-list of contractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52375/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The process of Pre-Qualification of contractors for the project in question is underway. For this particular project, pre-qualification of reserved specialists for the mechanical and electrical works is also required. The Pre-qualification process culminates in the compilation of shortlists of suitable candidates for each respective discipline.

The closing date for pre-qualification of contractors was November 1 2018 and 17 potential main contractors have expressed an interest in the project. An assessment of the submissions has commenced and validations have been requested from the potential contractors.

On receipt of the validated submissions the tender assessment report can be completed and the final shortlist prepared. When pre-qualification is complete the project will then be progressed to tender stage which normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

This project is included in the Department of Education and Skills' 6 year construction programme.

Schools Designation

110. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on the application by a school (details supplied) in County Kildare to become co-educational; if not, the issues delaying the sanctioning of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52376/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of correspondence from the Patron of the school in question relating to a proposed change of the school's status. Further information requested by my Department in that regard has recently been received; this allows the request to be progressed.

Schools Building Projects Status

111. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if tenders have been invited for the completion of a campus (details supplied) in County Kildare; the number of contractors from which tenders have been sought; the closing date for receipt of tenders for the project; when it is envisaged the successful contractor will be on site; if the completion date remains June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52379/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, the project to which he refers is being delivered by Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). Since the main contractor for the project went into liquidation earlier this year, KWETB and its Design Team have been working to prepare the project to tender the unfinished works. It was also working with the bondsman for the project on a proposal to finish out the envelope of the building so as to weather the works already carried out.

I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that an acceptable agreement has been reached with the bondsman to allow the weathering works to be done and my Department has given its approval to the ETB to proceed with this arrangement. A builder is currently on site carrying out those works.

In the meantime, the remainder of the finish-out works are on track to be tendered to pre-qualified contractors shortly.

Schools Site Acquisitions

112. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 137 of 21 November 2018, if agreement has been reached on a new site for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52380/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As previously confirmed to the Deputy, officials in my Department are currently making progress on the identification of a suitable site to accommodate the school to which the Deputy refers. Ongoing close engagement with Kildare County Council and discussions with a landowner on a potential site continue. Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions in general, I am not in a position to provide further details at this time.

Schools Building Projects Status

113. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 115 of 9 October 2018, if tenders have been sought for the appointment

of a design team for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; the closing date for receipt of tenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52382/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB).

My Department has given approval to KWETB to proceed with the appointment of a Design Team for the project. That process is currently underway.

Schools Building Projects Status

114. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in north County Kildare will open in September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52383/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Maynooth Community College opened in 2014 with an Irish-medium Aonad and it was stated that should the Aonad demonstrate sufficient viability after four years from its date of establishment, a Gaelcholáiste would be established.

As the Deputy will be aware, Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta had been working through the practical arrangements necessary to facilitate the establishment of a new Gaelcholáiste. My Department has recently received correspondence from both parties and this is currently being considered.

Schools Facilities

115. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a list of all primary schools; the primary schools that have a kitchen or a canteen; the primary schools that do not have a kitchen; and the primary schools that do not have a canteen, respectively, in tabular form. [52411/18]

116. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new school build contracts include the provision of a kitchen and a canteen for students and teachers. [52412/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 and 116 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that a list of all primary schools nationwide is available on the Department's website www.education.ie/Publications/Statistics/DataonIndividualSchools/LatestAvailablePrimarySchoolsLists.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold details of schools with canteen or kitchen facilities or those without such facilities.

My Department has in place detailed design guidelines for primary and post-primary schools. These guidelines, which are available on my Department's website, currently provide for a standard range of serving and eating facilities in the design of new and refurbished Primary and Post Primary schools. In Primary schools a serving area of 8.0m² in area is provided. At Post Primary level a kitchenette, 25m² in area, is provided off the General Purpose/Dining Area.

These facilities are not intended to be full commercial type canteens where food is prepared or cooked.

Special Educational Needs Staff

117. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce an immediate appeals procedure for staffing allocations to special schools for matters such as staffing allocation which are not given to special schools until late in the academic year, often July (details supplied); if he will clarify or correct the situation by which he and the principal officer of the special education section deny responsibility to adjudicate an appeal from a special school stating it rests with NCSE which in turn states it rests with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52413/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in special schools, in accordance with the policies of my Department.

Enhanced pupil teacher and SNA ratios are provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupils' educational and care needs. Since 2012, special schools are staffed on the basis of their actual pupil profiles and the disability category of each pupil, as opposed to being based principally on school designation, in accordance with my Department's Circular 0042/2011.

Special school staffing allocations are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE and schools are staffed on the basis of each year's school enrolments, unlike mainstream primary and post primary schools, which are allocated staffing based on staffing schedules.

Where a special school has a query in relation to their allocation, they can discuss their concerns, in the first instance, with the Special Education Needs Officer (SENO) who will provide the basis for, and background to, their class teacher allocation. Where a special school is unhappy with the SENOs' decision, the advice of the Senior SENOs may be sought on the matter.

Special Schools are advised of their teaching and SNA staffing allocations at the same time. Following the Government's decision of 5th July 2017, that the allocation of SNAs would now be part of the annual Estimates process, this has allowed the NCSE to make staffing allocations to special schools much earlier than in previous years. Special Schools were advised of their staffing allocation on 20th May 2018.

I have recently requested the NCSE to develop policy advice on the educational provision that should be in place for students educated in special schools and classes and make recommendations on the provision required to enable students in special schools and classes achieve better outcomes. Issues in relation to appeals will also be considered.

The NCSE have been asked to complete and submit its report to the Minister not later than June 2020. There will be no change to the staffing arrangements currently in place in special schools, pending the receipt of this policy advice.

Special Educational Needs Data

118. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to undertake an exercise to scope out the requirement for special school places particularly in the area

of ASD and complex needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52414/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's policy is to provide for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs, including Autism (ASD), in mainstream school settings, unless such a placement would not be in the best interests of the child concerned, or the children with whom they will be educated.

The greater proportion of children with ASD attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

Some students with ASD, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there and placement in an ASD special class should be considered.

Special classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools. They offer a supportive learning environment to students who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day.

Students enrolled in special classes should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities.

Special school placements are provided for other students with ASD and very complex special needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week. Enrolment of a child in a special school is based on a professional assessment in consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year, and where special class or special school provision is required, it is planned and established to meet that need. The NCSE continues to establish additional special class and special school placements to support children with Special Educational Needs including Autism as required.

From time to time, the Council identifies local areas where additional provision is required. In those circumstances, SENOs work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved.

My Department is aware that the establishment of special provision in some schools and communities can be challenging.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 will assist in addressing this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act, which commenced Monday 3rd December 2018, will provide the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the NCSE, the board of management and the patron of the school, to compel a school to make additional provision for the education of children with special educational needs.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate plan-

ning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities. To this end the Department and the NCSE have convened a working group to put in place a new working protocol to ensure that there is effective pro-active planning and timely delivery of specialist educational places for students in special classes and special schools.

The focus of the working group is to guide the development of necessary placements in schools in the short, medium and longer terms to meet the anticipated needs of pupils and to ensure that any necessary school building or refurbishment and school transport considerations are resolved as early as possible so that placement options can be accessed where and when they are needed.

Special Educational Needs

119. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce a reduction in the paperwork requirement for special schools particularly the personal pupil plans when requesting one extra SNA in addition to a reasonable timeframe for a response from the NCSE in view of the fact that staff continue to deal with violent behaviour in the interim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52415/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Board of Management of each school is responsible for the care and safety of all pupils and employees in their school.

Students who have a challenging behavioural needs should, in the first instance, be supported by teachers, other staff members and by whole school policies on the management of behaviour in schools. The emphasis in the school situation should be on the development of well co-ordinated interventions in response to the student's identified needs. The provision of appropriate teaching and health supports, as required, should result in improved behaviours, leading to improved educational outcomes.

Tusla's Educational Welfare Service, under the aegis of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, has published guidelines for schools on Codes of Behaviour which all schools are required by law to have in place.

Schools may seek advice from their local National Educational Psychological Services psychologist, from the NCSE's Support Service which includes Special Educational Needs Organisers, the National Behavioural Support Service and the Special Education Support Service, as to how children with behavioural needs can best be supported in school.

A range of guidance is available for schools in relation to the management of student behaviour. The Department published Guidelines for Supporting Pupils with Behavioural, Emotional, and Social Difficulties, which is available on the Department's website, www.education.ie. The National Educational Psychological Services document Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties – A Continuum of Support also provides advice for teachers.

Training is available for schools in relation to the provision of support for children with special educational needs from the NCSE's Regional Service. The Special Education Support Service can, as part of their designated training modules, provide guidance for schools in relation to the management of difficult behaviour.

In situations where behavioural management strategies have not been successful and where it is demonstrated how access to SNA support can assist with ongoing planning and intervention for the student such support will be provided in accordance with the criteria set out in Depart-

ment Circular 0030/2014.

Further to this, a new model of allocation of SNA support is currently being considered by my Department. The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme, published by the NCSE on 30 May 2018, has recommended the development of a frontloaded model for allocating SNA support to schools for children with special educational needs who have additional care needs.

The introduction of such a model of allocation would reduce, and in many cases eliminate, the need for individual applications and professional assessments in order to access resources.

Work is also ongoing in my Department in relation to the development of guidelines for crisis situations. Following a request by my Department for policy advice from the NCSE, which provided recommendations in relation to crisis situations and complex behavioural needs, work on developing guidelines for schools is underway. My Department will engage with education partners on these in the coming months. The guidelines will assist schools in responding in circumstances where students pose an immediate threat of harm to themselves or others.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 101.

Special Education Review

121. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an urgent review and replacement of report of the special education review committee 1993 will be carried out in view of the fact that the pupil profile has changed significantly but resources have remained the same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52417/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Staffing arrangements for special schools are in line with policy advice provided by the NCSE in 2013, which did not recommend alteration to staffing ratios established under SERC Report in 1993.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in special schools, in accordance with the policies of my Department.

Enhanced pupil teacher and SNA ratios are provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupils' educational and care needs. Since 2012, special schools are staffed on the basis of the pupil population and the disability categorisations of those pupils, as opposed to being based principally on school designation, in accordance with my Department's Circular 0042/2011.

Special school staffing allocations are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE and schools are staffed on the basis of each year's school enrolments.

In Budget 2019, it was announced that for the school year 2019/2020, funding will be provided for administrative deputy principal posts in special schools that have a principal and 15 class teachers or more. This change is in recognition of the additional administrative needs of special schools.

I have recently requested the NCSE to undertake policy advice on the educational provision that should be in place for students educated in special schools and classes and make recommendations on the provision required to enable students in special schools and classes achieve better outcomes.

The NCSE have been asked to complete and submit its report to the Minister not later than June 2020. There will be no change to the staffing arrangements currently in place in special schools, pending the receipt of this policy advice.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

122. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consistent access to a multidisciplinary team, particularly a behaviour support specialist, for all special schools will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52418/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme was published by the NCSE on 30 May 2018 and contains 13 recommendations. One of these recommendations is the provision of multi-disciplinary therapy support, including behaviour practitioners, to provide advice and guidance to schools.

In response to the Review, I have undertaken to develop proposals for the implementation of the NCSE's recommendations and to return to Government following engagement with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Health, with a proposed implementation plan to include governance and accountability framework and detailed costings of any recommendations that subsequently may be approved by Government.

Work in this regard is underway and I expect to bring proposals for implementation of the Review's recommendations to Government shortly.

Special Educational Needs Staff

123. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an administrative deputy principal will be appointed in all special schools with eight teachers which equates to a minimum staff of 32 in view of the fact that mainstream national schools with five or more special classes and no specified enrolment number can be allocated an administrative deputy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52419/18]

131. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he will take to tackle the high levels of absenteeism among staff due to the lack of support available in special schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52483/18]

132. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to resolve the inconsistency in the way in which the allocation of part-time specialist teachers and or hours are sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52484/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123, 131 and 132 together.

The recruitment, appointment and deployment of teaching and SNA staff is a matter for the individual school authority.

The managerial authority of a school may employ a substitute to replace a teacher and SNA absent on an approved absence including certified illness and maternity leave.

In order to ease the situation reported of some schools experiencing difficulties in finding substitute teachers, in the last school year I suspended the limits that teachers on career break can work as substitutes. Schools were also reminded that, in considering career break applica-

tions, the needs of pupils should take precedence and they must take account of the availability of appropriate qualified replacement teachers. Retiring teachers were also reminded that in order to remain eligible for employment in a state funded teaching post for a period of more than five consecutive days, a teacher must maintain registration with the Teaching Council.

Earlier this year my Department established the Steering Group on Teacher Supply. The Group is considering the issues that impact on teacher supply, including: initial teacher education policy, provision, funding and support; data/research requirements; policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility/supply; and promotion of the teaching profession. In undertaking its task, the Group is cognisant of the requirement that all persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council, which is the professional regulatory body for the teaching profession.

A consultative forum was held on 8 November. Its purpose is to ensure that all stakeholders are kept aware of the measures being considered and implemented and to facilitate their input and participation. A number of regional focus groups are planned before end of 2018.

The Teacher Supply Action Plan was published on this day and it is an important step in an ongoing process to address teacher supply. Consultation and engagement across the various sectors is key to meeting the challenge and addressing issues currently being experienced in schools.

My Department's Online Claims System (OLCS) is designed to enable schools to record all absences (Substitutable and Non Substitutable) for all Staff Members paid directly on my Departments payroll and to make claims for substitution in respect of teachers and special needs assistants.

The data input by schools, once validated, updates my Department's Payroll and Personnel systems and issues payment directly to the substitute staff members concerned, if applicable.

The OLCS does not allow the entitlements under each leave type to be exceeded.

My Department has put in place an Occupational Health Strategy as a supportive resource for teachers and special needs assistants to promote their health in the workplace, with a focus primarily on prevention rather than cure. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises of the Employee Assistance and Well-being Programme and the Occupational Health Service.

The Occupational Health Service incorporates pre-employment health assessments, sickness absence management, assessments of medical fitness for work and ill health retirement assessments.

The Employee Assistance and Well-being Programme is a confidential service accessible by means of a free-phone telephone helpline available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, providing counselling on a range of personal health and well-being issues given by qualified clinicians. Up to 6 face-to-face counselling sessions are available to provide supportive and solution-focused care based on an individual's clinical needs. The telephone service also provides specialist information, support and advice in relation to family, financial, legal, work-related and consumer information services as well as providing management support

The School Authority, as employer, has a duty under Section 8 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to "ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees". The Occupational Health Service (OHS) is in place to assist the employer in carrying out this duty. The employer must therefore refer the teacher/SNA to the OHS, for the purpose of an independent assessment, where reasonable concerns ex-

ist as to the capacity of the teacher/SNA to undertake his/her duties in a manner that is safe for both the teacher/SNA and students. The OHS Provider, as contracted by the Department, is the sole recognised provider of independent medical advice for teachers/SNAs and employers. It is a requirement of the Sick Leave Scheme that all participants and beneficiaries of that Scheme abide by the medical assessment of the OHS.

NCSE's Support Service has brought under its control the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and for children who are blind/visually impaired (VTSVHI). The Support Service provides advice and support to schools on the education and inclusion of students with special educational needs, providing in-school support for teachers, continuing professional development for teachers and support to schools on the management of challenging behaviour. It also enhances the multi-disciplinary capacity of the education system through providing access to expert knowledge in areas such as autism, speech and language therapy and challenging behaviour.

With regard to staffing in special schools, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in special schools, in accordance with the policies of my Department.

Enhanced pupil teacher and SNA ratios are provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupils' educational and care needs.

Since 2012, special schools are provided with teaching staff on the basis of individual pupil profiles and disability categories of those pupils, as opposed to being based principally on school designation, in accordance with my Department's Circular 0042/2011. Special school staffing allocations are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE and schools are staffed on the basis of each year's current school enrolments.

In addition, some special schools are in receipt of part-time specialist teaching hours which were originally allocated to provide for specialist subjects for post primary aged students. The provision has been maintained by the special schools in receipt of same, but no expansion of the provision has been provided for in recent years.

In Budget 2019, it was announced that for the school year 2019/2020, funding will be provided for administrative deputy principal posts in special schools that have a principal and 15 class teachers or more. This change is in recognition of the additional administrative needs of special schools

I have recently requested the NCSE to undertake policy advice on the educational provision that should be in place for students educated in special schools and classes and make recommendations on the provision required to enable students in special schools and classes achieve better outcomes.

The NCSE have been asked to complete and submit it's report to the Minister not later than June 2020. There will be no change to the staffing arrangements currently in place in special schools, pending the receipt of this policy advice.

Special Educational Needs Staff

124. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to remedy a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52420/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in special schools, in accordance with the policies of my Department.

Since 2012, special schools are provided with teaching staff on the basis of the pupil population and the disability categorisations of those pupils, as opposed to being based principally on school designation, in accordance with my Department's Circular 0042/2011. Special school staffing allocations are reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE and schools are staffed on the basis of each year's current school enrolments.

In Budget 2019, it was announced that for the school year 2019/2020, funding will be provided for administrative deputy principal posts in special schools that have a principal and 15 class teachers or more. This change is in recognition of the additional administrative needs of special schools which operate on substantially reduced pupil teacher ratios.

Special Education Teachers (previously Resource and Learning Support Teachers) are provided under the Special Education Teaching allocation model, introduced in mainstream primary and post primary schools for the 2017/2018 school year, providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs. Special Schools are not included under this model, as their staffing is provided as outlined above.

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme is a school-based intervention provided to DEIS schools to address the needs of all pupils/families at risk of educational disadvantage through acknowledging and developing the role of the parent as prime educator. The role of the HSCL Coordinator is to work primarily with the salient adults in the child's life, in order to empower them, so that they can better support their children to attend school, participate in education and develop positive attitudes to life-long learning. Central to the HSCL initiative, is the identification of educational needs and the provision of a tailored and proportionate response to those needs, through a range of interventions, which are evidence-based, focused and structured.

While the HSCL scheme is funded by my Department, Tusla the Child and Family Agency, which is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving well-being and outcomes for children has responsibility for the management of the HSCL Scheme.

With enhanced pupil teacher and SNA ratios provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupils' educational and care needs, teaching staff typically have extensive engagement with parents, HSE multi-disciplinary teams and the NCSE.

In addition to planning and coordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs, each NCSE SENO works in an assigned local area with parents, schools, teachers, psychologists, health professionals and other staff who are involved in the provision of services in that area for children with special educational needs.

In dealing with parents of children with special educational needs, SENOs will keep parents informed of what resourcing decisions are being made on their child's behalf. The SENO will also discuss any concerns that parents have about the present or future educational needs of their child. SENOs recognise that parents/guardians are the key stakeholders with regard to the child and are committed to forging good relationships with parents and parent groups. The SENO is available to parents to discuss any issues they have and to offer support and expertise. SENOs are also available to give presentations to groups of parents, advocacy groups etc.

I have recently requested the NCSE to undertake policy advice on the educational provision

that should be in place for students educated in special schools and classes and make recommendations on the provision required to enable students in special schools and classes achieve better outcomes.

The NCSE have been asked to complete and submit its report to the Minister not later than June 2020.

Special Educational Needs Staff

125. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to allocating full-time nursing support to special schools with pupils with complex medical needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52421/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme which set out to ensure that the Scheme is achieving the best outcomes possible for children with special educational needs was published by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on 30 May 2018.

The Review contains 13 recommendations, one of which is the provision of nursing support for students with complex medical needs.

In response to the Review, I have undertaken to develop proposals for the implementation of the NCSE's recommendations and to return to Government, following engagement with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Health, with a proposed implementation plan to include a governance and accountability framework, and detailed costings of proposals.

I expect to bring proposals for implementation of the Review's recommendations to Government shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

126. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52435/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): This project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural Planning. Planning Permission has been received and the Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate have been granted.

The Department has authorised the pre-qualification of contractors. The school was informed of the timeframe for progression of the project to tender stage and construction stage and the steps involved. When pre-qualification is complete the project will then be progressed to tender stage. A tender stage takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

This major building project is included on my Department's 6 year Programme and is expected to commence construction in mid-2019.

Summer Works Scheme

127. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a scheme (details supplied) will be reintroduced in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52452/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is designed to allow schools, on a devolved funding basis, to carry out necessary improvement and refurbishment works that will upgrade existing school facilities. Under SWS 2016-2017 almost €80 million has been approved to date, in respect of over 640 school projects in categories 1 - 6. The applications in categories 7-10 remain available for consideration for funding.

The launch of Project Ireland 2040 included an announcement of a major package of investment in education for the next decade with the school building budget increasing by 70%.

This investment will provide for the continued increase in demographics while also allowing for a greater focus on refurbishment and upgrading of existing school stock.

Schools Amalgamation

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) is being amalgamated with another 18 km away; and if this course of action will be reversed in view of the fact that it will cause considerable hardship to parents and students and significantly undermine the ethos of the school that has been in place for many decades. [52472/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that the decision making authority for school amalgamations belongs to the Patron/Trustees of a school, and this is subject to the approval of the Minister for Education and Skills. Any proposed changes involves extensive negotiations at local level and must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of students, parents, teachers, local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system.

In this regard, correspondence from the relevant ETB was received in recent days. Once my Department has had an opportunity to consider same further contact will be made with the ETB.

Special Educational Needs Staff

129. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to remove the requirement to take SNAs from panels for special schools in view of the fact that they may not have the necessary skill set, knowledge and relevant experience that is sought through the usual recruitment process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52481/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am not aware of any specific proposal along the lines outlined by the Deputy. The purpose of the Supplementary Assignment Arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school or ETB. The arrangements are in place for recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and ETBs, and apply to all of these schools with no exclusions.

Under the terms of the most recent Circular (0034/2018), SNAs with a Panel Form 1 (PF1) retain the first option to be interviewed. The employer is obliged to offer the vacancy to an SNA with a PF1, subject to the SNA meeting any specific competencies and/or requirements to meet the special educational needs of the pupil. If none of the applicants with the PF1 form meet the specific competencies and/or requirements of the Board then the employer can call other applicants for interview.

Teachers' Professional Development

130. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that there is continuing professional development specifically for various types of special schools for both teachers and SNAs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52482/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme which set out to ensure that the Scheme is achieving the best outcomes possible for children with special educational needs was published by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in May this year.

One of the recommendations in the Review is the development of a national training programme at FETAC level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications for existing and new SNAs, recognising the fundamental importance of building schools' capacity to meet students' additional care needs.

In response to the Review, I have undertaken to develop proposals for the implementation of the NCSE's recommendations and to return to Government following engagement with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Health, with a proposed implementation plan to include governance and accountability framework and detailed costings of any recommendations that subsequently may be approved by Government.

Work in this regard is underway and I expect to bring proposals for implementation of the Review's recommendations to Government shortly.

There are also a range of in-service professional development supports provided to teachers by the Department. Since March 2017, the NCSE Support Service, has a remit to develop schools' capacity to include students with special educational needs and to promote a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive and responsive.

The role of the NCSE Support Service includes enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision. The service co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.

In addition to the above, the Department provides funding support for teachers to expand their capacity through courses at the Middletown Centre for Autism and through funded post-graduate provision at a number of higher education institutions for teachers involved in Learning Support and Special Education.

Questions Nos. 131 and 132 answered with Question No. 123.

Parliamentary Questions Data

133. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52245/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department has answered 10,895 parliamentary questions from January 2016 to 6 December 2018. This figure includes linked questions where a single comprehensive answer is provided to a number of questions on the same subject. It does not include questions which have been withdrawn, disallowed or transferred to another Department.

When information is sought which is in the purview of a body or agency under the aegis of my Department, the practice is to seek that information in order to provide it in the response to the parliamentary question, rather than referring the question to that body or agency for direct reply. That is generally the position in relation to, for example, An Garda Síochána, and the Courts Service. Where information is not available in the time provided for by the Oireachtas, I generally issue a follow-up response to the question when the information becomes available. On occasion, I may indicate in my answer that information, or further information, is to be provided directly to the Deputy by an agency or body under my remit.

My Department has a Parliamentary Questions coordinator whose functions include liaison with the Questions office in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Since September 2017 my Department has operated the ePQ system - an integrated system which allows for the timely submission, approval and transfer to the Oireachtas of replies to parliamentary questions, and involves input from staff across the Department.

Replies are prepared by Departmental staff working directly in the subject area. As with other areas of work, my adviser may liaise with other staff as part of this process and on my behalf, prior to submission of responses to the Oireachtas. Neither public affairs companies or public relations companies have any involvement in the process.

Departmental Correspondence

134. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he plans to respond to the correspondence and questions sent to him by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52279/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in Wards of Court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

The correspondence referred to by the Deputy has been received and is currently being addressed by my Department. A reply is being finalised at the moment and will issue shortly.

Garda Vetting

135. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the wait time for Garda vetting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52281/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by the National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. It is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 and is, as I am sure you will agree, a very important task which must be done thoroughly and correctly. My Department has no role in the

processing of individual vetting applications.

I have been informed by the Garda Authorities that the Vetting Bureau works to ensure that the processing time for vetting applications is kept to the minimum necessary in order to ensure that the statutory obligation to receive a vetting disclosure prior to permitting any person to undertake relevant work or activities on behalf of an organisation can be facilitated without undue delay.

All Garda vetting applications are processed on a first-come, first served basis in chronological order from date of receipt. This is with a view to observing equity and fairness in respect of all vetting subjects.

In respect of certain applications, it is necessary for the Vetting Bureau to conduct further enquiries, for example to confirm information provided by the applicant with external bodies. The time required to receive such information may be outside of the control of the Vetting Bureau. In such instances, processing times may be significantly longer than the average.

In general, the vetting process is working well and I understand that there are no backlogs or delays in Garda Vetting at present.

This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations.

The current turnaround time for vetting applications submitted by organisations utilising the eVetting system is 5 working days for over 85% of applications received.

Individual applicants can track the process of their application online using the eVetting Tracking System, details of which are contained in the email received by applicants when completing their application online.

Data Retention

136. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 215 of 12 December 2017, the progress he has made regarding the Communications (Retention of Data) Bill 2017; if his attention has been drawn to the outcome of a recent High Court case (details supplied) regarding the Communications (Retention of Data) Act 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52290/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government approved the revision of existing data retention legislation to take account of evolving ECJ jurisprudence in this area in October 2017.

Drafting of the Communications (Retention of Data) Bill 2018 is well advanced and I would expect to publish the Bill in early 2019.

I am aware of the recent High Court case to which the Deputy refers. The judgment will be examined by my Department and by the Garda authorities in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General to identify the important points arising and to inform the work that is currently being finalised on reform of the law in this area.

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

137. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the refurbishment works at the courthouse in Wicklow town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52336/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, a number of developments in relation to Courts Service accommodation requirements are outlined in the Government's recent National Development Plan 2018 - 2027. They include:

- Further new or refurbished courthouses in regional cities and county towns where facilities remain substandard (including Galway City, Wicklow Town, Portlaoise, Tralee and Roscommon) and further provincial locations such as An Clochan Liath (Dungloe) to serve as the Gaeltacht court for the region, and Tuam;

- Regional Family Law Centres;

- A nationwide condition survey of all court buildings in the estate will be undertaken to determine their condition and identify works required in relation to any issues identified and meet ongoing maintenance requirements.

The precise allocation and timing of additional funding over the entire ten year period remains to be fully determined. It will be dependent on the outcome of further detailed planning and analysis of costs which will determine prioritisation of projects from a timing and budgetary perspective.

Furthermore, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that, as part of its provincial capital building programme, one of the objectives is to extend and refurbish the courthouse in Wicklow town to provide a significantly larger 4 courtroom venue together with a range of facilities for staff, the judiciary, persons in custody, jurors, legal professionals, other state agencies and members of the public.

The Courts Service has indicated that while detailed planning or design work has not yet commenced, it has purchased a number of adjacent properties, some of which will be demolished in order to create a larger site capable of accommodating a courthouse building on the scale envisaged. Assistance has been sought from the OPW in this regard and it is hoped that demolition work will proceed in 2019.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

138. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria in place for areas to be chosen for the Garda youth diversion projects; his plans to establish the project in Bray and Arklow, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52337/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy may be aware, there are currently two Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) operating in County Wicklow - the New Directions Project, in Bray and the Way Project, in Wicklow town.

At present, there are some 105 GYDPs operating around the country, catering for approxi-

mately 4000 young people every year. In general, the location of projects is linked to local needs and the levels of youth crime. The existing network of GYDPs has developed organically over 3 decades and I am committed to ensuring that it continues to develop so that every young person has access to these very valuable programmes, and that they are delivered to the highest standard possible.

During 2018, my Department has engaged in a wide ranging consultation on the future of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects with community stakeholders to inform the preparation of a development programme for GYDPs. It is intended that this will be implemented over a number of years, in partnership with the community-based organisations which run the GYDPs, and An Garda Síochána.

An important aspect of these consultations is the engagement with the young people who participate in GYDPs, including a formal consultation with young people facilitated by the Participation Hub in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

I was delighted to be present at the Annual Conference for GYDPs on 7 November 2018 which provided an important opportunity for engagement with Youth Justice Workers and Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers, as well as some of the young people who participate in local projects. The conference also helped to launch a new Action Research Project (ARP) which will work with some 14 selected GYDPs, to move beyond the testimonial and anecdotal evidence we have that projects work well and provide a good service. The ARP will attempt to capture precisely what specific approaches and interventions work best, document this evidence, and roll the learning from this out across all the projects over a period of years. I am very pleased that the ARP is being enabled by the support of the REPPP project (Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice), a research partnership involving the Irish Youth Justice Service and the University of Limerick.

All of this work will help to further develop and enhance, over time and as resources allow, the approach to the location of new projects, in Co. Wicklow and elsewhere, within the overarching objective that all young people in need of such a service have access to a project in their area.

Prison Accommodation

139. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 189 of 5 December 2018, the reason the unit referred to is not accommodating prisoners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52347/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by my officials of the Irish Prison Service that plans to place the first prisoner in the National Violence Reduction Unit (NVRU) are nearing completion and the intention is that the new facility will commence operations in the short term. The Deputy will appreciate that the development of the NVRU represents a new departure in the management of violent prisoners. Preparations to fully harness the two pronged operational and psychological approach have been extensive.

Prison Security

140. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the report into the circumstances surrounding the escape of a prisoner (details supplied) requested for by his predecessor following the stabbing of two prison officers in Tallaght hospital in Feb-

ruary 2018; if the report will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52359/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Director General of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) was asked to provide a full report on all of the circumstances surrounding the escape of the prisoner (details supplied) during a hospital appointment at Tallaght Hospital on 17th February 2015. This report was received in March 2015 and it sets out the security and operational circumstances of the incident and related actions and recommendations. For operational and security reasons this report will not be published. The Health and Safety Authority also conducted an investigation into this incident under its statutory powers and issued an improvement notice which the IPS has implemented in full.

Subsequent to this incident, the State Claims Agency was asked to conduct a major review of assaults on operational prison staff in Ireland. That review followed a number of violent physical assaults on IPS staff by prisoners, including the incident referred to in the Deputy's question. The aim of the review was to determine the root cause of the issue, to reflect on the potential for future such occurrences and to make recommendations for improvement.

The review was published in November 2016 and the recommendations are being implemented by the IPS. One of those recommendations implemented by the IPS was the development of a national escorting standard to improve the security and safety in the conduct of escorts across the prison estate.

Constitutional Amendments

141. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will expedite consideration of the report by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality following pre-legislative scrutiny of the general scheme of the 38th Amendment of the Constitutional (Role of Women) Bill; and if a public consultation process will be convened early in 2019 with a view to holding the referendum in 2019. [52360/18]

147. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Citizens' Assembly will be requested to consider Article 41.2 of the Constitution. [51799/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 and 147 together.

Minister Flanagan and I will consider this Report, which was published on 6 December, and make proposals to Government in due course.

General Data Protection Regulation

142. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans on section 30 of the Data Protection Act 2018; his plans to amend and commence section 30 by way of legislation and or statutory instrument; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52365/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware from the detailed response which I gave to previous Parliamentary Questions from the Deputy, in particular Questions 623 and 628 on 24 July last, concerning commencement of section 30 of the Data Protection Act 2018, Article 58 of the GDPR already confers a far reaching power on supervisory authorities such as the Data Protection Commission to order controllers

and processors to bring processing operations into compliance with the GDPR's provisions, including the standards and safeguards applicable to the processing of children's personal data.

Moreover, Article 58 also confers powers on the Data Protection Commission to impose a temporary or definitive limitation, including a ban, on such processing and to impose an administrative fine pursuant to Article 83 in the case of infringements. This means that the possibility of imposing significant administrative fines on controllers and processors in cases of unlawful processing of children's personal data, as foreseen in section 30, already exists without the commencement of, or any amendments to, that section.

As regards possible future changes to existing law, the position is that I have asked my Department to keep application of those provisions of the GDPR and the 2018 Act that relate specifically to the protection of children's personal data under review. Since both the GDPR and the 2018 Act entered into force on 25 May last, it is not possible to say at this early stage whether any changes to the law will be required.

For the Deputy's information, the Data Protection Commission - which acts with complete independence in the performance of its tasks and exercise of its powers - has informed my Department that it will shortly be launching a public consultation on the processing of children's personal data and the data protection rights of children under the GDPR. This will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to make submissions on issues concerning the processing of children's personal data, the safeguards and standards applicable to children, and the rights of children as data subjects. The aim of the consultation is to promote increased awareness of children's data protection issues and to establish appropriate standards of protection across all sectors where children's personal data are processed.

Garda Recruitment

143. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when there will be further graduations of probationer Gardaí from Templemore in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52384/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility to manage and control generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members.

The Commissioner has indicated that there will be three attestations in 2019, most likely in March, June and November, though these dates are provisional.

Data Retention

144. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the aspects of the Communications (Retention of Data) Bill 2017 he has incorporated from the Communications (Retention of Data) Act 2011; if he is satisfied it complies with European Court of Justice advices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52385/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Communications (Retention of Data) Act 2011 Act already provides for a number of the requirements identified by the European Court of Justice. The current Act provides that data can only be accessed by specific agencies where the data is required for the prevention, detection, investigation or pros-

ecution of a serious offence, the safeguarding of the security of the State or the saving of human life. Additional safeguards provided for in the legislation to protect the data in question include data security provisions, data destruction provisions and restrictions on access to retained data. The legislation also provides for oversight of its operation by a High Court Judge who reports to the Taoiseach at least annually (with discretion to report more frequently) and for a complaints referee (a Circuit Court judge) to deal with the concerns of any person who believes that their data may have been unlawfully accessed in breach of the Act. These safeguards have been retained in the revised draft legislation.

The draft Communications (Retention of Data) Bill, which is currently being finalised, will respond to the relevant European Court of Justice rulings –

- by providing for Ministerial authorisation for the retention by service providers of targeted categories of traffic and location data for the purpose of the prevention, detection, investigation or prosecution of serious crime or safeguarding the security of the State;

- by requiring judicial authorisation for disclosure of retained data to the Garda Síochána and other agencies;

- by providing for the data concerned to be held for a 13 month period and for that data to be held in the EU;

- by providing for notification of persons whose data have been disclosed when such notification is unlikely to jeopardise the investigation of an offence or to undermine the security of the State,

The judgment in a recent High Court case regarding provisions in the 2011 Act will also be examined by my Department and by the Garda authorities in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General to identify the important points arising and to inform the work being finalised

I am satisfied that this will ensure compliance with the European Court of Justice rulings and I expect that the Bill will be published early in 2019.

Crime Data

145. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of detections of financial crime in 2015, 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, by category; the nature of the crimes detected; the sums of money involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52393/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities on the information sought by the Deputy and I will contact him directly when the report is to hand.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

146. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of appointments provided daily through the immigration appointment booking system; if his attention has been drawn to complaints from users that are having difficulty getting appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52406/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As outlined in responses to previous parliamentary questions, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department became aware in September of customers experiencing difficulties booking registration appointments. Some of these difficulties had arisen because third party agents had been able to secure multiple appointments through the use of automatic software. Software upgrades were put in place to minimise this abuse.

The period September to November is the busiest time for registrations with many student registrations in addition to the usual workload of the office. A number of measures have been taken to increase the capacity of the office, including the assignment of additional staff to the Registration Office, overtime and opening the office for registrations on most Saturdays and some Sundays. These measures are aimed at ensuring that as many appointments as possible are made available each day. INIS is continuing these measures at least into December to ensure demand is met.

There are between 400 - 500 appointments every day in Dublin provided through the online booking system.

I am also advised that INIS is currently developing a new online appointments system which should be operational late next year. This new system will assist in streamlining and improving the current online booking process. INIS is examining options for renewals of some types of permissions for 2019 and is also developing a new computerised registration system which will enable further options to streamline the registration process to be developed. This is a large ICT project planned to be delivered in 2020. The overall aim of these measures is to improve customer service and efficiency and so that future demands can be met.

Question No. 147 answered with Question No. 141.

Referendum Campaigns

148. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the involvement of his Department on plans for the forthcoming referendum on divorce in May 2019. [51797/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, the Government has agreed to hold a referendum on divorce together with the European Parliament and local elections in May 2019.

I am currently considering the question of the scope of the amendment on divorce that might be proposed for the referendum. I intend to bring proposals to Government early in the New Year to ensure adequate time for parliamentary and public debate and for the Referendum Commission to be established and begin its work. In that regard, my Department has considered issues relating to the scope of the amendment that might be proposed, including the various views expressed in the Oireachtas and legal advice.

I believe that it is important to have broad consensus in the Oireachtas for the proposal that will be put to the people. In that regard, I am currently engaging in consultations with parties and political groupings and I hope to conclude these consultations before the Christmas recess.

Parliamentary Questions Data

149. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innova-

tion the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52234/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department replied to 1,806 Parliamentary Questions in 2017 and has replied to 1,562 in 2018 to date. A figure for the number of Questions answered in 2016 is not readily available due to the introduction of a new ICT system for PQ administration at the end of 2016.

All Parliamentary Questions submitted to my Department are answered directly and Questions are not referred to bodies or agencies for direct reply. Where necessary input to replies is sought from agencies under the aegis of the Department.

The Secretary General's Office manage the administration of Parliamentary Questions in the Department, in addition to other duties. There are currently three members of staff assigned to the Office (excluding the Secretary General). All Questions received in the Department are forwarded to the relevant Division to prepare replies. Replies are then reviewed by myself and my Special Advisers or the Ministers of State and their Advisers.

No external advisors, public affairs or public relations companies have been involved in the preparation of replies to Parliamentary Questions.

Forálacha Pinsin

150. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Gnó, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta cén uair a cheadófar pinsean do dhuine (gonraí tugtha) atá ag fáil pinsean easláine faoi láthair agus a bheidh 66 bliana d'aois ar an 8ú lá de mhí na Nollag agus a bhfuil iarratas déanta aici ar phinsean; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [52271/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Níl aon ról ag mo Roinn in íocaíocht den phinsean Stáit. Is é an t-aon fheidhm atá ag mo Roinn maidir le hinchur íocaíocht shochair na Roinne Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Shóisialaí is ea sonraí de ranniocaíochtaí ÁSPC íochta i rith tréimhse fostaíochta iar fhostaí den Roinn seo nó d'aon cheann dá shlánaonaid mar an Roinn Tionscail agus Tráchtála nó an Roinn Saothair a sholáthar le cur ar chumas na Roinne Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Shóisialaí taifid fostaí áirithe ÁSPC a dhaingniú. Tá na taifid seiceáilte ag baill de m'Aonad Pinsin agus ar bhonn na faisnéise atá curtha ar fáil, ní bhfuarthas aon iarratais le haghaidh taifid ÁPSC faoin ainm atá curtha ar fáil. Ba chóir don Teachta an cheist shainiúil sin a chur faoi bhráid an Aire Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Shóisialaí.

IDA Ireland Portfolio

151. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA Ireland facilities being constructed in County Mayo in the past five years; the cost of each facility; the number occupied; and the number vacant. [52276/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The overall outlook for foreign direct investment in Mayo remains positive. There are 16 IDA cli-

ent companies employing approximately 4,500 people in the County. Mayo has experienced a 26% increase in FDI employment from 2012 to 2017 with job numbers increasing from 3,537 in 2012 to 4,462 at the end of last year. IDA Ireland continues to engage with its existing client base there to support them in growing their business and footprint further.

In the past five years the IDA has constructed one Advanced Technology Building (ATB) in Mayo, located in Castlebar, at a cost of €4m. The building is complete and the Agency is actively marketing the facility to potential investors through its offices in Ireland and abroad.

Work Permits Applications

152. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a work permit. [52287/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits section of my Department inform me that an application for a General Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 8 July 2018.

On 22 November 2018, the application was refused as it appeared that the applicant had not provided evidence that the Labour Market Needs Test (LMNT) had been carried out in the manner prescribed under the Employment Permits Act 2006 as amended.

In order to satisfy the LMNT an applicant must advertise the vacancy:

- with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection Employment Services/ EURES employment network for at least 2 weeks;
- in a national newspaper for at least 3 days; and
- in either a local newspaper or jobs website (separate to Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection/EURES websites) for 3 days.

The advertisements must include the following information:

- a description of the employment;
- the name of the employer;
- the minimum annual remuneration;
- the location/s of employment; and
- the hours of work.

The applicant was notified of this decision in writing and of their right to request a review of this decision within 28 days, in line with the provisions of the Employment Permits Acts. I am informed that no request for a review was received from the applicant or their authorised agent.

A refusal to grant an employment permit does not preclude an applicant from submitting another application for an employment permit. Such an application should comply with all of the legislative requirements for the particular employment permit type.

Consumer Protection

153. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if an organisation (details supplied) has applied for prescriber status under the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 2007 in order to take action against denture manufacturers that illegally provide directly to the public and other unregistered, unregulated practitioners; if so, when the application was received; if it has been approved; when it will be dealt with; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52409/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 71 of the Consumer Protection Act 2007 deals with court orders prohibiting a trader from committing or engaging in an act or practice prohibited under the Act. Section 71(2) provides among other things that a public body prescribed for the purposes of the subsection may apply to the Circuit Court or High Court for such an order. “Prescribed” is defined in section 2 of the Act to mean “prescribed by regulations made by” the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The Act does not specify however the criteria to be taken into account by the Minister in considering a request from a public body to be prescribed for the purposes of section 71(2). The public body referred to in the details supplied by the Deputy wrote to me in December 2017 requesting that it be prescribed for the purposes of section 71(2), the first such request by a public body since the enactment of the Act in 2007. A reply issued from my office in January 2018 stating that, while I was open in principle to the request, discussions should be held at official level on a number of issues before any final decision could be taken. An official of my Department met with representatives of the public body in May 2018 and sought information on a number of matters, including details of the number and type of cases in which a court order might be sought, the other enforcement options available to the body to address practices of concern to it, a range of issues relating to the procedure for applying for a court order under the section, and the importance of close cooperation with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission. The latter is of particular importance as, in addition to the fact, first, that cases in which a court order is sought by a prescribed body could also be the subject of criminal proceedings initiated by the Commission. Secondly, section 71(5) of the Act provides that where an application for a court order under the section is made by a party other than the Commission, the court may not make the order unless the Commission has been afforded an opportunity to be heard and adduce evidence. I have considered the various issues raised by the request for prescribed status by the public body in question and am satisfied that according it this status would be appropriate. I propose accordingly to submit a draft statutory instrument to this effect to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in the near future.

Brexit Issues

154. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the percentage of companies that export to Britain that will be Brexit ready by 29 March 2019. [52122/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the primary providers of supports to assist enterprises within the indigenous sector that are facing challenges arising from Brexit. They are working vigorously to enable companies to consolidate market share within the UK and to become more resilient by broadening their sales to other international markets.

The UK is the leading export destination for Enterprise Ireland supported companies and is the first export destination for many companies. Despite this, Enterprise Ireland supported companies are increasingly diversifying their global footprint beyond the UK. The proportion of our exports going to the UK has reduced by 10% over the last ten years, reflecting the suc-

cess that Irish companies are having in substantially increasing and broadening their exports to other international markets.

Enterprise Ireland offers a range of activities and supports for client companies throughout the country to innovate and remain competitive in international markets and is working with its clients to ensure they are resilient to economic shocks, such as Brexit.

As part of Enterprise Ireland's response to Brexit, the agency launched the following two supports to drive Brexit awareness and preparedness:

- **Brexit Scorecard:** This interactive online platform can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars. Based on answers supplied by the user, the Scorecard generates an immediate report which contains suggested actions and resources, and information on events for companies to attend, to prepare for Brexit.

- **Be Prepared Grant:** This grant offers SMEs a grant of up to €5,000 to assist them in preparing an action plan for economic shocks such as Brexit. The grant can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and travel expenses associated with researching the direction of their action plan. For example, this might involve investigating the feasibility of diversifying into new markets and market segments; investment in innovation; improvement in operational competitiveness; and/or enhancement of strategic financial capability.

In terms of effectiveness of the supports, a recent survey of 2,400 Enterprise Ireland clients found that 85% of them are taking Brexit-related actions. This is a positive indication that companies are undertaking Brexit preparedness actions.

Working closely with Enterprise Ireland's global network, the agency will continue to support its client companies plan, innovate, compete and diversify their exports in order to support companies navigate the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit. In this regard, Enterprise Ireland's new customs training and the planned LEOs customs training will help to demystify customs procedures for both exporting and importing companies. In addition, Enterprise Ireland and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade regional advisory clinics have been held around the country to assist companies prepare for Brexit.

Brexit Issues

155. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the contingency plans for companies if sterling falls by 3% or more. [52123/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is carrying out extensive work to prepare for all Brexit eventualities. Informed by detailed research, my Department has been putting in place a package of measures that will allow us to respond to the needs of businesses affected by Brexit.

A notified Rescue and Restructuring (R&R) scheme was approved by the Commission in late November 2017. Under the 10 million euro scheme, which will run until 2020, Enterprise Ireland can provide restructuring support to SMEs in severe financial difficulties.

The R&R scheme was extended in May 2018 to include temporary restructuring aid for enterprises facing acute liquidity needs. This provides a further 10 million euro of State support and is in addition to the original 10 million euro under the R&R scheme. Restructuring aid under this scheme is in the form of direct grants or equity support. It is important to have stabilisation measures such as these schemes in place in the event that they become needed.

However, there is whole suite of supports in place that enterprises can avail of to mitigate the impact of Brexit uncertainty.

The Brexit Loan Scheme, launched in March of this year and operated by the SBCI, offers affordable working capital to eligible SMEs that are either currently impacted by Brexit or which will be in the future. Funding granted under the scheme must be used to innovate, change or adapt to meet the challenges posed by Brexit. The Future Growth Loan Scheme announced in Budget 2019, will provide loans for terms of up to 10 years for eligible businesses to invest in a post-Brexit environment.

To assist businesses in responding to Brexit, Enterprise Ireland has established a Prepare for Brexit online portal and communications campaign, as well as an online “Brexit SME Scorecard” to help Irish businesses self-assess their exposure to Brexit and a “Be Prepared Grant” to support SME clients in planning to mitigate risks arising from Brexit. It has also launched a new Eurozone Strategy to help SMEs broaden their export footprint beyond the UK.

Local Enterprise Office funding has been increased by 22%, and this increase is being used to assist micro-enterprises in becoming more competitive and better able to cope with the changing environment in which they are operating. The suite of LEO Brexit supports includes tailored mentoring to address Brexit-related business challenges and targeted training on specific Brexit issues.

Advisory supports in relation to business planning, such as those provided by the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland, will be particularly important in assisting viable-but-vulnerable SMEs that may be adversely affected due to Brexit. These supports will help raise awareness of both private market financial supports and existing State supports.

As part of awareness-raising activities, EI has been rolling out regional Brexit Advisory clinics throughout the year. To date, clinics have been held in Letterkenny, Tralee, Portlaoise, Claremorris, Cootehill, Charleville, Dublin, Galway, Dundalk, Waterford and most recently Limerick. A Brexit two-day external consultancy support is also being rolled out to individual clients to help them develop a detailed sustainable growth plan. DBEI and its agencies have also participated in the Government’s “Getting Ireland Brexit Ready” events. These events have so far taken place in Cork, Galway, Monaghan, Dublin, Limerick and Donegal.

With regard to currency management specifically, my Department has published a guide for SMEs on currency risk management, which has been developed in collaboration with Pricewaterhouse Coopers and is available on my Department’s website.

Parliamentary Questions Data

156. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52243/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The statistical information requested by the Deputy is presented in the following table. The four staff of the Secretary General’s Office staff allocate PQs and return replies to the Oireachtas. All departmental staff are involved in the preparation of PQ replies. Ministerial Advisors in the Department are involved in reviewing

prepared replies. There is no role for public affairs and relations companies in the PQ process.

Year	Total PQs	Answered	Referred
2018 to date	10,553	3,410	7,143
2017	11,318	3,391	7,927
2016	07,189	2,109	5,080

Departmental Correspondence

157. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when an independent expert will be appointed to examine a matter (details supplied); the terms of reference of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52252/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Correspondence has recently been received in relation to the issue to which the Deputy refers and this is currently being examined by my Department.

Commencement of Legislation

158. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if the commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 is reliant on enactment of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 [52253/18]

176. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health when the Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Bill 2018 and the general scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 will be enacted and commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52304/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 176 together.

The commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 is not reliant of the enactment of the Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) legislation.

The Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Bill 2018 was enacted on 24 July 2018. This Act was introduced to correct typographical and technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, which will facilitate the subsequent commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act. Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 contain provisions relating to the regulation of donor-assisted human reproduction (DAHR) procedures carried out in the State, including dealing with the rights of children born as a result of those procedures. There are important administrative and operational arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of Parts 2 & 3, including the establishment of the National Donor-Conceived Person Register and the appointment of authorised persons under the Act. It is my intention that Parts 2 & 3 of the Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

The Government approved the drafting of a Bill on AHR and associated areas of research in October last year. The General Scheme is published on my Department's website. The Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of this year. The review is on-going, and the Committee intends to publish its report early in 2019.

The introduction of legislation in relation to AHR and associated research is a priority for me and the process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. As part of this process my officials will ensure that there is coherent interaction between the AHR Bill and Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Disabilities Assessments

159. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the reason there are staff shortages in the offices of the National Disability Complaints Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52260/18]

160. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that parents of children who have exceeded the waiting times for disability assessment in the south Lee area of County Cork are receiving letters from the HSE stating that due to staff shortages there is a considerable delay in responding to complaints; his views on whether this is acceptable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52261/18]

161. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has undertaken an investigation into the reason assessments for disability are longer in the south Lee area of County Cork; if the service providers provide private assessments on the same site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52262/18]

162. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the long waiting times for disability assessments in the south Lee area of County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52263/18]

163. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a waiting list regarding complaints on delays in disability assessments in the south Lee area of County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52264/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 to 163, inclusive, together.

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

164. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to difficulties in providing inpatient services for women with breast cancer in CUMH due to constant overcrowding; if there are undue delays for women; the way in which this is being assessed and dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52265/18]

165. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent letter that concerned staff in the breast care unit wrote to management to outline access problems and capital funding deficiencies for diagnostic equipment together with other issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52266/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

I am advised that the Breast Multi-Disciplinary Team in Cork University Hospital (CUH) raised issues with management in the hospital in regard to services for breast cancer patients there.

I understand that one of the main points brought up by the clinicians refers to inappropriate referrals to the Symptomatic Breast Disease Clinics. This issue is being addressed nationally and the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) has established a Clinical Guidelines Group. The NCCP is also working directly with GPs to better streamline breast cancer referrals to acute hospitals to avoid unnecessary referrals.

Dedicated CT slots have been allocated recently to breast cancer patients in CUH to streamline patient pathways. An amount of €0.75m has also been invested in replacement mammography equipment in the hospital and this is of major benefit in addressing cancer diagnosis.

A review of Rapid Access Clinics (including Symptomatic Breast Disease Clinics) was carried out by the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) in 2016. The review recommendations are being implemented at designated cancer centres to ensure the provision of quality, timely services to breast cancer patients. The performance of Rapid Access Clinics are also monitored on an on-going basis and steps will continue to be taken to address any issues that arise.

Requests for further increases in resources for personnel and equipment in CUH will be considered in the context of available resources in 2019.

Palliative Care Services Provision

166. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of palliative care services three year development framework 2017 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52267/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): National policy on palliative care is contained within the 2001 Report of the National Advisory Committee on Palliative Care. While the quality and vision of the Report means it is still relevant today, it is recognised that the landscape of palliative care has changed in the intervening years, and it became apparent there was a need to identify measures to address the current needs of people accessing palliative care services.

As a response to current needs, the Palliative Care Services Three Year Development Framework was launched in November 2017. The objective of the Framework is to inform and direct the development of adult palliative care services, both generalist and specialist, in Ireland for a three year period. This is against the backdrop of an ageing population in Ireland, coupled with increasing numbers of deaths from cancer, dementia, and neurodegenerative disease, with an associated palliative care need.

The Framework's focus is to identify the gaps that exist in the current level of adult pallia-

tive care service provision and to present a set of recommendations and actions which, over the duration of the Framework's lifetime, would seek to address these service issues and deficits, subject to available resources.

The Framework was commissioned by the HSE, with support from the Department of Health. As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy with an update on the status of implementation of the Framework as soon as possible.

Hospitals Building Programme

167. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason St. Brigid's Hospital, Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary is not included in the five year plan for refurbishment and upgrading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52268/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Dental Services Provision

168. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the dental service operating in the health centre in Maynooth, County Kildare; if there are plans to relocate this service in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52272/18]

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

Home Help Service Provision

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if home supports are in place for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52274/18]

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.

Proposed Legislation

170. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to publish the health and social care professionals (amendment) Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52278/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill as published was initiated in the Seanad on 27 September 2018. The Bill completed its passage through the Seanad on 7 November 2018 and is scheduled for debate in the Dáil commencing Tuesday 11 December 2018.

Home Care Packages Provision

171. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if home care hours will be provided to a person (details supplied). [52283/18]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

172. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused a medical card. [52289/18]

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

Health Repayment Scheme

173. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the amount held or managed by the patients' private property account central unit; the way in which this fund is invested and safeguarded; the amounts held on behalf of each organisation within its remit by county; if the fund comes under the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General; the number of individual cases in which the Circuit Court's direction was sought in circumstances in which the HSE used in excess of €5,000 of client funds in a single calendar year; the number of families refused access to the funds of a family member in circumstances in which the funds were being used to benefit the owner of the fund; the number of persons who have had welfare benefits or cut-off due to the funds held on their behalf; the way in which the fund is used for end of life care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52292/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The legal framework for patients' private property accounts is provided for under section 9 of the Health (Repayment Scheme) Act 2006. Section 18 (3) of that Act provides that the Comptroller and Auditor General is entitled to audit these accounts.

As the other matters raised by the Deputy relate to service issues this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply in relation to those matters.

Hospital Appointments Status

174. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an operation will be arranged at WUH for a person (details supplied); if the matter will be expedited; and the reason the person has had to wait for nine years. [52294/18]

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, since 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 the Deputy directly.

Health Reports

175. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the resolution of the issue concerning women who had vaginal mesh implants; and when progress will be made on same. [52300/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health, I requested Dr Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to draft a report on the use of Uro-Gynaecological in the surgical treatment of stress urinary incontinence (SUI) and pelvic organ prolapse (POP) in women. The report covers the clinical and technical issues involved in ensuring both:

1. the safe and effective provision of mesh procedures in urogynaecology and
2. an appropriate response to women who suffer complications as a result of undergoing such procedures.

This report has now been completed and was published on the Department of Health website on 21 November 2018.

Synthetic mesh devices have been widely used in the surgical treatment of SUI and POP in women over the past two decades. However, controversy about the safety of mesh devices has arisen in many countries because of concerns about the frequency and severity of complications associated with their use.

Preparation of the report has involved consultation and engagement with national and international bodies. The report has been informed by review of international reports and safety reviews of mesh surgery which have been published in recent years. The report has also been informed by the personal experiences of women who have suffered complications following mesh surgery.

I acknowledge the bravery, commitment and dignity shown, by the women he met and by those women who have written to him concerning this issue, in sharing what were harrowing, deeply personal experiences.

The Report identifies that for many women, surgical procedures using synthetic mesh devices have provided a more effective and less invasive form of treatment than traditional SUI and POP procedures. However, mesh devices are associated with significant and severe complications in a minority of women. These are of concern given the difficulties of mesh implant removal.

The Report makes 19 recommendations including:

- the development of patient information and informed consent materials;

- surgical professional training and multidisciplinary expertise in units carrying out mesh procedures;
- the development of clinical guidance;
- the development of information systems to monitor the ongoing use of mesh devices;
- ensuring the reporting of mesh related complications; and
- ensuring timely, appropriate and accessible care pathways for the management of women with complications.

The HSE was also asked by the Chief Medical Officer on 24 July to pause all mesh procedures where clinically safe to do so, until a number of key recommendations are implemented.

Following the publication of the report, the Department wrote to the HSE to request that it prepare a detailed Implementation Plan for the complete set of recommendations set out in the CMO's Report, working in conjunction with other stakeholders.

The HSE has published a dedicated webpage about vaginal mesh implants, including contact information for women suffering complications, which I hope is a useful resource. This can be found at:

hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/woman-infants/vaginal-mesh-implants/vaginal-mesh-implants.html

Question No. 176 answered with Question No. 158.

Hospital Groups

177. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the reason Letterkenny University Hospital is not included in the priority list of hospitals in the 2018 winter plan proposals of the HSE and his Department; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that LUH had full capacity protocols exercised on 87% in 2018 to date which is one of the highest nationally; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the hospital is at crises level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52307/18]

178. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the extra resources and provision he plans to make available for Letterkenny University Hospital to deal with the impending increase of numbers which will avail of the hospital services between December 2018 and the end of February 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52308/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 and 178 together.

My Department has engaged extensively with the HSE throughout the year to ensure the most effective response to the challenges faced by the health service this winter.

As part of this process, integrated Winter Preparedness Plans have been developed by Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations to meet the anticipated surge in demand for healthcare services during the winter months. The Plans are designed to optimise existing resources and encompass:

- planning and escalation;

- operational management of patient flow; and
- maintaining public health.

The Winter Plan, which runs until the 31 of March 2019, includes a four-week period of focused action from 17 December to the 13 of January. During this period, 9 key hospital sites of concern which were identified on the basis of pressures experienced in previous winters, will be targeted with a suite of enhanced actions including:

- Extended opening hours for Local Injury Units, Minor Injury Units and key Primary Centres;
- ‘Winter Ready’ clinics in the Community targeting at-risk groups;
- Increased diagnostic access for GPs and extending hours of service in hospitals;
- Enhanced Senior Decision-Making across the Hospital.

Furthermore, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) will be providing support to the Winter Plan, including the provision of diagnostics and hospital treatment for patients. This support will commence on 10 December and continue until the end of January 2019. The NTPF support will be made available for patients presenting at the 9 “key sites of concern” identified by the HSE, as well as 5 additional sites, including Letterkenny University Hospital.

A central component of the Plan which is already underway, is the provision of an additional 550 home care packages over the winter period, to help patients return home from hospital with the supports they need.

Increasing capacity is a key priority for this Government. The Winter Plan will also seek to increase bed capacity in Q1 2019, with an additional 75 acute beds nationally, including 5 additional acute beds in Letterkenny University Hospital. Over the past 12 months, an additional 240 beds have been opened and work is nearing completion on a further 78 beds which are due to open in 2019. In addition to Winter funding, €10 million is being made available in 2019 to increase acute bed capacity. Further details will be included in the National Service Plan 2019. Taken together, these initiatives will increase the number of available in-patient beds in the acute hospital system to over 11,000, a threshold last seen in 2009.

In relation to the particular query raised about the provision of extra resources to Letterkenny University Hospital, and the rationale for the selection of the key sites of concern, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Disabilities Assessments

179. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when an autism assessment report will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52314/18]

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.

Social Welfare Benefits

180. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the financial supports available for non-medical costs for families of sick children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52320/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department of Health has no role in the provision of non-medical financial supports.

You may wish to contact my colleague Minister Regina Doherty T.D., as assistance may be available through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection's (DEASP) which operates a number of schemes including exceptional needs payments, through designated persons, formerly known as Community Welfare Officers (CWOs).

Hospital Appointments Status

181. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled. [52325/18]

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, since 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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

182. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if an orthopaedic consultant appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52327/18]

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.

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

Medical Card Eligibility

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card has been withdrawn in the case of a person (details supplied); if a decision to cancel their card will be reviewed with a view to reinstatement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52335/18]

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

Hospital Equipment

184. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the cost of hiring a machine from the UK for Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, for a procedure (details supplied); the number of times it is hired in a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52351/18]

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

Stroke Care

185. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the support services available to stroke survivors in the community in each of the CHO areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52361/18]

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.

Stroke Care

186. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated to support services for stroke survivors in the community in each of the CHO areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52362/18]

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.

Obesity Strategy

187. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the frequency with which the obesity policy implementation oversight group has met since its establishment; the dates of these meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52363/18]

188. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the establishment of a monitoring body to monitor voluntary codes of practice (details supplied); the timeline for same in view of the fact that the codes will be one year old in February 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52364/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 187 and 188 together.

An Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) has been established under the Chair of the Department of Health. It is comprised of representatives from the following Departments and Agencies: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Department of Children and Youth Affairs; Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; Department of Education and Skills; Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government; University College Cork; the Food Safety Authority of Ireland; the Health Service Executive (HSE) - including the National Clinical Lead for Obesity; and Safefood.

The OPIOG held its inaugural meeting on the 19th of October, 2017 when it agreed to establish two sub-groups for Reformulation and Healthy Eating. Both sub-groups have met on a number of occasions since being established.

Further meetings of the OPIOG were arranged for 28 February 2018; 24 May 2018 and 23 October 2018 for the purposes of providing oversight to the implementation of the national Obesity Policy & Action Plan (OPAP).

Under the umbrella of the OPIOG, work is continuing on the development of the monitoring mechanism for the Codes of Practice on the Marketing and Advertising of Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages; and at the same time, the Department of Health focus in this area has also been on progressing the development of Guidelines for the practical interpretation and application of these codes and I expect this process to be facilitated in the near future. Furthermore, my Department has engaged with industry representation on initiating a register of signatories to the Codes of Practice.

Nursing Staff Provision

189. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of an advanced nurse practitioner rheumatology post at UHK as promised in December 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52392/18]

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

Health Services Provision

190. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason women are being refused a scan (details supplied) in view of the fact that the RCSI hospital group has said that it is available to all women that request it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52403/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the

HSE to reply to you directly.

Medical Products Supply

191. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will receive the medication they need for their condition. [52408/18]

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 that regard as the concerns raised relate to service matters, I have arranged for your correspondence to be referred to the HSE for consideration and direct reply to you.

Hospital Services

192. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if the charges of €80 per visit capped at up to €800 per year in certain venesection clinics including Louth hospital will be overturned and the treatment made available for free to persons who cannot access medical cards and cannot afford private health insurance; if this has been reviewed; if a decision has been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52465/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are eligible, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services. The current public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €80 per day, subject to a maximum of €800 in any period of 12 consecutive months. All persons accessing public in-patient services, including day case services, in a public hospital are liable for the statutory public-inpatient charges, subject to a number of exemptions, including where a person is a medical cardholder.

There are currently no plans to exempt further categories of patients from the public in-patient charge.

Medical Products

193. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will order a review of the regulation of the medical devices sector following the recent international investigation by journalists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52480/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Concerns around the safety and certification of various medical devices have been raised by “The Implant Files”, an article published in the Irish Times on 26 November 2018.

Medical devices in Europe are currently regulated by legislation which is in place since the early 1990s. Under this system of regulation, devices are assessed and certified by a notified body. These notified bodies (in Ireland the National Standards Authority of Ireland, NSAI) are designated and overseen at each national level by the regulatory authority, in Ireland the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA). The HPRA’s primary roles in relation to medical de-

vices are the market surveillance/vigilance of medical devices once they are on the market and the designation and the designation and oversight of the notified body.

Negotiations on new EU-wide regulations of medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices were formally agreed for implementation by the EU Parliament and Council in May 2017. The new regulations will be implemented in 2020 and 2022 respectively.

The new Regulations represent a significant development and enhancement of the existing legislation; they build on existing principles to strengthen the regulatory framework, make it more effective and more harmonised in its implementation. These Regulations ultimately provide a secure, consistent regulatory framework which will enhance public health in Ireland and across the EU as a whole, by ensuring that medical devices available on the market are safe, perform and afford benefits to patients and to healthcare systems.

Furthermore, in 2013 the Commission launched a joint action plan (referred to as the Dalli Action Plan). The Plan contains concerted actions to: improve the functioning of the notified bodies system and their oversight within the EU; enhance market surveillance activities; and to improve coordination, communication and transparency. Since then enhanced oversight of notified bodies has been achieved through joint assessment of these notified bodies by Member States and the Commission. Joint assessments have contributed to an improved and harmonised regulatory oversight of notified bodies across Europe.

While it is acknowledged that there are risks associated with any medical intervention, the potential benefits of medical devices for many patients, often with critical or long-term illness, means they will continue to play a vital and necessary role in the wider health service.

Parliamentary Questions Data

194. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52233/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has processed the following number of PQs in 2016, 2017 and up to end November 2018:

Year	Oral	Written
2016	56	2515
2017	63	2475
2018 (to end Nov)	57	2607

Two members of staff in my Private Office are responsible for assigning and processing Parliamentary Questions. Parliamentary Questions are assigned to the particular Division(s) of my Department dealing with the subject matter(s) and replies are prepared as part of the normal work of that Division. The number and level of staff and the time spent on preparing an individual answer depends on the complexity of the issue raised, the form in which the information exists and is requested, and whether an oral or written reply is required.

Replies to Parliamentary Questions are submitted by the Secretary General's office to my office for final approval. No public affairs or public relations companies have composed Parliamentary Question replies or had an act or hand in forming Parliamentary Question replies on my behalf.

In relation to the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of my Department for direct reply, there is no central register held recording the number of questions referred for direct reply. My Department requests that Parliamentary Questions referred to State Bodies should be responded to directly to the Deputy within 10 working days.

Fisheries Protection

195. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding pair trawling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52273/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Sprat is a short-lived species and an important prey fish for many marine species therefore it is a vital species to the ocean food chain as well as an important source of income for inshore fishermen.

Sprat in Irish waters is not a species subject to fishing quotas or Total Allowable Catches established under EU regulation. Scientifically, relatively little is known about the sprat species. The International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) considers sprat to be a data limited stock which means that more detailed data is required in order to form a full understanding of the state of the stock.

Available scientific information is that sprat in Ireland spawn from January to June with a fishery normally taking place from October to Christmas. This is a fortuitous situation, allowing some degree of reproductive output as the fishery takes place after the fish have been able to spawn.

The Marine Institute, in cooperation with the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, have participated in a three-year research project which was partially funded by Industry, in order to address the lack of accurate information in respect of the sprat stocks in waters around Ireland. The aim of this project was to develop an accurate and detailed understanding of the stock structure of sprat around Ireland and the data collected will also contribute to the ICES assessment of the vulnerability or otherwise of sprat in the waters around Ireland. This project commenced in 2015 and is due to be completed in 2019.

In addition to this research project, the Marine Institute, in close cooperation with Industry, participated in a number of observer trips in the sprat fishery in 2017 and 2018, the purpose of which was twofold:

- To obtain biological information on the resource itself and on any other fishery by-catch, i.e. herring, juvenile mackerel, etc.

- To obtain information on any by-catch this fishery might have of protected, endangered and threatened species, under the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF) marine biodiversity scheme such as marine mammals, seabirds and listed fish species.

A risk assessment of fisheries interactions in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) including for Harbour Seals in Kenmare Bay by the Marine Institute, noted that the risk posed by pelagic fishing on harbour seals through by-catch and disturbance of haul out locations was low.

The Observer programme greatly increased the number of trips on board vessels fishing Sprat from about 2 trips per season to 15 trips in 2017. In 2018, sampling effort (7 trips) was focused on the south coast as the northwest had been well covered the previous year. Bycatch information from these data is preliminary and will be analysed once sufficient sampling over area and season has been achieved. The reason for fewer observer trips in 2018 is that the programme was concentrated in the South west where trips are logistically more difficult due to greater diversity of vessels and ports as well as longer trips.

A public consultation process to examine the arrangements for trawling inside the six nautical mile zone and inside the baselines ended on 11 June 2018.

Over 900 responses were received in relation to the public consultation and these have been carefully examined. Taking into account the submissions received and having undertaken further analysis I plan to announce my decision relating to any possible measures shortly.

Teagasc Courses

196. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if cases have been brought to his attention regarding outstanding green certificates to be issued by certification operators to persons who have successfully completed the certificate and passed in 2018; the number of such cases his attention has been drawn to date in 2018; and if he will permit persons who have successfully passed the exams in 2018 and that are still waiting on certificates to be issued by operators to be eligible to qualify and receive 2018 payments under the national reserve, young farmers scheme and BPS in view of the fact that the issuing of certificates is beyond their control. [52405/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Green Cert programme is delivered by Teagasc and accredited by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) an independent State agency, operating under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science, and responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. The date of issue of QQI certifications is a matter for QQI and neither Teagasc nor my Department has any input into the matter.

Applicants to the 2018 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme were required to have successfully completed a recognised course of education in agriculture giving rise to a QQI award at Level 6 or its equivalent by the 15 May 2018. The Teagasc Green Cert programme meets the education requirements of the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme.

Where delays arise in issuing formal certifications, education providers can furnish applicants with a "Pending Certification" letter, which is accepted by my Department with a copy of the results for the purpose of processing applications under the National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme.

Fisheries Protection

197. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the ongoing pair trawling for sprat in estuaries and bays in view of the concern of conservation organisations and persons; and the way in which he plans to remedy this practice. [52410/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Sprat is a

short-lived species and an important prey fish for many marine species therefore it is a vital species to the ocean food chain as well as an important source of income for inshore fishermen.

Sprat in Irish waters is not a species subject to fishing quotas or Total Allowable Catches established under EU regulation. Scientifically, relatively little is known about the sprat species. The International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) considers sprat to be a data limited stock which means that more detailed data is required in order to form a full understanding of the state of the stock.

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- To obtain biological information on the resource itself and on any other fishery by-catch, i.e. herring, juvenile mackerel, etc.

- To obtain information on any by-catch this fishery might have of protected, endangered and threatened species, under the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF) marine biodiversity scheme such as marine mammals, seabirds and listed fish species.

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A public consultation process to examine the arrangements for trawling inside the six nautical mile zone and inside the baselines ended on 11 June 2018.

Over 900 responses were received in relation to the public consultation and these have been carefully examined. Taking into account the submissions received and having undertaken further analysis I plan to announce my decision relating to any possible measures shortly.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

198. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will receive payment under the beef genomics scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52434/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in the Beef Data and Genomic Program (BDGP). Payments under the 2018 BDGP scheme, including to the person named, are scheduled to commence mid-December 2018.

Fish Quotas

199. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he plans to prevent the closure of all other fisheries in view of the zero TAC that has been advised for cod and whiting in area 6A and the fact that the landing obligation is coming into effect from 1 January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52446/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): While there was a zero TAC advice from ICES for cod and whiting in Area 6a, that is not the proposal on the table from the Commission. The Commission has proposed a “Union TAC” for these two stocks - 1461 tonnes for cod and 937 tonnes for whiting. These TAC’s are intended to cover by catches in targeted fisheries only and no directed fishing for these two species would be allowed. The Commission’s rationale for setting a limited TAC is to support targeted fisheries and avoid closure arising from insufficient quota for unavoidable by catches of cod and whiting. I fully support this rationale.

I do not support, however, the proposal that Member States will not receive their quota shares for these two stocks, and three others of relevance to Ireland, in the normal way (relative stability shares). I am very concerned about this potential aspect of the Commission proposal as it is likely to create more issues than it solves. Ireland is working closely with other relevant Member States to provide that a TAC is set and allocated in accordance with relative stability. Our objective is that key commercial fisheries are not closed early due to a ‘choke’ situation.

Fish Quotas

200. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he will ensure the economic sustainability of the fishing fleet in view of some of the proposed reductions in key stocks, for example, 32% in nephrops and other stocks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52447/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The annual TAC and Quota negotiations are always a challenge and this year will be no different. While the process for deciding TAC levels concludes in December, our preparation begins much earlier. My aim in all of these negotiations is always, in consultation with the stakeholders, to ensure that we have a profitable and sustainable fishing industry that will continue to benefit our coastal communities.

I share the deputies concern about a number of the proposals including Nephrops, our second most important stock. I am always conscious of the immediate impacts the decisions taken at the December Fisheries Council have for so many communities around our coast. This is why I believe the advance preparation should be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible involv-

ing my own Department as well as Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Marine Institute, all industry representatives and the Environmental Pillar. As part of this, I launched a public consultation as part of our Sustainability Impact Assessment, which went before the Oireachtas. This process is invaluable and helps me identify the key areas of concern.

Discussions have also taken place with many parties on issues in relation to December Council. There are high level meetings with the Commission, the Presidency and other Member States as part of the preparation for the December Fisheries Council and a number of important technical meetings. I also engaged with a number of my Ministerial colleagues at Agriculture & Fisheries Council in November. These meetings help me to understand the priorities of other Member States and also gauge where Ireland can build relationships to help us deliver our priorities at the December Council.

I endeavour to ensure that I am comprehensively prepared for all potential issues discussed at December Council. Where cuts are proposed we must ensure that they are justified by the scientific advice and that the advice from ICES is being applied correctly by the Commission and in a fair and consistent manner.

I can assure the Deputy that Ireland is well prepared and I will do my utmost to ensure that the final outcome is one that is good for the industry and the long term sustainability of the stocks.

Parliamentary Questions Data

201. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52236/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): There were 4,809 PQs processed by my Department in the last three years. My office does not maintain a record as to whether a question was answered directly or whether it was referred to an agency for answer directly to a Deputy. Where a question is referred to an agency, this is stated in the reply, and the agency is expected to respond to the Deputy within 10 days as per Standing Orders. Where appropriate, input is sought from the relevant body or agency in the preparation of replies.

Two persons in my Private Office are assigned to process questions.

Officials in my Department prepare a draft reply which is then submitted to my office for approval.

Public relations companies are not involved in the preparation of replies to Parliamentary Questions.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

202. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment if he will report on the planned industrial terminal on the Shannon Estuary; the way in which this planning fits with the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act 2018 recently passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52310/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Mitigation Plan, published in July 2017, restates the Government's commitment to move from a fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system. Investment in further renewable generation will be incentivised. The new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme, approved by government in July 2018, will provide for a renewable electricity ambition of 55% by 2030. Currently, 30% of our electricity is generated from renewables.

I have secured Government approval to develop an all of Government plan which will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. This Plan will include the steps which we must take in order to reach this target. I will work with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives across electricity, transport and heat, as well as a range of other sectors.

In all projected transitions to a low carbon economy by 2050, gas will continue to play a role. It plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the power generation, industrial and commercial, residential and transport sectors by replacing more Co2-intensive fossil fuels. In Ireland gas powered generation also provides an important back-up for intermittent renewable wind generation.

So while gas usage will reduce significantly in the years ahead, Ireland will still need secure sources of gas. At present this is provided by both gas piped on shore from Irish gas fields and imports through gas pipelines from the UK.

The development of an LNG facility could further enhance Ireland's gas security of supply by increasing import route diversity and would be compatible with the State's commitments to tackle climate change.

Ireland's energy policy is fully aligned with the EU's climate and energy objectives on the transition to decarbonisation, which includes continuous and on-going review of policies to reduce harmful emissions, improve energy efficiency, incentivise efficient and sustainable infrastructure investment, integrate markets, and promote research and innovation while ensuring our energy security of supply is maintained and enhanced.

The project to which the Deputy refers is a private commercial project. Final investment decisions for the project and compliance with any legal and regulatory requirements in relation to consents or permits are the responsibility of the project promoter.

In relation to the production, sourcing, buying and selling of natural gas produced outside this jurisdiction, this is an operational matter for the undertakings involved. Any undertaking would be required to comply with EU law in this area.

Illegal Dumping

203. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address the issue of illegal dumping nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52332/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Illegal dumping is first and foremost a matter of individual responsibility and com-

pliance with the law. While enforcement action in this area is a matter for local authorities, my Department encourages a multi-faceted approach to tackling the problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education and, as such, provides funding to support the activities of the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities of approximately €1 million per annum and of the network of local authority waste enforcement officers of approximately €7.4 million per annum. In addition, my Department has developed the Anti-Dumping Initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. Since 2017 funding of €3.3 million has been made available from the Environment Fund in this regard which has supported over 400 projects across all 31 local authority areas, remediating black spots and equipping local authority enforcement officers with the latest technologies available to support SMART enforcement of our waste laws.

A review of this initiative is underway which will inform a 2019 anti-dumping work programme that will place an increased emphasis on all actors who facilitate the unauthorised movement and disposal of waste.

EU Directives

204. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the ongoing review of the audiovisual media services directive; the action or research he is undertaking; if and when a consultation process will commence with stakeholders on transposition of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52366/18]

205. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of the national regulatory authority to be appointed which will monitor and ensure that video sharing platforms have appropriate measures in place as part of the audiovisual media service directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52367/18]

206. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether it is appropriate for an authority which has not yet been formally appointed to seek meetings with industry and social media companies that will fall under the scope of the new audiovisual media service directive (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52368/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 to 206, inclusive, together.

The current Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) was codified in 2010 and contains rules and requirements that form the minimum standards that Television Broadcasting Services and On-demand Audiovisual Media Services such as the RTÉ Player or the iTunes Store, must follow in the EU. The provisions of the current Directive are reflected in Irish law in the Broadcasting Act 2009 and related statutory instruments.

In May 2016 the European Commission published a proposed revision of the AVMS Directive. The proposal was designed to update the rules and requirements in the AVMSD to reflect the rapid changes that the video media market was and is experiencing. One part of the proposal concerned new rules and requirements, separate to those existing for Television Broadcasting Services and On-demand Audiovisual Media Services, for Video Sharing Platform Services, for example YouTube and Dailymotion.

The text of the revised Directive has been adopted by the EU and was officially published on 27 November 2018. Following a 20 day standstill period the revised Directive will enter into

force and Ireland will then have 21 months to implement the provisions of the revised Directive. The deadline by which Ireland must implement the provisions is 19 September 2020.

Ireland is committed to ensuring that the provisions of the revised Directive are implemented in Ireland in a robust and effective manner and my Department has been carrying out preparatory work in relation to this matter since late 2017. Given that the final text has now been published, and the challenging legislative timeline involved, as a first step it is intended that a public consultation will commence shortly to gather the views and suggestions of stakeholders on how Ireland should approach the implementation of the provisions of the revised Directive, including the issue of a national regulatory authority in respect of Video Sharing Platform Services.

On the specific question regarding meetings held by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, I have no role in the Authority's day to day operations given that it is a statutorily independent body.

Consultancy Contracts Data

207. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent on outside consultancy fees to date for advices since the initial announcement of the national broadband plan. [52401/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan procurement team is supported by a range of expert consultants. The following table sets out annual expenditure on external advisers under the NBP from the date of their engagement. Total cost to date for NBP advisers since 2013 is €22,380,943 (inclusive of VAT). NBP Payments to Consultants by Year

Year	Cost
2013	€323,491.23
2014	€538,541.69
2015	€2,874,888.91
2016	€2,306,365.91
2017	€9,920,423.32
2018	€6,417,232.21
TOTAL	€22,380,943.27

All figures include VAT

Energy Schemes

208. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce a grant for the installation of stoves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52466/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government funds a number of energy efficiency grants for homes which are operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. The grants promote a fabric first approach – advising people to first reduce heat losses by installing insulation and ventilation, making it easier to keep a home warmer and more comfortable for longer periods, before mov-

ing to installation of new or renewable heating systems. The individual measures that are currently funded were selected for inclusion as they were deemed most likely to deliver significant energy savings to homeowners, at least relative cost, and would thereby optimise the use of Exchequer funds while at the same time maximising the opportunities for homeowner participation.

I am aware that an increase in the use of stoves for home heating can be a cause of increased air pollution, particularly where such stoves replace cleaner, less air polluting fuels such as gas. Any increase in air pollution is a concern given its public health impacts.

That is why installation of wood burning stoves can only be funded as part of a deeper energy efficiency upgrade – achieving an A3 Building Energy Rating - via the Deep Retrofit Programme or the Better Energy Communities scheme. Stoves installed must meet certain requirements; the specification is available on SEAI's website.

In addition, the Energy Efficiency Obligation requires all energy suppliers above a certain threshold to work with their customers to deliver energy savings. The replacement of an open fire with a solid fuel, biomass or gas fired room heater can save homeowners money and is an eligible measure under this scheme. Some suppliers offer their customers rebates for replacing open fires in their homes. If a customer would like to pursue this option they will need to contact their energy supplier directly or they can obtain more information from the SEAI.

Parliamentary Questions Data

209. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52249/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information sought by the Deputy is voluminous in nature and will take time to collate. Accordingly, a full reply to this PQ will issue within 10 working days.

Road Network

210. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be considered for the extension of the M3 motorway to Cavan town and the east west link which are urgently needed in the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52250/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

The National Development Plan (NDP), which has been developed by Government to un-

derpin the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework, provides the strategic and financial framework for TII's national roads programme for the period 2018 to 2027.

The N3 Virginia Bypass scheme is included amongst a number of major national road schemes that were identified for development during the period of the plan. In that context, when my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, provides capital funding to TII for the implementation of the NDP, TII's function is to then deliver on an integrated approach to the future development and operation of the national roads network throughout Ireland. Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a detailed and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

In relation to the East-West link, proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo.

As regards the regional road aspect of the proposal the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design.

This year I gave an allocation to Cavan County Council to enable the Council to undertake a preliminary appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Investment Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the route. The aim of this appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for development post 2021. Preparation of the appraisal is the responsibility of the Council.

Bus Services

211. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has investigated the use of articulated buses to provide bus services in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52254/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including bus fleet acquisition.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Public Transport Initiatives

212. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided to Dublin Bus in order to provide off-vehicle ticketing services on buses. [52255/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including ticketing and technology.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Bus Services

213. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department will facilitate Dublin Bus in providing staged or abridged versions of certain services in which capacity is preventing passengers from boarding services at later points in the service. [52256/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Dublin Bus and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Services

214. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that certain routes in the proposed BusConnects network include frequent stops, that is, stops placed at a minimal distance from each other and may prevent services from being delivered in an effective manner. [52257/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including BusConnects.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Bus Services

215. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will reinstate the Sligo town bus service to a location (details supplied) to facilitate a park and ride service for the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52275/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a

matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with Bus Éireann, and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

216. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the recent round of sports capital grants results will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52284/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications are for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that were allowed to resubmitted corrected documents this year. These applications are being assessed first and I hope to make allocations to this category of application early in 2019.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of next year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

217. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when successful candidates (details supplied) will be notified; and the status of same. [52319/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications are for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that were allowed to resubmitted corrected documents this year. These applications are being assessed first and I hope to make allocations to this category of application early in 2019.

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Bus Services

218. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to customer complaints (details supplied) regarding public transport services; the way in which, or if, the NTA is monitoring these services for punctuality and or reliability; if ongoing issues with same will result in financial and or other penalties for the operator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52349/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Olympic Games

219. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the recent decision by an organisation (details supplied) to suspend the boxing competition at the 2020 Olympics; and if he has made representations on the matter. [52358/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I am aware of the recent announcement by the IOC - the International Olympic Committee - to suspend planning for the Olympic boxing tournament at Tokyo 2020. This announcement was accompanied by a statement of the IOC's intention to initiate a full inquiry into the internal governance arrangements of the International Boxing Association (AIBA). At the present time, it is my understanding that the IOC has not yet made a final decision in relation to the inclusion of boxing at the 2020 Olympics.

It is important to clarify that International Sport Organisations, such as the IOC, are independent, autonomous bodies that are responsible for deciding their own operational procedures and competition rules. No Government has a role or function in such decision making.

I am deeply concerned by the potentially adverse consequences of this emerging situation for our athletes within Ireland's high performance boxing programme and in their preparations for Tokyo 2020. It is crucial that these athletes do not suffer and that their Olympic ambitions are protected. I welcome the positive commitment of both Sport Ireland and the Irish Athletic Boxing Association (IABA), with whom I have been in contact, to address this situation. Sport Ireland and the IABA are continuing to work collaboratively in preparing our Irish boxers for Tokyo 2020 and I will continue to monitor this situation closely.

Anti-Social Behaviour

220. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of anti-social behaviour incidents that have been reported on Luas lines to date in 2018. [52391/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The safety and security of passengers and staff including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour on the Luas is a matter for the transport operator (Transdev) in conjunction with, as appropriate, An Garda Síochána.

I have forwarded the Deputy's question to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), who have

contracted Transdev to operate Luas, for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Brexit Issues

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department is making provision for the eventuality of Brexit with particular reference to its implications for air and sea travel in view of the necessity to ensure easy travel access to continental Europe for Irish persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52453/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit and its potential implications for Ireland are being managed on a whole-of-government basis. The Department is represented on all relevant cross-Departmental coordination structures, and an internal Departmental Committee on Brexit meets on a monthly basis to oversee the Department's analyses and planning in the areas of aviation and maritime transport, and tourism.

Contingency planning in relation to Brexit at both a national and an EU level is focused on preparing for two scenarios - a no-deal scenario or "disorderly Brexit" and on a central case scenario, involving a transition period and agreement on the future relationship.

Access to and from Ireland is wholly dependent on our maritime and aviation networks. Any disruption to current access arrangements would have major implications for Irish businesses and for the overall economy. However, I do not envisage any major changes for people travelling from Ireland directly to continental Europe by air or by sea when the UK has left the EU.

For persons travelling to continental Europe via the UK, the European Commission's Contingency Action Plan, published last month, outlines that it plans to propose measures to ensure that disruption to air travel between the UK and the EU will be minimised in the event of a disorderly UK exit from the EU, subject to reciprocity. This will provide assurance to those travelling by air between the EU and UK in such a scenario. Ferry services will continue to operate between Ireland and the UK following Brexit, including in a disorderly Brexit scenario, and the Government is working on contingency plans to ensure that any potential delays in ports as a result of additional checks on UK goods being carried by ferry are minimised.

The Draft Political Declaration setting out the Framework for the Future Relationship between the EU and the UK published recently foresees a comprehensive partnership between the EU and the UK across a range of areas of importance to Ireland, including air transport.

Recreational Facilities Provision

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his future plans for investment in recreational infrastructure such as swimming pools, community centres and other sporting facilities; the extent to which he has identified a budget in this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52454/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country. Under the 2017 round of the programme €62m was allocated to 1,837 sporting projects and my officials continue to assist these grantees in completing their projects and draw

down their grants.

Sanction was received earlier this year from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to open a new round of the Programme with allocations of up to €40m. This new round opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of next year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced. Sufficient resources are available next year to cover all existing commitments under the programme in addition to the new allocations of €40m.

With regard to swimming pools, the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP), as operated by my Department, provides grant aid to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools. To date 51 pools have been completed and four swimming pool projects remain in the current LASPP. The priority next year will be on advancing these four projects and sufficient resources are available to cover these commitments.

In relation to the future funding of swimming pools and other larger projects, the National Development Plan confirmed the establishment of a new Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) with at least €100m available over the coming years. The new scheme opened for applications on 19th November and the closing date for applications is the 17th April 2019. Full details of the scheme and application forms are available on my Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/large-scale-sport-infrastructure-fund-ssif>. The aim of the fund is to provide Exchequer support for larger sports facility projects where the Exchequer investment would be greater than the maximum amount available under the SCP. Initially, the scheme has a particular focus on National Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Authorities. New swimming pool projects will also be considered.

Rural Transport Services

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department has continued to evaluate rural transport requirements with a view to bringing transport to persons rather than forcing persons to converge on towns and villages as the population increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52455/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

As I advised the Deputy in response to his identical Question on 06 November, 2018 (ref no 45347/18) the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) which now operates under the Local Link brand.

Noting this, I forwarded the Deputy's previous Question to the NTA for direct reply. I am advised that the NTA replied to the Deputy on 06 November last.

Transport Policy

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department continues to evaluate the transport system, road and rail, public and private to ensure the development of efficient and effective transport in all areas throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52456/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, earlier this year Government launched Project Ireland 2040 which sets out both the planned spatial development and investment framework for the coming years.

Within that framework, Government has committed to major investments in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the transport network. These investments reflect the needs which have been identified by my Department and its various agencies, during the development of Project Ireland 2040.

The investment committed to within the National Development Plan will result in the delivery of a number of significant projects and programmes, such as -

- The BusConnects programme of improved bus services and infrastructure in all major cities, including significantly enhanced cycling facilities also;
- The MetroLink; and
- The DART Expansion programme.

Those projects and programmes will be complemented by other planned investments, such as the significantly enhanced funding allocated toward the heavy rail network nationally, the development of a new National Train Control Centre, the roll-out of strategic cycle networks in the major cities and a programme of investment in national and regional roads as detailed within the National Development Plan.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that my Department is currently conducting two further pieces of analyses -

1. a review of public transport policy, as committed under the Programme for a Partnership Government; and
2. the Planning Land Use and Transport - Outlook 2040 (or PLUTO 2040) study, which forms part of my Department's response to Project Ireland 2040.

Both of these work-streams will be subject to public consultation in 2019 and will be a very useful addition to our evaluation of the transport needs of the country.

In addition to this Department-led work, each of the three regional assemblies is currently developing a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy to support delivery of the National Planning Framework. Development of these strategies includes an evaluation of the needs of the transport network in each region and outlining potential developments to improve performance.

Finally, at a metropolitan level there are transport strategies either in place, as in the case of Dublin and Galway, or under development, as in the case of Cork and Limerick, which detail the planned development of transport networks in the relevant urban areas over the next 20 to 30 years.

As the Deputy can see, a significant amount of analysis has been completed, and is continuing, in order to ensure we plan appropriately for the delivery of the transport infrastructure and

services required in the coming years.

Transport Policy

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which commuter rail services are available to the majority of towns and villages throughout the country, the residents of which may commute to larger centres with obvious greater job opportunities on a daily basis; if the existing services are adequately tailored to meet their needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52457/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Tourism Industry

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the full extent of growth within the tourism sector with particular reference to the number of persons employed; the scope for further development resulting in employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52458/18]

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the areas in the tourism sector that have shown the greatest potential for future development and expansion both internally and externally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52461/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 226 and 229 together.

There has been significant growth in tourism in recent years with 2018 expected to be another record breaking year for the sector in Ireland.

In 2014, prior to the publication of the Government's national tourism policy "People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025", Fáilte Ireland estimated total revenue generated by tourism at €6.85bn. By 2017, this figure had grown by 29% to €8.84bn. The main driver in this significant increase is the growth in overseas tourism revenue from €3.6bn in 2014 to over €4.9bn in 2017. All of our main overseas markets experienced growth over the period with North America and Mainland Europe performing particularly well. There seems little doubt at this stage that 2018 will see further growth in revenue from overseas visitors and tourism overall.

All parts of Ireland have seen the benefits of this growth in tourism and it is one of our largest indigenous industries and a vital employer in the regions. It is deeply rooted in the fabric of Irish society, with Fáilte Ireland estimating that tourism now supports approximately 260,000 jobs across the economy, compared to 205,000 in 2014.

While the industry has gone from strength to strength in recent years, there is always scope for development and expansion on a sustainable basis. In terms of our tourism offering, the main areas with very strong potential for future development and expansion are Attractions, Activities, Festivals and Business Tourism. Fáilte Ireland is focussing its efforts on two key areas - 'Experience Development' and the promotion of its brands of scale and singularity – Wild

Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East, Dublin, its newest brand Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Meet in Ireland – the business tourism brand. These brands are designed to differentiate Ireland in a very competitive international marketplace.

Tourism Ireland undertakes marketing campaigns in more than 20 overseas markets with priority markets being Mainland Europe, North America, Britain and fast-growing Emerging Markets such as China. It has recently carried out strategic market reviews in conjunction with island of Ireland industry partners and sister agencies, for the Emerging Markets, USA and Germany. I have allocated increased funding to the agency in 2019 to commence implementation of these market strategies. This will help us to continue to grow overseas tourism in a targeted manner over the coming years.

Overall, therefore, the tourism sector is well placed for further development. I will shortly publish a Tourism Action Plan for the period 2019-2021 which will set out a number of actions to enable the sector to grow in a sustainable manner, with a particular emphasis on regional performance and seasonality, which will result in further job creation in all parts of Ireland.

Public Transport

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which bus and rail services are fully utilised and are in fact tailored to meet the requirements of the travelling or commuting public with particular reference to the need to ensure that the services are convenient to passenger requirements thereby enhancing viability and efficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52459/18]

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which rail and bus services in County Kildare are co-ordinated in such a way as to meet in full the requirements of the commuters in the various towns and villages throughout the country; the extent to which his Department continues to be appraised in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52464/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 and 232 together.

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with the relevant transport providers, and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Events

228. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department continues to liaise with the various sporting organisations with a view to facilitating the use of Ireland as a venue for worldwide competitions in sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52460/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The hosting of major sports competitions, both participative and spectator sports, can provide great opportunities to showcase Ireland and drive international visitor numbers. In addition, the media coverage of sports events helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination.

Accordingly, I am very supportive of the work of the tourism agencies and the national governing bodies of sport to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs and benefits involved in any State financial support, in particular the number of overseas visitors.

Fáilte Ireland provides financial assistance, subject to eligibility criteria, to applicants who are proposing to bid to host international events (including sporting events) in Ireland that would attract significant numbers of international visitors. When an event with international tourism appeal is confirmed for Ireland, Tourism Ireland would then promote it in relevant markets overseas.

In terms of forthcoming sporting events, Ireland will host four games as part of the UEFA EURO 2020 football tournament in June 2020 - three group games and one round of 16 game. The bid to host was a collaborative effort between the Football Association of Ireland, Dublin City Council and my Department. Depending on qualification, up to 160,000 overseas visitors may attend Euro 2020 matches in Dublin. Ireland will also host the UEFA European Under 17 Championships in 2019.

Minister Ross and I also support efforts to explore possibilities to host other major sporting events. With regard to soccer, we welcomed the recent announcement by the FAI and IFA of their intention to submit a joint bid to host the UEFA European Under 21 Championships in 2023. In addition, the national football associations of the United Kingdom and Ireland are in discussions about the feasibility of bidding to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup. This consideration is at a very early stage. My Department is supporting the FAI in this feasibility study and we will fully examine the potential of being part of such a bid.

In the sport of golf, Minister Ross and Department officials met with representatives of the PGA European Tour at the Ryder Cup in Paris to discuss the possible hosting of a future Ryder Cup in Ireland. The PGA European Tour subsequently visited Dublin and met the Taoiseach and Minister Ross. The purpose of these meetings was to explore the opportunities that may exist for hosting the Ryder Cup in the future and considerations are ongoing in this regard.

As regards any further events being considered for possible agency support, I have asked Fáilte Ireland to reply directly to the Deputy in this regard. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Question No. 229 answered with Question No. 226.

Transport Costs

230. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to have discussions with his EU colleagues with a view to ensuring that transport costs here are competitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52462/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Cost competitiveness is a key consideration for Ireland as an open export-oriented economy and transport is one of the many factors influencing that competitiveness.

The Government's plans to improve competitiveness are set out in the Programme

for Government and place a heavy emphasis on the delivery of effective transport services.

While not specifically an item on the agenda of recent EU Transport Councils, transport costs and competitiveness are an important underlying premise to ongoing discussions with my EU counterparts.

Integrated Ticketing

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which integrated ticketing continues to be successful; if further expansion is planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52463/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure including ticketing and technology.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Question No. 232 answered with Question No. 227.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

233. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of places on the ECCE scheme which are available in Ballincollig, County Cork. [52231/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Early years schemes are operated on behalf on my Department by Pobal. Pobal's records show four services that either had Ballincollig in their address or are located in the Ballincollig Electoral Division and had children registered under ECCE. In total, there are 90 children registered on the Programmes Implementation Platform (PIP), under ECCE 2018/2019 (as of 10/12/2018).

An examination of statistical returns from these four services for the purpose of compiling the Early Years Service Profile 2017/2018 (data collected between April-May 2018) indicates that the number of children enrolled between the ages of 3-5 years old is 175. It should be noted however that not all children aged 3-5 are registered under ECCE, as some may avail of CCS/P or may be attending the after-school in a service. It should also be noted that the 3 - 5 year old cohort will also include children who are either not yet eligible for ECCE (as some children don't become eligible until they are 3 years and 7 months old) and others who are over the age of eligibility (as a child is not eligible for ECCE if they will turn 5 years and 6 months at any point during the pre-school year).

Parliamentary Questions Data

234. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and-or public

affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act of hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52235/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The number of Parliamentary Questions processed by my Department in the period 2016-2018 is set out in the table below. The numbers for 2018 are to the end of November.

The processing of Parliamentary Questions is co-ordinated through the Secretary General's Office, which has a team of two staff. Replies to Parliamentary Questions are prepared at individual Unit level across the Department, with input where appropriate from my advisers.

There are four bodies under the aegis of my Department, the Child and Family Agency, the Adoption Authority, the Ombudsman for Children's Office and the Oberstown Children Detention School Campus. The number of referrals to agencies for direct reply is not routinely recorded. In general the practice is that where questions are purely of an operational nature they are referred directly to the agency for reply. The introduction of the ePQ system, scheduled for early 2019 as part of the wider Build to Share civil service wide initiative, will allow for the reporting of such referrals.

PQs	2016	2017	2018
Oral	62	84	66
Written	747	1639	1090

Detention Centres Staff

235. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff employed by a campus (details supplied) by administration and care work, in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [52316/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been advised by Oberstown that the number of staff employed in administration and care work from 2014- present is as follows:

Number of staff (Whole Time Equivalent)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Care	197.5	184.5	197	187	188
Admin	11.5	12.5	15.5	19.5	18
Total	209	197	212.5	206.5	206

I understand that the increase in administration staff is reflective of the Campus developing as an entity and the development of an appropriate corporate support structure.

Child Detention Centres

236. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 613 of 4 December 2018, the basis of her assertion that all members of the board of Tusla had an opportunity to read the operational review of the centre before the decision was taken in 2017 to not publish the report; and if she is satisfied that all members of the board did in fact read the report before that decision was taken. [52402/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Parliamentary

Question No. 613 of 4 December 2018 asked “if all members of the Board of Oberstown Detention Centre had been given an opportunity to read the operational review of the centre before the decision was taken in 2017 to not publish the report.” I responded that the Board of Oberstown had the opportunity to read the report in question.

A previous question, number 536 of the 26th of November 2018, asked whether “all members of the board of Tusla had been given an opportunity to read the operational review of Oberstown before the decision was taken in 2017 to not publish the report.” My response to this question was: “The report of operational review of the Oberstown Children Detention Campus was not shared with the Board of Tusla - the Child and Family Agency. Tusla has no operational responsibility in relation to Oberstown.”

Therefore, the I did not assert that all members of the board of Tusla had an opportunity to read the report of an Operational Review of Oberstown Children Detention Campus. I am satisfied that the Board of Tusla has not read the report and that the Board of Oberstown has had the opportunity to read the report, in advance of their decision not to publish that report.

Recreational Facilities Provision

237. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to introduce funding schemes in the Fingal area to address the rapid expansion of population and lack of facilities to accommodate the large scale growth of the adolescent population in recent years in view of the fact that many are turning to anti-social behaviour due to lack of facilities. [52301/18]

238. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on the growing issue of anti-social behaviour displayed in adolescents residing within newly established areas due to a lack of facilities offered to them especially in areas such as Lusk and Fingal. [52302/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 238 together.

My Department provides supports to help identify the need for community facilities in specific areas, and provides some funding for these facilities. It supports Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) who are responsible for the delivery of the community elements of their Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs). These plans are adopted in each local authority area, including Fingal.

Needs identified in the LECPs are funded from a range of sources including schemes and programmes provided by my Department. For example, the Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) can contribute towards the renovation and development of community infrastructure. In 2018, the Fingal Local Authority area received €477,189 under the CEP. Small capital projects including CCTV installation for the monitoring of anti-social behaviour can be funded under the scheme. My Department also provides capital funding under the LEADER programme, which can support the development of facilities outside of the five main cities, including some areas within Fingal.

Separately, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government administers the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), which was launched as part of Project Ireland 2040 to support the compact growth and sustainable development of Ireland’s five cities, regional drivers and other large urban centres. The Fund has an allocation of €2 billion to 2027.

While a community facilities project alone is unlikely to be eligible for this funding, the URDF invites a range of proposal types, which must be in line with the assigned assessment criteria, including, inter alia:

- Whether the proposal forms part of an overall integrated vision for an area and is likely to be instrumental in the achievement of transformational, place-based change.

- The extent to which proposal co-ordinates with and/or contributes to evidence-based strategies for social, economic and physical/environmental development, including in particular Regional Social and Economic Strategies and City/County Development Plans.

- The need to leverage wider residential and/or commercial development.

A further call for proposals for 2020 funding will issue in 2019, with the aim to facilitate a greater focus on integrated urban projects, as such proposals require sufficient time for design, planning, procurement and construction to be advanced properly. It will be open to Fingal County Council to submit suitable proposals for funding in respect of eligible parts of the Fingal area. Further details can be found at

www.housing.gov.ie/urdf and www.gov.ie/urdf.

Parliamentary Questions Data

239. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and/or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52247/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department was established on 19 July 2017. There are currently three staff located in my Department's Secretary-General's office involved centrally in the processing of Parliamentary Questions (PQs). However, staff across all units of my Department are involved in inputting to PQ replies.

In relation to bodies or agencies under the aegis of my Department, data and information is requested from those bodies or agencies, if appropriate, however, my Department provides the reply directly to the Oireachtas. Agencies or bodies have not been asked to reply directly to parliamentary questions.

In general, non-Departmental staff or public affairs and relations companies have no role in relation to drafting PQ responses. Ministerial advisers have a role in proofing the final draft replies on my behalf.

In 2017 my Department processed 311 PQs and 278 were answered directly.

To date in 2018, 1,222 PQs have been processed and 877 have been answered directly.

CLÁR Programme

240. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the areas in which he is expanding CLÁR funding in 2019, by category; when this funding will be open for applications in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52318/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): CLÁR was originally launched in October 2001 to provide for targeted investment in disadvantaged rural areas. The areas originally selected for inclusion in the programme were those which suffered the greatest population decline from 1926 to 1996. The Cooley Peninsula was also included on the basis of the serious difficulties caused in that area by Foot and Mouth disease. The average population loss in the original CLÁR regions over the period 1926 to 1996 was 50%.

In 2006, an analysis of the 2002 Census data was carried out by the NIRSA Institute at Maynooth University and the programme was extended to include areas with an average population loss of 35% between 1926 and 2002.

The CLÁR programme was closed for new applications in 2010. However, I re-launched the programme in the second half of 2016, using as a base-line the areas identified in the work carried out by NIRSA. Over 1,200 projects have been approved for funding of €25 million under CLÁR since I re-launched the programme in 2016.

I have initiated a review of the CLÁR programme which will examine CLÁR areas by reference to the 2016 Census of Population data. It will also consider whether there are any other factors that should be taken into account in designating areas for eligibility under CLÁR. The review will also help to inform future CLÁR programmes in 2019 and beyond.

Decisions regarding specific areas and measures which might be supported under the CLÁR programme in 2019 will be made early next year. No decision has been made yet as to when the 2019 CLÁR scheme will open for applications.

Departmental Funding

241. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the current and capital funding allocated for each scheme and programme in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 under his Department and bodies under the remit of his Department; and the amount expended in each such year to date in 2018 for each scheme, in tabular form. [52396/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department of Rural and Community Development was established in July 2017. The funding allocations made available to the Department are published each year in the Revised Estimates Volume. The Revised Estimates Volume 2018 is available here:

<http://www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/REV-2018-compressed.pdf>.

The 2019 Revised Estimates Volume will be published shortly by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The outturn for the Department is published in the Annual Appropriation Account. The 2017 Appropriation Account is available here:

<https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/2018/vote-42.pdf>.

Provisional capital and current expenditure figures for my Department at Vote level in respect of 2018 to date, along with the estimated expenditure for 2018 as detailed in the revised estimates, are set out below:

Provisional Capital Expenditure to date 2018 (€'000s)	Estimate	Spend to date
V42 – GROSS SPEND	95,208	73,677
A - REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT & REGIONAL AFFAIRS	85,855	56,552
A.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	166	151
A.3 - DORMANT ACCOUNT MEASURES	2,006	53
A.5 - NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES	18,083	11,809
A.6 - LEADER - RURAL ECONOMY SUB PROGRAMME	40,000	22,266
A.8 - TOWN AND VILLAGE REGENERATION	15,000	11,439
A.9 - RURAL BROADBAND & REG ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	600	511
A.10. - LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES	10,000	10,323
B - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	9,353	17,125
B.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	136	107
B.6 - RAPID	3,767	3,767
B.8 - PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION	700	0
B.10 - LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHIVE SERVICE	2,750	2,736
B.11 - COMMUNITY FACILITIES FUND	2,000	10,515
Provisional Current Expenditure to date 2018 (€'000's)	Estimate	Spend to date
V42 - GROSS SPEND	144,024	135,421
A - RURAL DEVELOPMENT & REGIONAL AFFAIRS	15,229	12,688
A.1 - ADMINISTRATION - PAY	4,644	4,205
A.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	1,748	518
A.3 - DORMANT ACCOUNT MEASURES	2,320	2,171
A.4 - WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION	1,516	1,436
A.5 - NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES	3,600	3,023
A.7 - TIDY TOWNS COMPETITION	1	115
A.9 - RURAL BROADBAND & REG. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	1,400	1,219
B - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	124,243	119,927
B.2 - ADMINISTRATION - PAY	3,618	3,229
B.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	1,351	398
B.3 - SUPPORTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR	12,687	13,909

Questions - Written Answers

Provisional Current Expenditure to date 2018 (€'000's)	Estimate	Spend to date
B.4 - SICAP, LOCAL/REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS	43,230	42,431
B.5 - LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES	1,905	1,931
B.6 - RAPID	2,233	1,911
B.7 - DORMANT ACCOUNTS MEASURES	5,750	4,700
B.8 - PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION	3,028	2,186
B.9 - IRISH WATER SAFETY	1,104	1,254
B.10 - LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHIVE SERVICE	1,102	1,017
B.12 - COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMME	46,190	43,525
B.13 - SOCIAL INCLUSION UNITS	550	531
B.14 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS	1,550	2,050
B.15 - OTHER SERVICES	35	54
C - CHARITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY	4,552	3,606
C.1 - ADMINISTRATION - PAY	76	75
C.2 - ADMINISTRATION - NON PAY	30	9
C.3 - CHARITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY		
C.3 - PAY	2,957	2,112
C.3 - NON PAY	1,489	1,410

Departmental Budgets

242. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he has sought permission from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to carry over unspent capital to 2019; if so, the amount sought as a carryover; the reason this was necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52397/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that permission has not been sought from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to carryover unspent capital to 2019 as a full spend for departmental capital programmes is anticipated this year.

Parliamentary Questions Data

243. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and/or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52240/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information sought by the Deputy is contained in the following table:

Year	Written PQs	Oral/Priority PQs	Total PQs
2016	2,975	61	3,036
2017	3,692	105	3,797
2018*	2,549	68	2,617

* Till end September (latest data available)

All questions were answered directly, with input from agencies under the Department's remit, as required. None were referred for direct answer by the agencies.

There are approximately 600 staff members of varying grades involved at some level in distributing, answering and submitting PQs for approval across the Department. Responses to all PQs are prepared by Department staff and approved at senior management level within the Department and then submitted to the Minister for approval.

Carer's Allowance Applications

244. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52280/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 19 July 2018.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

The person's case was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 10 December 2018 to assess the level of care being provided, assess the applicant's means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

245. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of jobseeker's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied); the correct level of arrears due in the case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52282/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has informed the Department that the appeal for this customer was successful. Their Jobseekers Allowance Payment has thus been awarded from the 08 June

2018 at a personal rate of €198.00 per week. Arrears of €5282.00 for the period 08 June 2018 to 11 December 2018 have been awarded.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Reform

246. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has addressed the issue of women whose children were born before 1994 who were excluded from the home carer’s scheme and as a result qualify for a much reduced contributory pension in comparison to other women then took time out of the workforce to care for children; if not, her plans to address this issue in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52291/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A policy to introduce the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pensions calculation was adopted by Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the decision to base the entitlements of all new pensioners on this approach from around 2020.

In advance of this, on the 23rd January this year, the Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated by an interim “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) which will include up to 20 years of new HomeCaring Periods. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person’s social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines their final pension outcome. The HomeCaring Periods can be claimed for any year in which they occurred - they are not limited to years since 1994.

People whose pensions were decided under the 2000-2012 ratebands were subject to a significantly more generous regime than those who qualified before or afterwards, as a Yearly Average of only 20 contributions per year (out of a maximum of 52) could attract a 98% pension. The effect of those changes, as it impacted upon those new pensioners since 2012, will be familiar to anyone who followed the debate on this matter over the last 6 years. If pre-2012 pensioners were also allowed avail of HomeCaring Credits, their arrangements, as a group, would continue to be significantly more generous than those of post-2012 pensioners. There would also be a very significant cost which would be expected to be of the order of several hundred millions of euros each year. This in turn could significantly impact funds for future pension increases with consequential implications for pensioner poverty.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum personal rate for which is €232 (over 95% of the maximum rate of the contributory pension). This rate of payment does not include rent allowance, household benefits or fuel allowance. Alternatively, if their spouse is a State pensioner and they have significant household means, their most beneficial payment may be an Increase for a Qualified Adult, based on their personal means, and amounting up to 90% of a full contributory pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer’s Benefit Applications

247. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52315/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment made to a person who leaves the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on 10 July 2018. The person in respect of whom the claim was made, died on 20 August 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 10 December 2018 with effect from 26 July 2018 to 3 October 2018.

Arrears of benefit due, including the 6 weeks after death entitlement for the period 26 July 2018 to 3 October 2018, will issue to her bank account on 14 December 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 10 December 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Commencement of Legislation

248. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when staff training will be completed following the commencement of section 13 of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52317/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am aware of the pressing need to make technical amendments to the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, and of the impact that this issue is having on affected families, particularly same-sex female couples wishing to have the second partner entered in the register of births as the parent of their child.

My intention is to make these necessary amendments at the earliest possible opportunity. It is my intention to have these taken as Committee Stage amendments to the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 .

In order to progress this matter, officials from my own Department are working with the General Register Office and the Department of Health to ensure that the appropriate legislative, regulatory, and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of all of the relevant legislation that will allow for birth registrations of donor-conceived children.

Legislative Measures

249. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has considered options to speed up the resolution of technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52321/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am aware of the pressing need to make technical amendments to the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, and of the impact that this issue is having on affected families, particularly same-sex female couples wishing to have the second partner entered in the register of births as the parent of their child.

My intention is to make these necessary amendments at the earliest possible opportunity. It is my intention to have these taken as Committee Stage amendments to the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 .

In order to progress this matter, officials from my own Department are working with the General Register Office and the Department of Health to ensure that the appropriate legislative, regulatory, and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of all of the relevant legislation that will allow for birth registrations of donor-conceived children.

Invalidity Pension Payments

250. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on an invalidity pension for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52322/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 11 October 2018. Payment, including arrears due from 11 October 2018 to 12 December 2018 will issue to his nominated bank account on the 13 December 2018. The gentleman in question was notified of the decision on 05 December 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

251. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit payment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52323/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department administers the Illness Benefit scheme to those customers who cannot work because they are sick or ill., provided they are covered by the appropriate class of social insurance (PRSI) and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

Illness Benefit rates are graduated according to your average weekly earnings in the relevant tax year. Average weekly earnings are calculated by dividing the total reckonable gross earnings (without deductions) in the relevant tax year by the actual number of weeks worked in that year.

The relevant tax year for Illness Benefit claims made in 2018 is 2016 and, as the person concerned has average weekly earnings of €297.87 in 2016, if an Illness Benefit claim is made in 2018, she will qualify for a payment of €155.10.

Any improvements or additions to the Department's schemes can only be considered in a budgetary context and in the light of available resources.

It is open to the person concerned to apply for Invalidity Pension if she is permanently incapable of work. In addition if the person concerned has an urgent financial need she can apply for assistance to the Department's Community Welfare Service at her local Intreo office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Direct Provision Payments

252. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who lives in a direct provision centre is entitled to a weekly payment for transport if attending a full-time or part-time course; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52330/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection administers the daily expenses allowance which is paid to applicants for international protection who live in the direct provision system where they are provided with full board, accommodation and other services by the Reception and Integration Agency of the Department of Justice and Equality.

In addition, applicants for international protection can access exceptional needs payments (ENPs) and the back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) as these are not subject to the habitual residence condition. There is no entitlement to other weekly social welfare payments which are subject to this condition.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off, exceptional expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. There is no automatic entitlement to a payment under this scheme. Payments are made at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

The Department of Education and Skills are operating a support scheme for students who are in the protection system or at the leave to remain (but not deportation order) stage and who are pursuing an approved post leaving certificate course or an approved undergraduate course for the academic year 2018/19. A maintenance grant is provided under this scheme, and would be expected to cover costs such as travel to college/university. Full details of the scheme are available on that Department of Education and Skill's website and any queries in relation to that scheme would be a matter for my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

253. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter will be addressed regarding illness benefit in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52473/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was paid Illness benefit up to the 10th October. The employer of the person concerned confirmed that the person returned to work on the 24th July 2018 and the person's Illness Benefit claim was subsequently closed with effect from the same date and an overpay-

ment was raised for the period 24th July 2018 to the 10th October 2018.

According to standard practice in such cases an Overpayment Letter was issued to the person concerned to inform him of the situation.

On foot of the Deputy's representations I have arranged to have this matter re-examined and the person concerned will be informed directly of the outcome of this review as soon as possible.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Urban Renewal Schemes

254. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a funding application in respect of a project (details supplied); the appeals process available for unsuccessful applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52286/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) was launched as part of Project Ireland 2040, to support the compact growth and sustainable development of Ireland's five cities, regional drivers and other large urban centres. I initiated the first call for proposals under the Fund in July 2018 and the deadline for submission of applications was 28 September. A total of 189 applications were submitted to my Department and on 26 November I announced the successful applicants for funding, details of which are available on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/urdf_-_2019_funding_allocations_0.pdf

There were two categories of submission; Category A for projects that were 'ready to go' and Category B to support the initial development of projects (Master-planning/Feasibility) to ensure a pipeline of projects into the future as the URDF is a rolling fund, with €2 billion available to 2027. The fund in the initial call was oversubscribed in both categories (A & B).

The URDF grant in respect of the successful proposal in question, as with all other successful bid proposals, has been approved in principle subject to agreement of subsequent technical details with my Department and may be regarded as an initial investment of support for the project. Given that this proposal has been allocated Category B funding, my Department intends to further engage with the applicant in order to discuss the progression of the proposal in 2019 and to agree on the terms of the funding allocation. As the process involved in finalising agreements with successful applicants is currently ongoing, project conditions will only be concluded after this process, which in part involves commercially sensitive information or proposals subject to a formal consent process at a later point.

The appraisal process for proposals received under the URDF includes an appeal mechanism for unsuccessful applicants, within a specified time period. Once notified of their markings, any unsuccessful applicant may avail of that appeal process. It is envisaged that all markings will issue shortly.

Local Authority Staff

255. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will review a case (details supplied); the number of waste enforcement officers in Monaghan and Cavan County Councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52331/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department has not received staffing sanction requests for additional enforcement officer positions from Cavan County Council or Monaghan County Council.

Parliamentary Questions Data

256. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and/or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52244/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The processing of individual Parliamentary Questions is undertaken as part of the normal day to day work of individual Sections within my Department and no staff in my Department are assigned full time to deal with Parliamentary Questions.

The number and level of staff, and the time spent on individual replies, depends on the complexity and urgency of the issues raised, the ease of access to the required information, and the degree of cross-Divisional coordination required in preparing the reply.

Each Question may have input from staff within Sections, the Principal Officers and equivalents leading those sections, the relevant Assistant Secretary, the Secretary General and his office staff and the Minister and Ministers of State and staff in their offices. While information may have to be sought from external parties for the purposes of preparing replies, the preparation of all replies is managed by staff of the Department.

A breakdown of the numbers of Oral and Written Questions for 2016 and 2017 is available on page 57 of my Department's 2017 annual report, which can be accessed at the following link -

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/category/corporate/topic/0/topic/annual-report>.

Information in regard to Questions processed to end November 2018 is set out below;

Parliamentary Questions to end November 2018	
Questions Received	3,438
Questions Answered*	3,157
Question Type	
Oral	401

Parliamentary Questions to end November 2018	
Written	2,756

* The remainder of questions were disallowed, withdrawn or transferred.

Questions are not referred to agencies under the aegis of my Department for direct reply as information in relation to such bodies is a matter for the individual bodies concerned. However, arrangements have been put in place by each agency to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email addresses for each agency, as set out below, are provided in response to Parliamentary Questions, where appropriate.

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	oireachtas.enquiries@VALOFF.ie

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

257. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on the council housing waiting list for Ballyjamesduff, County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52269/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The most recently published SSHA, carried out this year, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018.

The results of the SSHA are available on my Department's website and include breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories, including household composition. The results do not provide a breakdown of the numbers by electoral area and my Department does not hold such data. The 2018 report also includes the results of the 2017 summary for comparative purposes.

Full details in relation to the 2018 assessment are available on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf.

Water Pollution

258. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52277/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have no direct statutory responsibility for the investigation of specific water pollution issues as this area is a matter for the relevant local authority pursuant to the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977, as amended. The Environmental Protection Agency, pursuant to the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992, as amended, is responsible for the supervision generally of local authorities in this respect.

However, in relation to the specific matter raised, I understand that the relevant local authority has, at the request of the National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NP-DWAG), established a local inter-agency action group, comprising the main stakeholders, to consider and agree a collaborative and consistent set of actions and communications regarding pesticides within the wider river catchment. The local authority is available to provide further information on this initiative.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

259. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if consideration is being given to making low-cost sites available to persons in a position to afford to build their own homes in view of the ongoing housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52305/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities already have powers to make low-cost sites available to individuals, who are qualified for social housing support, and collectively, to voluntary or co-operative not-for-profit housing associations.

The Government continues to address affordability specifically. In particular, for those households earning low to moderate annual gross incomes (up to €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for dual applicants), a multi-stranded approach is being taken to the targeted delivery of affordable housing.

In order to support the affordable housing programmes of local authorities, the Government has committed €310 million, over the three years 2019 to 2021, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) announced as part of Budget 2019. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure, on public lands, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent. I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home and on this basis at least 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated.

In this regard, I have issued approval in principle for ten infrastructure projects across five local authority areas, in Dublin and Cork, under the first SSF call for proposals. This first tranche of funding of €43 million will enable the delivery of 1,400 affordable homes on local authority lands. I expect infrastructure works on these projects to begin as soon as possible and delivery of affordable homes from early 2020 onwards. Details of these projects are set out in the following table.

List of projects that have received approval in principle under the SSF first call for proposals

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	Project/Location	Total Provisional Cost of Proposal€	Provisional Exchequer Grant Amount €	Provisional Local Authority Contribution€	Affordable-Housing Potential
Cork County	Glanmire	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	20
Cork City	Boherboy Road	€4,968,366	€4,421,846	€546,520	103
Cork City	Kilmore Road, Churchfield	€1,410,551	€1,255,390	€155,160	21
Dublin City	Cherry Orchard	€7,645,415	€6,804,419	€840,996	183
Dublin City	Balbutcher, Ballymun	€4,135,351	€3,680,462	€454,889	74
Dublin City	Silloogue, Ballymun	€3,975,000	€3,537,750	€437,250	83
DLR	Enniskerry Road	€4,537,576	€4,038,443	€499,133	50
Fingal	Church Fields, Mulhuddart	€11,000,000	€9,790,000	€1,210,000	753
Fingal	Dun Emer, Lusk	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	74
Fingal	Hackettstown, Skerries	€2,198,667	€1,956,814	€241,853	49
Total		€42,870,926	€38,155,124	€4,715,801	1410

More broadly, all local authorities are carrying out economic assessments of the requirement for affordable housing in their areas and the viability to deliver such affordable housing from their sites. My Department hosted a workshop for local authorities last month to discuss these issues. A second call for proposals under the Fund will be made shortly. The scope of that call will be influenced by the information received from local authorities, as part of the aforementioned assessments, which are currently being collated by my Department.

In terms of the type of affordable housing that will be delivered on local authority sites it may be affordable housing for purchase, for example, under the recently commenced provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, or cost rental, which is being advanced on a number of pilot sites before being rolled out further. The Regulations to support the operation of Part 5 will be finalised shortly. These initiatives complement other Government actions which help first-time buyers to buy a home, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

Tenancy Protection Scheme

260. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a housing provider is required to issue notices to quit in cases in which homeless persons or persons who have been homeless have licence agreements in emergency, transitional or own door accommodation that due to the length of time of the license risk accruing tenancy rights, placing the persons at risk of further homelessness; and if so, if changes to regulations or legislative amendments made in the forthcoming residential tenancies (amendment) Bill to ensure that no resident in emergency, transitional and own door accommodation will not be issued with a notice to quit in cases in which they are unable to find permanent accommodation. [52309/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 25 of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 disapplies its security of tenure rights under Part 4 from Approved Housing Body (AHB) tenancies of up to 18 months in duration re-

lating to designated “transitional dwellings”. Where a lease extends beyond 18 months, then the property in question is no longer considered to be a “transitional dwelling” for the purposes of the Act and the tenant will obtain Part 4 rights.

AHBs work closely with tenants to identify suitable dwellings for occupation under a subsequent tenancy to commence before or upon the expiry of the initial 18 month tenancy in a transitional dwelling. Local authorities are available to assist AHBs in this regard with the aim of preventing homelessness.

Part 5 of the Acts provide for the termination of tenancies only, with sections 62 and 66 setting out the requirements for a valid tenancy termination notice by a landlord and the notice periods applicable.

Accommodation let under licensing agreements does not fall within the remit of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 which protect tenancy agreements only. If there is any doubt as to the type of agreement in place in respect of individual dwellings, for example whether a licence agreement or a tenancy agreement exists, the matter should be referred to the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) for a determination. Where the RTB determines that a tenancy exists, it can deal with any dispute arising.

A licence agreement does not become a tenancy agreement with the passage of time; such agreements are separate in nature.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

261. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the planned industrial terminal on the Shannon Estuary; the way in which this planning fits with the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act 2018 recently passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52311/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, I am, as Minister, specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or the Board is or may be concerned, except in very specific circumstances, which do not arise in this case. In addition, it would be inappropriate for me to make any comment on the proposed liquefied natural gas terminal development referred to as it is presently the subject of High Court proceedings.

The Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill 2016, which has recently been passed by the Oireachtas, falls within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Solar Energy Guidelines

262. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce guidelines for solar farms; the process involved and associated timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52328/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As is the case with the large majority of development types, there are currently 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, with planning applications made to

the relevant local planning authority and with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála. Within the wider national and local planning context, planning authorities must make their decisions, based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

While I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments, the matter is being kept under review, in consultation with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, who leads on renewable energy policy. Our two Departments are presently exploring the potential for enhancing national planning guidance on solar energy, taking account of solar energy projects being assessed by planning authorities and the scope for future development of the sector in the context of the ongoing development of renewable energy policy.

On foot of this on-going engagement between the two Departments, where the need for specific planning guidance for solar farms is identified, my Department will develop such guidance as appropriate.

Fire Service Staff

263. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider introducing annual medal presentations for bravery as takes place for members of An Garda Síochána for members of the fire service both full-time and retained firefighters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52333/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Persons from all walks of life and all sections of society, including staff of local authority fire services, are eligible to be nominated for an award under the National Bravery Awards. Under this scheme, Deeds of Bravery Awards are given to people who have saved a human life involving personal risk to themselves.

Comhairle na Míre Gaile - the Council for the recognition of Deeds of Bravery – is under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality, and it meets on an annual basis to consider and decide on the awards to be made. The scheme has been in operation since 1947 and awards are presented in four categories – gold, silver, bronze and a certificate of recognition. Further information relating to the Bravery Awards may be found at: www.bravery.ie.

I wish to take this opportunity to again place on the record my appreciation of the vital contribution made to our society by the men and women of the local authority fire services. Fire services are trained to operate as teams, to evaluate each emergency situation and to undertake appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of the public they serve as well as their colleagues and themselves. Given the focus on teamwork and risk assessment, I have no plans to introduce a separate bravery awards scheme for individual members of local authority fire services staff.

In 1992, a scheme of long service awards for personnel in the local authority fire services was launched. There are four categories of awards, marking service of ten years, twenty years, thirty years and forty years. The ten-year award is a certificate presented locally, while the twenty, thirty and forty year awards all involve the presentation of medals and certificates at a national ceremony. The twenty-year award is a medal bearing the traditional logo representation of the fire service - a helmet and crossed axes. The thirty-year award is a flame emblem. The forty-year award is a bar; both the emblem and bar attach onto the medal ribbon.

The first national awards presentation was organised in 1998 and is now held every two

years at a national presentation ceremony. The latest of these ceremonies was held in November 2018 at which 288 fire service personnel were eligible for awards.

Referendum Campaigns

264. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the involvement of his Department on plans for the forthcoming referendum on plebiscites in May 2019. [51797/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At its meeting of 27 September, 2018, the Government agreed in principle that plebiscites would be held in Cork City Council, Limerick City and County Council, Waterford City and County Council, Galway City Council and Galway County Council on directly elected mayors with executive functions at the same time as the local government elections in May 2019. This decision was subject to the necessary provisions for the holding of the plebiscites being included in the Local Government Bill 2018 and the requirement that I would revert to Government with more detailed proposals on the plebiscites, the questions to be put and the specific powers to be given to mayors.

On 26 November, 2018, the Government approved Committee Stage Amendments providing for the holding of plebiscites as part of the Local Government Bill 2018. The Committee Stage process concluded on 6 December and the Bill proceeds this week to Report Stage.

My Department is also working to produce the more detailed policy proposals required. These proposals, including an analysis of the costs involved, are at an advanced stage of preparation and will be submitted shortly to Government.

Housing Data

265. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of permissions granted for apartments and houses, respectively in each of the four local authorities in Dublin during the period of Q1 2016 to Q2 2018; the number of houses and apartments, respectively which have been completed during the period of Q1 2016 to Q2 2018 according to the CSO by year, local authority, number of apartments per year, number of houses per year, number of permissions granted and number of CSO completions in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52444/18]

266. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses and apartments, respectively sold in each of the four local authorities in Dublin during the period of Q1 2016 to Q2 2018 by year, local authority, number of apartments sold per year and number of houses sold per year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52445/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 265 and 266 together.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical office, compiles and makes available detailed data on a number of housing related issues including housing completions, permissions granted and sales, which in turn inform government policy.

As regards housing supply generally, more new homes will be provided this year than in any year in the past decade: most recent data show the continuation of some very positive trends:

planning permissions are up 39%, with 27,000 new homes granted planning permission in the year to end Q2 2018, while commencements are up 18% per annum and have more than doubled since the end of 2015, to almost 20,500 in the year to September. In terms of housing completions, the latest CSO data indicates that there were 4,673 new dwelling completions in Q3 2018, compared with 3,786 completions in the same period last year, an increase of 23.4%. This brings the total number of new dwellings completed in the first 9 months of 2018 to 12,582, an increase of 27.7% on the comparable period in 2017, when 9,856 dwellings were completed.

In terms of planning permissions granted, the most recent CSO data available is for Q2 2018 and is accessible at the following link:

https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Planning%20Permissions/Planning%20Permissions_statbank.asp?sp=Planning%20Permissions&Planguage=0.

Data on new dwelling completions can also be found on the CSO website at the following link:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ndc/newdwellingcompletionsq32018/>.

The latest Residential Property Price Index from the CSO was published on 11 December 2018. While the CSO does not provide details of all residential property transactions at local authority level, it does so on a county level. Further details can be found at the following link:

https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/House%20Prices/House%20Prices_statbank.asp?SP=House%20Prices&Planguage=0.

Furthermore, as committed to under Rebuilding Ireland, my Department has developed a monthly housing activity report, which provides monthly updates on a range of statistics. This report is published on the Rebuilding Ireland website at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news-page/>.

Residential Tenancies Board Administration

267. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he expects the proposed register of landlords to be initiated and available for public inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52479/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 set out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants in both the private rental sector and the Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) sector. The Acts provide that landlords in the sector must apply to register a tenancy of a dwelling with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) within one month of the commencement of the tenancy.

The RTB actively pursues landlords for non-registration. Failure of a landlord to register a tenancy with the RTB can result in criminal conviction. If convicted, a landlord may be liable to fines of up to €4,000 and/or six months' imprisonment, along with a daily fine of €500 for a continuing offence. In addition, if the tenancy is not registered, the landlord cannot avail of the dispute resolution services of the RTB should an issue arise with the tenancy.

To pursue non-compliant landlords, the RTB receives information on residential rented dwellings from several sources. Where non-compliance is identified, notice and warning letters are sent to the landlord. If the landlord still fails to register, enforcement action is taken through the courts.

The RTB's register of tenancies is available and searchable by rental dwelling address on

the RTB's website at the following link <https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/check/index.html/> . While legislative changes are proposed in order to publish additional data on rents, it is not proposed to publish individual landlord details.

Parliamentary Questions Data

268. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of parliamentary questions his Department has processed in the past three years to date; the number of questions answered directly; the number of questions referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of his Department for direct reply; the number of staff who are assigned to his parliamentary questions section; and if non-departmental staff, advisers and/or public affairs and relations companies have composed parliamentary question replies or had an act or hand in forming parliamentary question replies in the timeframe specified. [52237/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that the number of Parliamentary Questions (total of Oral + Written) my Department has processed for each of the last three years are as follows; 904 in 2016, 1,567 in 2017 and 1,332 up to the end of November for the current year. No Parliamentary Questions have been referred to bodies or agencies under the aegis of my Department for direct reply during this period.

As the Deputy will be aware, the processing of Parliamentary Questions including the preparation of replies, forms part of the normal workload of civil servants. Accordingly questions are assigned for answer to and addressed by the relevant section of my Department as they arise. Public affairs companies are not involved in the preparation of parliamentary replies. From time to time, non-Departmental staff, including relevant bodies under the aegis of the Department, contracted specialists and advisers may have an input into the drafting process of replies where necessary or appropriate.

Departmental Budgets

269. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has sought permission from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to carry over unspent capital to 2019; if so, the amount sought as a carryover; the reason this was necessary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52398/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The carryover of unspent capital monies from one year into the next is at the discretion of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and is also subject to approval by the Dáil. The level of carryover to be approved, if any, is also at that Minister's discretion.

Any application from my Department to carryover unspent capital monies from 2018 to 2019 will fall to be assessed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and if approved, published as part of the Revised Estimates for 2019 later this month. At the time of publication the carryover amount and the subhead designation will be provisional and will need to be confirmed by Ministerial Order no later than 31 March 2019.

Departmental Budgets

270. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount of capital allocated to her Department in 2018; the amount spent to date; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [52399/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The 2018 capital allocation for my Department is €54.3 million as published in the 2018 Revised Estimates is contained in the following link: <https://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2015/07/2018rev.pdf>

Details of capital expenditure by my Department and all Government departments are published by the Department of Finance on a monthly basis at <https://www.finance.gov.ie/archive-of-fiscal-monitors/>

Capital expenditure to 31 October 2018 for my Department amounted to €32 million - approx. 80% of profile. All expenditure within my Department's Vote will continue to be carefully monitored between now and year end to ensure the best use of available financial resources.

Departmental Budgets

271. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the current and capital funding allocated for each scheme and programme in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 under her Department or the bodies under the remit of her Department; and the amount expended in each such year to date in 2018 for each scheme in tabular form. [52400/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As the Deputy will appreciate my Department operates a wide range of funding schemes across all areas of the Departments' remit.

In view of this and because of the wide range of my Department's schemes and programmes, along with those schemes administered by bodies under the aegis of my Department, it is not possible to provide the information sought. However, if the Deputy has specific queries relating to a particular programme or grant, I will endeavour to provide her with relevant information in that regard.

Details of funding allocations and awards are published on my Department's website at www.chg.gov.ie from time to time. In common with all Government Departments, details of annual expenditure are also included in the annual Appropriation Accounts.

Details of 2019 allocations across all programme areas and subheads will be available as part of the 2019 Revised Estimates due to be published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform later this month.

For the Deputy's convenience a summary of the various funding areas and the links to detailed information in respect of funding available from my Department is set out in the following table.

Programme Area	Details available at:
Arts Film and Investment	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-provided-by-the-department/arts-unit/#grantfunding
Cultural Policy and Institutions	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/%20freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-%20provided-by-the-department/cultural-policy-and-institutions-unit/#grantfunding

Programme Area	Details available at:
Culture Ireland	http://www.cultureireland.ie/funding
Creative Ireland	https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/creative-ireland-programme/
Built Heritage & Architectural Policy	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/%20freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/%20services-provided-by-the-department/built-heritage-%20and-architectural-policy-unit/#grantfunding
National Monuments Service	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-provided-by-the-department/national-monuments-service/#grantfunding
Gaeltacht Support Schemes	https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/the-gaeltacht/language-support-schemes-programmes/
Irish Language Support Schemes	https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/the-irish-language/language-support-schemes/

National Development Plan Expenditure

272. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the areas the €1.2 billion of culture, heritage and Irish language funding has been invested in to date (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52407/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Project Ireland 2040 – the National Planning Framework and associated 10 year National Development Plan (NDP) – explicitly recognises that our culture, language and heritage are integral to the sustainable development of the country and underpins this recognition by a commitment to invest in excess of €1.2 billion in our culture, language and heritage over the next 10 years.

€54 million was allocated across these programme areas in 2018 as year one of this 10 year plan. The detailed break-out of the 2018 allocation is published in the Revised Estimates Volume for this year at www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/REV-2018-compressed.pdf.

€75 million is to be allocated across the programme areas in 2019 and the detailed break-out of allocations across programme areas will be made available in the soon to be published 2019 Revised Estimates. However, I can advise the Deputy that broadly speaking, €190 million will be available for culture; €80 million for our heritage including our waterways and €69 million for our language.

The break-out of the annual allocations for subsequent years will be determined having regard to the scheduling of delivery of projects and programmes in accordance with the outcome of the requisite appraisal and planning phases under the Public Spending Code.

I would draw the Deputy's attention to the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and specifically to its associated Action Plan 2018-2022. Both of these documents are uploaded onto my Department's website and provide the background to specific areas of Government investment in the Irish Language and the Gaeltacht. www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht.

Generally speaking, recruitment into the Civil Service is managed through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) www.publicjobs.ie and I am pleased to inform the Deputy that, as recently as last summer, PAS organised a competition for Clerical Officers in the civil service which was specifically targeted at potential candidates with a proficiency in the Irish language.

In addition, the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) www.epso.europa.eu just recently ran a competition seeking 72 Irish language translators for permanent positions in the institutions of EU, while the European institutions also regularly announce the availability of temporary employment opportunities for Irish language linguists and maintain lists of potential applicants for that purpose.

As the Deputy may be aware, in line with the provisions of the Gaeltacht Act 2012, my Department, in partnership with both Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge, is currently rolling-out the language planning process in some 45 Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks, all of which will require the recruitment locally of Language Planning Officers over the next two years.

All of these initiatives are improving employment opportunities for Irish speakers and will continue to do so over the next number of years.