

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 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 13 to 19, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 20 to 25, inclusive, answered orally.

Local Authority Housing

26. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that the supply of new local authority housing is meeting demand. [8476/19]

38. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of new homes provided by local authorities in 2018 under the various categories of provision including build, lease, voids refurbishing and acquisition by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8245/19]

58. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of direct build social houses delivered by all 31 local authorities in 2018 excluding those built by approved housing bodies and Part V; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8471/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26, 38 and 58 together.

Qualified households on social housing waiting lists can have a wide variety of housing needs and it is therefore important that there is a blend of social housing delivery mechanisms available that can meet those diverse needs in the most effective manner. Under Rebuilding Ireland, the aim is to meet the housing needs of some 138,000 households over the 6 year period 2016 to 2021, and provision is made for this to be achieved through a mix of different mechanisms. These include build, acquisition and leasing schemes delivered by local authorities or in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

Just over two years ago there were over 90,000 households on local authority housing waiting lists. By June 2018, the number had reduced to less than 72,000 and this trend is expected to continue in the coming years. Over the three year period 2016 to 2018, some 72,000 additional households across the country had their housing needs met. In 2018 alone, just over 27,100 households were supported, 6% ahead of the overall target for the year.

In January 2018, I committed to publishing individual targets for housing delivery in each

local authority area to enable greater transparency and accountability when it comes to increasing the stock of social housing and responding to social housing needs more generally. With over €6 billion committed to Rebuilding Ireland, it is vital that this public funding is used efficiently to deliver new homes and that this can be demonstrated clearly.

Data in relation to 2018 social housing output against target, broken down by local authority area, has just been published on the statistics page of my Department's website. Overall, a very strong performance versus the national target for the year was achieved. That is not to say, however, that delivery by individual local authorities was consistently strong. At a Housing Summit with local authority Chief Executives last week, I took the opportunity to discuss their individual delivery pipelines and I heard from them about local plans and actions to further accelerate output.

Looking specifically at build, acquisition and leasing schemes, Rebuilding Ireland supported local authorities to deliver 8,422 homes to households on their waiting lists in 2018. This included:

- 3,410 local authority and AHB new build, 2,022 of which were delivered through local authorities, plus 841 local authority and AHB Part V homes, bringing the overall new build figure for 2018 to 4,251, up 85% on 2017;

- 560 voids;

- 2,610 local authority and AHB acquisitions, up 17% on 2017; and

- 1,001 local authority and AHB leases, up 21% on 2017.

The evolution of the social housing programme is clear from the overall 2018 performance. While the level of new build social housing homes was more than 8 times the level in 2015, the year before Rebuilding Ireland was introduced, the level of new HAP supports remained static last year and will decline over the coming years.

I recognise that the blend of delivery will vary across areas depending on local circumstances. However, my message to local authorities has been consistent and it is a message that every possible effort must be made to, at minimum, achieve our targets, if not exceed them. The range of delivery schemes, funding and resources are in place to support this and while I am pleased that 2018 showed a strong performance overall, there is no room for complacency. I will therefore be continuing to engage proactively with local authorities to ensure that any impediments to progress are addressed.

Questions Nos. 27 to 31, inclusive, answered orally.

Home Loan Scheme

32. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the allocations of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan; if further allocations will become available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8475/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan launched on 1 February 2018. Prior to its launch, an initial tranche of €200 million of long-term fixed-rate finance was borrowed by the Housing Finance Agency to provide funds for the scheme to local authorities.

When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was initially being developed it was estimated

that the drawdown of loans under the scheme would be approximately €200 million over three years. From the data collated on the scheme to date, the RIHL has proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, as a result of which, the scheme would require a further tranche of funds to be borrowed by the HFA in order to enable its continuation.

My Department is currently in discussions with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance with regard to an extension of the scheme in this regard. When these discussions are concluded I will be in a position to make an announcement on the matter.

Approved Housing Bodies

33. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the efforts being made to have approved housing bodies reclassified as off-balance sheet. [8453/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is continuing its work on the issue of reclassification, by Eurostat, of the majority of Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies as part of the Government sector for accounting purposes. It is engaging with the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, with technical support from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) and the Housing Agency (HA), in order to ensure that AHBs can continue to fulfil their full potential in the delivery of the targets set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

The Department has also had constructive discussions with the AHB representative bodies. The sector itself has engaged its own research on the matter, and has put forward its own proposals. My Department is evaluating these proposals as part of its ongoing consideration of the issue and with regard to their potential wider implications. The Department is also examining measures that could be taken to develop the AHB sector to enable reclassification in the longer term.

Notwithstanding the decision by Eurostat, the Government continues to see a central role for the voluntary housing sector in contributing to delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland. It is committed to using all mechanisms and schemes, including through the AHB sector, to ensure that we maintain the momentum towards meeting the ambitious 50,000 social housing target under the Action Plan.

Vacant Sites Levy

34. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that the changes introduced in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018, specifically the removal of provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2018 relating to reduced rates of vacant site levy being applied in situations in which a site loan exceeds specific percentages of the market value of a vacant site, are working as intended; if there has been an increase in the number of sites being placed on the register following the removal of the exemptions; if he is satisfied that local authorities applying the most up to date version of the vacant site levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8469/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The vacant site levy measure was introduced by the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015. As part of an on-going oversight and review of the levy, the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 introduced amendments to the 2015 Act, which collectively aimed to

further strengthen the vacant site levy provisions. The amendments included provisions to increase the rate of the levy from 3% to 7% for sites on local authority vacant site registers from 2019 onwards and the removal of the possibility of applying reduced or zero rates of levy for sites on registers that are subject to a site loan, reflecting the improved economic circumstances and higher property prices since the levy measure was originally introduced.

The removal of the possibility of applying reduced or zero rates of levy on specified vacant sites does not impact on the number of sites placed on vacant site registers. The inclusion of sites on registers continues to be determined by the criteria provided for in section 5 of the 2015 Act, that is -

(1) in the case of residential land, that the site is situated in an area in which there is a need for housing, the site is suitable for the provision of housing, and the site or the majority of the site is vacant or idle, and

(2) in the case of regeneration land, that the site or the majority of the site is vacant or idle, and being vacant or idle has adverse effects on existing amenities or reduces the amenity provided by existing public infrastructure and facilities in the area in which the site is situated or has adverse effects on the character of the area, subject to the site exceeding 0.05 hectares in area.

While application of the levy provisions is a matter for individual local authorities, my Department continues to monitor implementation of the levy to ensure that it is being effectively applied, in line with its intended purpose of incentivising the development of vacant or under-utilised sites in urban areas. To support this work, progress reports were requested from local authorities and the responses received are currently being examined by my Department to see what further implementation supports may be required.

Land Development Agency

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the fact that the Land Development Agency is not accessible under freedom of information; if information relating to the work of the agency to date on the number of staff employed, external advisers employed and fees associated with both staff and external advisors will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8470/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on 13 September 2018 by way of Establishment Order under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971.

As set out in Section 6(12) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014, the LDA, being a public body as set out under Section 6(1) of the FOI Act, is not subject to FOI until a maximum of 6 months have passed since the date of establishment. As the LDA was established on 13 September 2018, it is not officially bound by FOI legislation until 13 March 2019.

There are currently 3 staff working in the LDA who are on secondment from the NTMA. Expenditure in relation to the LDA in 2018 was approximately €250,000. This related to professional services, including legal and financial services, relating to the establishment of the LDA, as well as services in relation to the initial work regarding the masterplans of the 8 initial sites to which the Agency has access, which have the potential to deliver 3,000 homes in the short term and a further 7,000 at later stages, 30% of which will be affordable housing.

In line with the Establishment Order, the LDA will be required to publish an annual report

and audited financial statements for each financial year and the audited accounts will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The LDA has already appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government and will, of course, continue to be available for further engagement as its work programme advances.

Urban Development

36. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications for the Project Ireland 2040 urban regeneration fund; the status of the applications; the value of grants that will be issued in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8293/19]

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, with €2 billion available to 2027.

A total of 189 applications were submitted to my Department under the first call for proposals. Following a three-staged assessment process, I announced 88 successful proposals in November 2018, details of which are published on my Department's website.

The projects involved fall into two categories: Category A - projects that are 'ready to go' - and Category B - projects which are at an earlier stage (Master Planning/Feasibility) and which will assist in forming a future pipeline of projects. Successful bid proposals have been approved in principle, subject to final agreement of technical details with my Department, and the funding allocations should be regarded as an initial investment of support for the projects.

My Department has been actively engaging with successful applicants on the detailed progression of their proposals in 2019. This process will be finalised shortly, following which project conditions and formal grant agreements will be concluded.

Funding of €100 million has been allocated in respect of the 88 successful proposals, combining both category A and B projects. In terms of 2019 spend, while an initial allocation of €71 million was provided for the URDF as published in my Department's 2019 Estimate, it was determined in the context of the accommodation of increased costs of the development of the National Children's Hospital, that €13 million of drawdown under the URDF could be re-profiled from 2019 to 2020 without any delay in the progression of successful proposals. I am satisfied at this point that the revised allocation of €58 million in respect of URDF grants for 2019 will be spent in full.

It is expected that a second call for proposals for 2020 funding will be launched later in Q1 2019 and a workshop for applicants will be organised in advance. It is envisaged that this application period will run until summer 2019.

Housing Provision

37. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address the lack of housing in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8185/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of housing, whether it be social, affordable or pri-

vate is a top priority for this Government. Under Rebuilding Ireland, the Government is making over €6 billion available to deliver 50,000 social housing homes nationally, through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021. In addition, some 88,000 households are to be supported under the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme. Good progress is being made and to date under Rebuilding Ireland, over 72,000 households have had their housing needs met nationally.

In Wexford, delivery against social housing targets has been strong and the statistics for each local authority's 2018 delivery, which are being published today, show that Wexford County Council supported 920 additional households in 2018 and exceeded its overall target of 627 for the year, as well as its specific target of 231 for the build, acquisition and leasing of new social homes. This progress can also be measured in the number of households on Wexford's waiting list, which has reduced by 15% between 2017 and 2018. While those achievements are very positive, more remains to be done and I will shortly be writing to all local authorities, including Wexford County Council, setting out their individual targets for social housing for 2019.

In the important area of new social housing build, Wexford County Council, in conjunction with Approved Housing Bodies, has over 300 further new social homes that are either on site or in planning and procurement. This is in addition to what has been delivered already up to the end of 2018. My Department will continue to work with the Council to support the further expansion of their build programme and their wider delivery of social housing supports to households on their waiting list.

In terms of housing overall, just over 18,000 dwelling completions nationally were recorded by the CSO in 2018, up 25% on the previous year. 485 of these were in Wexford, which was a 38% increase on the 352 recorded in 2017.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 26.

Social and Affordable Housing

39. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has contacted Dublin City Council in relation to cost-benefit and opportunity cost studies of significant vacant lands under the control of the authority which have been earmarked for social and affordable housing for decades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8187/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Public Spending Code, project sponsoring bodies, such as Dublin City Council, must prepare an economic appraisal, such as a cost benefit analysis or a cost effectiveness analysis, for current and capital expenditure projects or programmes costing €20m or more. In the case of large-scale social housing projects, my Department reviews such appraisals, as the relevant sanctioning authority, and they are submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) for technical review.

My Department is working with Dublin City Council and DPER to ensure that the critical appraisal process is carried out in a robust manner, with the minimum impact on project delivery timelines. To this end, my Department recently met with Dublin City Council and DPER, arising from which my Department is preparing additional detailed guidance for local authorities on the appraisal process for social housing projects over €20m.

My Department continues to work closely with all local authorities to support accelerated delivery of new social and affordable homes on their residential land banks, with particular

emphasis on prioritising those sites with the greatest potential to deliver mixed tenure housing at scale, in the short to medium term.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

40. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to publish the review of the tenant purchase (incremental) scheme 2016; his further plans to change the scheme to make it more attractive; the number of houses purchased under the scheme to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8396/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the operation of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase (Incremental) Scheme has been completed and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations. I hope to be in a position to publish the review shortly, following consideration of a number of implementation issues arising.

My Department publishes information on the sale of local authority houses each year; this can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics>.

Social and Affordable Housing

41. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether legislation allowing developers to deliver 10% of social housing units required per development off site is acceptable in the housing emergency in Dublin and nationally; if the legislation relating to this exemption will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8472/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities have been advised in Guidelines on Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, issued under section 28 of the Act in January 2017, that the priority option to be pursued in relation to Part V agreements is the acquisition of social housing on the site which is the subject of the planning permission. However, in some cases acquiring homes on the development site is not an efficient use of resources, for instance where:

- land costs are particularly high;
- the homes are of significantly higher specification than would be the case in a local authority own housing project; and
- there are excessive annual management fees.

My Department considers all requests from local authorities for sanction for funding in terms of the acquisition of homes under Part V in the light of the key aims of Part V, including social integration. However, on some occasions it has been necessary for local authorities to use the off-site option in view of the prohibitive costs of some on-site homes.

My Department remains committed to working with the local authorities to find the best balance and to deliver social housing stock in the places where it is needed but at a price that is acceptable to the Exchequer.

Rent Controls

42. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions he will take to reduce rents to affordable levels in view of the fact that rent increases in most of the country in 2018 were multiples of the rent pressure zone limits. [8479/19]

44. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions he is taking to alleviate the escalating rents in the private rental sector in counties Laois and Offaly. [8290/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 44 together.

Affordability remains a significant issue in the rental market. Continued economic and population growth coupled with inward migration and a constrained supply of housing contribute to upward pressures on rents.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, introduced the Rent Predictability Measure to moderate rent increases in those parts of the country where rents are highest and rising resulting in great difficulty for households finding affordable accommodation. In Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs), rents can only increase by a maximum of 4% annually. The measure applies to new and existing tenancies, when rents are set at the start of a tenancy and when rents are set in a rent review during an ongoing tenancy or new tenancy, unless otherwise exempted.

Section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended, provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone. For the purpose of the Act, 'area' is defined as either the administrative area of a housing authority or a local electoral area within the meaning of section 2 of the Local Government Act 2001.

For an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as inserted by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016):

(i) the annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and

(ii) the average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in the RTB's Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€1,122 per month in Q3 2018).

The RTB Rent Index Report includes a summary in Table 9 of the data used to establish whether each Local Electoral Area fulfils the criteria for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone. This ensures transparency in relation to the position of individual areas in terms of average rent levels and increases.

Further information on Rent Pressure Zones and designations is available on my Department's website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/PUBLICATIONS>, by searching 'rent pressure zones - information'.

The most recent average national rent available for this purpose is taken from the Q3 2018 RTB Rent Index Report which records an average national rent of €1,122. Data for Q3 2018 show that nationally, private rents rose by 7.5% annually across the country, a slight deceleration from 7.8% in Q2 2018. National rents showed a quarterly increase of 1.9%, a decrease from 3.4% in Q2 2018.

The six Local Electoral Areas (LEA's) in Laois and Offaly do not currently fulfil the RPZ designation criteria under the legislation as the average rent in each is below the National Standardised Rent of €1,122. The data from the Q3 2018 Rent Index Report relating to the six LEA's located is set out in the following table.

Local Electoral Area	Quarters >7%	Average 2018 Q3 (€)
Borris-in-Ossory-Mountmellick	2	767.54
Portlaoise	4	921.14
Graiguecullen-Portarlinton	3	926.01
Birr	1	559.29
Tullamore	5	772.37
Edenderry	3	825.26

The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment)(No. 2) Bill 2018 was published on 19 December 2018 to deliver on a number of commitments flowing from Rebuilding Ireland and commitments made subsequently to provide powers to the RTB to investigate and sanction landlords who engage in improper conduct, including non-compliance with the rent increase restriction in Rent Pressure Zones.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 27.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 42.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

45. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the establishment of the MICA redress scheme; the planned commencement date of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8179/19]

46. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the recent announcement of the MICA redress scheme; the date in 2019 from which homes will be repaired under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8180/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 45 and 46 together.

The Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

In 2017, the report of the Expert Panel was published and included eight recommendations, which my Department is actively progressing with the relevant stakeholders, prioritising the

implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) established a Technical Committee to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol. The standardised protocol will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders. The standardised protocol was published by the NSAI on 13 November 2018 and 'I.S. 465:2018 - Assessment, testing and categorisation of damaged buildings incorporating concrete blocks containing certain deleterious materials', is available at www.nsai.ie.

The standard can be used to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite. Previously, there was no common way for engineers or homeowners to assess the damage caused by defective concrete blocks, in order to decide what, if any, remedial work could be carried out. The standard:

1. establishes a protocol for assessing and determining whether a building has been damaged by concrete blocks containing certain excessive amounts of deleterious materials (free or unbound muscovite mica, or aggregate with potentially deleterious quantities of pyrite);
2. describes methods for establishing the extent of the problem;
3. describes the scope of any testing required; and
4. categorises buildings, in accordance with the standard, providing competent persons with guidance on the appropriate measures to be taken.

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in relation to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowners/affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland has provided assurance that they are in the process of finalising measures to establish such a register now that the standardised protocol is in place. Engineers Ireland has recently issued a call for suitably qualified engineers to participate on the register.

In 2017, I visited Donegal and Mayo and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, elected members and officials of the local authorities and other interested parties. I made similar visits to both counties last year and I will continue to monitor the situation and to update affected parties on progress.

Under Budget 2019, the Government approved in principle the development of a grant scheme of financial assistance to support affected homeowners in the two counties to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been damaged due to defective concrete blocks. Work on the development of such a scheme is well underway, including discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the operation and funding of the scheme. It is intended to revert to Government with proposals for the scheme as soon as possible, with a view to publishing details of the scheme thereafter.

Local Authority Housing

47. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that none of the renovated voids completed in 2018 were leased to tenants prior to renovation. [8478/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The purpose of the voids programme, funded by my Department, is to support local authorities in returning vacant social homes to use as quickly as possible, particularly homes that would likely remain vacant for a significant period of time because of the cost of the works required.

My Department does not collate data on the letting history of local authority properties submitted for refurbishment under the voids programme. Indeed, the tenanting of social homes is a matter for individual local authorities, therefore the information sought is not available from my Department. As a matter of practice, I expect that most, if not all, properties supported under the voids programme were re-let following completion of works. However, it may be possible for some works to be carried out in tandem with a property being re-let and that might facilitate a tenant being housed more speedily; such decisions are operational ones for local authorities to take.

Legislative Process

48. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the commercial rates Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8458/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Local Government (Rates) Bill 2018 is currently before the Oireachtas and completed Second Stage in the Dáil recently. Given that the current legislative basis for the levying and collection of rates is spread over a number of enactments, some dating back to the 19th century, the Bill contains proposals for modernisation of the legislation governing commercial rates. Included in the provisions are:

- the removal of the requirement for ratepayers to pay their annual bill in two instalments (moieties) and provision to allow ratepayers to pay rates by instalments or a payment plan agreed with the local authority;
- schemes for the abatement of rates on vacant properties;
- power for local authorities to introduce rates waiver schemes to support local and national policy objectives;
- the levying of interest on unpaid and overdue rates; and
- the rendering of unpaid rates to be a charge on relevant property.

Additionally, further measures could not be finalised for inclusion in the Bill as published but are currently being examined with a view to their introduction at Committee Stage. These include:

- the issuing, by a local authority, of a Rates Compliance Certificate when a ratepayer has discharged the rates liability or has entered into a payment plan, and the introduction of a requirement to have a Rates Compliance Certificate in order to obtain certain statutory licences;
- addressing the powers for local authorities to take legal action through the Courts to pursue unpaid rates; and
- amending the provisions of section 56 of the Valuation Acts 2001-2015 relating to a Rates Limitation Order in the year following a revaluation of a local authority, in order to maintain the same level of rates income for the local authority in question.

The Bill is a key priority of my Department and when enacted, will facilitate more effective and streamlined rates collection procedures.

Housing Issues

49. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he can address concerns of residents in areas that have seen large developments of housing stock while ensuring targets are being reached in the Rebuilding Ireland programme; the success of the programme to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8399/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Rebuilding Ireland, some 50,000 additional social housing homes will be delivered through build, acquisition and leasing schemes over the period 2016-2021. In addition, a further 87,000 households will be supported under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Overall targets for each local authority are directly proportionate to the housing need in their area and the aim is to deliver the housing required in the most efficient and effective manner through a range of delivery streams led by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

The scale and relevant tenure mix for new social housing developments are, in the first case, matters for the relevant local authority, whether those developments are contracted by the authorities themselves or by AHBs operating in their areas. Central guidance for housing developments is set out in my Department’s publication ‘Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities’, which is available on my Department’s website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C1979%2Cen.pdf>. This advises, inter alia, that good quality, sustainable housing development should be socially and environmentally appropriate, where the mix of dwelling type, size and tenure should support sound social, environmental and economic sustainability policy objectives and contribute to the integrated development of the areas in which they are located.

The guidance also recommends that in the case of social housing, the mix of dwellings should have regard to the need to achieve a balance in home types, sizes and tenure, but should be based primarily on the results of the most recent assessment of housing need and the characteristics of households likely to be accommodated in the scheme.

I consider that this guidance is appropriate and will support the long-term, sustainable development of communities. In applying this guidance, local authorities or AHBs are not prohibited from developing new schemes of any particular size where they are working within the guidance on sustainable communities. The current portfolio of projects under development includes a wide range of different sized schemes.

Finally, a key determinant of the scale of new social housing developments is the consideration of such proposals by the elected members of each local authority, through the Part 8 planning process.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

50. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress being made on reducing the social housing waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8196/19]

51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses allocated to families on the various local authority housing lists in the course of 2018; the expectation in this regard in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8432/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 51 together.

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, an exercise which has been carried out on an annual basis since 2016.

The 2018 assessment shows that 71,858 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 13,941 households or 16.2% on the last assessment in June 2017. Indeed, since the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan was launched in 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 71,858, a reduction of 22%.

In terms of meeting the need of households on waiting lists, Rebuilding Ireland provides for a total of 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered through build, acquisition and leasing programmes and 87,000 additional households to be supported through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme, over the 6 year period 2016 to 2021. At end December 2018, over 72,000 households had their social housing need met, representing 53% of the overall Rebuilding Ireland target.

In 2019, funding of €2.4 billion is being provided for the delivery of housing programmes, which will allow for the housing needs of almost 27,400 households to be met. By end 2019, it is anticipated that approximately 100,000 families and individuals will have had their housing needs met through programmes funded under Rebuilding Ireland.

My Department engages with all local authorities on a regular basis regarding the delivery of social housing. I am confident that the actions, targets and resources available to all local authorities under Rebuilding Ireland provide a strong platform for meeting our challenges in the housing sector and continuing to reduce the number of households on waiting lists.

While my Department reports quarterly on the number of social housing supports delivered through the range of Government funded schemes, this does not take account of other households that may have been housed by local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies through, for example, routine re-lettings. Indeed, the allocation of social housing support is a matter for each individual local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and associated regulations. Section 22 of the 2009 Act requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

Land Development Agency

52. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

the compulsory purchase powers the new land agency will have for the procurement of under-utilised private land for the provision of housing. [8456/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on 13 September 2018 by way of Establishment Order under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971.

On establishment, the LDA had access to an initial tranche of 8 publicly owned sites that have near term delivery potential for 3,000 new homes and an additional potential for 7,000 new homes. The LDA will also be involved in strategic land assembly by consolidating strategic privately owned lands, for example lands which may be key to opening up the potential of public lands, or which may present long-term strategic land-assembly opportunities, to ensure land supply to the market on an enduring basis, including the potential use of compulsory purchase powers where required.

A Land Development Agency Bill is currently being prepared, which will include provisions for the LDA to compulsorily acquire lands, if necessary, to deliver on its mandate. It is expected that a General Scheme of the LDA Bill will be published in the coming weeks, with pre-legislative scrutiny to follow shortly thereafter.

Ministerial Meetings

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of meetings he has had with the Pyrite Remediation Board and the Housing Agency in relation to the pyrite remediation scheme since 2016 with particular reference to the key aspects of the scheme addressed at those meetings. [8401/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme, to be implemented by the Board, with support from the Housing Agency.

My Department's records indicate that I have attended six meetings in relation to the operation of the scheme. Representatives of the Pyrite Resolution Board attended two of those meetings, while representatives of the Housing Agency attended one of the meetings involved. Officials from my Department attended all six meetings.

My Department provides technical and general support to the Board, as well as funding to cover the expenditure incurred by the Board and the Housing Agency in the implementation of the scheme. I receive monthly updates from my Department on activity and progress under the scheme. These updates are in addition to the quarterly and annual reporting arrangements that are in place. My Department is in regular contact with the Board and the Housing Agency in relation to the implementation of the scheme and is satisfied with the arrangements in place in that regard.

It should be noted that in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions and, as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters relating to the implementation of the scheme.

Housing Data

54. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

the number of rapid build housing units that have been constructed to date and occupied; the number of additional units expected to be completed before the end of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8183/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statistical information in relation to social housing delivery across all delivery streams, including rapid delivery, is published on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/node/6338>. Statistical information for the full year 2018 has just been published and is available at: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-eoghan-murphy-publishes-break-down-of-social-housing-delivery-in-2018-on-a-local-authority-basis/>.

At the end of 2018, 423 homes had been delivered under the rapid delivery programme. Since the programme's inception, some 40 projects have been added to the pipeline and will deliver over 1,100 homes out to 2021. Some 180 of these are expected to be delivered in 2019.

Housing Data

55. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expressions of interest received by the end of October 2018 for the enhanced long-term social housing leasing scheme; the number of housing units he expects the scheme to yield by each local authority in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8184/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A range of housing options are necessary to ensure a supply of accommodation to meet different types of social housing need. Harnessing the off-balance sheet potential of private investment in social housing is an important objective of the Government and the social housing targets set out in Rebuilding Ireland over the period to 2021 reflect the ambition in that regard.

My Department has introduced the Enhanced Long Term Social Housing Leasing Scheme in order to target newly built or yet to be built houses and apartments for long term leasing, and to target property developers and investors who are in a position to deliver housing at a reasonable scale in order to supplement delivery under Pillar 2 of Rebuilding Ireland.

The first call for proposals for the Enhanced Leasing Scheme was open from January to April 2018 and a total of 33 submissions were received. The second call for proposals closed on 25th October 2018 and a total of 22 submissions were received. Information with respect to the number and location of the dwellings proposed for leasing under the Scheme will be available once the respective housing authorities have signed Agreements for Lease arising from the completion of the due diligence process. It is expected that the first Agreements to Lease will be signed later in Q1 2019.

My Department and the Housing Agency continue to work with local authorities and proposers in respect of the Enhanced Leasing Scheme, and the leasing schemes generally, in order to ensure maximum delivery of high quality leased properties to meet the needs of households on social housing waiting lists. It is intended to open the Enhanced Leasing Scheme to the market permanently in 2019.

Water Services

56. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the reform of water services including the creation of a single utility and a referen-

dum to enshrine water in public ownership. [8451/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 sets the broad policy context for the development of water services, including the position of Irish Water as the single, publicly owned national water services authority. This is consistent with the recommendations made by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services in 2017, and the legislative reforms in the Water Services Acts.

In this context, Irish Water has proposed fully integrating its operations and ending the current operational arrangements for the delivery of water services through service level agreements, or SLAs, with local authorities. This, of course, will give rise to significant organisational change for local authorities and their staff.

To this effect on 19 September 2018, the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) reported on a process of engagement, undertaken at my request, with the parties involved in the transformation programme for Irish Water, including, ICTU and relevant affiliated unions, local government management through the County and City Management Association, Irish Water and my Department. In response to the WRC report, I asked the parties to engage in a process to work towards the development of a stable structural and operational framework for the future. This engagement is to commence in the coming weeks.

In relation to the question of a constitutional amendment on the public ownership of water services, the position is that I have received Government approval for the priority drafting, by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in the Attorney General's Office, of proposed amendments to the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No. 2) Bill 2016, which will focus on retaining the entity charged with the provision of public water services in public ownership. This Bill is currently before the Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. Work on the amendments is being given priority attention by the Office of the Attorney General. I have written to the Chairperson of the Committee as recently as 21 January 2019 and will continue to keep the Committee updated on progress in this matter.

Referendum Campaigns

57. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to hold referendums in 2019. [4260/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): At its meeting on 4 December 2018, the Government reviewed the progress on Bills to amend the Constitution and agreed that two referendums would be held on the same date as the local and European elections in late May 2019. A referendum would be held on the issue of divorce which would be a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality while the second referendum would concern extending the franchise at Presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State.

In light of the significant impact that the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union is having across all of Government, particularly in the first quarter of 2019, the Government agreed on 5 February 2019 that the proposed referendum on extending the franchise at Presidential elections would be deferred until October 2019.

Furthermore, the Government also agreed on 5 February that the preferred option to be put to the people for a referendum is for an extension of the franchise to all citizens resident outside the State, including citizens resident in Northern Ireland. This will now inform the develop-

ment of a Constitution Amendment Bill in good time for the holding of a referendum in October 2019.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 26.

Home Loan Scheme

59. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme processed by the Housing Agency; the number recommended by the agency; the number refused; the number sent back for further information; the amount recommended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8296/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications. Last year, I asked the Agency to compile figures on its processing of applications. The most recent figures, as at the end of January 2019, indicate that the Agency had assessed 3,916 applications since the scheme began. Of these, 667 were deemed invalid, 1,660 were recommended for approval and 1,598 were recommended for refusal. The data provided does not include figures on the number of applications returned for further information.

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

Pyrite Issues

60. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he has taken in relation to the continued failure of the Pyrite Remediation Board to bring forward a resolution to issues in relation to the interpretation of sections 15 and 17 of the Pyrite Resolution Act 2013. [8400/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” for affected homeowners, who have no other practical option to obtain redress and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board’s website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

The scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2017 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. It is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having re-

gard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

Where a dwelling, otherwise not eligible for inclusion in the scheme, adjoins a dwelling already included in the scheme, such a dwelling may be considered in accordance with the exceptional circumstance provisions set out in section 17 of the Act. Section 17 provides that exceptional circumstances may apply where:

- failure to include a dwelling in the scheme may result in damage to that dwelling or damage to the dwelling being remediated under the scheme, or
- pyrite remediation work is causing or may cause damage to a dwelling.

The Housing Agency will consider if exceptional circumstances apply when the Remedial Works Plan is being drawn up and the Board will be informed of any recommendation for a decision in the matter. To date, one dwelling has been included in the pyrite remediation scheme under the exceptional circumstances provisions of the Act.

In relation to section 15 of the Act, the restriction in Section 15(3) of the Act preventing applications being made under the scheme by a person who purchases a dwelling on or after 12 December 2013 (the publication date of the Pyrite Remediation Bill), applies where that person knew or ought to have known that the dwelling was constructed using hardcore containing reactive pyrite. Following a number of requests for clarification on this matter, my Department sought legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General on the Board's interpretation of Section 15(3). It is my Department's view, informed by the legal advice received on the matter, that Section 15(3) does not represent a blanket exclusion preventing applications being made under the scheme by a person who purchases a dwelling on or after 12 December 2013 and that it is a matter for the Board to determine, based on facts and evidence in each individual case, whether an applicant is or is not entitled to apply for inclusion into the Pyrite Remediation Scheme.

The Board was notified of my Department's view on the matter. However, it is important to note that, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters relating to the implementation of the scheme. The Board may be contacted directly by phone at Locall 1890 252842 or by email to info@pyriteboard.ie or alternatively at oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie.

Land Development Agency

61. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of staff he expects to be seconded from NAMA and the National Treasury Management Agency, NTMA, to the Land Development Agency; if he has had discussions with the Minister for Finance and his officials in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8473/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on 13 September 2018 by way of Establishment Order under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971.

There are currently three staff working in the LDA on secondment from the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA). These secondments were directly arranged between my Department and the NTMA. Further LDA secondments from the NTMA or secondments from the National Asset Management Agency are not envisaged at this time.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 28.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

63. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new build social houses constructed in Galway city and county in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8483/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statistical information on social housing delivery across a range of delivery streams, broken down on a local authority basis, is published on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/node/6338>.

Over the course of Rebuilding Ireland, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 137,000 households. With funding of over €6 billion in place, significant progress on implementation of the Plan has already been made.

While there are a number of delivery mechanisms in place to support local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to deliver social housing in an effective and efficient manner, a very substantial focus of the Plan is on accelerating new build activity for social housing across all local authorities, including Galway City and Galway County. Indeed, I discussed this with both local authorities at the recent Housing Summit with local authority Chief Executives in the context of reviewing 2018 delivery.

My Department will continue to work with the Galway local authorities, and all other local authorities, to deliver on the targets set out under Rebuilding Ireland.

Weather Events Response

64. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to fully prepare for extreme weather events in 2019 (details supplied); if his Department is monitoring the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3139/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is the Lead Government Department for co-ordinating the response to severe weather events. The task of monitoring for, and initial response to, emergencies of all kinds within my Department's remit is assigned to the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management. The National Directorate responds on the basis of its Standard Operating Procedures and has gained considerable experience in working with Met Éireann to lead the response to severe weather at national level.

In addition to the considerable experience of responding to severe weather events over the last decade, much development work has also taken place in emergency management. This is based on a systemic risk management approach, following international good practice.

My Department reviews the response to each severe weather event, with a view to consolidating good practice and identifying issues for further improvement after each event. A review report has been prepared by my Department on the extreme weather events which occurred in the period August 2017 to August 2018, which includes three flooding events, ex-Hurricane Ophelia, Storm Emma and the extended drought of summer 2018.

My Department is implementing recommendations within its own remit. The report's recommendations on national co-ordination and cross-cutting actions are being considered by a sub-group established by the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning.

Departmental Expenditure

65. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the annual cost in 2017, 2018 and projected for 2019 of the housing assistance payment, HAP, the rental accommodation scheme, RAS, rent supplement and all other housing assistance payments to landlords; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8484/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested in respect of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is set out in the following table:

Year	HAP (€m)	RAS (€m)
2017	152.69	142.8
2018	276.6	143.4
2019 (Allocated)	422	134.3

Rent Supplement falls within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Private Rented Accommodation

66. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address the situation by which landlords in the private rental market seek the deposit and first months rent in advance of handing over the property while the housing assistance payment is issued to the end of the month when a tenant could already be in the property for three weeks and thereby bringing issuing of the housing assistance payment more into line with the private rental market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8482/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme has been structured in a way that protects Exchequer funding, by ensuring that payments are made only on valid and complete applications. For this reason rent is generally paid in arrears, which ensures that money is only paid in respect of time that the property has actually been occupied by the tenant. This practice helps avoid a situation where the local authority has to attempt to recover money from the landlord and simplifies the administration of the scheme. While certain landlords may have a preference to obtain rent in advance, it should be noted that one of the advantages of the HAP scheme for a landlord is that it offers the security of regular monthly payments.

Limerick City and County Council provides a highly effective transactional shared service on behalf of all HAP local authorities. This HAP Shared Service Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord.

Once a HAP application has been received and confirmed as valid by the relevant local authority, it is then processed by the HAP SSC. On average, HAP applications are processed by the HAP Shared Service Centre within 1 working day of receipt. Any rental payment arising for a given month will then be made to a landlord on the last Wednesday of that month.

At the end of Quarter 3 2018, there were more than 40,800 active tenancies in receipt of HAP support and over 25,000 landlords and agents involved in providing accommodation to those households. My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

67. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase the number of social and affordable houses in County Meath. [8384/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is firmly focused on increasing housing supply and the priority is to support those in society with the greatest housing access and affordability challenges. In that context, the focus is on meeting the housing needs of those in the lower-income categories, particularly those in need of social housing supports, and other households that are most challenged from an affordability perspective, such as first-time buyers. The significant progress being made in these areas is outlined on the Rebuilding Ireland website at www.rebuildingireland.ie and was further supported through Budget 2019, which has provided €2.4 billion for housing purposes this year.

Overall, the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan will increase the supply of new homes to 25,000 per annum by 2020; deliver an additional 50,000 social housing homes in the period 2016 to 2021; and meet the housing needs of a further 87,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

In 2018, in excess of 27,000 households had their social housing need met, significantly ahead of the target set. The level of progress being made is reflected in social housing waiting lists, which have reduced by 22% nationally, from 91,600 households to 71,858, between 2016 and 2018. The Social Housing Delivery Report for 2018 provides further details of delivery last year and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Social-Housing-Report-2018.pdf>.

Statistical information in relation to social housing delivery across all delivery streams is published on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/node/6338>. Statistical information for the full year 2018 has just been published and is available at:

Social Housing Breakdown

I will shortly be writing to all local authorities, including Meath, setting out their individual social housing targets for 2019 and progress against these targets will continue to be published each quarter.

In relation to the provision of affordable housing for purchase, Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 has been commenced, placing the scheme on a statutory footing. In order to support local authorities in delivering affordable homes, €310 million is being made available from 2019 until 2021 under the Serviced Site Fund (SSF). The SSF will fund facilitating infrastructure on local authority sites. At a maximum funding rate of €50,000 per affordable home, at least 6,200 affordable homes will be facilitated.

On foot of the first call for SSF proposals which issued to local authorities in Dublin, the Greater Dublin Area, Cork and Galway City, approval was issued in December 2018 for ten

projects at a cost of €43m, which will support the delivery of some 1,400 affordable homes. Infrastructure works on these projects will begin as soon as possible and delivery of affordable homes is anticipated from early 2020 onwards. A second call for proposals will issue to local authorities shortly, taking account of the authorities' economic assessments of the requirement and potential to deliver affordable homes from their sites.

The Government is also committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work. There are currently two cost rental projects at Enniskerry Road in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, which will deliver 50 and 330 cost rental homes respectively. The experience on these projects will inform a national cost rental framework under which similar projects will be rolled out on a wider scale. My Department is engaged with the National Development Finance Agency, the European Investment Bank and the Land Development Agency to develop the optimum funding and delivery mechanisms to support cost rental delivery at scale in Dublin and other urban areas.

My Department will continue to work with all local authorities with regard to any social and mixed-tenure housing proposals that they bring forward, in order to maximise delivery and also harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional housing units in 2019.

Local Government Reform

68. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied with the level of readiness of local authorities and the implementation oversight group ahead of the Cork city and county boundary changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8474/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Cork boundary alteration is the most significant of its kind undertaken in the State. It represents a major reorganisation of local government in Cork with a population of over 85,000 people in the relevant area transferring from Cork County Council to Cork City Council.

The Local Government Act 2019 came into effect on 31 January 2019 and provides primarily for the alteration of the administrative boundary between Cork County Council and Cork City Council, which is planned to take place when the new Councils take office after the local elections in late May 2019. The Act provides for the establishment of a statutory Cork Boundary Alteration Implementation Oversight Committee to ensure that the challenges of implementation are addressed effectively and to oversee arrangements for the alteration of the boundary in accordance with an implementation plan.

Responsibility for the detailed planning and implementation of the reorganisation process rests primarily with the two local authorities, subject to guidance and oversight by the Oversight Committee and compliance with the Implementation Plan.

The Committee has advised my Department that work is continuing in a timely fashion towards the transfer day of 31 May 2019. The statutory implementation plan is expected to be published in the coming weeks. Work on staff transfer plans and the financial settlement is also progressing and I am satisfied with the engagement and the level of readiness in the local authorities and the implementation oversight by the Oversight Committee.

Local Authority Housing Data

69. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority dwellings that were refurbished in 2018 under the voids programme by local authority; if the funds originally allocated to each local authority were drawn down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8246/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The voids programme provides additional support to local authorities in preparing vacant social homes for re-letting, particularly homes that would likely remain vacant for a significant period of time because of the cost of the works required. The programme assists local authorities in actively targeting such vacant properties, to minimise their turnaround and re-let times and return them to use in an energy efficient condition.

The number of local authority dwellings that were brought back to productive use during 2018, with funding provided through the voids programme, is set out in the following Table. My Department did not issue funding allocations to each local authority; instead the funding was drawn down as local authorities undertook the remediation works.

Units Returned in 2018

	No.
Carlow	38
Cavan	14
Clare	43
Cork City	74
Cork County	205
Donegal	86
Dublin City	495
Fingal	48
South Dublin	61
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	50
Galway City	3
Galway County	45
Kerry	98
Kildare	27
Kilkenny	15
Laois	12
Leitrim	30
Limerick	24
Longford	3
Louth	13
Mayo	20
Meath	59
Monaghan	52
Offaly	10
Roscommon	2
Sligo	100
Tipperary	63
Waterford	20
Westmeath	23

	No.
Wexford	8
Wicklow	24
	1,765

Local Authority Housing Data

70. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses acquired and purchased by Cavan and Monaghan county councils from 2013 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8197/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details of the number of houses that have been built and acquired by local authorities, including in counties Cavan and Monaghan, in each of the years 2013 to end Quarter 3 of 2018, are published and available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Details in respect of Quarter 4 of 2018 will be published shortly. Similar details for 2019 will be published on a quarterly basis.

Emergency Accommodation Data

71. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of adults and children, respectively, that accessed local authority managed emergency accommodation in January 2019. [8477/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes data on a monthly basis outlining the number of homeless persons accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and are produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS).

The most recently published statistics for December 2018, show that there were 9,753 persons in emergency accommodation, comprising of 6,194 adults and 3,559 associated dependents. This represented a reduction of 215 people nationally on the numbers recorded in November 2018. The December statistics also show there were 111 fewer families and 252 fewer dependents in emergency accommodation than was the case in November.

The monthly homelessness report for January 2019 is currently being compiled and will be published by my Department shortly. The monthly reports can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

Local Authority Housing

72. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the situation facing residents at a location (details supplied); if the local authority has raised the case with his Department; and if supports will be provided for the affected tenants. [8253/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A number of measures have been introduced in recent years with the objective of improving security of tenure for tenants. Security of tenure provisions under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 apply once a tenant has been in occupation of a dwelling for a continuous period of 6 months, with no notice of termination having been served during that time. Section 34 provides that a landlord must state a reason for the termination in any notice served, in line with those set out in section 34 of the Act.

The so-called ‘Tyrrelstown amendment’, included in the 2016 Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act, already limits the ability of landlords to use the grounds of sale to terminate tenancies, provided for in section 34 of the Residential Tenancies Act. Where a landlord proposes to sell 10 or more units within a single development at the same time, that sale will now be subject to the existing tenants remaining in situ, other than in exceptional circumstances.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015, enacted on 4 December 2015, provided for notice periods for the termination of further Part 4 tenancies, i.e. tenancies that extended beyond 4 years, to be extended pro rata in line with the length of the tenancy, subject to caps of 224 days for termination by landlords and 112 days for terminations by tenants (previously 112 days for landlords and 56 days for tenants).

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Acts to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. Section 56 of the Act provides that, where there is an abuse of the termination procedure in section 34, a tenant may bring a complaint to the RTB on the basis that they have been unjustly deprived of possession of a dwelling by their landlord.

Further information from the RTB is available at <https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/> and through the RTB helpline - Lo-call on 0818 30 30 37 (mobile operators may charge a premium rate to the Lo-call number) or 01 702 8100 - available from Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 6.30pm

The national housing charity, Threshold operates the Tenancy Protection Service (TPS) which is a national service providing advice and support to households living in private rented accommodation who are experiencing tenancy problems, including where a tenancy is at risk of termination. The TPS seeks to protect existing tenancies and keep tenants in their homes. The Tenancy Protection Service (TPS) helpline on free-phone 1800 454 454 – available from Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm. Further information is also available at www.threshold.ie.

Households at risk of becoming homeless can seek assistance from their local authority. Any household assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for housing support through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme. Once a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the HAP scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that local authority. This includes determining whether it is appropriate to refer a household to the Homeless HAP Place Finder service, which is a targeted support for households in emergency homeless accommodation, or who are at immediate risk of entering emergency accommodation, who may find it difficult to secure accommodation via the HAP scheme.

The Homeless HAP Placefinder can engage directly with property owners, support qualified households to find suitable tenancies and ensure that any additional supports that may be needed are put in place. The Place Finder Service can assist by paying deposits and advance rental payments, within HAP limits.

As the case in question is in the Dublin region, tenants affected can contact the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive's Central Placement Service homeless helpline at 1800-707-707.

Urban Development

73. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the conflict between the legally binding strategic development zone, SDZ, North Lotts plan in Dublin 1 and the recent ministerial guidelines on building height; and if his attention has been drawn to a commercial advantage for developers that pursue his guidelines over developers that adhere to the legally binding SDZ. [8398/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 7 December 2018, I issued 'Urban Development and Building Height' Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála, pursuant to Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Publication of the guidelines, which were called for widely in the wider planning and development sector, followed a period of public consultation and consideration of over 100 submissions and a thorough assessment by my Department. A copy of the guidelines is available on my Department's website at the following link:

Urban Development and Height Guidelines

Under Section 30 of the 2000 Act, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government is specifically precluded from exercising power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

By way of background, however, it is important to note that the guidelines specifically address their application in the context of areas covered by Strategic Development Zone Planning Schemes (SDZs), in particular, through the insertion of Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPR) 3(B & C). SDZs may be reviewed at any stage by their respective development agencies to reflect changing implementation and policy circumstances and development agencies frequently employ these review mechanisms.

The intention of the above policy requirement is to ensure that, on the one hand, planning authorities give practical effect to Government policy on building height in planning scheme areas, while at the same time allowing for effective public engagement in any significant policy shift in relation to heights to comply with Government policy and in view of the absence of third party appeal rights in relation to planning applications in SDZs.

For this reason, it is not the intention that SPPR 3 would allow an immediate 'over-ride' facility for the alteration of approved planning schemes without the undertaking of a review process that is provided for in statute. Rather, the implementation of SPPR 3, and its components at A, B and C, as an integrated package is focused on securing strategic planning outcomes commensurate with proper public consultation.

In determining planning policy and making planning decisions around appropriate building heights, the planning process has to strike a careful balance between enabling long-term and strategic development of relevant areas, while ensuring the highest standards of urban design, architectural quality and place-making outcomes. I am satisfied that these guidelines are necessary and appropriate to give clear context and direction to the overall requirement to promote increased density and building height in appropriate locations within our urban centres.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

74. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the thresholds for entitlement to social housing will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8177/19]

79. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of social housing eligibility; when the review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8291/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 79 together.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is underway. The Housing Agency is continuing to carry out the detailed statistical work, which will underpin this review, on behalf of my Department.

The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Social and Affordable Housing

75. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to utilise the cost rental model of housing; and the timeline and quantity for which he plans to utilise this model for the provision of homes in the next five years. [8455/19]

245. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 299 of 8 November 2018, the status of the cost rental housing project at a location (details supplied); if the project has gone to tender; the estimated completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8524/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 245 together.

Given the affordability challenge faced by renters in Dublin and other parts of the country, the Government is committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

There are currently two cost rental pilot projects being advanced in Dublin, at Enniskerry Road in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, and Emmet Road in Inchicore. The pilot projects will deliver 50 and 330 cost rental homes, respectively. The Enniskerry Road project is at a very advanced stage with the tender evaluation process currently being finalised.

The Emmet Road project is of critical importance, both as part of the Government's cost rental programme, but more importantly to the community of Inchicore and Kilmainham. Therefore, Dublin City Council is progressing the project with a high level of consultation and engagement. In this regard, a community consultative forum, the Inchicore Regeneration Forum, with an independent Chairperson and a Forum Director, has been established, and has twenty delegates representing various members of the community, including three local City Councillors. The City Council is also currently procuring a design team to prepare an Urban Design Development Framework Plan and thereafter will procure a multi-disciplinary design team to prepare the project for the planning application stage.

More broadly, the experience gained from these projects is informing the national approach to cost rental delivery at scale. My Department is engaged with the Housing Agency, the National Development Finance Agency, the European Investment Bank and the Land Development Agency to develop the optimum funding, delivery and administrative frameworks.

In order to support local authorities in delivering affordable homes, including cost rental, €310 million is being made available from 2019 until 2021 under the Serviced Site Fund (SSF). The SSF will fund facilitating infrastructure, on local authority sites, for the provision of affordable housing. At a funding rate of €50,000 per affordable home, at least 6,200 will be facilitated in total. The Enniskerry Road project has received approval in principle for approximately €4m under the first round of allocations and a second call will issue shortly.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 31.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

77. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications made since the introduction of the mortgage to rent scheme; the number of applications successfully granted since the introduction of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8295/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since the introduction of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme in 2012, a total of 4,475 cases have been submitted under the scheme to the end of 2018. Of the 4,475 cases submitted, 3,043 were ineligible or terminated during the process. Of the remaining cases submitted, 445 have been completed, and the remaining 987 applications are being actively progressed.

The reasons why a case may not have progressed are varied and can depend on the household, the property, the ability of the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector to increase its involvement in the scheme, the sale of the property not being agreed between the lender and AHB or a MTR application being withdrawn by either the lender or the borrower. The Housing Agency publishes, on a quarterly basis, detailed statistical information on the operation of the MTR scheme, which is available on the Agency's website at the following link:

<https://www.housingagency.ie/our-services/housing-supply-services/mortgage-to-rent.aspx> .

A Review of the MTR scheme, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amend-

ments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the scheme in order to improve its operation. The Review, which is available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the avenues and impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households. The eligibility requirements of the scheme were widened to include a greater number of borrowers and a larger number of property types. Increasing awareness and understanding of the scheme has been a priority and a new website - www.mortgagetorent.ie - dedicated to guiding and advising borrowers has been developed. In addition, new structures and arrangements have been put in place to encourage a greater number of entities to take part in the scheme.

The implementation of the resulting actions from the Review means that MTR is available to provide a long-term solution for more households in mortgage distress, where appropriate.

Where MTR is not an option, it is a matter for the borrower to discuss with their lender if there are other options available to resolve their mortgage arrears situation. Likewise, the borrower, if eligible for social housing support, may also be able to consider other social housing options, including accessing the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

The Abhaile service is a national mortgage arrears resolution service, provided free of charge to mortgage holders in arrears and its aim is to help these borrowers to find the best solutions and keep them, wherever possible, in their own homes. The unique element of Abhaile is that it brings together, for the first time, the full range of supports and services required by borrowers in home mortgage arrears. A dedicated adviser will work with the borrower and their lender to find the best solution for their particular situation. The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) acts as the gateway for the service and can be contacted by telephoning (076)1072000 or by accessing their website at: www.mabs.ie/abhaile.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

78. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the quality standards framework inspection regime for emergency homeless accommodation; and when the framework will be in place. [8450/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. This includes operational issues such as ensuring that contracted services are delivered in a professional manner, that inspections take place and that homeless families/individuals can report issues to the relevant authority.

In this regard, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has been overseeing the development of a quality standards framework, coordinating this work in consultation with an advisory group, which includes representation from various housing authorities, service providers, Tusla, clients and other stakeholders, with a view to having the finalised standards adopted on a national basis by individual housing authorities.

Guidance on the national implementation of a quality standards framework will be issued to all local authorities before the end of Q1 2019.

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 74.

Motor Insurance Costs

80. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the way in which the CSO acquire data on the price of motor insurance; and if staff working for the office identify themselves as a representatives of the CSO when requesting such data from a company. [8521/19]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): Private motor insurance is one of the items measured in the monthly Consumer Price Index (CPI) published by the CSO. To compile the Motor Insurance sub-index of the CPI, the CSO collects premiums information from a sample of insurance companies. The sample covers approximately two thirds of the motor insurance premiums written in the market.

The insurance companies are requested to supply price quotations for defined customer profiles for both new and existing customers. This request is made monthly via email from a member of the CSO's CPI team directly to a representative of each of the insurance companies in the sample. As with all companies contacted directly for information used in the compilation of the CPI, the CSO team members identify themselves.

The CSO keeps the profiles regularly updated so that they continue to be representative of the private motor insurance market. Each representative profile specifies characteristics such as the model and age of the car and the sex, age, location and occupation of the insured person. The measurement is designed to explicitly exclude any changes in premium that might occur due to changes in the characteristics of the policy (e.g. changes such as a new claim in the past year, older driver, additional penalty points etc.) as the aim of the CPI is to measure the change in prices each month for exactly the same goods and services.

Tender Process

81. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the tender process for the replacement of the CASA maritime patrol aircraft; when it is expected that a preferred aircraft will be identified; the sum of money allocated for the replacement in the 2019 Estimates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8581/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

The White Paper on Defence provides for the replacement of the two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft with consideration of their replacement with larger more suitable aircraft, which would enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks.

A public tender competition for the replacement of the CASA Maritime Patrol Aircraft is underway in my Department at present. The tender competition is being carried out as a two stage restricted procedure in accordance with EU Directive 2009/81/EC, which is a specific Directive relating to the award of contracts in the field of defence and security. A Request for Proposals (Stage 1) was published on the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) in May 2018, followed by a Request for Tenders (Stage 2) which issued in November 2018. Ten-

ders when submitted will be assessed against the award criteria set out in the published Request for Proposals, i.e. on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender. It is expected that the tender competition will be completed by mid 2019.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on at this stage or to divulge the budget allocation for this project for expenditure in 2019 pending the outcome of the tender competition as this information is commercially sensitive and the procurement process has not yet been completed.

In accordance with the National Development Plan, the capital allocation for Defence has been increased to €106 million for 2019, an increase of €29 million. The NDP provides for a total of €541 million over the period 2018 to 2022. This level of capital funding will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as identified and prioritised in the Defence White Paper and builds on the significant investment programme over recent years. The replacement of the Air Corps CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft is among the projects included for funding.

Irish Language

82. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8617/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department and the Defence Forces are committed to the relevant undertakings of the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030. On foot of this strategy, my Department and the Defence Forces, identified certain objectives as being relevant to the Defence Organisation, in particular, objectives 2 and 12.

Objective 2 of the Strategy is that the Official Languages Act will be fully implemented and that the right of the public to use Irish in dealings with the State and with other bodies will be developed and the appropriate arrangements to deliver this will be put in place.

Objective 12 of the Strategy is that the use of the Irish language by An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces will be continued and developed.

In relation to Objective 2, my Department has fulfilled its commitments in relation to the provision of services in Irish under the Official Languages Act 2003. The Department's fourth Irish language Scheme 2017 - 2020, is in place since September 2017.

Commitments under the scheme continue to be delivered and include the following:

- The static content on my Department's new website is bilingual and there is an option for users to access the site in Irish or English, as is the case with the Defence Forces' website.

- My Department has a pool of Irish speakers to allow customers to conduct their business through the medium of Irish, should they so wish.

- When my Department issues new press releases, it has procedures in place to ensure that it complies with the requirement that a minimum of 20% be available through Irish.

- Irish Language awareness is part of the induction process for new staff in my Department.

My Department also has a *Líonra na Gaeilge* Committee which holds meetings throughout the year.

Signage at my Department buildings is bilingual and telephone calls to the Department are answered in Irish. Correspondence received in Irish is answered in Irish. This approach is replicated by the Defence Forces.

Additionally, the Learning and Development section promotes Irish internally through accommodating requests for Irish language courses and by running various events such as quizzes, bingo and coffee mornings through Irish.

In relation to Objective 12, the Defence Forces continue to promote the Government policy of bilingualism and to ensure that the Defence Forces provide a quality service through the Irish language. At present, this policy is implemented under the Defence Forces' Scheme 2014-17 under section 15 of the Official Languages Act 2003 (*Scéim Óglaigh na hÉireann 2014-17*). The Defence Forces will continue to prioritise implementation of the joint Implementation Plan for the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 through the Defence Forces Language Council (*An Chomhairle Gaeilge, Óglaigh na hÉireann*). *An Chomhairle Gaeilge*, actively uses the 20 Year Strategy as a guide to progress and benchmark Irish within the Defence Forces at its meetings, which normally occur monthly.

As well as complying with the Official Languages Act 2003 by publishing Irish Languages Schemes, the Defence Forces have put in place a policy in order to achieve objective 12 (Administrative Instruction A8 para 5). Under this policy, a Senior Irish Language Officer, *An t-Oifigeach Gaeilge Sinsearach*, of Colonel rank who reports directly to and advises The Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces has been appointed. This officer briefs the General Staff and Formation Commanders on a bi-monthly basis on Irish language matters.

The officer also chairs the Defence Forces Irish Language Council, *An Chomhairle Gaeilge*, whose membership includes representatives from all Defence Forces formations, as well as a representative from *An Chéad Chathlán Coisithe*, the designated Irish speaking unit, based in Galway. This Council drafts and presents an Annual Plan for the Irish Language for the approval of the Chief of Staff. It convenes on a monthly basis throughout the year to monitor and progress the implementation of the Plan and to coordinate all Irish language activities within the Defence Forces.

The Director of Defence Forces Training makes funding available for personnel to undergo Irish Language Courses, and to attend *An Campa Gaeilge*, an annual Irish Language training camp, conducted in *An Chéad Chathlán Coisithe*, Renmore, Galway, and at a location in the Gaeltacht. This course has achieved maximum capacity of 60 personnel in 2018 and is likely to be over-subscribed again in 2019. A training syllabus for a one-week Irish language course is promulgated in the Defence Forces' Annual Training and Education Directive. In 2018, courses were conducted in Renmore Barracks, Galway and Sarsfield Barracks, Limerick. The Defence Forces (DF) provide funding for members, on the recommendation of *An Chomhairle Gaeilge*, to complete Irish language Diploma level courses. In 2018, two DF students commenced Diploma level courses at UL and NUIG.

Since 2016 an annual Irish Language Seminar, has been organised and run by *An Chomhairle Gaeilge*, for Irish-speaking personnel and guest speakers are invited to discuss the latest developments and opportunities in the Irish Language Community. The DF conduct induction and promotion interviews whenever requested as *Gaeilge* and *An Chomhairle Gaeilge* maintain a panel of appropriately ranked Irish speakers to staff the interview boards where required.

Candidates for induction and promotion may avail of the opportunity to undergo interview

in the Irish Language. A lapel pin can be worn on the uniform of serving personnel that signifies that the wearer is empathetic to the language and is willing to converse in the language regardless of ability/fluency. In 2019, a badge will be issued to those personnel to be worn on the day to day working dress.

Diplomatic Representation Expenditure

83. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason an embassy (details supplied) sponsored an event at which persons were not permitted to attend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8546/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Irish Embassy in South Africa provided financial support for a closing event for a conference on post-conflict reconciliation organised by Stellenbosch University in December 2018. The closing event, at which the Embassy supported the participation of a speaker from Northern Ireland, was planned to honour the legacy of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and mark the 20th anniversary of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Embassy agreed to support the closing event in light of the relevance of the themes of post-conflict resolution to the Northern Ireland Peace Process, in what was the 20th anniversary year of the Good Friday Agreement. It was felt that this was a good opportunity to highlight the ongoing reconciliation work taking place in Northern Ireland and the support provided by South Africa to the Irish Peace Process. Stellenbosch University has an existing strong relationship with Queens University Belfast and is a respected institution in South Africa.

I understand that the conference organisers, faced with strong local protests about the participation of Israeli academics, tried to devise a formula which would describe the Israeli academics as being present in their personal capacities, and not as representatives of Israel or of their universities. This was a good faith effort by the organisers, but the Israeli academics concluded they could not participate under the altered terms, which would have applied only to them, and withdrew from attending the conference.

I would like to make clear that Ireland is opposed to boycotts of Israel, including academic boycotts. The absence of the Israeli participants from this conference was regrettable, and this is clearly also the view of Stellenbosch University.

I am convinced that peacebuilding and reconciliation work is very important and a positive contribution to conflict resolution, and I believe that this conference, despite this unfortunate situation, nonetheless played a valuable role in this regard. I understand that other European Embassies and Cultural Institutes who were involved with sponsoring the conference took the same view.

Election Monitoring Missions

84. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8551/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I refer the Deputy to the responses to Parliamentary Questions No. 80 of 30 January 2019 and No. 61 of 6 February 2019. No request for a reasonable accommodation was received

before the deadline for applications. If such a request had been received, it would have received full and thorough consideration.

Irish Language

85. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8621/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has been proactive in implementing the three action points assigned to it in the Government's 2018-2022 Action Plan for the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030. We have engaged extensively with the *Trasna Na dTonnta* Twitter campaign (including in the latest round of activities as run over the period 4th-8th February 2019) and supported the *Cultúr Club* diaspora initiative.

The Government has also consistently engaged with the British Government and all of the political parties in Northern Ireland in pursuit of an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland, as envisaged under the St Andrews Agreement and continues to seek progress with this as an outstanding commitment from the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements.

My Department's Irish Language Officer, in conjunction with our Training and Development Unit, regularly encourages the use of the language by Department staff both at home and abroad. Ireland's network of diplomatic missions abroad likewise engages in frequent promotion of the Irish language wherever possible, particularly around *Seachtain na Gaeilge* and St. Patrick's Day.

There are no bodies under my Department's remit.

Northern Ireland

86. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at his recent meeting in Belfast with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the political parties; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8733/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The continuing absence of vital institutions of the Good Friday Agreement is a source of deep concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government. The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions.

Secretary of State Bradley and I met with the leaders of the 5 main political parties at Stormont on 15 February, further to our respective consultations with each of the party leaders. This meeting sought the parties' views at this stage on how a new talks' process could most constructively be commenced in the period immediately ahead.

Each of the party leaders confirmed their wish to participate in the institutions again and provided views on the necessary basis for an effective talks' process.

It was agreed that the two Governments would engage further with the parties to seek an

urgent way forward with a new political process that can secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly.

Following these further consultations, the Government does not underestimate the way to go in achieving a resolution, but continues to believe that this can be achieved and that there is an increasingly urgent need for talks to begin.

The two-year absence of the devolved institutions cannot be allowed to continue. There are pressing decisions and issues across a range of areas, which require a functioning Executive and Assembly. The devolved institutions of the Agreement are also urgently needed so that the Assembly and power-sharing Executive can represent the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland and address issues of concern, including the challenges for Northern Ireland resulting from the UK decision to exit the European Union. The North South Ministerial Council is also essential to oversee and develop North South cooperation on matters of mutual interest, as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement.

The legislation that was brought forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which temporarily suspends the requirement to call an Assembly election, underlines the urgent requirement for all with responsibilities to do everything in their power to get them operating again.

I will continue to work with the Secretary of State and remain in regular contact with the leaders of each of the political parties to get the necessary political process underway to secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly and North South Ministerial Council.

VAT Rate Application

87. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale for the increase from a 0% to 23% rate of VAT on health foods and supplements; his views on whether it is justified; his further views on whether this may detrimentally affect the health of users of such supplements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8727/19]

89. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Finance if the 23% VAT increase on all vitamins, minerals and food supplements on health and financial grounds will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8547/19]

95. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take with the Revenue Commissioners to reverse the decision to place a 23% VAT rate on all food supplements including vitamins, minerals, probiotics and fish oils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8653/19]

96. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether a tax on products that will have a positive impact on health goes against the Healthy Ireland initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8654/19]

97. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the VAT rate of 23% on all food supplements if implemented could lead to the closures of health food stores and the loss of jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8655/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87, 89 and 95 to 97, inclusive, together.

Under the VAT Consolidation Act, the standard rate of VAT applies to all food supplements,

which are not foods in the ordinary and everyday meaning of the word. However, a longstanding concession provided through Revenue guidance permitted the zero rating of certain types of food supplements (vitamins, minerals and fish oils). Revenue published new guidance on 27 December 2018 concerning the rate of VAT that applies to food supplements. The new guidance withdraws the concessionary application of the zero rate to certain food supplements provided for in previous guidance and these products will be liable at the standard rate from 1 March 2019.

Food supplement products that did not fall within the withdrawn concession were already liable at the standard rate and this remains unchanged. Human oral medicines and other health products, including folic acid and vitamin products, that are licenced by the Health Products Regulatory Agency (HPRA) are liable at the zero rate, meaning that access to the health benefits of these products also remains unchanged.

Independent of the Revenue Commissioners' decisions on interpretation, I agreed during last year's Finance Bill to put in place a process that will involve the examination of some of the policy choices around the VAT treatment of food supplements by the Tax Strategy Group in advance of this year's Budget.

Banking Sector

88. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding appointments to a board (details supplied) in view of his request in May 2018; and the applicants being considered for same. [8530/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, in 2018 the Government announced it would cease the appointment of new public interest directors (PIDs), in the banks in which the State holds a shareholding and reform the process by which State nominees were appointed to the board of the banks. Future appointments will be made on foot of my rights as shareholder in each of the banks and not using the powers contained in the Credit Institutions Financial Support (CIFS) Act as was the case with public interest directors. Pursuant to these rights I, as Minister for Finance, can appoint up to two directors to the boards of both AIB and PTSB and one director to the board of Bank of Ireland.

My Department and the Public Appointment Service, PAS, established a transparent process to identify appropriately skilled candidates for nomination to the three banks in which the State holds a shareholding. This process involves an independent assessment panel compiling a list of suitable applicants following which a preferred candidate(s) is selected by myself, as Minister for Finance. This preferred candidate would then be proposed as the Ministerial nominee to the individual institutions, who in turn will conduct the required governance and submit the candidate for SSM approval in line with their regulatory requirements.

In 2018 separate processes began in AIB, PTSB and BOI to appoint new state nominated directors under the updated regime. With regard to AIB, the preferred candidates have been proposed to the bank and are currently undergoing the standard fitness and probity assessments by the regulators. The processes at PTSB and BOI are ongoing.

It is important to note that any company director, regardless of whether or not they are a State nominated director, is subject to the requirements of company law to act in what he or she believes to be the interests of the company to which they are appointed. These are the director's fiduciary duties which are owed to the company rather than to the appointing shareholder. However under the Companies Act 2014 (as amended) there is a provision allowing a nominee

director to have regard to the interests of the appointing shareholder.

I would also note that the new appointment procedure for bank directors needs to have due regard to the distinct differences which exist relative to appointments to State boards. These include the requirements of the central SSM 'Fitness and Probity' regime and the requirement to have a broad set of expertise relevant to large regulated entities in an ever more complex banking regulatory environment.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 87.

NAMA Staff Remuneration

90. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the increased number of staff in NAMA that earn more than €100,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8579/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my response of 12 February 2019 in which I provided details of NAMA staff remuneration for 2018. It is important to highlight that the total of 98 staff, who were in receipt of remuneration in excess of €100,000 per annum outlined in that response, also included staff members who were employed and left NAMA during 2018.

Per my response to a PQ of a similar nature for 2017, given on 13 February 2018, the equivalent figure for 2017 was 103, showing a comparative decrease of 5 in the overall number of staff receiving pay in excess of €100,000 per annum over the period.

Remuneration information for year-end 2018 will be published in mid-2019 in NAMA's Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2018. Such year-end information is at a point in time and includes staff who are scheduled to leave under voluntary redundancy and other leavers whose salaries are above €100,000 but who will remain on the payroll until their garden leave expires.

Revenue Commissioners Data

91. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of cash seized from persons exiting and entering the State by the Revenue Commissioners enforcement officers at sea ports here in the past ten years; the amount of cash returned to persons on appeal to the Revenue Commissioners annually by port and amounts issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8602/19]

92. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of cash seized from persons exiting and entering the State by the Revenue Commissioners enforcement officers by way of electronic funds transfers in the past years; the amount of cash returned to persons on appeal to the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8603/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 92 together.

I am advised by Revenue that cash is seized by them, in accordance with the Criminal Justice Act 1994, as amended by the Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act 2005, if it is believed to be from the proceeds of crime.

Questions - Written Answers

Details of cash seizure for each of the years 2009-2018 for each of the locations listed is shown in the following tables.

Dublin Port

Year	Amount Seized €	Amount returned €
2009	297,246	41,480
2010	68,660	Nil
2011	39,939	Nil
2012	79,912	79,912
2013	139,451	Nil
2014	179,450	Nil
2015	414,741	15,145
2016	67,459	21,365
2017	41,801	5,396
2018	19,439	Nil
Total	1,348,098	163,298

Rosslare Port

Year	Amount Seized €	Amount Returned €
2009	40,000	Nil
2010	128,381	23,500
2011	Nil	Nil
2012	Nil	Nil
2013	18,298	Nil
2014	107,981	73,275
2015	56,420	12,600
2016	9,385	9,385
2017	15,500	Nil
2018	57,238	10,088
Total	433,203	128,848

Ringaskiddy Port

Year	Amount Seized €	Amount Returned €
2009	Nil	Nil
2010	Nil	Nil
2011	Nil	Nil
2012	Nil	Nil
2013	Nil	Nil
2014	36,000	36,000
2015	12,000	Nil
2016	Nil	Nil
2017	Nil	Nil
2018	56,295	4,310
Total	104,295	40,310

I am advised by Revenue that the definition of cash for the purposes of the legislation does not extend to electronic funds transfers.

Irish Language

93. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8620/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the objective of the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 -2030 is to increase on an incremental basis the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language through nine areas of action:

1. Education
2. The Gaeltacht
3. Family Transmission of the Language – Early Intervention
4. Administration, Services and Community
5. Media and Technology
6. Dictionaries
7. Legislation and Status
8. Economic Life
9. Cross-cutting Initiatives

The Strategy has cross-Departmental ownership and responsibility for its implementation falls on a number of Government Departments in addition to Irish language and Gaeltacht Bodies and Organisations. The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has the overall responsibility of co-ordinating implementation of the Strategy. The Deputy will be aware that an overview of progress since the Strategy was published in relation to each of the nine areas of action is set out in the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's 'Action Plan 2018-2022' which can be accessed here - <https://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/02/action-plan-2018-2022.pdf>.

The Deputy may wish to note that my Department's Third Irish Language Scheme 2018 – 2021, which can be accessed on the Department's website or via the link - <https://www.finance.gov.ie/ga/updates/language-scheme-2018-2021/>, includes a number of commitments to increase the number and quality of the Irish language services provided to the public and to promote the use of the Irish language in the Department.

The 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language provides that language schemes will specify the posts within an organisation that require an Irish language competency. The Department's recruitment policy, which is subject to the framework of agreed national recruitment procedures, has regard to the need to improve Irish language capability on an incremental basis. I can advise the Deputy that it is expected that the recruitment of staff to the Department through the Public Appointments Service, with the appropriate level of competence in the Irish language, will be the primary means of optimising the availability of services through Irish. The Depart-

ment keeps the requirements of posts under review, but currently there are no posts for which a competency in Irish is essential.

The Strategy also provides that language awareness and language training programmes need to be developed so that a higher proportion of public service staff are functional in Irish and can deliver services in Irish to customers who seek them. I can advise the Deputy that the Department's Language Scheme also provides that the Department will promote all forms of Irish language further education and it is committed to making available opportunities for staff to attend accredited Irish language training courses. There is also a voluntary panel of Department staff in place who have competence to engage in Irish, as required.

The Deputy may also wish to note that other commitments set out in the Department's Language Scheme include assigning an Irish Language Officer to oversee implementation of the Language Scheme and the Official Languages Act 2003 in addition to promoting cultural initiatives which support and encourage the use of the Irish language in the Department, increasing the number of press releases in Irish and creating a greater Irish language presence on the Department's social media platforms.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department is committed to providing quality services in Irish to its customers and ensuring that there are adequate language resources within the Department to provide the required level of Irish language service.

My Department is liaising with the Bodies under its aegis regarding their progress in implementing the relevant actions in the 20 Year Strategy and I will revert to the Deputy with those details in line with Standing Orders.

Insurance Costs

94. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to situations by which persons who may need to go into a nursing home are seeing insurance companies in some instances increasing their house insurance premiums by nearly four times the original amount in addition to requesting that the electricity and water be turned off; if legislation can be brought forward which would allow a person who had to go into a nursing home to get public liability cover for their home in case of intruders on their property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8638/19]

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

Notwithstanding the above, my officials contacted Insurance Ireland on foot of the Deputy's query to understand more about the process. Insurance Ireland advised that generally, if a person vacates their property for an indefinite period, it may alter the level of cover provided or an insurer may require that the property is in a good state of repair and regularly maintained while left unoccupied.

Insurance Ireland also stated that if a property is unoccupied, it is important to ensure that measures are taken such as draining the water system and turning the heating on frequently to protect against frozen pipes during periods of cold weather, and that any alarm system is monitored and maintained appropriately.

In relation to the Deputy's query regarding whether legislation could be introduced to allow for a person that had to go into a nursing home to get public liability cover for their home in case of intruders on their property, it should be noted that Public Liability policies protect an insured person in respect to their legal liability to third parties for bodily injury, and for any loss or damage to their material property. Public liability insurance does not cover loss or theft of the policyholder's own personal property. The decision of whether or not to take out public liability insurance is for each individual to make in respect of their own property and, as mentioned above, the provision or pricing of insurance products are commercial matters to be determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept.

Questions Nos. 95 to 97, inclusive, answered with Question No. 87.

Revenue Commissioners Enforcement Activity

98. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners are satisfied that a person (details supplied) has supplied sufficient evidence to show that they reside in County Derry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8734/19]

99. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners are satisfied that a person (details supplied) is resident in County Derry; the reason the person was issued a compromise release term to release a seized vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8735/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 99 together.

As previously advised to the Deputy in my reply to Question 6323/19, Revenue issued a compromise settlement offer (in lieu of forfeiture) to the person on 28 January 2019 following correspondence received from him in October 2018. Revenue has confirmed that the person has now agreed to the terms of the compromise settlement and payment (of the agreed amount) is expected shortly. As soon as the payment is received the vehicle will be returned to the person.

Insurance Costs

100. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request that insurers agree commitments to reduce prices in line with reforms introduced using a template (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8754/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand the table which the Deputy is referring to relates to estimates from the Irish Insurance Federation (now Insurance Ireland) of reductions in total claims costs from implementation of the MIAB recommendations made in 2002, and not commitments to decreases in pricing. However the two issues are sufficiently closely connected that I believe there is a need to be careful about requesting such commitments, particularly in the context of competition in the sector, as it may send a signal to other insurers about what pricing levels might be. This is particularly the case in the context of ongoing investigations into the insurance sector by both the European Commission and the CCPC.

It is also important to note that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

However, the above said, I would expect that insurers' pricing for motor premia in general would take account of the measures that have been implemented and are being implemented as a result of the Cost of Insurance Working Group's (CIWG) recommendations. In particular it is envisaged that the full implementation of all the recommendations taken cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, can achieve the objectives of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and businesses, and a more stable and competitive insurance market.

I believe that insurers recognise that the implementation of the CIWG recommendations will have a positive impact on pricing. In this regard, I would recall that Justice Nicholas Ke-arns, the Chairperson of the Personal Injuries Commission, noted in the foreword of the PIC's second and final report that insurance industry representatives on the PIC repeatedly stated that, as award levels and associated costs account for the bulk of the cost of insurance, if claims costs come down and are maintained at a consistent and predictable level, then premiums will also reduce accordingly.

Finally, I believe it is important to acknowledge that pricing in the motor insurance market has stabilised over the last year, albeit it is accepted that premiums are still at a high level for many people and that further decreases would be desirable.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

101. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of all contacts which were made by an office (details supplied) in respect of cost overruns of the national children's hospital. [8584/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I stated in the Dáil on the 7th February I met the official to whom the Deputy refers on Tuesday 5th February. At this meeting we discussed his role as a member of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board. I am satisfied that he met all of the responsibilities that he had as a member of the board and that the information regarding the project was being shared by the Board with the Department of Health. I am satisfied that happened.

Irish Language

102. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8625/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department, along with other relevant Departments, is represented on the Oversight Group for the 5 Year Action Plan for the Irish Language, which is chaired by officials from the Department of

Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

In terms of the 20 Year Strategy, the Deputy may wish to note that the Public Appointments Service has held specific competitions for Clerical Officer and Executive Officer with fluency in Irish to assist Departments in meeting their requirements in providing a service through Irish. There is currently a panel in place for Clerical Officer Irish. A new competition for Executive Officer Irish will be held in the first half of 2019 in order to establish a new panel.

The Deputy may also wish to be aware that OneLearning, the Civil Service Learning and Development Centre based in my Department, are responsible for all training that is common across the Civil Service. OneLearning offerings that have been developed in the Irish Language area include two levels of the Certificate in Professional Irish that enable participants to confidently converse and reply to written and spoken enquiries up to Level 5/6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) awarded by Gaelchultúr.

More generally, my Department has recently completed a public consultation requesting submissions from interested parties for the purpose of compiling its revised Irish Language Scheme in accordance with the Official Languages Act 2003.

In relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department, I have been advised of the following.

The National Shared Services Office (NSSO) is fully committed to providing a bilingual service. The NSSO is dedicated to ensuring that customer service is available in both languages and have agents available in all Shared Services Centres to take calls and respond to emails and letters in Irish. The NSSO customer service phone lines and customer alerts are also bilingual. Both Payroll and HR portals (for customers and internal use) are fully bilingual, with all information and forms available in both languages.

The Office of Public Works is currently drafting its third Irish Language Scheme in accordance with the Official Languages Act 2003. Under the scheme, the OPW will undertake new commitments in relation to enhancing the use of the Irish language in the organisation. In addition, the OPW will continue to deliver on commitments made in previous schemes.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) has an Irish Language Scheme in place which sets out its commitments in this regard. As noted already, PAS has held specific competitions for certain grades with fluency in Irish to assist Departments in meeting their requirements in providing a service through Irish.

The Office of the Ombudsman is an independent statutory Office with responsibility for the examination of complaints about the administrative actions of certain service providers. The Office has no explicit role in the implementation of the various aims and objectives set out in the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030. However, the Office of the Ombudsman has an Irish Language Scheme under the terms of the Official Languages Act 2003 and meets its various obligations under its Scheme.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

103. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the additional costs in terms of inflation and other costs that will be incurred as a result of delays to infrastructure projects in view of the overrun in the cost of the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8769/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Government has not changed the overall capital spending envelope under the NDP. An important rationale for Government to commit to a ten year spending ceiling is, precisely, to mitigate the risk of cost inflation by giving stakeholders a basis for their capacity planning. I would not expect construction cost inflation to change in any meaningful way because an individual project is rescheduled within the existing budgetary envelope.

I might add that the National Development Plan 2018-2027 explicitly points to the need for a healthy, sustainable, competitive and well-functioning construction industry as essential for NDP delivery. I have therefore initiated the Construction Sector Group, as envisaged under the NDP, as a mechanism for engagement with the sector. This will ensure that any strategic capacity bottlenecks, which could accelerate cost inflation, are identified and addressed.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

104. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if extra ASD classes in the Dublin 7 area will be provided due to the shortage and high demand for such classes. [8511/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The NCSE is responsible, through its network of Special Needs Organisers, for the development and delivery and co-ordination of education services to children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special class and special school placements.

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes from 548 in 2011 to 1,459 across the country now, of which 1,196 are ASD special classes.

There are 37 special schools and 237 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Dublin. Of these, 17 are ASD early intervention classes, 139 are primary ASD classes and 41 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 197 in 2018/2019. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available on www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE, through its network of Special Needs Organisers, is aware of emerging need from year to year, and where special provision, including special class provision, is required, it is planned and established to meet that need. This process is ongoing.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible. Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning process.

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

Section 8 of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, which commenced Monday 3rd December 2018, will provide me 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.

As the Deputy's question relates to a particular area I have arranged for the question to be

forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

My Department will continue to support the NCSE in opening ASD special classes in areas where there is an identified need.

Education Grants

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the options available to a person (details supplied) in relation to a higher education grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8526/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding including those which relate to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

Article 32 (1) of the Student Grant Scheme 2018 provides for the possibility of a review of eligibility during the academic year where a change of circumstance has occurred. Under this provision, the award of a grant or the level of grant awarded may be re-assessed by the awarding authority in the event of changes of circumstances between 1 January following the reference period and the end of the academic year for a number of reasons as defined in the relevant scheme.

My officials have been advised by SUSI that the student in question applied for a change of circumstances based on repayments regarding a student loan however, under the terms of the scheme, this does not constitute a change of circumstance.

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

Students may also qualify for tax relief on fees paid. Details are available on www.revenue.ie.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

106. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the pupil-teacher ratio inequity gaps that exist in classes between junior and senior DEIS schools such as a school (details supplied); the steps he is taking to remove this gap in order that pupils in senior DEIS schools can continue to benefit from the lower pupil-teacher ratio in place in the junior school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8554/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, is my Department’s main policy initiative aimed at tackling educational disadvantage in primary and post primary schools and DEIS Plan 2017, launched in February 2017, sets out the vision for future interventions in the critical area of educational disadvantage policy. It builds on what has already been achieved by schools who have benefited from the additional supports available under the initial DEIS programme introduced in 2005.

All DEIS schools receive a suite of supports with those with the highest levels of disadvantage (DEIS Band 1) benefiting from lower class size. Research shows that reduced class sizes have the most impact in the early primary grades and my Department therefore recommends DEIS Urban Band 1 schools, such as the school referred to by the Deputy, should implement the recommended 20:1 ratio at junior level and 24:1 at senior level.

DEIS Plan 2017 commits to an “Evaluation of the level of teaching resources for schools participating in the SSP to be undertaken within the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to inform future policy in this area”. My Department has established a Class Size Working Group to determine what the optimum and most effective class size is for those most at risk of educational disadvantage to ensure improved learning outcomes. Membership of the Working Group includes the Education Partners, the Educational Research Centre and the relevant Business Units in the Department.

Schools Building Projects Status

107. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the opening of a school (details supplied). [8564/19]

110. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of building works at a new school (details supplied); and when the school will open. [8738/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 110 together.

The Schools Bundle 5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme comprises five school buildings, including the school referred to by the Deputy, and one further education college across four sites in Bray, Wexford, Carlow and Kells. Completion of these projects was delayed due to the liquidation of Carillion Construction Ltd in January 2018 and the examinership and subsequent liquidation of Carillion’s sub-contractor, Sammon Contracting Ireland Ltd (SCIL).

A replacement contractor was appointed in June 2018 and three of the six schools, Coláiste Raithín and Ravenswell Primary school in Bray and Loreto Secondary School in Wexford, have achieved service commencement and are now fully operational.

The replacement contractor is now completing the remaining three school buildings in Carlow and Kells. While there has been slippage in relation to the completion dates originally targeted by the replacement contractor, work is progressing on all sites. The PPP company has most recently indicated that they are targeting completion of all remaining buildings by Q2 of this year. However, the PPP company and contractor are currently working to finalise a detailed completion programme, which we expect to receive shortly.

The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), in consultation with the Department, continues to track progress very closely and to liaise with the PPP company in seeking a realistic and robust completion programme. The Department is also keeping the schools updated.

Monthly unitary charge payments in relation to the buildings which remain to be completed will not be paid by the Department until the buildings are operational.

Irish Language

108. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress

made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8618/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Following a consultation process, in June 2018, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht published the 5 year *Action Plan for Irish*, to provide a more cohesive and coherent framework in support of the 20-Year Strategy's implementation, focusing on specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific actions to be implemented over the next five years to 2022.

My Department is committed to progressing the aims of *the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* and implementing the actions identified in Area for Action 1: Education as set out in the 5 year *Action Plan 2018-2022*.

A high level steering group has been established to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan on which the Department of Education and Skills (D.ES) is represented.

Key areas of progress to date in the area of Education include:

- Implementation of the actions set out in the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* on a phased basis, including the *Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme*.

- Schools participating in the *Scheme* will continue to receive additional supports and resources on the basis of their ongoing engagement with the terms of the *Scheme*.

- A 3 year e-hub pilot project is currently being implemented under the *Scheme* to extend the range of subject options through Irish for students in post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht.

- Contracts for two new Irish-medium teacher education programmes were awarded in order to increase the supply of teachers with the competence to deliver high quality Irish-medium education in schools.

- The D.ES has provided a package of supports for each of the five post-primary schools located on islands to help address their unique sociolinguistic context.

- A scoping paper is being finalised to plan and support the implementation of a Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) pilot project. A steering group will be established to advise and oversee the project.

- A review of Senior Cycle Irish is under way and draft specifications are due to be ready for public consultation in Q4 2019.

- The public consultation on the policy and practice in relation to the granting of exemptions from the study of Irish concluded on the 18th January. Over 11,000 responses were received and these are currently being analysed. The results will inform the revised circulars.

- Assessment guidelines for Junior Cycle Irish have been published.

- Ongoing access to continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers to support the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) is being provided.

- Irish language textbooks are being provided to support the introduction of new curricula.

- Immersion education guides for Gaeltacht primary and post-primary schools have been published.

- The Department increased the funding to support the *Gaelbhratach* programme at pri-

mary and post primary level.

- A new online patronage process system (OPPS) has been developed by the Department which provides objective information and allows parents to express their preferences in relation to the patronage model and language of instruction in respect of the new schools being established.

Education Data

109. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an immigration levy is payable for non-EEA national students with children attending State schools; if so, the amount of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8648/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The immigration regime which applies to non-EEA students seeking to have their children accompany them during their study period in Ireland is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

I can confirm that this Department does not administer an immigration levy for non-EEA students attending state schools.

Question No. 110 answered with Question No. 107.

Schools Building Projects Expenditure

111. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding has been approved for extensions to schools (details supplied); if so, when work will commence on the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8751/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the first school to which the Deputy refers is included on the 6 Year Programme 2016 – 2021. It was announced on 17th November 2015 to go to tender and construction. This project is at an advanced stage of architectural planning. All statutory approvals have been secured and a report on this stage of the process (stage 2B, detailed design) is expected in the coming weeks. This report will then be reviewed by the Department.

At the same time, the Department will shortly be authorising this project to commence the pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of contractors. The school and its design team are currently programming construction to commence in the summer of 2019. My Department will do everything it can to facilitate the achievement of this target date.

The second project referred to by the Deputy has been devolved for delivery to the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA).

I can inform the Deputy that the NDFA has started preparations for the appointment of a design team for the project. This appointment will be a key first step in the design and construction stages. While at this early stage it is not possible to provide a timeline for completion of the project, the NDFA will be engaging directly with the school authority to keep it informed of progress.

Schools Building Projects Status

112. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will on report on planning permission for the new post-primary school in Charlesland, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8752/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, in April 2018 my Department announced the opening of 42 new schools and this announcement included a new 800 pupil post primary school to serve Kilcoole & Greystones school planning areas as a regional solution.

My Department is currently examining potential site options and discussions with the landowner in respect of a potential site acquisition are currently ongoing. Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time.

Once a suitable site has been acquired my Department will be in a position to progress the project concerned into the architectural planning process.

School Patronage

113. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of patronage of the new post-primary school in Charlesland, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8753/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new 800 pupil post-primary school (to be established in 2021) to serve the Kilcoole & Greystones school planning areas as a regional solution. This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG submits a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are made available on my Department's website.

An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to all parents which will allow them to make an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education. Parental preferences were previously collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies.

The patronage process for 12 primary schools to be established in 2019 is nearing completion. The patronage process for the remaining schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy, will also be run at a later date, significantly ahead of their due opening. Updates in relation to further patronage processes will be announced on the OPPS website and the Depart-

ment's website (www.education.ie).

Departmental Legal Services

114. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address matters (details supplied) in relation to the services directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8567/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In the interests of transparency, I wish to point out that the matter raised by the Deputy relates to the regulation of advertising of legal services by legal practitioners in the State and a possible breach of Article 24 of the EU Services Directive. Formal Notice to that effect was issued to the Government by the European Commission in November 2013 drawing attention to “a potential breach of Article 24” of that Directive. This also sought the Government’s observations, including by reference to the on-going development of what was then the Legal Services Regulation Bill of 2011. As public documents, the 2013 Notice of a potential breach and the related Reasoned Opinion issued by the European Commission on 24 January 2019 are matters of public record. While the main focus of these documents is on certain aspects of the current regulations that apply to advertising under the Solicitors’ Acts 1954-2015, they also reflect my Department’s earnest engagement with the Commission since 2012 in seeking to address these matters as part of the Government’s structural reform of our legal services sector.

As the Deputy will recall, the 2011 Bill has since been enacted in the form of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015. The basis of a legislative solution to a potential breach of the Services Directive in this instance is now provided under section 218 of that Act, the terms of which were completed in consultation with the European Commission. In its Reasoned Opinion of 24 January 2019 the Commission remains of the opinion that section 218 of the 2015 Act “is in compliance with EU law, in particular Article 24 of Directive 2006/123/EC.” Under section 218 the Legal Services Regulatory Authority, which was duly established on 1 October 2016, will have responsibility for the regulation of advertising by both solicitors and barristers - thereby replacing the professional bodies who have historically exercised that function. Under section 218 the Regulatory Authority may make regulations in this area “including in relation to the information that may be contained in advertisements published or caused to be published by legal practitioners in relation to legal services they provide and any areas of law to which those services relate”. In the making of these regulations the Authority must consult with the legal professional bodies and other interested parties as considered appropriate.

However, it should also be recalled that, to date, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority has been heavily engaged in meeting its initial statutory consultation and reporting obligations, the building-up of its staffing and other working capacities and the on-going roll-out of its statutory functions under its Strategic Plan 2018-2020. This is set to include the introduction of Legal Partnerships and of Limited Liability Partnerships in Quarter One of this year and the coming into operation of a new public complaints regime to deal with allegations of misconduct by legal practitioners which will be supported by the establishment of an independent Legal Practitioners’ Disciplinary Tribunal at the end of Quarter Two of 2019.

Under the terms of the Reasoned Opinion of 24 January 2019, the European Commission has invited Ireland to take the necessary measures to comply with it within two months of its receipt. My Department is, therefore, working closely with the Legal Services Regulatory Authority in order to meet the Commission’s request building on the previously negotiated legislative solution that is offered by section 218 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 and in further detailed consultation with the European Commission, the legal professional bodies and

other stakeholders concerned. This will include my commencement, as Minister, of section 218 of the 2015 Act and the completion and issue of the relevant advertising regulations by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority as appropriate to ensure full compliance with our obligations under Article 24 of the Services Directive.

Gambling Legislation

115. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the 2014 EU consumer protection guidelines for online gambling have not been implemented in view of a recent study carried out by a person (details supplied). [8545/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Deputy will be aware that the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has policy responsibility for general consumer protection legislation, while the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has overall responsibility for the enforcement of general consumer protection legislation.

The 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill contained a number of provisions relating to the protection of consumers of gambling services. Officials involved in the preparation of the General Scheme also had an input into the 2014 guidelines produced by the European Commission, through participation on the Commission's Expert Group on Gambling Services. A sizeable component of the guidelines are reflected in the 2013 Scheme's provisions.

In the Report referred to by the Deputy, implementation of these voluntary guidelines has generally occurred in jurisdictions where there is a dedicated regulatory authority for gambling. Ireland does not currently have a dedicated regulatory authority for gambling.

However, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that an Inter-Departmental Working Group on Gambling was established as a result of the Government Decision of 10 January 2018 to review the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill and all relevant developments since. The Group was also tasked with developing proposals for the establishment of a gambling regulatory authority.

I chaired this Group, comprising all stakeholder Departments and the Office of the Attorney General which met on six occasions between February 2018 and January 2019. I was very much concerned that the Group should review measures to increase the protection of those persons who consume gambling products. This included the 2014 European Commission Guidelines, the provisions of the 2013 General Scheme and any other relevant matters arising since. My intention is that the establishment of a gambling regulatory authority will introduce an improved licensing and compliance regime and a regulatory environment that can ensure fairness and transparency for persons engaged in gambling. Such measures can also assist in the greater protection of persons vulnerable to addiction.

The Group's Report is currently being finalised and I hope to bring it to Government for consideration as soon as possible.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal

116. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration has been given to carrying out a survey of victims of crime who engage with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal with a view to ascertaining if those that engage experience a process of

secondary victimisation or trauma due to the set-up of the system. [8586/19]

117. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all staff of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal receive specialist training in dealing with victims of crime; and if not, the reason therefor. [8587/19]

118. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he is taking to clear the backlog of cases that has built up in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal. [8588/19]

119. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the rationale for granting the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal a fixed budget of €4 million per year in view of the fact that this sum is perceived as insufficient to cover the quantum of annual payouts by the body. [8589/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 to 119, inclusive, together.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted. Under the Terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of individual decisions on applications for compensation.

The Deputy will appreciate that the level of resources allocated for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, as for any area of the Justice Vote, must be determined having regard to the overall budgetary context and the many demands for funding within the sector. Nevertheless, I can inform the Deputy that I have maintained the current level of funding of €4 million for a number of years, and again into 2019. Moreover, an increased allocation of some €2.4m was provided as part of a Supplementary Estimate for the Vote in 2018.

Applications to the Tribunal are processed with a minimum of formality compared to court proceedings where compensation is sought under the Civil Liability Acts. However, in making their decisions Tribunal Members must be satisfied that all supporting documentation has been provided and is in order, for example, Garda reports arising from criminal investigations and medical reports. The absence of such information can sometimes lead to delays in bringing cases to finalisation.

Tribunal members, who are practising barristers and practising solicitors in the Courts system, provide their services on a part time basis to the Tribunal. I have ensured that a full Tribunal membership has been maintained in order to continue to address claims as promptly as possible. The term of office for all Ordinary members has been extended to June 2019 pending the completion of a recruitment process for new members.

The Department's Customer Service Action Plan and Culture and Values Charter commits the Department to delivering public services to a high standard. I can assure the Deputy that staff in my Department receive appropriate training as required on an ongoing basis and as identified through the performance management process. All new members of staff attend a half-day induction programme which covers their responsibilities under the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviours, including dealing with the public. Specific training courses are organised from time to time in response to identified needs. For example, this month the staff of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal received resilience and stress management training due to the particular nature of their work. Suicide awareness training has also been made available recently to staff dealing with members of the public. I have asked my officials to identify if there are any further training needs specific to the Tribunal staff that need to be addressed.

The Deputy may also be aware that I have requested an assessment of the caseload of the

Tribunal and have asked my officials to examine this assessment and to obtain the views of the Tribunal in this regard. Furthermore, in view of the length of time since the Scheme was last revised, my Department has submitted a request for a review of the Scheme to the Law Reform Commission (LRC) for consideration in the context of its Programme of Law Reform. I expect that this review should cover all aspects of the scheme including training of staff and the nature of the Tribunal's interactions with applicants.

More broadly it is the case that victims of crime not only in this jurisdiction but elsewhere can report dealing with the criminal justice system to be an intimidating and sometimes negative experience which can result in secondary or repeat victimisation. This is an issue which the Government is cognisant of - particularly in light of our obligations under the EU Victims Directive - and has been tackling in a comprehensive and concerted way to make it a much more victim-oriented and responsive process.

Garda Data

120. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of cash seized and-or frozen from persons exiting and entering the State by the Garda cyber crime bureau by way of electronic funds transfers in the past five years; the amount of cash returned to persons on appeal annually by amounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8604/19]

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

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

121. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 126 of 7 February 2019, if the MABS-Abháile scheme will be broadened to include analysing mortgage accounts to examine if the accounts were run correctly and to establish if the product was suitable for the distressed families or if the accounts have been affected by the tracker scandal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8608/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Abhaile, the national mortgage arrears resolution service, began operation in July 2016 and was formally launched by the Government in October 2016 to help people who are insolvent and at risk of losing their homes due to mortgage arrears ('borrowers').

Abhaile provides access, without charge to the borrower, to a range of independent expert financial and/or legal advice and assistance, to help identify and put in place the most appropriate solution for resolving the borrower's arrears and, wherever possible, keeping them in their home. The Abhaile Scheme is jointly coordinated by my Department and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. It is operated by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), working together with the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI), the Legal Aid Board and the Citizens Information Board.

MABS acts as the gateway to the Abhaile suite of services and will direct the borrower to the advice services best suited to address his or her individual mortgage arrears situation. Financial advice and negotiation assistance may be provided under Abhaile by a Personal Insolvency Practitioner (PIP) on the Abhaile PIP panel, a (Dedicated Mortgage Arrears) DMA adviser

working with MABS, and/or an accountant on the Abhaile panel, as appropriate.

The role of a Personal Insolvency Practitioner in advising and assisting the borrower is to be future focused, aims to make the mortgage sustainable, and to help the borrower to identify the most appropriate solution and to get it into place. Personal Insolvency Practitioners already deal with tracker arrears cases and will always review the history of the mortgage account in front of them. Even in cases where it is assessed that no tracker issue exists, the ISI indicates that many PIPs include a term within the Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) such that if a tracker issue only becomes known in the future, the Arrangement already provides for how it is to be treated. The PIP is required to ensure that a restructured home mortgage within a PIA is sustainable for the debtor, and returns the debtor to solvency.

In addition, if any legal issues emerge in relation to the mortgage, the PIP can refer the borrower to receive free legal advice from a Consultation Solicitor under Abhaile with relevant expertise.

MABS provide a Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Service (DMA), which has been incorporated into the Abhaile Scheme, across the MABS network and this will often be the first point of contact under the Scheme for a person in arrears with their home mortgage. Specialist DMA advisors are working across 27 locations countrywide, assisting borrowers to assess the options available to them and, where required, negotiating with lenders on their behalf.

The DMA process is a structured one which involves both gathering and analysing full borrower history and information together with supporting documentation, including original loan agreements, in order to complete a Standard Financial Statement (SFS) and generate a proposal to the lender. In the course of this process, advisers may identify issues relating amongst others, to the operation of the account, the Tracker Review and potential legal issues relating to the underpinning contract. Where such issues emerge, borrowers can be referred under Abhaile for additional expert support from an Abhaile accountant or a consultation solicitor with relevant expertise. MABS can also provide further support to borrowers with relevant appeals to lenders and to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

I can reassure the Deputy therefore, that the Abhaile Scheme does not need to be specifically broadened as it is already dealing with the types of cases she has highlighted. Whether a borrower is provided with financial advice and assistance by a Dedicated Mortgage Adviser through MABS or by a PIP, the suitability and sustainability of the mortgage is being assessed with a view to providing the borrower with a sustainable solution to their arrears, including in cases impacted by the tracker mortgage issue.

The operation of the Abhaile Scheme is regularly reviewed and reports for the first two years of operation illustrating the high take-up and positive outcomes of Abhaile have been published on my Department's website.

Irish Language

122. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8624/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Among the most significant achievements in Irish by the Department of Justice and Equality in the past nine years is the publication of an official Irish version of the Rules of Court, translated by the Department

or under the aegis of the Department. The Department has now published the official Irish version of the 1986, the 1997 and the 2001 consolidations of the Rules of the Superior Courts, the District Court Rules and the Circuit Court Rules, respectively, and many of the Amendments subsequently made to them, including the *Rules of the Superior Courts (Court of Appeal Act 2014) 2014*.

Excerpts from those consolidated Rules have also been made available to a wider audience than those in the legal profession, through a project at Dublin City University (www.gaois.ie). Furthermore, the terminology in the Irish version of the *District Court Rules 1997* and the *Circuit Court Rules 2001* has also been made available on that project's popular electronic dictionary, at www.tearma.ie, and work on making the terminology from the *Rules of the Superior Courts, 1986* similarly available has been carried out in recent months and is due to be completed by July this year.

The Department has added to the membership and to the work of the Irish Legal Terms Advisory Committee, which is under the aegis of the Department and chaired by Chief Justice Frank Clarke.

The Department has run a number of specially tailored internal Irish courses for officials of the Department, and officials also attended courses outside of the Department and achieved qualifications ranging from the Irish European Certificate (*TEG*) to a Master's Degree in the case of one official.

The Department currently has one post, that of Translator, where it is a requirement for the holder to be functionally bilingual in Irish and English. It also has a cohort of 45 officers on a list of staff who are available to provide services (i.e. answer queries) in Irish.

Among the Department's initiatives as regards the Irish language was the adoption of *Tailte Éireann* as the single official name for the new body being formed from the merger of the Property Registration Authority, Ordnance Survey Ireland and the Valuation Office.

An Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána introduced a recruitment policy change in 2013, which initiative saw 10% of positions set aside for candidates fluent in the Irish language.

An Garda Síochána currently has 163 native Irish-speaking members, and many other members who are fluent Irish speakers, capable of carrying out their duties through the medium of Irish throughout the Divisions.

An Garda Síochána is currently focusing on increasing the number of fluent Irish-speaking members in Gaeltacht stations and will then focus on stations that in part service Gaeltacht areas. The organisation has given An Coimisinéir Teanga and Gaeltacht communities a commitment that steps will be taken to ensure that all members serving in Gaeltacht stations will be able to carry out their duties confidently and effectively through the medium of Irish in the future. The organisation is in the process of finalising a new Allocations Policy for Gaeltacht Stations whereby a new Irish Language Proficiency Panel will be established, and will include members at Garda and Sergeant rank who have expressed an interest in working in a Gaeltacht station and who have demonstrated the required proficiency in An Garda Síochána's new Irish Language Competency Framework. All vacancies in Gaeltacht stations, as they arise, will be filled from this Panel.

Irish language training is compulsory for all Garda recruits completing training in the Garda College, with presentations provided on aspects such as language awareness and language rights. All staff have been made aware of the organisation's legislative requirements and of the

requirement to respect language choice when dealing with a member of the public.

An Irish Language Liaison Officer has been appointed by An Garda Síochána – this is a full-time role which aims to enhance the level of Irish language services provided by An Garda Síochána.

A Gaeltacht Programme has been in operation since 2011 and offers personnel the chance to participate in Irish language courses, specifically designed for the organisation, in Gaeltachtaí around the country.

An Garda Síochána has also been involved with Oireachtas na Gaeilge for the past number of years in an effort to engage with the Irish-speaking community.

Gaeilge

Ar na nithe is mó atá bainte amach ag an Roinn Dlí agus Cirt agus Combhionannais, ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, le naoi mbliana anuas, tá leagan oifigiúil Gaeilge de na Rialacha Cúirte, arna n-aistriú ag an Roinn féin nó faoi choimirce na Roinne, a fhoilsíú. Tá an leagan oifigiúil Gaeilge de chomhdhlúthuithe 1986, 1997 agus 2001 ar Rialacha na nUaschúirteanna, na Rialacha Cúirte Dúiche agus na Rialacha Cúirte Cuarda, faoi seach, foilsithe anois ag an Roinn, mar aon le go leor de na Leasuithe a rinneadh ina dhiaidh sin ar na Rialacha sin, lena n-áirítear *Rialacha na nUaschúirteanna (An tAcht um an gCúirt Achomhairc, 2014), 2014*.

Tá sleachta as na Rialacha comhdhlúite sin curtha ar fáil do phobal níos leithne ná an lucht dlí, chomh maith, ar chorpas comhthreomhar a bhaineann le tionscadal in Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath (www.gaois.ie). Ina theannta sin, tá an téarmaíocht atá sa leagan Gaeilge de na *Rialacha Cúirte Dúiche, 1997* agus na *Rialacha Cúirte Cuarda, 2001* curtha ar fáil ar fhoclóir leictreonach an tionscadail, a bhfuil tóir ag an bpobal air, ag www.tearma.ie – táthar ag oibriú le míonna beaga anuas chun an téarmaíocht atá i *Rialacha na nUaschúirteanna, 1986* a chur ar fáil amhlaidh, agus tá an obair sin le bheith curtha i gcrích faoi mhí Iúil na bliana seo.

Tá an Roinn tar éis cur le comhaltas agus le hobair an Choiste Chomhairlithigh um Théarmaí Dlíthiúla Gaeilge, atá faoi choimirce na Roinne agus faoi chathaoirleacht an Phríomh-Bhreithimh Frank Clarke.

Tá an Roinn tar éis roinnt mhaith sainchúrsaí inmheánacha Gaeilge a reáchtáil d'oifigigh na Roinne, agus d'fhreastail oifigigh ar chúrsaí lasmuigh den Roinn, chomh maith, agus bhain cáilíochtaí amach ó Theastas Eorpach na Gaeilge go Céim Mháistreachta i gcás oifigigh amháin.

Tá post amháin mar Aistritheoir sa Roinn a bhfuil sé riachtanach go mbeadh sealbhóir an poist sin dátheangach go feidhmiúil sa Ghaeilge agus sa Bhéarla. Tá cohórt de 45 oifigeach ar liosta de bhaill foirne sa Roinn atá ar fáil chun seirbhísí a sholáthar (i.e., ceisteanna agus fiosruithe a fhreagairt) as Gaeilge.

Ar thionscnaimh na Roinne ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, bhí *Tailte Éireann* a cheapadh mar ainm aonair oifigiúil ar an gcomhlacht nua atá á bhunú ar an Údarás Clárúcháin Maoine, Suirbhéireacht Ordanáis Éireann agus an Oifig Luachála a chumasc.

An Garda Síochána

Sa bhliain 2013 rinne an Garda Síochána athrú ar a mbeartas earcaíochta a thabhairt isteach lena ndearnadh 10% de na poist a chur ar leataobh d'iarrthóirí atá líofa sa Ghaeilge.

Faoi láthair is cainteoirí Gaeilge ó dhúchas iad 163 comhalta den Gharda Síochána, agus

tá go leor comhaltaí eile ar cainteoirí líofa Gaeilge iad agus atá ábalta a gcuid dualgas a chomhlíonadh trí mheán na Gaeilge ar fud na Ranna.

Tá an Garda Síochána ag díriú faoi láthair ar líon na gcomhaltaí ar cainteoirí líofa Gaeilge iad a mhéadú i stáisiúin Ghaeltachta agus díreoidh an eagraíocht ansin ar stáisiúin a fhreastalaíonn go páirteach ar limistéir Ghaeltachta. Tá gealltanais tugtha ag an eagraíocht don Chomisiún Teanga agus do phobail Ghaeltachta go ndéanfar bearta chun a chinntiú go mbeidh na comhaltaí go léir a bheidh ag fónamh i stáisiúin Ghaeltachta ábalta a ndualgais a chomhlíonadh go muiníneach éifeachtach trí mheán na Gaeilge sa todhchaí. Tá bailchríoch á cur ag an eagraíocht ar Bheartas nua Leithrannta do Stáisiúin Ghaeltachta faoi láthair faoina mbunófar Painéal nua Inniúlachta sa Ghaeilge, agus áireofar ann comhaltaí ar leibhéal an Gharda agus an tSáirsint a mbeidh spéis léirithe acu i bheith ag obair i stáisiún Gaeltachta agus a mbeidh an iniúlacht léirithe acu a bheidh ag teastáil sa Chreat nua Inniúlachta sa Ghaeilge atá ag an nGarda Síochána. Déanfar na folúntais go léir i stáisiúin Ghaeltachta, de réir mar a thiocfaidh siad chun cinn, a líonadh ón bPainéal.

Tá oiliúint sa Ghaeilge éigeantach d'earcaigh uile an Gharda Síochána atá faoi oiliúint i gColáiste an Gharda Síochána, agus déantar roinnt cur i láthair ar ghnéithe ar nós feachtas teanga agus cearta teanga. Cuireadh na baill foirne go léir ar an eolas maidir le ceanglais reachtúla na heagraíochta agus maidir leis an gceanglas meas a bheith acu ar a rogha teanga agus iad ag déileáil le duine den phobal.

Tá Oifigeach Idirchaidrimh Gaeilge ceaptha ag an nGarda Síochána – ról lánaimseartha atá sa ról seo, a bhfuil mar aidhm leis feabhas a chur ar an leibhéal seirbhísí Gaeilge a sholáthraíonn an Garda Síochána.

Tá Clár Gaeltachta i bhfeidhm ag an eagraíocht ó 2011 i leith agus tugann an Clár sin deis do bhaill den Gharda Síochána páirt a ghlacadh i gcúrsaí Gaeilge, atá sain-deartha don eagraíocht, i nGaeltachtaí ar fud na tíre.

Agus tá baint ag an nGarda Síochána le hOireachtas na Gaeilge le roinnt blianta anuas mar chuid d'iarrachtaí na heagraíochta dul i dteagmháil le pobal labhartha na Gaeilge.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Data

123. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of start-up entrepreneur applications received in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number approved by year; and the number rejected by year. [8646/19]

124. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an applicant under the start-up entrepreneur programme is required to demonstrate a minimum level of assets in addition to the sum to be invested in the start-up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8647/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 124 together.

The Start-up Entrepreneur Programme (STEP) was established in 2012 as a way for entrepreneurs with an innovative idea to apply for a residence permission in Ireland.

At present applicants are required to provide evidence that they have €50,000 funding available to help them build and grow their proposed enterprise. There is no separate asset threshold that applicants must meet in order to qualify for the programme. Rather, the focus is on the

nature of the proposal and its future potential to lead to substantial job growth / generation of economic activity in the State.

The following table provides a breakdown of total applications, approved applications, and refused applications for the years 2015 - 2018.

Year	Total Applications	Total Approvals	Total Refusals
2015	49	25	24
2016	134	33	101
2017	171	23	148
2018	35	12	23
Total	389	93	296

In general, the refusals occur as a result of the proposed enterprises not being in the innovation economy and therefore not meeting the published criteria of the programme.

The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department is in the process of updating the STEP for 2019 and accordingly, there have been no applications accepted for 2019 to date. However, the INIS website will be updated in the coming weeks with details for 2019 and all prospective applicants should refer to the website for further details.

Private Security Industry Regulation

125. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the report in relation to unlicensed security personnel will be published. [8665/19]

126. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the PSA should be provided additional sanctioning and investigative powers to deal with the aggressive behaviour or potential aggressive behaviour of security personnel involved in the repossession of homes, farms and other property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8666/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 126 together.

The Working Group on the proposed regulation and licensing of security personnel, assisting personnel in enforcing court orders, by the Private Security Authority (PSA) submitted its report to me last month. The Group examined the administrative, legislative, resource, security and other measures necessary to bring the regulation and licensing of security personnel assisting those enforcing court orders within the remit of the Private Security Authority.

I am consulting with the Attorney General in relation to the report and I intend to make an announcement in relation to this matter as soon as possible.

Any behaviour of a criminal nature or alleged criminal nature of security personnel involved in the repossession of homes, farms and other property is a matter for An Garda Síochána and any concerns in relation to safety should be raised with An Garda Síochána.

Citizenship Applications

127. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to

review the cost of obtaining Irish citizenship with a view to reducing the cost for adult non-widows, widowers and surviving civil partners of Irish citizens in view of the fact that it is prohibitive for many potential applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8722/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation are governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 569 of 2011).

The application fee, stipulated at €175, is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a certification fee is payable on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of recognised refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil.

As such, the Regulations make specific provision for particular categories of applicants who may be on a reduced level of income and there is no information available to either myself or Departmental officials that in general, the level of fees is discouraging people from applying for naturalisation. In that regard, it should be noted that once a grant of naturalisation is made in respect of non-EEA nationals, they are no longer required to register their immigration permission or pay the registration fee of €300 each time.

There is no provision in the Regulations for the discretionary waiver or reduction of fees, or for differing fees to apply to different nationalities, or based on length of residency.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. The Deputy will be aware that formal citizenship ceremonies have been introduced at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship. Any review of fees would have to consider other categories of applicants, such as EU nationals, and the impact any changes would have on the level of fees for other applicants.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. The Deputy will be aware that formal citizenship ceremonies have been introduced at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship.

Brexit Preparations

128. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether businesses are adequately prepared for all eventualities on 29 March 2019 in relation to Brexit. [8040/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As it stands, the UK is scheduled to leave the European Union as of Friday, 29 March 2019. While many Irish businesses already have plans in place to mitigate the impacts of Brexit, I am conscious that a proportion of businesses have delayed their Brexit planning due to the degree of uncertainty in the UK surrounding the Brexit negotiations and the withdrawal process. As we approach the withdrawal date, I am urging all businesses to prepare, make all necessary deci-

sions, and complete all required administrative actions. I am also encouraging businesses to apply for a working capital loan under the Brexit Loan Scheme. Once a loan has been sanctioned by one of the participating banks, it will be available for draw down as and when its needed.

Extensive work has been ongoing in my Department and across Government to help businesses prepare for all Brexit eventualities. This includes research and development of supports to help ensure that businesses are prepared for potential difficulties arising as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU. It is important that businesses understand that there are supports and advice available to help them prepare for Brexit.

My Department and its agencies are fully engaged in preparing Irish businesses for Brexit and have participated in the Government of Ireland's series of Getting Ireland Brexit Ready events in Cork, Galway, Monaghan, Dublin, Limerick and Donegal. As part of awareness-raising activities, EI continues to roll out regional Brexit Advisory clinics. To date, these clinics have been held in Letterkenny, Tralee, Portlaoise, Claremorris, Cootehill, Charleville, Dublin, Galway, Dundalk, Waterford and Limerick. Further events are planned in Galway, Cork, Letterkenny and Dublin ahead of the withdrawal date.

EI has also been running a PrepareforBrexit communications campaign, featuring the 'Brexit SME Scorecard' and the PrepareforBrexit.ie website, which offers information on the likely impacts of Brexit on Irish businesses and how these impacts might be mitigated. The Brexit SME Scorecard is an interactive online platform that can be used by all Irish businesses to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. EI has also made available a 'Be Prepared Grant' which offers up to €5,000 for exporting client companies to conduct further research and use external expertise to develop a Brexit Action Plan.

Funding to the Local Enterprise Offices has been increased by 22% and they, along with InterTradeIreland, are offering a range of Brexit focused supports to companies, including those engaged in cross-border trade with Northern Ireland. InterTradeIreland continues to offer its Brexit: Start to Plan voucher scheme, which makes available financial support of up to €2,250 towards professional advisory services to address Brexit-related challenges.

The LEOs offer Brexit supports to micro and small businesses through the 31 LEOs nationwide. These include a "Technical Assistance for Micro-enterprises" grant, designed to support qualifying businesses to diversify into new markets, enabling companies to explore and develop new market opportunities. This is accompanied by tailored mentoring to address Brexit-related business challenges, and targeted training on specific Brexit challenges, including financial aspects and capability building in innovation, competitiveness and opportunity diagnosis.

Irish Language

129. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to her Department and bodies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8613/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department continues to be committed to providing a quality service to the public through the medium of the Irish language having regard to the demand for services in Irish, and the Irish language skills and proficiencies of officials.

The Department has made good progress over the last three years in implementing the commitments made in its Second Irish Language Scheme. The Department's Third Irish Language

Scheme, which covers the period 2019-2022, following recent approval by the Minister of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, came into effect on 18 February, 2019. The new scheme builds on the Department's Second Irish Language Scheme and sets out the extent to which services are currently available through Irish and identifies areas for future development. It also includes a commitment to assess, on an ongoing basis, the level of demand for services through Irish to ensure that the Department continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent and accessible way.

The commitments made in the new Scheme will be monitored on a continuous basis by the appropriate Business Units and by the Cross Divisional Committee, established in 2014 which monitors the implementation of commitments made by the Department in relation to the provision of customer services generally and services through Irish.

As part of progressing the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030, my Department's Agency, Enterprise Ireland, has developed a protocol with Údarás na Gaeltachta on behalf of the 8 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in the Gaeltacht areas. The 8 LEOs, Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork South, Cork North and West, Waterford, Meath and Údarás na Gaeltacht's aim, through that protocol, is to ensure equal opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses with regard to Government supports. This protocol ensures that Údarás na Gaeltachta clients have access to the extensive expertise of the LEOs through their training and mentoring programmes.

The aim of this protocol is to:

- Ensure that Gaeltacht-based clients are afforded equal and comparable services and supports through Údarás na Gaeltachta that are otherwise provided in non-Gaeltacht areas by the Local Enterprise Office for entrepreneurs and new or existing enterprises.
- Establish a structured link between Local Enterprise Offices and Údarás na Gaeltachta centrally and locally regarding the provision of information, guidance and support to clients.
- Outline a mechanism for the provision of access to services and schemes to Údarás na Gaeltachta from the Local Enterprise Offices for eligible Gaeltacht enterprises.
- Provide for an efficient customer service in response to Local Enterprise Office and Údarás na Gaeltachta clients' queries.

Work Permits Appeals

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for a work permit in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8631/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits Section of my Department inform me that an application for a Critical Skills Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 6th December 2018. A decision was made to refuse the granting of the application on 21st January 2019, and the applicant was notified of this decision in writing.

This application was refused as the remuneration on offer was under €60,000, which is the minimum annual remuneration for a Critical Skills Employment Permit when the occupation in question is not on the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List. It would appear from the information provided by the applicant that the individual concerned (details supplied) would be

eligible for a General Employment Permit should they choose to apply for one, at a minimum remuneration level of €30,000.

On 30 January 2019, the applicant sought a review of this decision, and, on 18 February 2019, the Reviewing Officer confirmed the decision to refuse this application.

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. Any new application for this individual will be expedited. The applicant has been notified of this and has been provided with contact details to arrange same.

Brexit Issues

131. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she or her officials have discussed or outlined the number of companies that have located here from the UK since Brexit was announced. [8466/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Brexit represents the most significant economic challenge facing businesses in the last 50 years and I am satisfied that my Department, its offices and agencies are fully focused on supporting businesses to face the challenges ahead, and to maximize any potential opportunities presented by Brexit.

IDA Ireland report that approximately 55 Brexit-related investments with employment potential of more than 4,500 roles will locate in Ireland over the next two to three years.

The financial services sector accounts for 62% of all Brexit-related investments to date and 44% of the associated jobs (approximately 2,000 roles). The remaining investments have come mainly from life sciences and engineering (22%) and the broad technology and online/e-commerce sectors (16%).

In terms of regional distribution of projects secured so far, approximately 85% of investments and 70% of potential jobs will be in the South and East of the country. The remaining Brexit-related investment and jobs secured to date will be situated in the Border, Midlands and Western regions.

I understand that recruitment for the Brexit-associated jobs (all of which will be located in Ireland) generated by these investments is already underway by the companies concerned, with many staff hired already.

Separately, following the decision by the UK to exit the EU a number of UK companies are seeking to set up in Ireland as notified bodies in order to be in a position to continue operating within the European Union post Brexit.

A Notified Body is a Body which assesses the conformity of certain products, in accordance with a range of EU Directives, before they are placed on the market. In order to become a Notified Body and carry out conformity assessments throughout the European Union, a Body must be approved by a Notifying Authority in an EU Member State. My Department is a Notifying Authority under several EU Directives. To date, five UK Notified Bodies have been appointed as Notified Bodies in Ireland and a further two applications are expected.

Part of the criteria for appointment as a Notified Body is that the Body must be accredited

by the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) and the Notified Body must be established in Ireland.

The appointment of a Notified Body is carried out by my Department while the accreditation process is fulfilled by INAB. INAB operates independently of my Department, and is the national body in Ireland with responsibility for the accreditation of laboratories, certification bodies and inspection bodies.

I understand that INAB has 26 Brexit-related applications for accreditation, a number of which are from existing UK Notified Bodies seeking to become Notified Bodies in Ireland. I would point out, however, that all such applications must go through a robust assessment process prior to receiving accreditation from INAB. Furthermore, not all of the accreditation applications to INAB will result in subsequent applications to my Department as there are other Government Departments with a similar Notifying Authority role in respect of other Directives.

Air Ambulance Service Funding

132. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of purchasing and staffing one air ambulance to run 24-7, 365 days a year. [8577/19]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

133. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when a new transport allowance will be introduced to replace the mobility allowance that was ceased in 2013. [8740/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government in May 2018 on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme in May 2018. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. I intend to revert to Government in due course with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between myself and Minister Harris on the best way to progress the Transport Scheme.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of

public transport for people with a disability.

Home Care Packages Funding

134. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when funding for home care packages will be made available in an area (details supplied). [8512/19]

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.

Ambulance Service Staff

135. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the reason no investigation has been conducted over the past nine months since ambulance staff were suspended (details supplied); when an investigation will commence; and the expected duration of same. [8514/19]

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

Patient Transport

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when transport to and from hospital will be re-facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8528/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service Provision

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when necessary additional home help hours will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8529/19]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

138. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the business case submitted by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8542/19]

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

139. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on waiting lists for ENT appointments in County Mayo. [8543/19]

140. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults on waiting lists for ENT appointments in County Mayo. [8544/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 140 together.

Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government.

I hope to publish the joint Department of Health, HSE, NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 shortly. This will ensure an appropriate balance between high volume activities and offering treatment to complex long waiting patients.

This Plan for inpatients/day case (IPDC) and outpatients will set out the activity targets for the HSE in line with the National Service Plan, as well as those for the NTPF taking account of their increased funding totalling €75million in 2019, to provide treatment for patients.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables.

Mayo ENT waiting lists

Inpatient

Adult	Child
130	55

Outpatient

Adult	Child
2028	823

Emergency Departments Staff

141. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 372 of 29 January 2019, the rota of consultant presence for the emergency department on Saturdays and Sundays at University Hospital Waterford, UHW, from January to December 2018. [8552/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

142. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the length of time a person (details supplied) will be waiting for cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8553/19]

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.

Emergency Departments Staff

143. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if consultant cardiologists provided consultant presence on Saturdays and Sundays in the emergency department at University Hospital Waterford, UHW, from January to December 2018. [8555/19]

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.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

144. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the length of time it has taken to fill the CEO post in the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland following the departure of a person (details supplied) and the stepping down of another person pending a recruitment campaign; and the person holding the post at present. [8559/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that the position of Chief Executive Officer is currently filled on an acting basis. Under section 28 of the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 the appointment of a CEO is a matter for the Board of the NMBI.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

145. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on legal fees by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland since 2015 on fitness to practice and industrial relations issues. [8560/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) is an independent, self funded, regulatory body. The amount spent on legal fees is a matter for the Board and I have asked it to supply the information directly to the Deputy.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

146. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to evidence provided in early January 2019 by a person (details supplied) at a constructive dismissal case taken against the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, NMBI; and the steps he will take to investigate the allegations. [8561/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Responsibility for ensuring that the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland complies with its statutory and governance obligations, including those of employment law, rests with the Board.

I understand that the constructive dismissal case to which the Deputy refers was considered by the Labour Court. In that regard, the Labour Court is an independent, statutory body. Given its statutory independence, it would be inappropriate for me to intervene when the Labour Court exercises its quasi-judicial functions in relation to industrial relations disputes or employment law complaints.

Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors Recruitment

147. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of employing one, ten and 100 non-consultant hospital doctors, respectively, in tabular form. [8568/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

General Practitioner Data

148. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of reversing financial emergency measures in the public interest, FEMPI, for general practice. [8569/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, GPs are reimbursed for a range of services they provide to medical card and GP visit card holders. GPs are remunerated for these services primarily on a capitation basis, with a range of additional support payments and fees for specific items of service. GPs are also remunerated for services they provide on behalf of the HSE under other public health schemes, such as the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme, Primary Childhood Immunisation Scheme, etc.

The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2009 imposed a range of adjustments to health contractor payments. These included different levels of reductions to various GP fees and allowances and the elimination of certain payments, resulting in

savings of approximately €120 million per annum.

Despite reductions to the payment rates of health contractors made under FEMPI legislation, the total fees paid to GPs under the GMS scheme have increased from just over €472 million in 2009 to approximately €525 million in 2017. This increase in fees is largely due to significant developments and investment in GP services introduced in recent years, with more services being made available to our citizens and additional financial support provided by the HSE.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 now allows the setting and varying of contractor payments on a non-emergency statutory basis. It is my intention to put in place a new multiannual approach to fees in return for service improvements and contractual reforms based upon health policy considerations and engagement with representative bodies.

Officials from my Department and the HSE are currently engaged in talks with the Irish Medical Organisation in relation to the reform and modernisation of the GMS contract. Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multiannual basis. Of course, any agreement must benefit patients and provide value for the taxpayer.

In line with the long-established approach to such processes, and by agreement of the parties concerned, I am not in a position to give further details while engagement between the parties is under way.

Nursing Staff Data

149. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of public health nurses employed by the HSE in each of the years 2011 to 2018, in tabular form. [8571/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

HSE Staff Data

150. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of employing one, ten and 100 public health nurses, respectively. [8572/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Nursing Home Beds Data

151. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the capital cost of a nursing home bed; the estimated fully absorbed cost of a nursing home bed including staff, ancillary services and running costs; and the capital costs associated with opening new nursing home beds. [8575/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The costs associated with a nursing home bed in the public sector is a matter for the Health Service Executive and I have asked the Executive to respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Maternity Services

152. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of funding and implementing the national maternity strategy. [8576/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme has developed a detailed Implementation Plan for the National Maternity Strategy which will see the Strategy implemented on a phased basis over the coming years. The funding requirement will vary from year to year and the Implementation Plan will inform the annual estimates process.

The Deputy's query regarding the estimated overall cost of implementation has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Emergency Departments

153. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of abolishing the €100 charge for the use of emergency departments and the €75 per day charge for inpatient care, in tabular form. [8574/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2018, €29.3 million was raised through the statutory inpatient charge, and a further €18.6m was raised through the outpatient charge in the Acute Hospitals.

Therefore, it would cost approximately €47.9 million to abolish these charges.

Health Services Data

154. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid out under the European health insurance scheme in each of the years 2011 to 2018. [8573/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I will answer in respect of those elements of reimbursement made direct by my Department and I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in respect of the payments it processes.

Ireland and the United Kingdom operate a bilateral healthcare reimbursement arrangement in respect of health services provided under EU Regulations, covering temporary visitors between the two countries, pensioners of one country and their dependants residing in the other country, and the dependant family members of persons employed in the other country.

Under the arrangement net liability between the two countries is calculated on a lump sum basis rather than an individual basis. The amount payable in any one year is based on an estimate of the number of persons falling within categories eligible for reimbursement and for whom each country is liable and an estimate of the average cost of providing healthcare treatment. The amount payable is agreed following compilation of the necessary data and agreement between the two administrations. An initial payment on account is made for the relevant year and is subject to final settlement once all necessary statistical and financial information is complete. The finalisation of accounts is normally some years in arrears to facilitate collation of relevant statistics and for the approval of the average cost prepared by each country for the year concerned at EU level.

Ireland's liability to the United Kingdom in respect of reference years 2011 to 2014 repre-

sent final settled amounts and are as follows:

2011	2012	2013	2014
Stg £19,905,304	Stg £17,939,525	Stg £15,077,925	Stg £13,239,222

Accounts for years 2015 to 2018 have not yet been finalised.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

155. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the approval of the drug Spinraza in respect of persons suffering from spinal muscular atrophy. [8578/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The Act specifies the criteria to be applied in the making of reimbursement decisions which include the clinical and cost effectiveness of the product, the opportunity cost and the impact on resources that are available to the HSE.

I am advised by the HSE that the application for the reimbursement of Nusinersen (Spinraza) was considered by HSE Leadership at a meeting on 12 February 2019 and that the HSE is in the process of communicating its decision to the relevant company.

National Children’s Hospital Expenditure

156. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the contacts which were made by an office (details supplied) in respect of cost overruns of the national children’s hospital. [8583/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There were no contacts made by the Office (details supplied) in relation to cost overruns in the National Children’s Hospital. I am advised that the Secretary General of my Department arranged a discussion with the individual concerned, in his capacity as a Board member of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board, on 18 October 2018, relating to the completion of the Guaranteed Maximum Price process for the National Children’s Hospital, which was under way.

Pharmaceutical Sector

157. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the proposals by a society (details supplied) to make major changes to the position of pharmacists assistants, which it is lodging with his Department again, will be rejected in view of the fact that it will make the position of many assistants nationally untenable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8590/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmacy Act 2007 established the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the functions of the Society are set out in the Act. The functions of the PSI are carried out on its behalf by the Council of the Society.

Section 30 of the Pharmacy Act 2007 provides for an exception to the general provision in the Act which requires the sale and supply of medicines at a pharmacy to be conducted under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist, and specifies that no offence is committed where a registered pharmaceutical assistant “acts on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist”.

Section 30 also permits the Council to make rules as to:

1. What may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist; and
2. What constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist.

Following a period of public consultation, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting of 20 September 2018, where the Council approved the draft rules without amendment. Following this, the PSI undertook to redraft the Rules in relation to what may or not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist.

On 6 December, the Council of the PSI approved a revised draft of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 for issuance for public consultation. This public consultation commenced on 13 December 2018 and ran until 11 January 2019, affording any interested party the opportunity to make representations on the matter directly to the PSI.

Following completion of the public consultation phase, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on 14 February 2019.

My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my consent. I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgment.

I await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI and, until that time, I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

Primary Care Centres

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when the next tranche of publicly advertised primary care centres for third party operation lease will be announced; when a centre will open at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8605/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

159. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans and the preparations that have taken place by his Department and his counterparts in Northern Ireland in relation to

the EU cross-border directive as part of Brexit preparedness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8607/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE operates the EU Cross Border Directive (CBD) in Ireland. Patients in Ireland can seek to be referred to another EU/EEA member state for medical treatment that is available in the public health service in Ireland. The patient may access the overseas service in either the public or private health sector of the EU/EEA member state they choose to receive the service in. The patient pays for the treatment and claims reimbursement from the HSE at the cost of that treatment in Ireland or the cost of it abroad, whichever is the lesser.

As part of a whole of Government response to Brexit, the Department of Health is working to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated set of preparations to ensure continuity of health services post-Brexit.

Work is ongoing to ensure that insofar as possible there is minimum disruption to health services and that essential services are maintained on a Cross-Border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis.

It should also be noted that post-Brexit, patients in Ireland can continue to seek to be referred to the remaining EU/EEA member states for treatment under the CBD.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

160. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the creation of a neuro nurse in University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8611/19]

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

Irish Language

161. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8622/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department prepared an Implementation Plan under the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 in June 2013. This plan contained actions for implementation by the Department of Health and the agencies under the aegis of the Department. The Department of Health's actions related to language awareness and training programmes for its staff, the adoption of a Language Scheme and the identification of posts within the Department that required Irish language competency.

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht published the Action Plan 2018-2022 under the 20-year Strategy which provides an overview of the progress to date since the publication of the Strategy and sets out time-specific actions for implementation in the period to 2022. There are no specific actions identified for implementation by the Department of Health in this Action Plan. However, the Action Plan provides for an Oversight Group to monitor implementation of individual actions in the Plan including representatives from Government Departments and relevant stakeholders, bilateral meetings between the Department of Culture,

Heritage and the Gaeltacht and relevant Departments and agencies to ensure that progress is being made and annual reports on progress which will be submitted to the Government. The Department of Health will engage fully with all of these processes.

My Department is collating the response in respect of agencies under its aegis other than the HSE and will respond to the Deputy as soon as possible. The HSE has statutory responsibility for the provision of health and social personal services, including through the medium of Irish and in Gaeltacht areas, and this question has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply in respect of implementation of the HSE actions in the 20 Year Strategy and the 2018-2022 Action Plan.

Health Services Data

162. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of new therapy posts (details supplied) that have been filled to date; when all 100 posts will be filled; the breakdown of posts between assessment of need waiting lists for children with disabilities, personal assistance and home support service hours, residential places and respite places; the details of the additional posts by region and county, in tabular form; and the assessment of needs waiting lists by county and CHO area for children with disabilities, in tabular form. [8634/19]

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.

Departmental Bodies Data

163. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the dates on which the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board requested or advised their reappointment to his office; and when he reappointed the board. [8642/19]

164. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if meetings were held between him and members of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board in the month before the reappointment of the board at the end of July 2018. [8643/19]

165. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if correspondence took place between the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board and him regarding the progress of the national children's hospital project and its cost profile in the month before the reappointment of the board at the end of July 2018. [8644/19]

166. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if meetings were held or correspondence took place between him and a person (details supplied) regarding the national children's hospital in 2018. [8645/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163 to 166, inclusive, together.

The process for appointing members to the Board of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is set out in the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (Establishment) Order 2007. In May 2018, the Chairperson of the Board advised my Department of the importance of maintaining continuity on the Board at the critical phase of the project and indicated that Board members were willing to be reappointed. In line with the requirements of the Establishment Order, the nominating bodies and the Chairperson were asked by officials of my Department to nominate persons to be appointed to the Board.

I issued letters of reappointment to the outgoing Chairperson of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board on 3 July, to eight ordinary members of the Board on 16 July 2018 including a person (details supplied), and to the remaining three members of the Board on 17 July, 7 August and 3 October respectively. The appointment letters made clear to all parties that their term of office would be until such time as new appointments were made in line with the new legislative provision. There is one remaining vacancy on the Board.

Other than the above, I can confirm that no meetings were held or correspondence took place between a person (details supplied) and me regarding the national children's hospital in 2018, or between members of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board and me in the month before the reappointment of the Board in end July 2018.

Primary Care Centres Data

167. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centres in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the services being provided at each location; his plans for an enhancement of services at these locations; when the new services will be on stream; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8649/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

168. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [8720/19]

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

169. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment with a neurologist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8729/19]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

170. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to approve the FreeStyle Libre scanner for children with diabetes on the long term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8744/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

171. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to add further illnesses to be covered under the long-term illness list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8745/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme at this time. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that it is proposed that the LTI Scheme would be included as part of a review of the basis for existing hospital and medication charges, to be carried out under

commitments given in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

Hospital Services

172. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a hospital bed will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8755/19]

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.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 668 of 15 January 2019, when such a position will be readvertised in UHK (details supplied); when the service will resume; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8756/19]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

174. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of the drug Kuvan for phenylketonuria; the reason it has not been provided to patients as recommended by the HSE drugs group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8758/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

175. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for a radiology appointment in Temple Street Children's University Hospital; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [8759/19]

176. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for a radiology appointment in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [8760/19]

177. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for a radiology appointment in Tallaght Children's University Hospital; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [8761/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 to 177, inclusive, together.

Regarding the information requested, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8765/19]

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 Waiting Lists

179. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an operation required by a person (details supplied) will be arranged at the Mater Hospital; the reason for the delay in dealing with the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8772/19]

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.

Live Exports

180. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason persons are being informed that 60,000 calves will be exported in view of the fact the

structure only allows for 38,000 calves to be exported; the person or body that will deal with the exportation of the remaining 22,000 calves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8556/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The export of calves is an entirely commercial matter.

The function of my department is regulatory in nature, for example through the provision of appropriate animal health certification, or the approval of vessels for the transport of animals to ensure that they comply with animal health and welfare requirements.

Bovines exported from Ireland to France are required under EU law to be rested and fed at lairage facilities in Cherbourg. These facilities are privately owned and operated. They do not have unlimited capacity, and therefore in practical terms, the numbers of animals that can be exported may be limited by the capacity of these lairages.

There has been significant engagement on the matter between my department, the French authorities, lairage owners, exporters and farm bodies, and this is continuing. I raised the matter as recently as yesterday with the French Foreign Minister. Ultimately, however, the provision of lairage capacity in other member states is a matter for commercial operators.

Some 156,000 calves were exported from Ireland in 2018, the main destinations being Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Belgium and France.

Bovine Disease Controls

181. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason bovine feedlots are allowed here; the locations to which the cattle from the feedlots are sent; if the cattle are exported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8557/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of our TB eradication programme, beef finishing herds, if they meet the necessary criteria, are allowed to avail of a special status, termed “Feedlot”. When a herd meets the criteria to be regarded as a ‘Feedlot’ under the TB Eradication Programme, the herd is restricted under the TB Regulations and a special official supervisory and testing protocol is established. Such herds are not exempted from testing, reactor removal or disinfection requirements. Restricted Feedlots are TB tested at least once a year. This feedlot status arrangement allows the delivery of an effective level of disease risk management while controlling the risk of further disease spread in compliance with animal health legislation, and enabling business continuity in this particular type of enterprise through the inward movement of cattle.

Cattle from feedlot herds restricted under the TB Eradication programme are only permitted to move to a EU approved slaughter plant. Cattle from feedlots may not be exported.

Bovine Disease Controls

182. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the person or body that owns the largest feedlots here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8558/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the General Data Protection Regulation I am precluded from releasing this information.

Irish Language

183. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8612/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language outlines an integrated approach to the Irish language. It identifies nine areas of action: education; the Gaeltacht; the family; public services; the media and technology; dictionaries; legislation; the economy; and cross-cutting initiatives. Responsibility for implementation within the State bodies under my remit is an operational matter and those bodies have been requested to respond directly to the Deputy. The aspects of the Strategy which are relevant to my Department are being implemented as follows:

In October 2016, my Department put in place its second Irish Language Scheme under the Official Languages Act 2003. The scheme was prepared with a view to developing and advancing the level and quality of service which the Department provides to Irish language speakers. The Scheme remains in force for a period of three years and my Department will commence work on its third scheme later this year with a view to having our third Irish Language scheme in place by October.

My Department has taken several measures to improve its Irish Language output. Our Irish Language Scheme sets a target of 20% of press releases to be published in Irish. However, in the second half of last year my Department began to target the publication of 100% of press releases in Irish. The following table sets out the progress made in recent years:

Year	Percentage of Press Releases published bilingually
2015	0%
2016	7%
2017	22%
2018	60%
2019 (up to 18 February)	100%

In addition to meeting its obligations under Section 10 of the Official Languages Act 2003, to publish certain documents in both official languages simultaneously, my Department publishes other corporate documents, such as the Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan, the Farmers' Charter of Rights, our Statement of Strategy and the Schemes and Services booklet, in both Irish and English. Budgetary constraints prevent the publication of every document in Irish.

Correspondence to my Department in Irish is responded to in Irish. Business areas of my Department in receipt of correspondence in the Irish language are assisted, where necessary, in translating the response into Irish. The quality of the response to correspondence in Irish is equal to that of the response to correspondence in English.

In May 2018, my Department ran a competitive procurement process, in conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement, and subsequently engaged in a contract with a service provider for the provision of Irish translation services. This contract has enhanced the timeliness of translation services provided to my Department and in turn the ability of my Department to respond efficiently to Irish Language correspondence.

One of the nine areas for action under the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-

2030 is the provision of services in the Gaeltacht. My Department provides services through Irish in our two offices in Gaeltacht areas, thus helping with two of the objectives of the strategy related to the Gaeltacht:

- The Irish language community inside and outside the Gaeltacht will be given encouragement and support to transmit Irish to the next generation as a living household language. Towards this end, a wide range of services in Irish will be provided.

- The Gaeltacht will be given special support as an Irish-speaking area.

Both of my Department's Gaeltacht offices are Fishery Harbour Centres. One is located in Ros a Mhíl, Co. Galway and the other in An Daingean, Co. Kerry. These offices represent the most direct interface which my Department has with Irish speakers and, as a consequence, their capacity to provide a high level of services through Irish is very important to the Department and its customers.

In the two offices, of the 13 staff employed, 10 can fully transact Department business in Irish while the remaining three members of staff have conversational Irish. My Department therefore can provide a full service through Irish where it has offices in Gaeltacht areas.

With a view to maintaining and enhancing Irish Language competencies at these two Fishery Harbour Centres, my Department is committed to filling all future vacancies with Irish speakers as far as possible. All competitions which involve posts headquartered in an office situated in a Gaeltacht area will place requirements in terms of Irish and English on an equal standing. However, it is necessary that my Department reserves the right to fill a post in a Gaeltacht area with a non-Irish speaker if no suitably qualified Irish language speaker presents. It is hoped that this will not be necessary but my Department must ensure that it carries out its functions at Fishery Harbour Centres.

In the context of Government policy for enhanced provision of services in Irish, in addition to what has been outlined above regarding our two Gaeltacht offices, my Department has identified a further four posts which require functional bilinguals. This is with a view to being able to facilitate customers who wish to transact business through Irish. Three of these posts are currently filled by officers with competence in Irish. My Department was unable to recruit an Irish speaker to fill the remaining post but hopes to be able to do so when the opportunity arises. In particular, these designated posts enhance the ability of my Department to provide services through Irish in areas where there is a demand including Cork, Kerry, Donegal, Mayo, Leitrim and Galway. In accordance with Government policy, future language schemes of my Department will specify the posts/areas which have an Irish language competency requirement.

Meat Processing Plant Inspections

184. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of carcasses graded by mechanical machine before it was found to be out of sync rechecked to determine if their respective grades were accurate on occasions when a mechanical grading machine in a meat processing plant was found to be working out of sync and the factory reverted to manual grading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8636/19]

185. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 526 of 12 February 2019, the number of carcasses checked at the start of each day to ensure the machine is operating within the limits in view of the fact that the return to service protocol of mechanical grading machines require at least 100 carcasses to be checked to make sure that they are working within the legal tolerances;

the person or body that oversees this protocol; the location it is recorded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8637/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 and 185 together.

Regarding operations in a meat plant operating mechanical classification, at the start of each day the meat plant performs a ‘daily system check’. This ensures that the mechanical classification system is within operational tolerances established by the system provider and if any mechanical system fails a morning system check then the mechanical classification system will not operate. This process does not require carcasses checking at the start of each day.

At each inspection carried out by my Department a minimum of 100 carcasses are re-checked against the machine normally in real time on the line during production. The manual grade is compared against the machine grade and the machine is scored. When a mechanical grading machine is found to be operating outside tolerance the factory is instructed to revert to manual grading straight away.

Brexit Issues

186. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a comprehensive package of market supports and direct aid from the EU will be made available to farmers to cover the cost a hard Brexit and the losses already incurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8656/19]

187. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether current EU intervention and APS support measures are not adequate; the additional measures sought in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8657/19]

190. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that the EU provide support of €20 per animal for each 5 cent per kg price drop with the onset of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8660/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186, 187 and 190 together.

I and my officials have been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland’s economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission’s own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. We discussed the unique exposure of these sectors to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and the food industry, including through traditional market supports such as intervention and Aids to Private Storage (APS); and also through exceptional aid under the CAP’s Single Common Market Organisation regulation; as well as increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU’s readiness to respond and

support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

Brexit Issues

188. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether the new market disturbance measures under EU Regulation 1308/13, Article 219/221 are required in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8658/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I and my officials have been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports, including exceptional reasons under EU Regulation 1308/13, being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan at the end of January to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. We discussed the unique exposure of these sectors to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, and increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues.

Subsequently there was a meeting between officials from my Department and from the Commission to explore possible support measures that may be required in the event of a no deal Brexit on 29 March 2019. The officials will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

Beef Exports

189. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions he has taken to ensure that beef holds its position in the UK market in view of the fact that there is no comparable, alternative market with the onset of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8659/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The UK is Ireland's largest export destination for beef exports. In 2018, beef exports were valued at €2,439m and exports to the UK were valued at €1,206m, which is 49.4% of beef exports.

Retention of the UK market for the beef industry is a key component of the Government's response to Brexit.

I have provided a total of €19.5m to Bord Bia since the UK referendum. This additional funding is being used, among other things, to provide direct support and advice to individual companies in relation to maintaining customer relationships in the UK.

In addition, I have met with the chief executives of the major British retailers to impress

upon them the commitment of Irish suppliers in continuing to supply the UK market post-Brexit.

More generally, the pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports, including beef exports, is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming years.

I and my officials have also been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish beef and other sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Commission are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

More recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan at the end of January to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit. We discussed the unique exposure of sectors such as the beef sector to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stress the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, and increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland. Subsequently there was a meeting between officials to explore possible support measures that may be required in the event of no deal Brexit on 29 March 2019. The officials will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

In addition, I have introduced a range of measures to help these sectors to deal with the impacts of Brexit –

- In Budget 2017, a farm-gate business costs reduction measure in order to enhance competitiveness, including a €150m low-cost loan scheme;

- In Budget 2018, a €50m, dedicated Brexit package which included a contribution to a €300m (joint DAFM/DBEI) "Brexit Loan Scheme", at least 40% of which is available to food businesses.

- In Budget 2019, a €78m Brexit package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs and to cover additional costs related to Brexit.

My colleague, Minister for finance Paschal Donohoe, also announced the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which will be rolled out in 2019 and for which I had made provision of €25m in 2018. The scheme will provide long term, unsecured investment finance for farmers and small scale companies in the food and seafood sectors.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the Government remains very focused on supporting the agri-food industry, including the beef industry, through the challenges ahead.

Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 186.

State Aid

191. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his

plans to ensure that EU state aid limits on member states are set aside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8661/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The agri-food sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy, and its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular. As such, Brexit has the potential to have a very significant impact on farmers and on the agri-food sector throughout Ireland.

I and my officials have been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan at the end of January to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. We discussed the unique exposure of these sectors to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, as well as increased flexibility under State Aid regulations, which has already been the subject of discussions with the Commission. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

As regards state aid limits, my Department operates the State aid rules and regulations governing the agriculture sector, where the state aid limits under the agriculture *de minimis* regulation are currently set at €15,000 per undertaking over a rolling three year period.

With regard to increases or exemptions to state aid limits, this is a matter for the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, who are the competent authority for the implementation of the general State Aid rules and regulations in Ireland.

Animal Slaughtering Standards

192. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure that controls are increased in addition to inspections and sanctions for factories on carcass trim, classification and weights. [8662/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Carcase classification and carcase presentation controls in slaughter plants are carried out by a dedicated team of specialist staff in the Beef Carcase Classification Section within my Department. Classification Officers conduct unannounced, on-the-spot inspections in 32 beef slaughtering plants to ensure that Carcase Classification is carried out in accordance with EU Regulations.

The number of inspections conducted annually significantly exceeds the legal requirement for the minimum number of inspections set down in EU legislation. In 2018, my Department conducted almost 550 inspections. This is an average of 20 inspections per factory per year, which significantly exceeds the legal minimum requirement of 8 inspections per year. At each inspection an average of 85 carcasses were inspected for correct classification and carcase presentation. The legal requirement is 40 carcasses per inspection.

Under legislation (SI 363/2010) sanctions may be applied. Non-compliance with the legislation attracts a maximum on the spot fine of €200 per carcass. In addition, any person who commits an offence under these Regulations is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding €5,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 6 months or to both.

Regarding enhanced controls, since January 1st, 2019, additional monitoring of carcass presentation by my Department's veterinary public health inspection staff (VPHIS) in these factories is in place. This will provide further assurance to stakeholders that the appropriate dressing specification is being applied. These staff will provide a supporting role for the Beef Carcass Classification staff.

TAMS Data

193. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers that availed of solar grants in counties Laois and Offaly in respect of installing solar panels on outhouses and buildings other than domestic dwellings. [8663/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The TAMS II Scheme provides a grant towards the cost of installing solar panels for the purposes of electricity production on buildings used for pig, poultry and egg production. There have been no applications for this investment from counties Laois and Offaly.

Beef Industry

194. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions he will take to ensure that a fair price is attained at factories for quality suckler stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8664/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Sector is an important element of the Irish rural economy and I am conscious of the importance that this key sector plays in rural Ireland. To this effect, I recently launched the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot, a targeted support of €20 million for suckler farmers specifically aimed at further improving the economic and environmental efficiency of beef production. As well as clear environmental and climate benefits, the BEEP will provide farm gate investment at a time of market volatility and uncertainty relating to Brexit. The pilot has been designed to be as straightforward as possible. Applications will be accepted up until this Friday 22 February, and I would urge all eligible farmers to apply.

Additionally, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is currently the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) period. This scheme is an agri-environmental measure to improve the environmental sustainability of the national suckler herd by increasing genetic merit within the herd. Also, it should be noted an additional €23 million was secured for the ANC scheme in 2019, which, effectively restored the Budget to pre-downturn levels.

While, I am aware of the current challenges facing beef farmers, I cannot intervene directly in any commodity price; cattle prices are a matter for the processing industry and the farmers who supply it. Cattle prices are influenced by a variety of factors such as the level of consumer demand, production levels and exchange rate differences. The UK's decision to leave the EU also presents enormous challenges for the entire beef sector.

I am, however, very conscious that the beef sector is currently facing a difficult period. I am deeply committed to fully supporting and developing Ireland's beef sector. I am strongly of the view that the existing range of supports available to suckler farmers, together with ensuring access to as many markets as possible, both for live animals and beef exports, are appropriate for the continued development of the sector. According to National Farm Survey data, suckler farmers receive support equivalent to approximately €500 per suckler cow on average.

One of the unique strengths of the agri-food sector has been the shared vision for the sustainable development of the sector in Food Wise 2025. It is crucial that we all continue to work together. At the last Beef Round table, I highlighted the need for stakeholders to recognise their inter-dependency and to support the sector through examination of mechanisms to add value along the supply chain and increase the strength of all links in the supply chain, including Beef Producer Organisations.

Officials in my Department are currently engaging extensively with stakeholders in relation to Beef Producer Organisations which have strong potential to help strengthen the position of the primary producer in the supply chain.

Beef Industry

195. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend the deadline by which beef suckler farmers must apply for the BEEP scheme beyond 22 February 2019 due to lack of awareness among farmers in respect of the scheme; the steps he has taken to ensure there is a sufficient level of awareness among beef suckler farmers regarding the deadline for receipt of applications for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8668/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I recently launched the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot, a targeted support for suckler farmers specifically aimed at further improving the economic and environmental efficiency of beef production. As well as clear environmental and climate benefits, the BEEP will provide farm gate investment at a time of market volatility and uncertainty relating to Brexit.

I am very conscious that 2018 was a very difficult year for beef farmers, in terms of weather, fodder issues and market volatility. This is the sector most exposed to Brexit, given its reliance on the UK market. The BEEP is designed to provide an injection of investment at a critical time for farmers navigating the challenges ahead, while delivering in real terms on our climate objectives.

The pilot has been designed to be as straightforward as possible and to ensure that the majority of the payment can be retained by the farmer.

The scheme was launched on 30 January with media in attendance. Details of the launch were posted on my Department's official Twitter account and details of the pilot were subsequently covered online and in print in the Irish Farmers Journal, Farm Ireland, Agriland and the Irish Examiner. The pilot was also the focus of a recent multi-page article in the Irish Farmers Journal. In addition some 25,000 existing Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) participants were notified of the pilot in a newsletter that also contained a BEEP application form.

The development of the programme was the focus of extensive stakeholder engagement with a range of representative bodies. Applications will be accepted up until this Friday 22nd of February and I would urge all eligible farmers to apply.

TAMS Payments

196. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a supplementary TAMS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8721/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in question made an application for mobile sheep handling equipment in the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II. The payment claim had a penalty applied and the application of this penalty has been reviewed following a request from the applicant. A balancing payment due following the outcome of the review will issue to the applicant shortly.

Animal Slaughtering Standards

197. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 535, 536 and 537 of 12 February 2019, the corresponding inspection figures for 2017; the number of machines operating outside of tolerance not identified by inspections that required the calibration to be checked by staff from his Department before mechanical grading recommenced in 2017 and 2018, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8728/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/1184 of 20 April 2017 governs the monitoring of carcase classification, carcase presentation and weighing.

Inspections carried out by my Department identify when the grading machines are operating outside of tolerance. In 2017, my Department conducted almost 630 unannounced, on-the-spot inspections in 32 factories on classification and carcase presentation.

In all cases where a machine is found to be working outside of tolerance, manual grading is instigated immediately. There were 8 instances in 2018 and 13 in 2017 when factories were instructed to revert to manual classification. In all instances, classification officers from my Department conduct a classification check before a factory is instructed to recommence mechanical grading.

Air Pollution

198. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a query (details supplied) will receive a response. [8515/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recent scientific evidence indicates that air pollution is more damaging at lower concentrations than was previously understood. With this in mind, I am committed to bringing forward Ireland's first ever National Clean Air Strategy. The Strategy, which I intend to publish this year, will provide the policy framework necessary to identify and promote integrated measures across Government that are required to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner air, while delivering on wider national objectives. Domestic solid fuel use will be addressed in the context of the strategy.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

199. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll out of the national broadband plan at a location (details supplied); if broadband will be connected in view of the number of houses in the area that have already been connected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8516/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

The Deputy makes reference to the premises' proximity to a commercial deployment of high speed broadband. This deployment is part of eir's commercial roll out of high speed broadband to 300,000 predominantly rural premises, in line with a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

eir's rural investment in high speed broadband is an entirely commercial undertaking, and not part of the planned State Intervention network. Although the deployment is monitored under the terms of a Commitment Agreement signed between the company and my Department, it is not funded by the State and it is not planned, designed or directed by my Department in any capacity.

Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis. I have no statutory role or function in such commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

Wind Energy Guidelines

200. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider placing a moratorium on the development of windfarms until guidelines are in place. [8522/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): All developments, including windfarms, are subject to the rigours of the planning system. Revisions to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines are currently being progressed

by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. These will be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and public consultation by that Department, which will ensure that environmental considerations are fully integrated into the revised Guidelines. It is expected that the revisions to the Guidelines will be finalised and come into effect during 2019 following the completion of the SEA process.

Irish Language

201. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8615/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 was published on 21 December 2010. To support the 20-year Irish Language Strategy, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has published a 5-year Action Plan (2018-2022). As part of this Action Plan, DCHG engages directly with broadcasters. My Department has adhered to its commitments under objectives 1 and 9 in accordance with the Broadcasting Act 2009 to ensure high quality broadcast services through the medium of Irish especially through the continuous development of RTÉ, Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4. Some of the specific measures taken include:

- the allocation of licence fee money to the Broadcasting Funding Scheme, of which TG4 is one of the main beneficiaries, was increased from 5% to 7%.

- The Good Friday Agreement provided that the British Government would work with the relevant British and Irish broadcasting authorities to make TG4 more widely available in Northern Ireland. Following the switchover to digital television in 2012, TG4's coverage has reached 94% in Northern Ireland. Raidió na Gaeltachta is also being provided on the Northern Ireland Freeview DTT network.

- Providing exchequer funding to TG4 to enable the Irish language broadcaster deliver on their statutory remit. RTE and TG4 have delivered a wide range of commitments over the course of the Strategy to date and have engaged directly with the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht in identifying further actions to be taken in the Action Plan 2018-2022 published by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in June last year. RTÉ launched its 5 year Irish language action plan in 2015. The plan aims to integrate Irish into everything that RTÉ does. RTÉ news website and News Now app now feature national, international and regional news in Irish and the broadcaster launched the Irish Language Radio app. TG4 launched an upgraded/redesigned TG4 Website with major new features for national and global users. This ensures access to Irish language programming to a worldwide audience via multiple devices. In addition to ensuring high quality broadcast services through the medium of Irish, my Department remains committed to ensuring the Official Languages Act is fully implemented in the work that we do, and that appropriate arrangements are put in place to ensure the public's right to use Irish in dealings with the State is met. To this end, my Department has taken the following steps:

- The Department developed and published its Workforce Plan 2017-2019 in April 2017 which included the identification of requirements for Irish language proficiency in business areas across the Department.

- In 2018, the Department's Language Scheme 2018-2021 was developed, approved and

published.

- Under this scheme, in addition to fulfilling all mandatory obligations under the Official Languages Act, the Department has also committed to publishing corporate publications and major policy statements or reviews in both official languages, as well as guidelines, information leaflets and application forms for individual schemes and programmes.

- Our Learning and Development team ensure access to advanced and intermediate Irish classes for staff members is available. Gaelchultúr, the educational company providing these courses, is a FETAC-accredited body.- The Department also supports employees who wish to further their professional development through our “Education Support Scheme”- In addition to these measures, through the workforce planning process, the HR Business Partners engage with divisions to identify Irish language requirements and any potential for further designated Irish language roles.

National Broadband Plan

202. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8746/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of all 2.3 million Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. When this Government came into office, this had risen to 52%. Today, 74% of premises can access high speed broadband.

The NBP procurement process is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible. I intend to bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

Road Network

203. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a query in relation to a road (details supplied) will receive a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8533/19]

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.

Road Projects Data

204. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the final cost of the abandoned Galway city outer bypass project by category of expense such as planning and design, legal costs, environmental impact studies and so on; the estimated cost of the project when it was originally commenced; the original estimated timeframe for completion of the project; the length of time that elapsed from when the road was initially announced until it was formally abandoned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8562/19]

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 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.

Road Projects Expenditure

205. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the spend on the N6 Galway city transport project to date by category of expense; the date the project was formally announced; the estimated completion date; the estimated final cost of the road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8563/19]

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 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.

Road Projects Expenditure

206. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has discussed removal of the A5 funding with his British counterpart. [8033/19]

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.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. Under this Agreement the Government is committed to provide funding of £75 million (sterling) towards the cost of Phase 1a of the A5 upgrade scheme. The aim of this commitment was to facilitate the delivery of this phase of the scheme as soon as possible once the planning process in Northern Ireland was concluded.

As part of the Capital Plan Review in 2017 financial provision was made for meeting the Government's commitment regarding the A5 in 3 tranches over the period 2019 to 2021. When those allocations were put in place it was anticipated that the planning process would have concluded and construction of the 1st phase started before now.

However, legal challenges to the approval of the scheme have resulted in unavoidable de-

lays to the timeframe for implementation of the scheme. Following judicial review proceedings last year the scheme approval was quashed.

In the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive I do not currently have a counterpart and the North South Ministerial Council has not been meeting. However, liaison is continuing, including meetings of the Senior Officials Group comprising Northern and Southern officials established to oversee implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement.

Allowing for the time required by the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to review work previously undertaken on the scheme and implement necessary statutory procedures, it was evident, following liaison at official level, that the initial €27 million tranche of funding would not be drawn down this year and would need to be rolled forward. As was the case for previous Government contributions, it is envisaged that payments towards the cost of the A5 will be based on an agreed protocol and linked to the achievement of construction stage milestones. Funding has been assured from 2020 onwards.

Swimming Pool Programme

207. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the mediator providing mediation services in relation to a dispute (details supplied); the name of the mediator; the powers under which they were appointed; if copies of the terms of reference and objectives of the mediation process will be provided; the timeframe for negotiations and mediation; the projected cost of the mediation; the funding stream that will fund same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8606/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The key policy objective of the Sport area of my Department is “To contribute to a healthier and more active society by promoting sports participation and supporting high performance and the provision of facilities.” Within the Sport area, the Sports Capital Programmes Division facilitates the building and maintenance of sports facilities by clubs, local authorities and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport.

The case to which the Deputy refers involves a Local Authority swimming pool that is now closed and would require a multi-million euro investment to become fit for purpose. Should the Local Authority decide to proceed with the renovation works and investment required, agreement would need to be reached with one local sports club, whose lands surround the swimming pool. It would be expected that any works to the pool would cause significant disruption to the activities of the local sports club. For example, access and egress by construction traffic to the swimming pool site, the storage of construction materials close to the site, and potential cordoning off of the site during construction.

Over the last number of years, the sports club and the Local Authority have engaged on how best to move forward with the swimming pool renovation project. Progress has been quite slow due to a wide range of complex issues. The issue was brought to my attention and I discussed it with my official who in turn consulted Sport Ireland. Sport Ireland has experience in resolving sport related disputes and grievances and use a panel of experienced facilitators in this regard.

Given the relatively slow pace of progress in recent years, my official suggested to the Local Authority and the sports club that the services of a facilitator might be useful. Both parties were agreeable and Sport Ireland recommended some facilitators who might be suitable. My official contacted one of the facilitators, Mr. Austin Kenny, and Mr. Kenny agreed to facilitate discussions between the Local Authority and the sports club. I understand that discussions between

the Local Authority and the sports club commenced soon afterwards. I further understand that considerable detailed technical work is underway by both parties and that this work needs to be completed before more material discussions take place between the parties.

Facilitation is a voluntary process entered into by the relevant parties. Terms of reference, timelines and costs are matters for the relevant parties. Sport Ireland would, from time to time, advise NGBs on dispute resolution, including efficient approaches to mediation, facilitation and arbitration. Requests from NGBs for assistance with the costs of facilitation are considered by Sport Ireland and are treated on their merits.

Irish Language

208. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8628/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has a 3 year rolling Irish Language Scheme 2018- 2021 in place in accordance with its obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003 and in compliance with the 20 year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030. In addition to having a dedicated Irish Language Officer , the Department facilitates and funds training courses in Irish where requested by its staff as part of their development programme.

The main demand for services through Irish in the Department is in relation to Motor Tax services. In keeping with the requirements of the Strategy the Department will keep under review, as part of its Irish Language Scheme, the need for any designated posts that would have an Irish Language competency requirement.

Coast Guard Services

209. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Irish Coastguard no longer has the ability to use blue lights in emergency situations; the road traffic provisions for all emergency drivers and vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8633/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Coast Guard recently issued a safety instruction to its volunteers in relation to the use of blue lights and warning devices (sirens) on Coast Guard vehicles on public roads. This instruction does not impact on their use while the vehicle is static. However, as part of the Coast Guard's continuing drive to enhance safety and protect its volunteers, full-time staff and members of the public, it has issued this instruction as a clarification in relation to the existing position as regards their use while driving on public roads. The policy mirrors best practice in other Emergency Services for untrained "Blue-light" drivers. This notice in no way impacts on the Coast Guard's status as an Emergency Service. The issue of training volunteers and full-time staff to drive with Blue Lights and sirens is being addressed in the Coast Guard's Safety and Risk Work Plan.

Trans European Transport Network Programme

210. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

the reason Ireland did not apply for the revision of the TEN-T core network including applying for the reinstatement of the cross-Border Western Arc in the first three months as promised in A Programme for A Partnership Government almost three years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8639/19]

211. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Western Arc route is being excluded from the TEN-T core network in order to ensure funding is available for the development of the Dublin metro; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8640/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 and 211 together.

The TEN-T Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 stipulates that a review of the TEN-T network will take place no later than by the end of 2023. My Department will be making a formal submission within the next 2 months to the European Commission calling for an early review of the TEN-T Network, taking into account our National Development Plan, our National Planning Framework, and the potential implications of Brexit.

My Department have previously informed the European Commission of the intention of the Minister to make a submission and, in recent weeks, it has also raised the matter of an early review of the TEN-T Network in Brussels at the relevant Working Party.

The TEN-T Regulation explicitly states that the European Commission should take into account national implementation plans when carrying out the review of the TEN-T Network. In Ireland's case, these would include both the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework. Both of these Government documents will shape the future development of Irish planning and infrastructure across a range of sectors, including transport.

Additionally, the UK's Withdrawal from the EU has been an evolving process over the last number of years, both in terms of the negotiations between the EU and the UK and in terms of contingency planning for a range of possible Brexit scenarios, which has been a whole-of-government effort coordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The preparation and making of a submission calling for a review of the TEN-T network should be strengthened by the proposals under the NDP and the National Planning Framework and by the added urgency of the implications of Brexit. However, the fact that a submission has not yet been made has no relationship to the development of the Dublin Metro.

It is important to note that the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the funding instrument of TEN-T, awards co-funding to eligible project proposals on a competitive basis. A strong business case must be made, including a cost-benefit analysis, which demonstrates high European added value and, crucially, a committed funding source for the balance of the project's funding.

As part of the European Commission's contingency plans for Brexit, it is seeking to introduce a new Regulation with regard to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union in the event of a no-deal scenario. If adopted, the effect of this will be to realign the NSMED Corridor to take account of the UK's exit from TEN-T. As part of this measure, supported by Ireland, it is proposed that a review the TEN-T Guidelines should be advanced to 2021 instead of 2023 as a result of possible changes in the flow of goods after Brexit.

A proposal for a new Regulation for CEF - the funding mechanism for TEN-T from 2021 - is also currently under consideration. In the latest draft, the Commission has accepted Ireland's proposal, made jointly with Malta and Cyprus, that funding be provided for infrastructure on the Comprehensive Network in Member States where there is no land border with another EU

Member State. If this is maintained as part of the final agreed Regulation, it will mean that organisations will continue to be eligible to apply for funding for suitable projects on the coming within the application criteria after 2020.

National Transport Authority

212. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 923 of 15 January 2019, the expected publication date for the NTA transport plan for Newbridge, County Kildare. [8669/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As previously stated in my reply to the question referred to by the Deputy, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have no statutory function in relation to the development of the transport plan in question.

As I understand there has been engagement between the local authority and the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to the plan, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for consideration and updated direct reply.

Please notify my office if you have not received a response within 10 working days.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

213. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting time to sit a driver test per county in tabular form; the average waiting time to sit a driver test; the number of persons per county at the end of January 2019 waiting to sit a driving test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8736/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The average waiting time for driving tests at all centres around the country are available on the Road Safety Authority (RSA) website www.rsa.ie. This information is updated weekly.

The number of people per county waiting to sit a driving test is a matter for the Authority, and I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Driver Test Data

214. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driver test inspectors allocated by county up to January 2018 and to the end of January 2019, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8737/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Taxi Data

215. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

number of taxi plates in County Kildare and in each county nationally in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8743/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the licensing of taxis, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act, 2013*.

Given the particular role of the Authority in these matters, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

National Car Test Fees

216. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost per year of removing the fee for the national car test excluding retests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8757/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006), the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has responsibility for the operation and delivery of the National Car Test.

I have therefore forwarded this Question to the RSA for direct reply to the Deputy. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Road Toll Data

217. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of each of the tolls here; the name of the company that has the contract for each toll; and when each contract for each toll expires. [8771/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local authority.

More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

Noting the above, I am referring the question to TII for direct reply within 10 working days. Please inform my private office if you do not receive the information.

Childcare Services Funding

218. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the fund-

ing supports available for renovations for a childcare facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8591/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have secured €6.106m in funding for the 2019 Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Capital programmes.

This funding will be delivered in three strands, as follows:

€4.231m has been allocated to Strand A, which will offer grants of up to €50,000 in value to early learning and care providers for the creation of new 0-3 places where demand for these is clearly evidenced.

€0.875m has been allocated to Strand B, which will offer individual grants of up to €15,000 in value to aid community/not-for-profit early learning and care services in addressing fire safety issues that have been highlighted in inspection reports by Tusla, the HSE or Local Authorities.

€1m has been allocated to Strand C, which will offer individual grants of up to €20,000 in value to school age childcare providers for the creation of new school age places where demand for these is clearly evidenced.

Funding will be available to providers nationwide in a competitive process, with the application window open from Monday 25th February to 3pm on Wednesday 27th March 2019.

I would advise the service in question to contact Kerry County Childcare Committee by phoning (066) 7181582, to discuss any questions they may have regarding capital funding, including eligibility requirements, the application process, etc.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Data

219. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of increasing universal subsidy levels under the affordable childcare scheme by increments of 50 cent up to an increase of €7.00 per hour, in tabular form. [8609/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The estimated costs per annum across the Affordable Childcare Scheme of increasing the universal subsidy in 50 cent intervals up to €7 are set out in the following table. The figures are based on the full cost to the Affordable Childcare Scheme, assuming that the minimum targeted subsidy is increased so as never to be below the universal subsidy in all cases.

The costs are arrived at by:

- establishing the number of families with children under 15 years by income bracket (data supplied by CSO) and
- profiling these families by reference to the age of their children and
- estimating the proportion of children in each income bracket and age range using registered care and
- calculating estimated subsidy rates based on income levels and age profile and
- applying estimates of the average hours used by age group for term time and non-term time.

The cost estimates for subsidies at the existing levels (50c universal and the current targeted subsidy levels) assume a relatively conservative level of change from current scheme uptake. This change is used at a fixed level throughout the estimates. In other words, increased subsidies may create behavioural changes by families which is not factored into scenarios from €1 (universal) upwards (for example, families moving from unregistered childminding to registered Early Learning and Care services that are eligible for the ACS, or families where the second parent decides to return to work).

Universal Rate	.50c	€1	€1.50	€2	€2.50	€3	€3.50	€4.00	€4.50	€5.00	€5.50	€6.00	€6.50	€7
Additional Cost per annum		€ 21m	€ 43m	€ 66m	€ 90m	€ 115m	€ 141m	€ 173m	€ 221m	€ 279m	€ 341m	€ 405m	€ 471m	€ 540m

The following should also be noted:

- The figures do not include once-off transitional “savers” costs under section 26 of the Childcare Support Act.

- This assumes the minimum targeted subsidy is set by the universal subsidy for all subsidies, including for children not eligible for universal subsidies but eligible for targeted subsidies (i.e. children over 3 whose families qualify under the income thresholds for targeted subsidies).

- As the universal subsidy increases and noting the minimum targeted can never fall below it, the number of subsidy bands reduces as the universal subsidy increases. For example, with €5 universal subsidy there is only one effective band for children 1 and over. Above €5.50 there is only one rate for all eligible families.

Finally, an important factor in considering the levels of investment listed above is the fact that Government has currently no mechanism to control the fees charged to parents in the current market model of childcare provision in Ireland. Increases in the universal subsidies could result in increases to the fee to parents diminishing the intended reduction in cost to parents. First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families commits to establishing a new Funding Model to address this issue.

Early Childhood Care and Education

220. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of increasing the number of weeks of the ECCE scheme by increments of two weeks up to 52 weeks per year in tabular form. [8610/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides for a programme of early learning for children before commencing primary school.

With effect from September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months will be eligible for a full two programme years on the ECCE scheme. This further enhancement delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children and families.

The current academic year runs for 38; weeks; the following table shows the cost of increasing the number of weeks available to children in 2019, based on estimated registration figures:

Table 1: Cost of increasing ECCE academic year by increments of 2 weeks

Number of weeks in academic year	Total Cost	Increase
38 (Current allowance)	298.1	0
40	313.8	15.7
42	329.5	31.4
44	345.2	47.1
46	360.9	62.8
48	376.5	78.4
50	392.2	94.1
52	407.9	109.8

Irish Language

221. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to her Department and bodies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8614/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Education theme of the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030, my Department is committed to supporting the provision of services in the Irish language to children at an early age; and supporting the role pre-schools and crèches can play in promoting Irish as a living language. There are no specific commitments in the strategy relating to bodies under the remit of my Department.

My Department has worked closely with colleagues in the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills in agreeing a comprehensive set of actions to be implemented under the Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018 to 2022; launched by the Minister of State for the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands, in June 2018. This five year action plan sets out a range of agreed actions, with associated timeframes, to be implemented in support of the overarching 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language for the period 2010 to 2030.

My Department has committed to a range of actions designed to affirm the importance of the role that early years settings can play in fostering Irish language proficiency. The aim of these actions is to build on existing measures, supports and partnerships in the area of Irish-medium early years education. The agreed actions include the creation of two Irish language early years posts to co-ordinate the development of Irish language provision in the early years sector in non-Gaeltacht areas, and the establishment of baseline supports for naíonraí that will inform future policy plans.

A further action relates to the establishment of an oversight group by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, comprised of representatives from the relevant departments, agencies and stakeholders, to oversee the implementation of the actions relating to the early years sector. The inaugural meeting of this group has taken place. My Department is also represented on the oversight group .

My Department is working to ensure improved communication with Irish speaking childcare services, in particular in the context of the major national childcare schemes that my Department funds. For example, in relation to the forthcoming Affordable Childcare Scheme, the website currently in development will be available in Irish, as will the parent application portal. Communications in relation to the launch of the new Scheme will also be available in Irish. The contact support centre will have Irish speakers on its staff. Training for the Access and Inclu-

sion Model (AIM) that helps children with a disability to participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) is available through Irish for Gaeltacht pre-school settings and the AIM website and materials are available in the Irish language.

The City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) are funded by the Department to act as a local agent in the delivery of the national early learning and care and school age childcare programmes and the implementation of Government policy at childcare committee level. They work with the Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta development workers, who provide direct supports to the stiurthoirí in the Irish language childcare services.

The Early Years Forum which I chair has two members representing Irish language needs in the sector.

A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families was launched on 19th November. This ambitious ten year plan contains two actions specifically aimed at supporting the development of the Irish language within the early learning and care sector (ELC). These actions are as follows:

- Introduce measures to ensure that children in Gaeltacht areas have access to Irish-medium ELC provision;

- Develop mechanisms to provide Irish-language supports to ELC provision where there are high proportions of children who are learning through the medium of Irish.

An implementation plan for the actions contained within that Strategy will be published within six months.

These are just some examples of the ways in which my Department is engaging with and ensuring that childcare services are facilitated to provide their services through the Irish language.

Child Abuse Reports

222. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 33 of 13 February 2019, when the review by HIQA of the NRP commenced; when it ceased; if a copy of the review will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8748/19]

223. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 33 of 13 February 2019, the timeline for the implementation of the action plan to identify the best governance solution for the NPR submitted by her Department to HIQA; the status of action plan; the person or body that prepared the action plan; if a copy will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8749/19]

224. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 33 of 13 February 2019, the consideration being given to placing the NPR on a statutory footing; the basis on which such a consideration is founded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8750/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 to 224, inclusive, together.

The National Review Panel (NRP) for the investigation of serious incidents, including the deaths of children and young people in care or known to the child protection system, was set up in 2010 as part of the Implementation Plan associated with the Report of the Commission to

Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report). The NRP carries out its work independently and the quality of the findings, judgements and systematic learning provided in the Panel's reports have consistently been found to be of the highest standard.

In 2016, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) conducted a monitoring exercise in respect of the NRP, on the basis of revised guidance produced in November 2014. HIQA shared a draft report with Tusla and my Department in June 2016, and submitted a final report in January 2017.

Overall, the HIQA report found that the reviews completed by the NRP were thorough, consistent, and of good quality. The NRP reports reviewed by HIQA were clearly written, fair and balanced, and highlighted both good practices and any deficits, if found. Key learnings were identified and recommendations were made, based on the findings of the reviews. The report found that reviews were consistent in their approach, quality assured by the NRP chair, and the final reports were structured in the same manner. In addition, the report found that the work of the NRP was carried out independently of Tusla and operated at a national level. The range of professionals selected to each review was found to be appropriate, and it was confirmed that the NRP liaised with Tusla to ensure that learning was shared from these reviews.

However, the report found a number of issues with the NRP in relation to governance matters, with the concerns raised largely relating to matters outside of the control of the NRP, and arising from the ad-hoc nature of the Panel's establishment in 2010.

On this point, the report acknowledged that the circumstances surrounding the genesis of the NRP were less than optimum. The NRP was established during a time of particular focus and pressure on the Health Service Executive in relation to severe criticism of its management of cases where children in State care had died. The urgent need for a solution, at a time of severe national economic challenge, impacted on planning for the body. In addition, it was originally estimated that the Panel would be dealing with approximately five cases per annum, involving an estimated two child deaths and three serious incidents. In fact, the NRP has been dealing with cases significantly in excess of this original estimate. This has on occasion contributed to delays in the publishing of reports.

In order to address concerns identified by HIQA, my officials prepared an action plan to identify the best governance solution for the NRP. These actions were to be addressed, in the main, by my officials and their colleagues in Tusla, with the assistance of the Chair of the NRP. The plan was forwarded to HIQA in October 2016.

In seeking to implement this plan, my officials continued to explore a number of options for the NRP, to address not only governance matters, but issues highlighted by the Chair of the Panel which have impacted on the efficiency of that body in concluding its work. This process was seen as a unique opportunity both to address the various challenges the NRP faces in producing its reports, and to maximise the Panel's value. Factors identified as challenges for the NRP included (i) a perception in some quarters that the NRP was not fully independent; (ii) access to files and personnel for review purposes (outside of those in Tusla); and (iii) governance and structural issues.

Having examined several options to address these issues, Government, last November, approved my recommendation that the NRP be established as an independent statutory body in its own right. Appointments to the Panel will be conducted by the Public Appointments Service.

This course of action will address the governance issues noted by HIQA in its monitoring exercise of 2016. Furthermore, it is intended that the Panel will have the power to seek cooperation from relevant parties. This will facilitate access to all pertinent files and personnel across

relevant agencies. The final construct and interventions available to the NRP will of course be refined during the drafting of the relevant provisions and will be subject to legal advice and the advice of Parliamentary Counsel.

My officials have begun the preliminary work to draft the necessary legislation. It is not possible to provide a timeline for this legislation at present.

Childcare Services Data

225. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of level 5, 6, 7 and 8 childcare workers supported under the learner fund in 2017 and 2018, in tabular form; the average funding provided to workers seeking levels 5, 6, 7 and 8; and the percentage of the training cost covered by the funding. [8770/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank Deputy Rabbitte for her question.

The Learner Fund for Early Learning and Care practitioners first opened for applications by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in March 2014.

Between 2014 and 2016, four strands of funding were opened. The Learner Fund at that time had two primary aims:

1. To support Early Learning and Care practitioners working directly with children in registered centre based and home based services to meet the mandatory minimum qualification requirements which (subsequently) came into effect on December 31st 2016. The specific qualification subsidised was a QQI award at NFQ Level 5 in Early Childhood Care and Education.
2. To support Early Learning and Care practitioners who already held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the NFQ (or equivalent), to attain an NFQ Level 6 qualification in the same discipline, in order to meet ECCE contractual requirements and facilitate expansion of the ECCE programme.

Through these specific funding strands, up to 4,488 Early Learning and Care practitioners were approved for funding to support them to raise their qualification levels in Early Learning and Care. To allow practitioners time to complete their qualifications, the final payments to training providers were made in late 2018. A final breakdown of the total spend per region and per person is not yet available. Funding was made available based on need, to a maximum of €950. Preliminary figures would indicate that not everyone who was approved for funding took steps to avail of the full amount.

There is not one uniform price for undertaking QQI awards, and the amount charged by training providers varies. My officials estimate that the amount paid would have covered between 80% to 100% of the cost of the programmes.

Since the introduction of these initial Learner Fund strands, DCYA regulations have ensured that the workforce now meets regulatory qualification requirements and as need has changed, the focus of the Learner funding has pivoted to support of continuing professional development. This year and into 2020, funding will be provided for Early Learning and Care services, including registered Childminders, to avail of First Aid Responder training accredited by the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council. There will also be supports put in place for Childminders to upskill to a major QQI award in Early Childhood Care and Education. Since January 2017, a bursary has been available to experienced Early Learning and Care practitioners, who

graduated from DCYA recognised Early Childhood Education and Care degree programmes. In 2017, 1080 individuals received a bursary as this included practitioners who achieved awards between 2013 and 2017. In 2018, 550 individuals received a graduate bursary.

The degree bursary amount per individual is €750. There is more variation in the cost of ECEC degrees in the country than might be expected; it is estimated that this amount would represent between 25 and 40% of the cost. As the Deputy is most likely aware, there are a variety of funding streams available to students of degree programmes in the State. Many Early Learning and Care providers pay for, or heavily subsidise the cost of this training for existing staff given the higher capitation payment that is made to ECCE services by a level 7 or 8 graduate. This additional Higher Capitation payment amounts to approx. €200 per week for an ECCE room of 20 children to cover the 15 hour programme.

Building a professional Early Learning and Care workforce is a key component of First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, which was launched on the 19th of November. First 5 commits to establishing a Workforce Development Plan for the ELC workforce. Preliminary work has already begun on this. The Department of Education and Skills has also recently developed enhanced criteria and guidelines for Higher Education Institutions providing Early Childhood Education and Care degree programmes. The aim is to ensure a more unified approach to professional training for ELC practitioners at degree level. This forms part of a range of measures to be introduced in the future. My department hopes to revisit the Learner Fund support for qualifications for ELC practitioners once further progress has been made with the Workforce Development Plan.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

226. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the issues raised by a cross county community childcare forum regarding its concerns relative to the childcare and aftercare compliance reports for 2018 and 2019; her plans to deal with the inability of the group to re-register up to 49 children in its crèche and after-school care services due to the compliance reports; if the solutions put forward by the forum will be considered and funding provided when needed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8774/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Assisting families to access high quality, affordable early learning and care and school age childcare is a priority for me as Minister and hence I take these issues raised in your question very seriously.

My Department funds a number of early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. Given the large amount of public money that is used in funding these programmes, there needs to be an appropriate level of oversight and accountability. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs believes that our approach to compliance and supporting services strikes the right balance. Our approach involves setting out the rules for the receipt of State funding, supporting providers to deliver services, and at the same time, the approach offers assurances to the taxpayer that the funding assigned is being spent as it was intended.

A high level of compliance with the rules of the various childcare schemes is vital to maintaining existing investment as well as ensuring future investment. It is a requirement that services operating the early learning and care programmes funded by my Department must be compliant with the *'Rules for DCYA childcare funding programmes'*, the most recent of which was published on 9th August 2018. These Rules clearly state the need to maintain attendance records and keep registrations updated in line with attendance. Compliance with these Rules is

overseen by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Because subsidies for the early learning and care programmes are paid based on attendance (and not just enrolment), this is a vital governance component of the funding for which my Department is responsible.

I appreciate that community childcare settings, such as those referenced, provide a valuable service to children and families across the country and may face a variety of challenges to their sustainability. However, significant support is available to them to bring their service onto a more sustainable footing, whilst being necessarily compliant with the scheme rules. My Department oversees an integrated Case Management system operated by Pobal through which a dedicated team assesses services facing challenges. This Case Management service provides non-financial assistance or support. Financial supports are also available for services facing certain challenges which may also be accessed through Case Management following a financial assessment.

Results from Pobal compliance visits for the first part of the programme year 2018/2019 show issues in relation to non-compliance which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I am encouraged however that most services have engaged constructively with the process so far. I would recommend all other services to get in contact with Pobal or their local City / County Childcare Committee if they need support or advice, particularly in relation to the re-registration issues you reference.

With regard to the particular service the Deputy referred to, I understand that they are meeting with Pobal representatives this week and I would expect that the matter can be resolved then. It is open to the service to register children on CCSP at any time in the programme year.

The Deputy will be aware that investment in childcare has increased by 117% over the last four budgets, now totalling €575m per year. Community services access much of this growing investment. The Affordable Childcare Scheme, which will be introduced later this year, will mark another significant milestone, creating an infrastructure from which Government can further increase investment in services over the next decade. This is in line with the commitment made in First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, I published last November.

Irish Language

227. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8626/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department was established on 19 July 2017. I can confirm that my Department has been engaged in the preparation of its first Irish Language Scheme in accordance with the Guidelines outlined under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003. The Scheme will be finalised shortly and will be in effect for the period from 2019 to 2021. It has been formulated with the intention of ensuring that all relevant obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003 relating to my Department, and its agencies, as appropriate, are being fully addressed on an incremental basis, through this and future schemes.

In addition to this, and to facilitate our provision of services through Irish, the Department has contracted translation services in accordance with the framework put in place by the Office of Government Procurement.

The Department recognises that the objective of Government policy in relation to Irish in the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 is to increase, on an incremental basis, the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language. Through the preparation and implementation of its Irish Language Scheme, the Department aims to implement the aspects of the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to its remit.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

228. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications between category 1 and 2 projects made under the rural regeneration and development fund by county to date, in tabular form; the number of successful and unsuccessful project applications, respectively, by category that applied for funding by county; the successful projects by county that have been approved for funding by category; the value of funding approved for each such project; the number of successful applicants that have received approved funding to date; the value of same; the number of unsuccessful applicants that have not received approved funding to date; the amount allocated for the fund in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8766/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The first call for applications for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund closed at the end of September. €1 billion is committed to the Fund over a 10 year period to support rural economic development and help build strong communities. €315m is allocated to the Fund for 2019-2022.

There was an excellent response from all across the country, with 280 applications received. 126 applications related to Category 1, “shovel ready” projects while 154 related to Category 2 projects - those which needed development funding to become potential Category 1 applications in future calls for applications.

In November 2018, I announced the first set of 18 successful Category 1 projects, providing €24.4m in funding for projects with an overall value of €34.6m. Just last week in Castleblayney, I announced another 20 successful Category 1 projects and 46 Category 2 projects which will benefit from support from the Fund of €62m, with a total project value of €83m. Overall, this first call from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will provide €86m in support for projects worth €117m.

A breakdown of the number per county of successful and unsuccessful applications as well as the number of applications received from each county is set out in Table 1.

A list of the successful projects by county and the amount of funding approved for each project is set out in Tables 2 and 3.

My Department is currently engaged with the successful lead applicants in agreeing milestones and schedules as part of due diligence and contractual arrangements. Payment dates will also be agreed as part of this process.

Table 1. Number of Applications by Category and County.

	Category 1			Category 2			
-	Number of Successful Applications	Number of Unsuccessful Applications	Category 1 Applications per County	Number of Successful Applications	Number of Unsuccessful Applications	Category 2 Applications per County	Overall Applications per County
Carlow	1	0	1	1	4	5	6

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	Category 1			Category 2			
-	Number of Successful Applications	Number of Unsuccessful Applications	Category 1 Applications per County	Number of Successful Applications	Number of Unsuccessful Applications	Category 2 Applications per County	Overall Applications per County
Cavan	1	1	2	2	1	3	5
Clare	4	9	13	2	8	10	23
Cork	2	15	17	5	44	49	66
Donegal	2	6	8	1	3	4	12
Dublin	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Galway	3	6	9	3	2	5	14
Kerry	1	6	7	4	3	7	14
Kildare	1	3	4	2	7	9	13
Kilkenny	2	2	4	1	4	5	9
Laois	1	3	4	0	1	1	5
Leitrim	0	2	2	1	2	3	5
Limerick	3	10	13	1	4	5	18
Longford	2	0	2	0	1	1	3
Louth	1	1	2	1	1	2	4
Mayo	3	4	7	2	4	6	13
Meath	0	2	2	4	2	6	8
Monaghan	1	4	5	4	0	4	9
Offaly	0	1	1	1	3	4	5
Roscommon	3	1	4	1	0	1	5
Sligo	2	1	3	1	1	2	5
Tipperary	1	2	3	0	3	3	6
Waterford	0	1	1	1	3	4	5
Westmeath	0	1	1	1	1	2	3
Wexford	1	4	5	4	2	6	11
Wicklow	0	1	1	0	2	2	3
Multiple Locations	3	2	5	3	1	4	9
Totals	38	88	126	46	108	154	280

Table 2. List of Successful Category 1 Projects

County	Lead Applicant	Location	Total RRDF Funding
Carlow	Carlow County Council	Borris	€654,820
Cavan	Cavan County Council	Cootehill	€867,174
Clare	Clare County Council	Kilrush	€1,720,000
Clare	Clare County Council	Loop Head Lighthouse	€868,500
Clare	Clare County Council	Lahinch	€2,860,000
Clare	Clare County Council	Ennistymon	€1,023,300
Clare; Donegal; Galway; Kerry; Mayo; Wicklow	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	National Parks (multiple)	€3,915,000
Cork	IRD Duhallow CLG	Banteer	€1,128,000
Cork	Cork County Council	Kinsale	€2,175,000
Donegal	Donegal County Council	Swan Park, Buncrana	€1,728,042
Donegal	Udaras na Gaeltachta	Doiri Beaga	€1,500,000
Donegal/Sligo/Mayo/Roscommon	Western Development Commission	Multiple	€644,734
Galway	Galway County Council	Athenry	€3,554,000

County	Lead Applicant	Location	Total RRDF Funding
Galway	Western Development Commission	Tullycross, Renvyle	€1,728,000
Galway	Údarás na Gaeltachta	An Spidéal	€548,887
Kerry	Kerry County Council	Valentia Island	€1,270,000
Kildare	Kildare County Council	Emily Square, Athy	€2,707,500
Kilkenny	Kilkenny County Council	Thomastown	€2,080,486
Kilkenny	Kilkenny County Council	Callan Town	€561,750
Laois	Office of Public Works	Emo, Emo Court	€1,200,000
Limerick	Limerick City and County Council	Abbeyfeale, Newcastlewest, Rathkeale, Ardagh	€2,724,657
Limerick	Ballyhoura Development CLG	Glenbrohane	€626,369
Limerick	Ballyhoura Development CLG	Murroe	€3,816,450
Limerick, Cork, Sligo, Dublin, Wicklow, Offaly, Laois	Coillte	Ballyhoura, Coolaney, Ticknock/Ballinastoe/ Slieve Blooms	€10,262,900
Longford	Longford County Council	Edgeworthstown	€1,269,019
Longford	Longford County Council	Granard	€2,872,434
Louth	Louth County Council	Ardee Castle	€2,147,000
Mayo	Mayo County Council	Ballinrobe	€825,000
Mayo	Sligo LEADER Partnership CLG	Claremorris	€2,100,000
Mayo	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Béal a' Mhuirthead	€795,062
Monaghan	Monaghan County Council	Castleblaney	€2,138,560
Roscommon	Roscommon Integrated Development Company Ltd	Ballaghdarreen	€1,656,750
Roscommon	Roscommon County Council	Boyle Town	€1,705,705
Roscommon	Roscommon County Council	Castlereagh	€1,545,000
Sligo	Sligo County Council	Yeats Trail	€500,000
Sligo	Sligo County Council	Strandhill	€615,752
Tipperary	Tipperary County Council	Tipperary Town	€600,000
Wexford	TEAGASC	Johnstown Castle	€658,696

Table 3. List of Successful Category 2 Projects

County	Lead Applicant	Location	RRDF Funding
Carlow	OPW	Ballon	€450,000
Cavan	Cavan County Council	Ballyjamesduff	€90,000
Cavan	Cavan County Council	Cootehill	€56,000
Clare	Clare County Council	Doolin	€465,571
Clare	Clare County Council	Inis Cealtra	€920,500
Clare/ Kerry	Fáilte Ireland	Multiple	€666,300
Cork	Cork County Council	Cork County	€206,168
Cork	OPW	Annes Grove	€375,000
Cork	Cork County Council	Ballydesmond	€56,250
Cork	Udaras na Gaeltachta	Baile Bhuirne/Colaiste Iosagain	€180,000
Cork	Avondhu Blackwater partnership CLG	Rathormac	€122,025

Questions - Written Answers

County	Lead Applicant	Location	RRDF Funding
Donegal	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	Killybegs	€293,436
Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Kerry, Wicklow	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht - NPWS	Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Kerry, Wicklow	€1,466,250
Galway	Galway County Council	Kinvara	€124,781
Galway	Galway County Council	Dunmore	€960,909
Galway	Galway County Council	Tuam	€175,000
Kerry	Udaras na Gaeltachta	Baile na Fheirtéaraigh	€292,500
Kerry	Udaras na Gaeltachta	Dingle Workhouse	€415,000
Kerry	Kerry County Council	Kenmare	€275,000
Kerry	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Gaeltacht Uibh Rathaigh/Iveragh Task-force	€174,352
Kildare	Kildare County Council	Athy	€80,000
Kildare	Kildare County Council	Monasterevin	€78,000
Kilkenny	Kilkenny LEADER Partnership	Kilkenny	€60,000
Leitrim	Leitrim County Council	Mohill	€37,500
Limerick	Limerick City and County Council	Newcastle West	€330,000
Louth	Louth County Council	Ardee	€526,744
Mayo	Mayo County Council	Multi Location	€75,000
Mayo	Mayo County Council	Westport and Cong	€56,000
Mayo, Galway	Geological Survey Ireland	Multi Location	€969,387
Meath	Meath County Council	Kells	€210,000
Meath	Meath County Council	Boyne Navigation and Greenway	€845,250
Meath	Meath County Council	Enfield	€726,000
Meath	OPW	Trim	€262,500
Monaghan	Waterways Ireland	State Agency	€325,000
Monaghan	Monaghan County Council	Clones	€377,250
Monaghan	Monaghan County Council	Ballybay	€410,400
Monaghan	Monaghan County Council	Carrickmacross	€632,000
Offaly	Offaly County Council	Edenderry	€75,000
Roscommon	Roscommon Integrated Development Company Ltd	Ballaghdarreen	€20,250
Sligo	Sligo County Council	Enniscrone	€131,250
Waterford	Waterford Leader Partnership	Blackwater Valley	€128,842
Westmeath	Westmeath County Council	Kinnegad	€600,000
Wexford	Wexford County Council	Gorey	€95,224
Wexford	Wexford County Council	Ferrycarraig and the Hook Peninsula	€1,087,340

County	Lead Applicant	Location	RRDF Funding
Wexford	Wexford County Council	New Ross	€328,407
Wexford	Wexford County Council	Gorey	€429,145

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

229. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of the €55 million funding allocated to the rural regeneration and development fund in 2019 or the planned initial funding of €315 million to the fund on a phased basis over the period 2019 to 2022 that will be reprofiled to another Department following spending overruns; and the amount being reprofiled from the fund for the allocations announced to date. [8767/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Under Project Ireland 2040, the Government has committed €1 billion to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund over a 10 year period to support rural economic development and help build strong communities. The Fund has been allocated €315m over the period 2019 to 2022 and the various allocations over that period will be confirmed as part of the annual budgetary process. Certain projects under the fund are multi-annual and this will also be provided for.

I do not expect the overall 4 year allocation for the Fund to be impacted by any re-profiling taken to address capital funding shortfalls elsewhere and my Department remains focused on delivering on its mission with the aid of the vote allocated to us for that purpose. Indeed, in respect of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, just last week in Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan I announced the details of 66 projects which were successful in the first call under the Fund. These projects will benefit from €62m in funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and are worth €83m in total investment for rural communities. Combined with the first announcement I made in November 2018 of 18 successful projects, the Fund has made available a total of €86m in funding to enable projects worth €117m to be delivered across every county in the country.

Further to the above, I also expect to be in a position shortly to launch a second call for applications under the Fund. I am satisfied that the funding commitment is available to enable these projects and future projects to be delivered over the next four years.

Social Insurance

230. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason credits are not applied in the case of widower's and widow's payments for the purpose of availing of dental and optical benefits; her plans to amend the status quo in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8513/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Credited contributions (credits) can be awarded where a worker has a gap in their insurance record as a result of their absence from the workforce for reasons of, for example, unemployment, illness, or due to a statutory leave eg. maternity. Receipt of a social welfare payment, such as a widows pension, does not in itself automatically result in the award of credits and it is not proposed to change the position in this regard.

In relation to Treatment Benefit (TB), if a person is qualified for TB in their own right or as a dependent adult, based on their spouse/partners PRSI record at the time of their death, they

will retain this entitlement until their circumstances change in relation to their marital/relationship status.

It should be noted that the award of credits alone would not confer entitlement to TB as the person would require a combination of paid and credited contributions to qualify.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) is eligible to receive an increased pension and arrears following a recent pension review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8527/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement on post Budget 2012 rate-bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods. My Department has already written to these pensioners to explain the process.

Where possible, my Department will use information already held to assist in these reviews. Additional information will be requested in writing from pensioners in relation to unexplained gaps in their social insurance record where required to complete their review.

Following a review of the social insurance record of the person concerned some unexplained gaps have been found in her social insurance record. A letter has issued to the person concerned requesting details of any periods of time spent in a parenting or caring capacity. Included in the letter are details on how to return the required information using the Department's online services. This is the quickest and easiest way to provide the information required to complete the review. The letter also provides a dedicated telephone number to call if the person concerned has any difficulty using the online application. If the difficulties cannot be resolved over the phone, a paper application form will be sent to the pensioner for compilation.

On receipt of the requested information, the person's state pension (contributory) pension will be reviewed and they will be informed of the outcome in writing. If an increase is due, it will be backdated to 30 March 2018. If no increase is due, the person concerned will continue to receive their current weekly rate of pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

232. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of illness benefit payments for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8540/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of Illness Benefit and is certified and paid, including any arrears, up to 13th February 2019. If the person concerned remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

233. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8580/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Illness Benefit is a payment for persons who are medically certified as being incapable of work and who satisfy certain PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance) conditions. One of these conditions is that a person is required to have 104 reckonable PRSI contributions paid since entering insurable employment. The records of the Department show that the person concerned does not have the required amount of PRSI contributions paid and as a result she will not qualify for payment of Illness Benefit at this time.

If the person concerned considers that she may have more PRSI contributions than is recorded by the Department she should provide evidence of same and the current position will be re-examined.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Data Protection

234. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the former data protection officer (details supplied) of her Department has been re-assigned from their role or transferred to another Department or location; the reason this person ceased to be the DPO of her Department; the date on which this occurred; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8585/19]

237. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if breaches of Article 38.3 GDPR (details supplied) have occurred and been brought to her attention since its introduction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8667/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 and 237 together.

Articles 37, 38 and 39 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) deal with the appointment and role of a Data Protection Officer (DPO). All public authorities and bodies including Government Departments are required to designate a DPO. My Department has assigned the DPO role to a senior manager at Principal level and also assigned considerable staff resources to support the DPO in fulfilling the requirements of the role set out in the GDPR.

As the Deputy is aware, Article 38.3 provides for the DPO to be independent in the conduct of his / her tasks and not receive any instructions regarding the exercise of those tasks. The Department is fully satisfied that the DPO is given the required independence and autonomy. The Department does not interfere in any way with the DPO's independent functions, nor does it instruct the DPO in the exercise of DPO duties.

Over the past number of weeks a significant number of reassignments have taken place at Principal level in the Department. Opportunities for these moves arose as vacancies were created by retirements and promotions of serving Principals. The Department is conscious of the

development needs of its staff and considers it important to provide staff with the chance to expand their personal experience and develop their careers. Movements of staff between functions also facilitates cross-fertilisation of knowledge and builds organisation resilience. The retirement and promotion of a number of staff at Principal level provided the Department with the opportunity to reassign almost 30% of Principals with a view to achieving these objectives. In this context the Principal performing the role of DPO was one of the Principals assigned to another role. A serving Principal with a significant knowledge of data protection issues has now been assigned to the DPO role.

Irish Language

235. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030 that are relevant to her Department and bodies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8619/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is represented on the Inter-Departmental Group for the Government's 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and officials are familiar with the objectives of the Strategy.

The Department's Language Scheme 2015 – 2018, which took effect from 16 March 2015, sets out the Department's commitments to customer service in Irish and advises of the availability of services through Irish. The Scheme, which was published on Department's website, sets out how our services will be improved during the life of the Scheme. This Scheme was developed within the policy context of the '20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030' and has been informed by submissions received from our customers and staff. The Department's new Scheme 2019-2022, which will come into effect from 26 February 2019, continues to expand on these commitments.

My Department is committed to providing quality services to its customers in either Irish or English as required by the customer and as set out in our Language Scheme 2015 – 2018, Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan 2016 – 2018. In accordance with our obligations under the Official Languages Act (OLA), letters and emails received in Irish are replied to in Irish; headings of stationery are provided in Irish or bilingually; all recorded oral announcements are bilingual; documents setting out public policy proposals, financial statements, annual reports and strategy statements are published bilingually on the Department's website; signage in Departmental offices is compliant with OLA and Regulations; circulars / mailshots are bilingual; the official place names of Gaeltacht areas are used by the Department.

The following public offices of my Department are located in Gaeltacht areas: Acaill, An Clochán Liath and Beal an Mhuirthead Intreo Centres and An Daingean branch office and all of these offices provide a full service through Irish.

The Department's web-site, www.welfare.ie, is a critical information service to customers, providing application forms and details of available schemes and services. In addition, notices advising customers of the availability of services through Irish are displayed in all relevant offices.

Staff members who volunteer to provide services through Irish are encouraged and supported by the Department's Staff Development Unit to attend Irish training courses. Staff are supported on an ongoing basis to complete Certificate in Professional Irish (NFQ levels 3 to 6)

with Gaelchultúr. The Department has assessed Irish language training requirements through consultation with managers and staff and arranged for Irish language training for staff. During 2017 and 2018, in-house training was delivered at the regional locations of Athlone, Galway, Roscommon and Longford by Gaelchultúr. Pre-entry language proficiency assessments are provided by Gaelchultúr to ensure staff members are supported to attend the appropriate level.

As part of my Department's workforce planning process, and in order to deliver on commitments under the Department's Irish Language Scheme, the Department in consultation with Managers reviews the locations where staff are required to provide a service to customers in Irish. When a post becomes vacant in a location where a functional bi-lingual is required, my Department seeks to have it filled from panels established by the Public Appointments Service. Currently, there are 184 people serving in both Branch Offices and Departmental offices who are available to deliver services through Irish.

The Department's staff are familiar with their obligations under the Official Language Act and Regulations. In areas where the staff available are unable to deal with a person through Irish, a language interpretive service is offered to the customer. This service, which can be arranged at very short notice, can be provided either by 3-way phone call, or in-person, as required.

The Department has also ensured that the obligations under the Official Languages Act and Language Scheme are brought to the attention of staff at relevant staff training courses including new entrant induction courses and managers training courses. To this end, Irish Language Training is promoted by Staff Development Unit in "Meet & Greet", "Induction & Orientation", and "Frontline Customer Service" Training. Obligations under the Official Languages Act are specifically referenced throughout, with emphasis also placed on Departmental interpretation and translation services and language training supports, including Refund of Fees.

My Department has given serious consideration to ensuring that the significant changes in the way the Department will do its business in the future takes account of the preference that some of our customers have to interact with us through Irish.

The government-wide platform MyGovID is a single, secure, online identity and access portal that provides access to a range of government services. To enable the Department's customers to access personalised and online welfare services the Department has also built a secure, online customer-facing portal called MyWelfare. All services and information within www.MyGovid.ie www.MyWelfare.ie and www.WelfarePartners.ie are available to customers in both Irish and English. No service can go live without both languages being fully available and functional.

Finally, the Corporate Planning Unit in my Department has specific responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Official Languages Act 2003 and the Department's Language Scheme and the Unit acts as liaison with Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga and with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and provides reports and other information as required.

Paternity Benefit

236. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if paternity benefit will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8632/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A

claim for paternity benefit from the person concerned was received outside of the prescribed time limits and as a result it was not initially awarded. Further information was requested in relation to the claim and the reason that it was submitted late to the department. Following receipt of this information a review of the decision has now been made and I can confirm that a decision was made on 18th February 2019 awarding the benefit.

A decision letter is in the post and payment will issue shortly to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 237 answered with Question No. 234.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

238. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the weekly cost of paying one full-time equivalent community employment worker. [8723/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are 4 points on the Community Employment (CE) supervisor pay scale. Over 75% of CE supervisors are on point 4 which equates to an average cost of €40,309 annually or a weekly rate of €772.50.

The following is the % break down of supervisors on the pay scale:

Point on Salary Scale	Weely Salary	Annual Salary	% number of supervisors
Point 1	€639.61	€33,374.84	9.4
Point 2	€683.86	€35,683.81	8
Point 3	€728.14	€37,994.34	7.4
Point 4	€772.50	€40,309.05	75.2

Public Sector Staff Retirements

239. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if those in the public sector who were set to retire at 65 years of age would be entitled to jobseeker's allowance until they reach 67 years of age in view of the changes to the compulsory retirement age in December 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8725/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years from its current age of 66. The first increase to 67 years of age will occur in 2021 and the second to 68 years of age in 2028. The purpose of these changes is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by roughly €1 billion every 5 years.

The age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. Where a person exits the workforce before reaching State pension age they may apply for either the jobseeker's benefit (JB) or jobseeker's allowance (JA) schemes. Jobseeker's payments are paid to eligible jobseekers aged 18 to 66 years subject to them satisfying the rules of the schemes. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age.

The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 announced by my colleague, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, last year provides that most public sector employees who were recruited before 1 April 2004, other than designated uniform grades and who did not reach their compulsory retirement age of 65 before 26 December 2018, now have a new compulsory retirement age of 70. People who joined the public service before 1 April 2004 previously had to retire at age 65. Now they can choose to work to age 70 on existing terms and conditions, subject to the normal standards of health and performance that apply to all staff. Any person who chooses to retire before 70 may be entitled to support under the jobseekers schemes or the State pension as theretofore.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Appeals

240. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a jobseeker's benefit appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8739/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 26th February 2019. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements for the hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

241. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if measures are being put in place to reduce long waiting times for applications to be processed within her Department. [8741/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed as quickly as possible.

Where any scheme area experiences delays, all possible steps are taken to improve processing times. This includes the assignment of additional resources, where available, and the review of business processes, to ensure the efficient processing of applications.

In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. One such example is the carer's allowance scheme.

To qualify for carer's allowance, the carer must show that they are habitually resident in the State, that they are providing full-time care and attention to a person who requires this level of care and that their means are less than the statutory limit.

On average in January, it took 16 weeks to award a new carer's allowance application.

While the average processing time is still higher than it should be, the re-assignment of staff from other areas of the Longford Centralised Schemes Office to claims processing in October has resulted in the a significant reduction in the number of claims awaiting decision and I expect the average processing time to reduce over the coming months.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Payments

242. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a farm assist payment was calculated on a weekly wage in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8747/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has been in receipt of Farm Assist since April 2017. Means for Farm Assist was reassessed from 23 January 2019 as the person concerned commenced insurable employment. As per payslip dated 08 February 2019 his gross earnings per fortnight are €1,069.08, PRSI deduction is €47.22. Means from his insurable employment have been assessed at €270.56 per week.

His spouse is employed 1 day per week, with earnings of €68.25 and means have been assessed from this employment at €28.95 per week.

Means have been assessed from his farm income at €6.20. He is currently in receipt of full Qualified Adult Allowance for his spouse as she is in receipt ½ rate Carers Allowance. The person concerned has been advised that his spouse should apply for full rate Carers Allowance.

Total weekly means is assessed at €306.00

His weekly Farm Assist Payment from 23 January 2019 is €23.40 + Fuel Allowance of €22.50.

His Farm Assist claim has been sent for review to the Social Welfare Inspector on 14/02/2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Rental Sector Strategy

243. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking and the progress made in developing an off-balance sheet cost rental accommodation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7151/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Acknowledging that renters in Dublin and other major urban centres are currently facing significant access and affordability challenges, the Government is committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental can make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

To support the introduction of affordable housing, including cost rental, the Government has made €310m available to local authorities to fund facilitating infrastructure, under the Serviced Sites Fund, over the next three years.

Two path-finder cost rental projects are currently being progressed. Firstly, the Housing Agency, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and two Approved Housing Bodies are working on a project at the Enniskerry Road, Dublin, which will deliver 50 cost rental homes. The second project, at St. Michael's Estate, Emmet Road in Inchicore can deliver up to 330 cost rental homes. It is expected that the tender for the Enniskerry Road project will be awarded and the Urban Design Development Framework Plan for St. Michaels will be completed, later in Quarter 1, 2019.

My Department is also working with the European Investment Bank to leverage its advisory and research capacity so that broader international lessons on the operation of cost rental can inform Ireland's approach. In addition, the Land Development Agency is examining the potential to deliver cost rental homes at scale from its land portfolio and the broader State land-bank.

Homelessness Strategy

244. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps being taken to address and eliminate child homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7143/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The latest Homeless Report published by my Department, for December 2018, showed that there were 1,617 families, with 3,559 associated dependants, accessing emergency accommodation.

Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, is designed to increase the delivery of housing across all tenures to help individuals and families meet their housing needs. The plan focuses on increasing the delivery of social housing, with a target of delivering 50,000 social housing homes in the period to 2021, while also making the best use of existing stock and laying the foundations for a more vibrant housing sector.

The Government is committed to ensuring that families experiencing homelessness receive the best possible supports until they can secure a home. In this regard, Budget 2019 provided an allocation of €146m, an increase of over 25% on the 2018 allocation, for the provision of homeless services by local authorities. Families experiencing homelessness are supported by the local authorities and their service delivery partners to exit homelessness into an independent tenancy, whether it be in a local authority property or a HAP supported tenancy in the private rental sector. In 2018, the HAP Placefinder service was made available to all local authorities to support households to identify and secure a tenancy in the private rented sector. My Department has approved funding for 22 Placefinder officers nationally.

In 2018, my Department provided €48.5m in capital funding to the local authorities for the provision of emergency accommodation. This funding has facilitated the provision of family hubs to provide appropriate accommodation for families experiencing homelessness. Family hubs provide a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation, with the capacity to provide cooking and laundry facilities and recreation space. Crucially, families transition more quickly through hubs and into tenancies than is the case in other types of emergency accommodation. This is as a result of the more intensive engagement with local services that is possible in hubs, including engagement with the HAP Placefinder service. My Department is working with the local authorities on the delivery of further family hubs in 2019.

Question No. 245 answered with Question No. 75.

EU Directives

246. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the recently initiated infringement proceedings by the EU Commission against Ireland for breaches of the water framework directive; the nature of the infringements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8525/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): An additional letter of formal notice from the European Commission relating to Infringement 2007/2238, which deals with Ireland's transposition of the Water Framework Directive, was received by my Department on 24 January 2019.

The letter outlines areas in which Ireland is alleged to have incorrectly or not fully transposed the Directive. The key elements of the Directive which, it is alleged, have been incorrectly or inadequately transposed by Ireland include the following:

- Article 2(28), the definition of "water services"
- Article 7(3) dealing with the protection of drinking water sources
- Article 11(3)(e) dealing with the control of abstractions and impoundments of water
- Article 11(5), dealing with the monitoring of water quality and the investigation of quality failures
- Article 11(6), dealing with the potential impact on marine waters of measures taken under the Directive
- Articles 11(7), 11(8) and 13(7) which set out key operational and review dates.

The letter also alleges potential gaps in transposition of the annexes to the Directive and in some definitional transpositions, as well as a number of possible interpretative misalignments.

In relation to Article 9(1), dealing with the recovery of costs for water services, the letter notes that responses received from Ireland are under consideration by the Commission and that the Commission will at this stage not follow up on transposition of this sub-article but that this is without prejudice to future follow up on the matter.

The Commission has sought a response within two months of receipt of the letter. However, given the extent and detail of the questions raised, my Department has requested a two-month extension, to 24 May 2019, in order to provide a full response to all the questions raised.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

247. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is considering or has decided to suspend the social housing applicant file for five years for persons who have refused two offers of accommodation; and if so, the basis on which this decision was made. [8548/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The current position in relation to the refusal by households of offers of social housing dwellings is set down in Regulation 12 of the Social Housing Allocation Regulations 2011, made under section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.

Under Regulation 12, a household that refuses two reasonable offers of such tenancies in any twelve-month period, other than an offer made under the Choice Based Letting (CBL) procedure, will not receive any further offers from any local authority for a period of one year from the date of the second refusal. An offer is deemed to be reasonable where the dwelling concerned would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the housing needs of the household and, except in an emergency, is located in an area of choice specified by the household.

My Department regularly engages with the local authority sector on this and other social housing policy matters. The refusal of offers can have a serious impact on the administrative process in local authorities and can prolong the period for re-letting of homes, lead to a loss of revenue through non-rental and is ultimately an inefficient use of the social housing stock, as well as local authority resources.

For these reasons, it is my intention to amend the regulations to provide that a household that refuses two reasonable offers in any twelve-month period, other than an offer made under the CBL procedure, will not receive any further offers from any local authority for a period of five years. The latter period is not subsequently reckonable for the purposes of determining the household's relative priority for another social housing tenancy.

Homeless Persons Supports

248. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the inconsistent use of the PASS system by different local authorities nationally when registering a person as homeless; his plans to regulate the managing of the PASS system to ensure the accurate recording of homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8582/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

The Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS) is an online, shared system utilised by the local authorities and other contracted service providers to manage bookings in State-funded emergency accommodation, operated and overseen by the local authorities. My Department has no function in the operation of the PASS system.

Irish Language

249. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 - 2030 that are relevant to his Department and bodies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8623/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF), published in 2018, the language planning process, as prescribed in the Gaeltacht Act 2012, represents the primary driver in support of the Government's commitment to the achievement of the objectives set out in the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030. Objective 29 of the NPF makes provision for supporting the implementation of language plans in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service

Towns and Irish Language Networks.

My Department has also produced planning guidelines, ‘Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities’, to address the mandatory objective of the Planning & Development Act for “the protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht, including the promotion of Irish as the community language, where there is a Gaeltacht in the area of the development plan”. These guidelines refer to areas such as linguistic and cultural heritage, the needs of the community in land-use terms for housing, community facilities, employment, tourism and design, including advertising and signage. By way of example, the Galway County Development Plan 2015-21 incorporated a variation to include a specific Gaeltacht area plan.

In June of last year, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht published an Action Plan 2018-2022, which aims to accelerate the achievement of the objectives set out in the 20-Year Strategy. The Action Plan is aligned with the objectives of the Strategy and also with relevant Government policies and programmes such as Project Ireland 2040 which encompasses the NPF.

Finally, in line with the Gaeltacht Act 2012, my Department continues to support staffing sanction requests from local authorities for bilingual officers.

Arrangements have been put in place by each agency under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email addresses for each agency are set out as follows:

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

Election Management System

250. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if all persons voting will be required to subscribe to and-or be in possession of a public services card in the context of proposals to modernise the electoral registration process; if persons will have to consent to data sharing between Departments and-or local authorities in order to vote; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8641/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): In March 2017 the Government determined that work should commence on modernisation of the voter registration process. In addition to meeting the objective to modernise the registration process generally, the Government was also cognisant of the possible need to register voters resident outside the State in the event that a referendum on extending the franchise in Presidential elections is passed.

The modernisation project will include consideration of wider policy and legislative chang-

es. There will be an initial focus on a series of proposals including those made by the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht in its report on the consultation it carried out on the proposed Electoral Commission in 2016. The proposals currently under consideration include an optional online registration process in parallel with the existing paper based system; the creation of a unique identifier for individuals; proportionate and limited data sharing between public bodies, essentially to improve the accuracy and timeliness of changes to the register information, e.g. in respect of those that are deceased. It is not envisaged that individuals will require a public services card (PSC) to engage in the registration process; however, if an individual wishes to engage through an optional online registration system, there will, of course be requirements in terms of identity verification and the PSC may be selected to meet requirements in this respect.

Conscious of the importance of the register and its role in our democracy and the need to ensure security and integrity are key priorities for any changes being considered, significant consultation is planned to engage all stakeholders, including registration authorities, the political system at all levels and the public.

An initial technical consultation with franchise teams in local authorities was completed in September 2018 and the constructive inputs received informed the further development of proposals which have now been put to a public consultation which is due to end March 15 this year. This consultation will offer an opportunity to all relevant stakeholders and the public to contribute. Details of the consultation are available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/public-consultation-proposals-modernise-electoral-registration-process>.

Local Government Fund

251. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding within the Local Government Fund in each of the years 1999 to 2018, in tabular form; and the details of each component of the funding in gross and percentage terms. [8650/19]

252. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding to the Local Government Fund in each of the years 1999 to 2018, in tabular form; and the details of gross increases or decreases in funding and the real terms percentage expression of year-on-year increase and decrease. [8651/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 251 and 252 together.

The information sought is set out in the following table..

The Local Government Fund is audited by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General each year. The audited accounts of the Local Government Fund 2003-2017 are published on my Department's website at the following link;

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/archived/archived/current/type/publications?query=Local%20Government%20Fund%20Accounts>.

Funding Provided	1999 €m	2000 €m	2001 €m	2002 €m	2003 €m	2004 €m	2005 €m	2006 €m	2007 €m	2008 €m
Motor Tax (net)	453.5	465.0	511.8	539.5	678.7	745.1	800.0	878.3	957.1	1,055.3

Questions - Written Answers

Funding Provided	1999 €m	2000 €m	2001 €m	2002 €m	2003 €m	2004 €m	2005 €m	2006 €m	2007 €m	2008 €m
Exchequer Contribution	342.8	400.0	475.2	419.6	451.1	465.7	500.6	532.6	537.1	548.7
Household Charge	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Local Property Tax	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Interest/Other	0.7	2.0	1.9	1.6	2.0	1.9	2.3	3.5	5.4	6.7
Total	797.0	867.0	988.9	960.7	1,131.8	1,212.7	1,302.9	1,414.4	1,499.6	1,610.7

Table cntd.

Funding Provided	2009 €m	2010 €m	2011 €m	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m	2017 €m	2018 €m*	2019 €m**
Motor Tax (net)	1,056.3	1,021.4	1,011.6	1,052.8	1,135.5	1,157.6	1,122.0	1,049.9	1,019.9	0.0	0.0
Exchequer Contribution	443.0	241.4	175.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	241.1	396.6	365.3	124.8	185.0
Household Charge	0.0	0.0	0.0	113.9	23.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Local Property Tax	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	491.4	469.2	463.4	476.5	470.0	470.0
Interest/Other	1.4	1.0	2.8	0.6	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	1,500.7	1,263.8	1,189.4	1,167.3	1,158.8	1,649.5	1,832.5	1,909.9	1,861.7	594.8	655.0

Funding Provided	1999 %	2000 %	2001 %	2002 %	2003 %	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %
Motor Tax (net)	56.9	53.6	51.8	56.2	60.0	61.4	61.4	62.1	63.8	65.5
Exchequer Contribution	43.0	46.1	48.1	43.7	39.9	38.4	38.4	37.7	35.8	34.1
Household Charge	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Local Property Tax	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Interest/Other	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table cntd.

Funding Provided	2009 %	2010 %	2011 %	2012 %	2013 %	2014 %	2015 %	2016 %	2017 %	2018 %*	2019 %**
Motor Tax (net)	70.4	80.8	85.1	90.2	98.0	70.2	61.2	55.0	54.8	0.0	0.0
Exchequer Contribution	29.5	19.1	14.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.2	20.8	19.6	21.0	28.2
Household Charge	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.8	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Local Property Tax	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	29.8	25.6	24.3	25.6	79.0	71.8
Interest/Other	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Accounts not yet finalised.

**Estimates for 2019

Local Authority Funding

253. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding provided to local government by funding from the Local Government Fund, commercial rates and other sources of funding in both gross and percentage terms. [8652/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): In 2017, the most recent year for which audited accounts are available, sources of revenue (current) funding to local authorities were as follows:

Table of Revenue Income 2017

Revenue account	2017
Income	€4.515bn
Revenue Income sources €	2017
Goods & Services	€1.290bn
Commercial rates	€1.476bn
Income from Grants and subsidies	€1.251bn
Contributions from other authorities	€105m
LPT	€393m
Total	€4.515bn
Revenue Income sources %	2017
Goods & Services	28%
Commercial rates	33%
Income from Grants and Subsidies	28%
Contributions from other authorities	2%
Local Property Tax allocations (via the Local Government Fund)*	9%

*Local Property Tax receipts are paid into the Local Government Fund and from there, allocated to local authorities.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

254. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if and when income eligibility limits will be revised to address the issues experienced by applicants for local authority housing who find themselves ineligible for a Rebuilding Ireland home loan on the grounds of insufficient income and equally ineligible for inclusion on local authority housing waiting lists due to excessive income; if the matter will be examined with a view to resolution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8706/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is designed to enable credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The scheme is targeted at first-time buyers who have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage, from a commercial lender, sufficient for them to purchase their first home.

Single applicants for the loan must not be earning greater than €50,000 gross per annum. The combined income of joint applicants must not be greater than €75,000 per annum. This is

to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources. There are no set minimum income limits; however, applicants need to demonstrate that they have sufficient borrowing and repayment capacity and must be capable of repaying the mortgage in accordance with the statutory credit policy underpinning the loan. These income limits are unchanged from the previous local authority loan offerings. I have no plans to review them at present.

To support prudential lending and consistency of treatment for borrowers, a Loan to Value ratio of 90% applies to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan as per the Central Bank's prudential lending guidelines. Therefore, in order to avail of the loan, applicants must have a deposit equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property.

Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information are available on the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website: <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>. Any person who meets the eligibility criteria may apply for a loan regardless of whether or not they are on the local authority housing list or qualified for social housing support.

In relation to income eligibility criteria for local authority housing, the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band are based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is currently underway. The Housing Agency is continuing to carry out the detailed statistical work, which will underpin this review, on behalf of my Department.

The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impact of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Home Loan Scheme

255. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications received to date by county; the number approved, refused or pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8707/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, loan applications under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated. My Department does not directly collect information on the number of enquiries to local authorities regarding the loan or the number of loan applications received by local authorities.

The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses valid loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants.

I asked the Agency to compile figures on its processing of applications and the most recent figures, as at the end of January 2019, indicate that the Agency had underwritten 3,258 applications since the scheme began. Of these, 1,660 were recommended for approval. The data provided does not include figures on the number of pending applications.

A breakdown by county of the approvals and refusals is in the following table.

RIHL approvals and refusals to end Jan 2019

Local authority	Applications Underwritten	Recommended to Approve	Recommended to Decline
Carlow County Council	48	17 (35%)	31 (65%)
Cavan County Council	18	8 (44%)	10 (56%)
Clare County Council	54	19 (35%)	35 (65%)
Cork City Council	112	56 (50%)	56 (50%)
Cork County Council	262	145 (55%)	117 (45%)
Donegal County Council	31	19 (61%)	12 (39%)
Dublin City Council	375	230 (61%)	145 (39%)
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	87	47 (54%)	40 (46%)
Fingal County Council	470	249 (53%)	221 (47%)
Galway City Council	69	31 (45%)	38 (55%)
Galway County Council	117	44 (38%)	73 (62%)
Kerry County Council	95	41 (43%)	54 (57%)
Kildare County Council	173	87 (50%)	86 (50%)
Kilkenny County Council	28	15 (54%)	13 (46%)
Laois County Council	75	39 (52%)	36 (48%)
Leitrim County Council	10	3 (30%)	7 (70%)
Limerick City & County Council	87	49 (56%)	38 (44%)
Longford County Council	32	16 (50%)	16 (50%)
Louth County Council	81	34 (42%)	47 (58%)
Mayo County Council	49	18 (37%)	31 (63%)
Meath County Council	213	133 (62%)	80 (38%)
Monaghan County Council	23	8 (35%)	15 (65%)
Offaly County Council	43	15 (35%)	28 (65%)
Roscommon County Council	29	13 (45%)	16 (55%)
Sligo County Council	42	20 (48%)	22 (52%)
South Dublin County Council	233	122 (52%)	111 (48%)
Tipperary County Council	87	31 (36%)	56 (64%)
Waterford City & County Council	50	15 (30%)	35 (70%)
Westmeath County Council	27	17 (63%)	10 (37%)
Wexford County Council	94	50 (53%)	44 (47%)
Wicklow County Council	144	69 (48%)	75 (52%)
Total	3,258	1,660 (51%)	1,598 (49%)

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

256. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if and when extra resources will be allocated to Kildare County Council to meet the requirements of the disabled persons grant scheme and housing adaptation grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8708/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 2019 funding allocations for both the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, which relate to private housing, and the Disabled Persons Grants scheme, which relate to local authority stock, will be issued shortly to all local authorities in respect of 2019. Ahead of these allocations, local authorities can proceed with works under both schemes, so no delay should arise in delivering the services involved.

For the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, the available funding is being increased to €71.25 million this year, an 8% increase over 2018 funding. For the Disabled Persons Grants scheme, all local authorities have been asked to set out their requirements for 2019, following which funding allocations will be made.

Home Loan Scheme

257. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when extra funding will be allocated to the various local authorities to ensure the continuation of Rebuilding Ireland home loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8709/19]

267. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when further funding will be allocated for applications for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8742/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 257 and 267 together.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan launched on 1 February 2018. Prior to its launch, an initial tranche of €200 million of long-term fixed-rate finance was borrowed by the Housing Finance Agency to provide funds for the scheme to local authorities.

When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was initially being developed it was estimated that the drawdown of loans under the scheme would be approximately €200 million over three years. From the data collated on the scheme to date, the RIHL has proven to be more successful than initially anticipated, as a result of which, the scheme would require a further tranche of funds to be borrowed by the HFA in order to enable its continuation.

My Department is currently in discussions with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance with regard to an extension of the scheme in this regard. When these discussions are concluded I will be in a position to make an announcement on the matter.

Planning Issues

258. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress to date towards the reactivation of development at Naas Town Centre,

Naas, County Kildare; if all outstanding issues in respect of way leaves and rights of way have been resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8711/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As indicated in my previous replies to Questions on this matter, the management of the stalled Naas Town Centre development is a matter for Kildare County Council in the first instance and is one in which I do not have any function.

Homeless Persons Supports

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which emergency local authority housing provision has been made in respect of each local authority with particular reference to those most affected by homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8712/19]

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps still to be taken to accommodate persons who find themselves homeless through no fault of their own while in some cases suffering from ill health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8713/19]

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families rehoused by Kildare County Council in each of the past four years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8718/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 259, 260 and 265 together.

Resolving homelessness is an absolute priority for this Government. Budget 2019 provided an allocation of €146m, an increase of over 25% on the 2018 allocation, for the provision of homeless services by the local authorities. This funding will ensure that the local authorities can provide the best possible supports to those individuals and families experiencing homelessness, until they can be supported to move to a home.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. In 2018, my Department provided €48.5m in capital funding to local authorities for the provision of emergency accommodation. This included the provision of emergency accommodation for rough sleepers and additional family hubs to provide a more appropriate form of emergency accommodation for families experiencing homelessness.

The local authorities and their service delivery partners provide supports to all households experiencing homelessness to identify and secure an independent tenancy. In respect of those with health needs, the local authorities work closely with the HSE on the provision of emergency accommodation and related services. In September 2018, the Government published the National Implementation Plan for Housing First. Housing First provides supported tenancies for homeless individuals with complex needs by providing extensive housing and health supports. The Implementation Plan set a target for 663 tenancies to be created nationally in the three-year period to 2021 and my Department is working closely with the local authorities on the implementation of the Plan.

The exits from homelessness to independent tenancies are recorded in the quarterly performance reports submitted to my Department by each of the nine administrative regions for the delivery of homeless services. Kildare County Council is the lead authority for the Mid-East

Region, which also includes Meath County Council and Wicklow County Council. The exits from homelessness for the Mid East Region from 2015 to 2018 (to end Q3) are set out in the following table.

Exits from Homelessness - Mid East Region

2015	2016	2017	2018 (to end Q3)
141	135	150	116

Local Authority Housing Data

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority housing tenancies entered into in the past 12 months; the number of tenancies arranged between approved housing bodies and local authority housing applicants in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8714/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not hold information on the number of social housing tenancies entered into by local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) each year. The allocation of social housing dwellings is a matter for each local authority.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new applicants registered on local authority housing waiting lists in each of the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8715/19]

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), which has been carried out on an annual basis since 2016.

The most recent assessment, carried out in June 2018, which is available at the link below, shows that 71,858 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 13,941 households or 16.2% on the last assessment in June 2017. A breakdown of this figure by the length of time households have been on the list is also available at the following link, although it does not record data on a month by month basis in the manner sought.

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf

Rental Sector Strategy

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps that will be taken to ameliorate the situation affecting families becoming homeless through buy-to-let repossessions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8716/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The appointment of a receiver to a dwelling can cause confusion and distress to tenants and in

circumstances where a receiver is appointed to a rented dwelling, it is essential that the rights of tenants are protected.

A number of measures have been introduced in recent years with the objective of improving security of tenure for tenants. Security of tenure provisions under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 apply once a tenant has been in occupation of a dwelling for a continuous period of 6 months, with no notice of termination having been served during that time. Section 34 provides that a landlord must state a reason for the termination in any notice served, in line with those set out in section 34 of the Act.

The so-called ‘Tyrrelstown amendment’, included in the 2016 Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act, already limits the ability of landlords to use the grounds of sale to terminate tenancies, provided for in section 34 of the Residential Tenancies Act. Where a landlord proposes to sell 10 or more units within a single development at the same time, that sale will now be subject to the existing tenants remaining in situ, other than in exceptional circumstances.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 provided for notice periods for the termination of further Part 4 tenancies, i.e. tenancies that extended beyond 4 years, to be extended pro rata in line with the length of the tenancy, subject to caps of 224 days for termination by landlords and 112 days for terminations by tenants (previously 112 days for landlords and 56 days for tenants).

My Department established a working group with representation from the Departments of Justice & Equality, Finance, and Business, Enterprise & Innovation, the Office of the Attorney General and the Residential Tenancies Board, to examine the scope for amending legislation to provide for greater protection of tenants’ rights during the receivership process, e.g. by ensuring that persons appointed as receivers will be required to fulfil some of the obligations of a landlord. The Working Group has finalised its report, which is now under my consideration. Some changes to legislation within the remit of other Departments may also be required.

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Acts to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. Section 56 of the Act provides that, where there is an abuse of the termination procedure in section 34, a tenant may bring a complaint to the RTB on the basis that they have been unjustly deprived of possession of a dwelling by their landlord.

Further information from the RTB is available at <https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/> and through the RTB helpline - Lo-call on 0818 30 30 37 (mobile operators may charge a premium rate to the Lo-call number) or 01 702 8100 - available from Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 6.30pm.

The national housing charity, Threshold, operates the Tenancy Protection Service (TPS) which is a national service providing advice and support to households living in private rented accommodation who are experiencing tenancy problems, including where a tenancy is at risk of termination. The TPS seeks to protect existing tenancies and keep tenants in their homes. The TPS helpline on free-phone 1800 454 454 – available from Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm. Further information is also available at www.threshold.ie.

Households at risk of becoming homeless can seek assistance from their local authority. Any household assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for housing support through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme. Once a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the HAP scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that

local authority. This includes determining whether it is appropriate to refer a household to the Homeless HAP Place Finder service, which is a targeted support for households in emergency homeless accommodation, or who are at immediate risk of entering emergency accommodation, who may find it difficult to secure accommodation via the HAP scheme.

The Homeless HAP Placefinder can engage directly with property owners, support qualified households to find suitable tenancies and ensure that any additional supports that may be needed are put in place. The Place Finder Service can assist by paying deposits and advance rental payments, within HAP limits.

In the Dublin region, tenants can contact the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive's Central Placement Service homeless helpline at 1800-707-707.

Planning Issues

264. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which planning procedures can be expedited to facilitate the building of extra local authority houses with particular reference to the need to make a serious impact on the number on local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8717/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 amended section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 relating to the arrangements for the approval by local authorities of their own development proposals, often referred to as the Part 8 process. This amendment required a supporting amendment to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, which was provided for in the Planning and Development (Strategic Housing Development) Regulations 2017.

Under the new arrangements, which came into operation with effect from 3 July 2017, the maximum timeframe for the determination of local authority-own development proposals is now 20 weeks from the date of issue of the proposals for public consultation by the Chief Executive, whereas previously there was no maximum timeframe.

These reforms provide greater certainty for local authorities around the decision timelines associated with such own-development proposals, including proposals for social housing projects and infrastructure servicing both public and private development.

Question No. 265 answered with Question No. 259.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

266. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review relating to housing income limits will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8726/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment

of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is underway. The Housing Agency is continuing to carry out the detailed statistical work, which will underpin this review, on behalf of my Department.

The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Question No. 267 answered with Question No. 257.

Local Authority Management

268. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on alleged financial irregularities at Cavan County Council; if an investigation was carried out by his Department or the local authority in question; if a report arising from the investigation is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8773/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): An investigation into allegations of financial irregularities in Cavan County Council was completed last year. My Department received a copy of the report of that investigation from Cavan County Council in August 2018, which I understand is being followed up appropriately by the Council.

My Department continues to engage with Cavan County Council in relation to the matters involved and will be considering what further actions may be appropriate, beyond those being taken by the Council itself.

Departmental Correspondence

269. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to previous parliamentary questions, the status of information provided to his Department in June 2016 by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in providing a final response to the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8775/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While the delay in meeting the request by the person named for my Department's full and detailed response to the submission in question is regretted, the matter is complex and requires the need to comply with the general principles of natural justice and fair procedures, including for third parties named in the submission.

My Department, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, is currently finalising its analysis of the submission made by the person referred to, with a view to communicating the outcome of the process to that person as soon as possible.

Heritage Sites

270. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to purchase a location (details supplied) in view of the unique archaeological and ecological importance of same. [8566/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In the interests of the preservation, conservation, management and presentation of the built and archaeological heritage, my Department seeks to acquire certain heritage properties and monuments as resources and opportunities permit. From time to time these may come onto the open market, may be bequeathed to the State or may be offered to it free of cost. In addition, lands surrounding or in proximity to national monuments or heritage properties in State care (i.e. incorporating the setting of the monuments/properties) often reside in private ownership. In certain cases, improved protection of the monument/property, or access to the monument/property, would be possible if the State was to acquire such additional lands.

In all cases the Department examines the potential acquisition carefully, taking into account the conservation needs of the property and Value for Money principles.

The national monuments in State care already number some one thousand sites at over 760 locations around the country and these command considerable resource commitments in terms of both funding and personnel allocation. In addition, there are in excess of 120,000 monuments listed in the Record of Monuments and Places that are not maintained by the State. Recorded monuments are protected under Section 12 of the 1994 National Monuments (Amendment) Act and two months' notice is required to be given to my Department in advance of works at, or in their vicinity.

The property at the location referred to by the Deputy contains a national monument in my ownership as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The day-to-day care of the monument is undertaken by the Office of Public Works on behalf of, and in consultation with, my Department. The national monument is fully protected under the provisions of the National Monuments Acts, 1930-2014, and any works at or in its vicinity require Ministerial Consent under Section 14 of the 1930 Act. There are also a number of recorded monuments on the property in private ownership, which are also protected under national monuments legislation.

My Department, in cooperation with the Office of Public Works, is only in a position to acquire, maintain, conserve and present to the public a limited number of properties and monuments.

It is not deemed prudent policy to disclose in advance potential interest or not in future purchases.

Irish Language

271. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress made on implementing all aspects of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 - 2030 that are relevant to her Department and bodies under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8616/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): As the Deputy is aware, my Department has overall responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 which

represents the state's policy on the Irish language. Since the Strategy was launched in 2010 following cross-party approval, circa €400 million has been invested by the Exchequer via my Department in support of the language and the implementation of the strategy.

This significant figure which represents year on year increases does not include exchequer investment in support of the language provided by other Government Departments, including the Department of Education and Skills.

Notwithstanding the challenges presented in advancing implementation of the strategy with significantly curtailed resources in its early years, significant progress has been and continues to be made in advancing its implementation.

Key measures include:

- The enactment of the Gaeltacht Act in 2012 and the subsequent and ongoing implementation of the language planning process set across all Gaeltacht regions in addition to Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks as prescribed under the Act.

- The publication by the Department of Education and Skills in 2016 of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017 – 2022 and its ongoing implementation, in partnership with my Department and other key stakeholders.

- The implementation of a comprehensive Irish language training program in the public sector.

- The progression of a Digital Plan for the Irish Language.

- The development of a new English-Irish online dictionary, www.foclóir.ie, by Foras na Gaeilge.

- The decision to end the Irish language derogation in the European Union by 2021.

- The creation of in the region of 500 jobs per annum by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

A more detailed overview of the progress being made in support the language and Gaeltacht regions is provided in my Department's Annual Report as well as on my Department's website.

In order to accelerate implementation, the House will be aware that my Department published a 5 Year Action Plan for the Irish Language in June 2018 following Government approval. While the plan presents an overview of the progress made since 2010, its primary focus is on clarifying and presenting actions which will be implemented over the 5-year lifetime of the plan to further underpin the language and by extension support the implementation of the strategy.

The plan outlines more than 180 specific measures that will be implemented by over 60 stakeholders on a cross-Governmental basis over the period, while also outlining a more efficient and effective approach to monitoring progress in order to provide for greater accountability and clarity. Key to this revised approach to monitoring progress will be the publication on an annual basis of a progress report following Government approval. An oversight group, which has been tasked with monitoring progress, has already met twice since publication of the Action Plan in 2018 and minutes of the its meetings will be made available on an ongoing basis on my Department's website and also provided to Coiste Oireachtais na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus na nOileán.

Inland Waterways Development

272. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there have been recent developments in the proposal to advance a project (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8730/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I can confirm that following a commitment I gave to Deputy Smith last October, Waterways Ireland have recently re-examined the development potential of extending the Erne navigation from Belturbet to Killykeen/Killeshandra, Co Cavan. The preliminary work previously completed has now been externally reviewed. However, the results of the initial assessment remain unchanged in that significant environmental impact would occur to the designated Lough Oughter habitat and a works project would not be permitted under current environmental regulations.

Waterways Ireland manages and maintains the navigation on the River Erne in County Cavan as part of the Shannon–Erne Waterway. Waterways Ireland’s public jetties are provided in both Belturbet and Kilconny and the navigation channel is provided with navigation markers and signage as and where required. The upper limit of the managed navigation on the River Erne is currently just below Erne Bridge between Belturbet and Kilconny.

Whilst there is no specific legal obligation on Waterways Ireland to deliver a Navigation Plan for the Lough Oughter complex, the preparation of a draft Navigation Plan was initiated in line with the organisation’s overall recreational remit in 2008. Waterways Ireland initiated a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of this draft Plan to establish a new navigation on Lough Oughter from Belturbet to Killeshandra.

Lough Oughter has a number of international conservation designations including being a candidate Special Area of Conservation, a Special Protection Area, a proposed Natural Heritage Area, a Ramsar site and a Natura 2000 site. Also there are a number of national and local monuments, and sites of historical/archaeological interest located within the Lough Oughter area.

During the initial data gathering process required for an SEA, the extent of concern for the protection of environmental and architectural heritage was raised by the statutory environmental authorities in both jurisdictions {National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)}.

A critical issue was the level of impoundment, the extent to which water levels would be raised throughout the system and impacts on the habitats on the extensive water margin. Detailed hydrological modelling and analyses of the entire Lough Oughter complex and potential impacts downstream from the development would be required to determine the actual extent/significance of impacts on the site. In addition as indicated by NPWS and NIEA during the Scoping Phase, given the site’s ecological significance, a detailed habitat survey of the entire shoreline area and comprehensive ecological assessment of the potential impacts on protected species is necessary to fully assess the proposal.

The SEA process indicated that considerable environmental and hydrological assessment would be required to complete any proposed Lough Oughter Navigation Plan. The expenditure necessary to carry out this work is estimated to be in the region of €300,000 and the result is likely to confirm the initial assessment that significant environmental impact will occur to the Designated Lough Oughter habitat and a works project would not be permitted under current environmental regulations. In addition to this, it was estimated in 2014 that development of the navigation would cost between €922,000 (lowest tender) and €1,382,000 (highest tender).

Waterways Ireland has concluded that without an imperative reason of public interest (IR-POI) for the project, creating navigation is not a prospect either in terms of the adverse impact on the European site or in terms of offering value for money in public expenditure.

There is already extensive existing underused navigation for example at Belturbet and Waterways Ireland has reiterated the potential in the waters of the Lough Oughter area being promoted as a distinct Blueway. The national context is that Blueways Ireland (National Trails Office, Canoeing Ireland and other state bodies) is currently considering the establishment of Blueways beyond the Waterways Ireland network of inland waterways.

To this end, Waterways Ireland has met with the Chief Executive of Cavan County Council, other council officials and elected representatives concerning Blueways developed successfully on the Waterways Ireland network to advise on possible ways forward. Waterways Ireland is happy to support Cavan County Council should it decide to develop a Blueway on the River Erne from Belturbet to Killykeen and Killeshandra but as the area is officially outside of their remit, this offer extends to advice and support only.

Inland Waterways Development

273. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the blueway development projects which will be progressed in 2019; the funding for each project; the timescale for the development of each project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8731/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Waterways Ireland commenced the development of Blueways as a means to attract new visitors to use the waterways, recognising changes in recreational activity with the growth in demand for activities such as walking, canoeing, cycling and stand up paddle boarding, on and beside the water in a comfortable, safe environment.

Waterways Ireland is continuing to support and expand the existing network of Blueway trails across its waterways, including the Shannon Blueway, the Shannon-erne Blueway, the Lough Derg Blueway and the Mullingar Blueway on the Royal Canal.

In 2019 the following Blueway development projects will progress, subject to additional third party funding being made available (together with Waterways Ireland match funded share).

Project/Timeline	3rd Party (€)	Waterways Ireland (€)
Shannon Blueway Acres Lake to Lough Allen 1.8km of Blueway trail with associated signage and interpretative panels. The pathway will connect the existing Blueway with the Lough Allen Hotel and the Education centre, with a new pedestrian bridge across the Millrace River. The development also includes new car parking facilities, pedestrian crossings and new safe access and egress points on and off the Blueway trails. Approximately 50% of the overall works is complete to date, and the anticipated completion of the overall project is April 2019.	305,000	76,800
Blueway Leitrim Village to Kilclare Trail Development The detailed design process for the trail is currently underway and the tender and award of the contract will take place in 2019, with commencement of construction towards the end of 2019.	648,000	162,000
Blueway Ballyconnell to Bellaheady Bridge Trail Development The on road works section will be completed in 2019. The detailed design process for the off-road section is currently underway and the tender and award of the contract will take place in 2019, with commencement of construction of this section towards the end of year.	1,118,235	124,500

*Third party funding comprises funds provided through relevant Local Authorities, the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the Department of Transport, Tourism

and Sport.

Ulster Canal Restoration Project

274. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the specific funding allocation for the restoration of the Ulster Canal in 2019; the works to be undertaken; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8732/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In July 2007, the North South Ministerial Council agreed to a proposal to restore a 13km section of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. This project is hugely important for the border region with potential to stimulate economic activity, giving a much needed boost to job creation and with the growth in water based tourism helping to attract significant numbers of visitors to the area. This is increasingly significant in the context of Brexit.

Government approval for Phase 1 of this project, to restore a 2.5 km stretch of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne in County Fermanagh to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson near Belturbet in Co. Cavan, was secured in February 2015.

The works to complete this first phase have recently been concluded. A new 250m bypass canal and new road bridge to provide navigation around the existing road bridge serving Derykerrib Island, which had insufficient head height for navigation, have now been constructed. Installation of moorings at Castlesaunderson as a destination for boats using the newly opened navigation from the Erne to Castlesaunderson will be completed in 2019.

Funding of €260,000 has been allocated towards the restoration of the Ulster Canal in 2019. Waterways Ireland anticipates expenditure of €160,000 to complete payment for works at Derykerrib and €100,000 for construction works for Castlesaunderson public moorings.

In May 2018, the Government approved Phase 2, the development the amenity of a 13km section of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones - with the first element being a water amenity in Clones, and re-committed to developing this cross-border stretch under the Project Ireland 2040 plan, in the category of Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage.

Further funding of €325,000 was allocated under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for this second phase of development to develop the Clones Terminal, along the original route of the Ulster Canal.

Arts and Culture Capital Scheme Funding

275. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason for the cost overruns in a project (details supplied); the status of discussions with Cork City Council as to the way in which additional funding announced in 2018 for the project is to be allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8762/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): This is a project led by Cork City Council with the development company BAM, having been selected by Cork City Council as the preferred tenderer. BAM in turn has engaged international events company Live Nation as the preferred operator. The project is ultimately being developed and managed by Cork City Council. This means that Cork City Council has responsibility for its delivery.

20 February 2019

The latest financial projections provided by Cork City Council to my Department indicates an increase in the original cost of project compared to when the project tender was issued in December 2014, which had an estimated cost of €50 million. The cost is now estimated at some €80 million. A significant part of this increase is accounted for by a redesign of the facility since the original tender to allow for an increase in the capacity of the venue.

In light of this cost increase, Cork City Council wrote to my Department seeking additional funding of €10m for the project from the Exchequer. This would bring the Exchequer contribution to €22 million and total public funding to €30 million.

Following detailed consideration and in light of the additional works which are now required for the Event Centre, my Department considers that, in accordance with public procurement rules, the total public funding for the project may be increased by €10 million to €30 million, made up of grant aid of €21 million and a repayable loan of €9 million.

Officials in my Department wrote to Cork City Council on 21 December 2018 regarding the provision of additional public funding for the development of the Event Centre. Furthermore, officials in my Department met with Cork City Council officials in January to discuss all aspects around the public funding elements of the project.

Cork City Council is now reviewing the potential additional funding available and has stated they will formally respond to my Department shortly on this matter.

Hare Coursing Regulation

276. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the need to establish more robust criteria for the granting of licences in view of the amount of footage and evidence brought forward by animal welfare groups on breaches of licences for coursing clubs. [8763/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department issued the Irish Coursing Club with licences in August 2018 on behalf of its affiliated clubs to capture and tag hares for the 2018/19 coursing season. There are 29 conditions associated with the licences issued to the Irish Coursing Club which have been developed and refined over the years.

Officials of the NPWS of my Department have monitored 33 coursing events during the current 2018/19 season to date. During the previous 2017/18 season, 35 coursing events were monitored while during the 2016/17 season a total of 17 coursing events were monitored by my Department.

The final event of the current coursing season will take place next Sunday 24 February. All reports in relation to the season will be reviewed and all issues arising, including possible breaches of conditions, will be investigated and considered in the context of applications for licences by the Irish Coursing Club for the 2019/20 coursing season.

Irish Language

277. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the role of her Department in supporting an Gaeilge; and her plans to celebrate Seachtain na Gaeilge in March 2019. [8764/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 (the Strategy), which represents the cornerstone of the Government's policy on the Irish language, was published in December 2010, following cross-party support in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Strategy contains a range of recommendations across nine areas, namely Education; The Gaeltacht; Family Transmission of the Language - Early Intervention; Administration, Services and Community; Media and Technology; Dictionaries; Legislation and Status; Economic Life; and Cross-cutting Initiatives.

The Strategy has cross-departmental ownership and, accordingly, responsibility for its implementation falls on a number of Government Departments, bodies and Irish language and Gaeltacht organisations.

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG) has overall responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the Strategy.

As a result of a consultation process organised by the Department on the matter, the need for a 5-Year Action Plan was identified. Subsequently, in June 2018, my Department published the 5-Year Action Plan 2018-2022 which contains specified strategic priorities for the next five years, along with a timeline for their implementation. The focus of the Plan is on the measures to be implemented in the period to 2022 to further support the Irish language and the Gaeltacht in the overall context of the nine areas for action as set out in the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish language.

The Plan outlines over 180 specific measures that will be implemented in conjunction with approximately 60 stakeholders on a cross-Departmental basis in support of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht from now until 2022. The Plan also outlines a revised approach to monitoring progress in order to provide for greater accountability.

Even at this early stage, I am satisfied that significant progress has been made already in relation to implementing the plan.

I should also add that my Department provides significant co-funding to Foras na Gaeilge to carry out its statutory mandate to promote the Irish language on an all-island basis. In 2018 total funding of €12.6m was provided to Foras na Gaeilge from my Department, including provision for Bliain na Gaeilge 2018. This funding, along with funding from the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, enables Foras na Gaeilge to provide support, advice and financial assistance to many groups and the six lead organisations, who are working to promote the Irish language in the community, including Conradh na Gaeilge who has responsibility, *inter alia*, for Seachtain na Gaeilge.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Seachtain na Gaeilge will take place from 1- 17 March in 2019 from within co-funding provided to Foras na Gaeilge and it is expected that Conradh na Gaeilge will organise another excellent Irish language festival this year. Further details are available at <https://snag.ie/>.