

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 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Childcare Services Regulation

11. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to tackle unregistered childcare facilities advertising as fully registered facilities; and the protocols in place to sanction premises that operate under false advertisement to ensure that parents have full confidence when seeking a childcare facility for their children. [14341/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Childcare Act 1991 (as amended by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013) requires that all persons wishing to operate a prescribed early years service must be placed on the register of early years services, which is maintained by Tusla - the Child and Family Agency. This is an important legislative requirement.

Continued operation of a service is contingent on registration with Tusla’s Early Years Inspectorate which operates as the statutory regulator for the sector. Tusla monitors compliance with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 through the registration process and through inspections of services. Any breach of the Child Care Act 1991, or of the Regulations, is taken very seriously by my Department and by Tusla.

Where a service meets the requirements for registration but refuses to cooperate with this process, for example by operating as an unregistered pre-school service, the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate may escalate the matter to the District Court. It is Tusla’s policy to seek closure of all unregistered services, and if engagement is not forthcoming from the provider of these services, Tusla will bring the matter before the courts.

The courts have a range of powers under the Child Care Act, including the power to impose fines and to prohibit an individual from providing an early years service. These are generic sanctions allowed for under the Act and are not specific to any particular case.

In February 2019, I signed the School Age Childcare regulations. These allow, for the first time, for the registration of school age childcare services in Ireland. Childcare services already registered with Tusla under the early years regulations have until August 18th to register their school age service. Stand-alone school age childcare services must register with Tusla before May 18. These regulations will be followed by more comprehensive regulations after a further period of consultation.

Question No. 12 answered with Question No. 7.

Youth Services Funding

13. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if funding for youth activities and affairs in County Meath will be increased. [14449/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware that there are a number of areas of the country where the youth population has grown to a significant extent without a corresponding growth in the level of targeted youth service provision.

Meath is one such area. In order to address this my Department undertook, along with the Education and Training Boards, a mapping exercise with Pobal of all youth service provision in the country in 2017.

This year, the Education and Training Boards are building on the knowledge gained in 2017 by carrying out a full area profile, needs assessment and service requirement for each of their areas. This process is to help the ETBs identify the specific needs of young people in their areas and the services required to meet those needs.

Ten of the ETBs will be focussing on already existing youth service provision in this exercise. The remaining six ETBs, including Louth Meath ETB, have been asked to also identify, through this exercise, areas where new service development is required. This is because these 6 ETBs have had no recent new youth services established in their areas.

I expect this to be completed by the end of May. My Department is committed to working with Louth Meath Education and Training Board to explore ways to address emerging needs.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country. This includes those from disadvantaged communities. The youth funding provided by my Department was €58.9m in 2018.

Budget 2019 provided an additional €1.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services which will be used, primarily, for programmes that target disadvantaged young people. This will include investing in new service provision where need is proven. I have asked for a sum of €30k to be set aside for each of the six ETBs, including Louth Meath ETB. This will support the cost of a quarter year of a youth service provision.

My Department is currently finalising the 2019 funding allocations for the youth projects and youth services throughout the country. Every effort is being made to complete this process as soon as possible and allocations will be notified to projects in the near future.

The funding allocation for the targeted youth projects and services in County Meath amounted to €152,854 in 2018.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. In 2019, I provided an additional 12% in overall funding for this scheme, bringing the total allocation to over €2m. This includes an allocation of €131,735 for Louth Meath Education and Training Board.

My Department is currently finalising details for a Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme for voluntary clubs/groups and a small capital scheme for staff led youth services to be launched in 2019. The full details of the application criteria for these schemes and the funding allocation provided to Louth Meath ETB will be announced in the near future.

Irish Language

14. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her policy on ensuring that all children in crèches receiving money from the State are given an opportunity in circumstances in which parents wish their child to come into contact with the Irish language; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14275/19]

24. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has had discussions with the Minister of State with responsibility for the Gaeltacht regarding the specific language needs of children from Irish speaking households in the context of funding for crèches; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14276/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 14 and 24 together.

I am conscious of the value of supporting the provision of services in the Irish language to children at an early age, and of the role pre-schools can play in promoting Irish as a living language. In this regard my Department has collaborated with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in agreeing a comprehensive set of actions under the 5 Year Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018-2022.

These actions are in support of the overarching 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030, and are designed to affirm the importance that early learning and care settings have in encouraging the development and revitalisation of the Irish language.

The aim of these actions is to build on the existing measures, supports and partnerships in place in the area of Irish-medium early learning and care, and to further improve these supports and services.

Furthermore, First 5, the recently published ten year Whole-of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families contains two actions specifically related to the provision of Irish language supports to the early learning and care sector.

My Department funds some 228 services which identify themselves as Naíonraí. Total funding of some €16m was provided to such services over the past four years.

Much is currently being done in my Department to ensure improved communication with Irish speaking childcare services. For example, in respect of the forthcoming National Child-care Scheme, the website and parent application will be available in Irish. Irish speaking support staff will be available to answer parental queries, and communications in relation to the Scheme will also be available in Irish.

Training and materials for the Access and Inclusion Model that helps children with a disability to participate in the ECCE scheme are available through Irish. Inspections operated by Tusla and the Department of Education are available through Irish, as are mentoring services from Better Start.

My Department is committed to continuing to support services wishing to operate through the medium of Irish.

Question No. 15 answered orally.

Child and Family Agency Staff

16. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which the welfare of children of all ages remains central in the context of her supervision and responsibility in this area, with particular reference to the need to ensure that adequate case workers are readily available to meet the demand and follow-up as required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14487/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The welfare and protection of children in this State continues to be a core priority of mine. I have secured a budget of over €786 million for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, which includes funding for the recruitment of more social workers and support staff for Tusla.

I can assure the Deputy that all referrals are screened when they are received. All urgent and emergency cases receive immediate attention by the local duty social work team. Other cases are referred to family support services or dealt with by child protection teams, as needed.

Once a referral has been screened, Tusla social work staff carry out a preliminary enquiry to determine the best course of action. The preliminary enquiry looks at all relevant information, and a decision is made on whether an immediate protective response is needed.

Tusla's goal is to complete all preliminary enquiries inside five days, and data on this metric is published on a quarterly basis.

I am very aware of cases awaiting allocation to a dedicated social worker. These cases are given appropriate attention by the duty team, which can include checking with professionals who see the child regularly, or visiting the child and family at home, getting additional information about the child's situation and in some instances, where a child is in care, organising a Care Plan Review and visiting the child.

One of the key challenges for Tusla in carrying out this important work is recruiting social work staff with the appropriate experience and qualifications. I can advise the Deputy that my officials are working with Tusla, and with the relevant educational bodies, to develop ways of increasing the number of training posts for social workers.

Childcare Services Funding

17. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of engagement between her Department and the community managed not-for-profit childcare service providers, with specific reference to negotiations for funding agreements and funding rules in the context of recent compliance audits by Pobal (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14494/19]

21. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to prevent a perceived forthcoming crisis in the childcare sector (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14271/19]

38. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the financial crisis the recent audit by Pobal has had on national community managed not-for-profit childcare services; the amount that will be sought back from the sector; and the steps she is taking to compensate these voluntary schemes in some of the most disadvantaged communities as a result of the audits. [14483/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 17, 21 and 38 together.

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 the issues raised by colleagues and services very seriously.

My Department funds a number of early learning and care and school age childcare programmes and I want to see investment in this area continue to increase significantly over the coming years. I am delighted that First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families commits to doubling investment over the next 10 years.

Given the large amount of public money invested in these programmes, there needs to be an appropriate level of oversight and accountability. I believe that my Department's approach to protecting Exchequer funding and ensuring compliance, is balanced appropriately with supports we provide to services to enable them continue to deliver a sustainable and high quality service.

Pobal, as administrator of my Department's funded childcare programmes, conducts compliance visits to childcare service providers. These visits check a service's compliance with the published rules of Exchequer funded programmes.

Results from Pobal compliance visits for the first part of the programme year 2018/2019 show a significant level of non-compliance. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

In particular many childcare services have been found to be in breach of programme rules concerning attendance records and registrations. This issue has been particularly acute among services offering the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS).

Non-compliance, like the type we have seen in CCS, represents a risk to Exchequer funds as it can lead to services receiving funding in excess of their entitlement. For this reason, my Department, working with Pobal, identify incorrect registrations and apply the relevant corrections to ensure that services are receiving the correct level of funding.

The level of overclaim identified varies for each service and may impact some services more than others. Pobal has been working with services to explain the financial impacts and manage the overclaims recovery process.

I recognise fully the challenges that can be faced by community services where incorrect registrations have been discovered. That is why my Department has developed a strong Case Management system, operated by Pobal, through which a dedicated team assists services facing challenges.

This Case Management service provides non-financial assistance or support in the first instance. Where financial difficulties or sustainability issues arise however, a budget I have created to assist with these challenges can then be tapped into to assist services transition, in a manageable way, towards sustainability.

I am encouraged that the majority of services have engaged constructively with the process so far and a way forward has been found. 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, or if they believe a sustainability issue arises. Again, I want to stress that expert assistance, and financial support is available to services who need it.

The existing or legacy targeted childcare schemes will be replaced later this year with the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). The NCS was developed based on evidence of the best interests of children and families. Its attendance rules will reflect the reality of children and parents' lives and the need for services to operate as businesses. My Department has engaged

with service providers on the development of the NCS and continues to do so.

The rules have been developed to be fair, proportionate and child-centred, while also being clear and consistent. Importantly they will recognise the need for flexibility for parents. My Department has worked hard to ensure that they will not disadvantage services for what can be considered minor non-attendances.

At the same time, rules will recognise the need to protect State finances by ensuring that Exchequer funds are used to support the maximum number of families in need of financial support, represent value for money for taxpayers, and are managed and allocated in accordance with robust and appropriate procedures.

My Department has begun to roll out a major national information campaign in relation to how the NCS will operate. A significant amount of time will be invested in working with services to ensure that they are ready for it.

The Deputies will be aware that investment in childcare has increased by an unprecedented 117% over the last four budgets, now totalling €575m per year. Community services access much of this growing investment.

Turnover for many services has increased substantially due to the fact that the number of servicers operating has increased only slightly and co-payments / top-up payments made by parents has decreased, both measures assisting many services to strengthen their sustainability and review their business model to meet compliance requirements.

The National Childcare Scheme will mark another significant milestone for early learning and care and school age childcare in this country, 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 that I published last November.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

18. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the fifth interim report of the Commission of Investigation into the Mother and Baby Homes will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14496/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) submitted a Fifth Interim Report to me on 15 March 2019.

I intend to seek formal Government approval to publish the report. In advance of this I will consult the Attorney General. Subject to this advice and approval, it is my intention to publish the report prior to Easter.

The dignity and memory of those who died in these institutions is central to my approach to these matters. I am mindful of the expectations of their families for an early publication date of the report.

It is a substantial report which focuses on the burial arrangements of persons who died while resident in these institutions. The report includes extensive technical reports prepared in the course of the Commission's investigations into the burial site associated with the institution formerly known as the Tuam Mother and Baby Home and the Commission's assessment of burial

arrangements in respect of a number of other institutions within its remit.

It also reports on burial arrangements in circumstances where the remains were initially transferred to educational institutions for anatomical examination.

My Department will advise representative groups, and those who have been in contact with my Department on these matters, of developments prior to the publication of the report.

Given the importance and sensitivity of these matters, I do not propose to comment further on the contents of the report in advance of it being made public.

Early Years Sector

19. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress she has made in addressing the concerns articulated by early years professionals regarding low wages and staffing issues; her plans to introduce a sectoral employment order to alleviate these concerns; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14343/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been unequivocal in my support for better pay and conditions for early learning and care professionals, who play a critical role in supporting children’s development. They deserve to be valued and respected for this.

My Department funds a wide range of initiatives to support the quality, affordability and accessibility of early learning and care. However the State is not the employer of staff and cannot therefore set wage levels.

Instead, I have actively supported a range of measures to improve pay and conditions. These include the 117% increase in investment since 2016 that has enabled services to operate at optimal capacity; the 7% ECCE capitation increase for providers last September and the introduction of Programme Support Payments to providers, which this year amount to €21.4m.

The average wage in the sector rose from €11.93 per hour in 2017 to €12.17 per hour in 2018, but there is a very long way to go before staff have the wages and working conditions that reflect the importance of the work they do, particularly now with 22% of the workforce being graduates.

Services are experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff, mostly I understand due to poor terms and conditions and partly because of the major growth in the sector that has happened in recent years.

Pobal data shows that 130,000 children were attending services in 2014 but this grew to 230,000 in 2018. While the staff turnover rate fell from 28% in 2017, to 24% in 2018, the rate is still too high.

I have repeatedly called for the sector to pursue a Sectoral Employment Order, which offers a viable mechanism to establish appropriate wage levels.

As the Deputy will be aware, neither I nor my officials can initiate a Sectoral Employment Order, but my Department is ready to input to such a process, if and when the sector seeks it.

Child and Family Agency Staff

20. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she or her officials have met the management or board members of Tusla in respect of the recruitment of a CEO; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14489/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I met with the Chair and representatives of the Tusla Board on two occasions when the recruitment of a permanent Chief Executive Officer for Tusla was discussed among other matters. These meetings took place on 1 October, 2018 and 28 January, 2019.

The Child and Family Agency Act 2013 provides that it is the responsibility of the Board of Tusla to appoint the Chief Executive Officer of the Agency.

The Board of Tusla appointed an interim Chief Executive Officer on 1st October last, following the resignation of the previous incumbent.

At the meeting in October 2018, the Board's plans, specifications for the Chief Executive Officer role and the intended recruitment process were discussed. At my more recent meeting with the Board in January this year, I received an update that included Tusla's contact with the Public Appointments Service and the use of executive search to assist in the recruitment process.

My officials have liaised with Tusla Human Resource Management and the Tusla Board to provide advice and to assist Tusla in making the necessary preparations for the recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer for a fixed term 5 year contract.

This included engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) to obtain the necessary approval for terms and conditions, as required by the governing legislation, to enable Tusla to finalise the required documentation and advertise the position.

The Deputy may be aware that the position of Chief Executive Officer of Tusla was advertised by the Public Appointments Service on Friday last, 22 March 2019.

In my view and I am sure the Deputy will agree, it is essential that a candidate of the highest calibre is recruited to lead on the transformation and delivery of effective child and family services in Ireland.

Question No. 21 answered with Question No. 17.

Departmental Funding

22. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the criteria for allocating the €1.2 million from December 2017 for a new intervention programme to help young persons escape the influence of criminal networks; and when the funding will be allocated. [11722/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Emerging Irish research, such as the Greentown Study, commissioned by my Department, identifies a small number of children in the state who fall victim to the influence of criminal networks and gangs, as foot-soldiers or couriers. These children are thus more likely to enter the criminal justice system and serve periods of detention. This can have profound negative impacts on their emotional and physical well-being as well as affecting the opportunities available to them as adults.

My Department commissioned further research under a partnership project with the University of Limerick. Funding of €1.2 million (€450,000 in 2018 and €750,000 in 2019) was allo-

cated under the Dormant Accounts Act, 2012. It facilitates the expansion of the research begun with the Greentown Study. It is intended to replicate this study in two other towns. Additionally, a national survey will be conducted to indicate how widespread the Greentown findings are. This will culminate in an expert-led intervention programme to be trialled next year.

It is my hope that, through this research, we will be in a position to make robust interventions available to motivate and assist vulnerable children in danger of criminal influence and their families.

Child and Family Agency Data

23. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children deemed to be at risk nationally; the extent to which support and attention is being made available to them; the level and quality of such support and its success to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14488/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can advise the Deputy that, at the end of December 2018, there were a total of 26,433 child protection cases open to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Open cases are allocated to a social worker and assigned a priority level: high, medium or low. At the end of December, there were a total of 1,003 High Priority open cases, 3,296 at Medium Priority and 2,133 Low Priority awaiting allocation to a social worker.

I would like to remind the Deputy that high priority does not necessarily mean high risk, and that all urgent or high risk cases receive immediate attention. Identified cases that have not yet been allocated receive support and a service from Tusla's duty teams.

The transition to a single national agency responsible for the welfare and protection of children has not always been easy and work remains to be done. Challenges are ongoing in respect of the recruitment and retention of staff, the integration of key services for children and families and the vital cross agency working that allows for quick and effective responses to all the situations referred to or dealt with by Tusla. The development of a national child care information system, the NCCIS, will support social workers in the work and provide a more effective protective service. I am confident that Tusla is fully dedicated to meeting those challenges, and to continue to improve the service they deliver to the most vulnerable young people in our society.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 14.

Child Abuse Reports

25. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 33 of 13 February 2019, when the report of the review panel that commenced on 16 May 2016 in respect of the care of three children in a foster home in County Galway will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14495/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The shocking abuse suffered by these very brave young women while in foster care in the early 2000's has disrupted and deeply impacted their lives. I am very conscious of the significant public interest in the case.

The Deputy will be aware that the review process begun by the National Review Panel in 2016 was paused at the request of An Garda Síochána, to allow criminal proceedings to con-

clude. Following the conclusion of the criminal case and sentencing of the perpetrator, the Review was resumed and has now been completed. It has been highlighted by Tusla that not all of the young people involved have chosen to waive their statutory right to anonymity. Tusla must not infringe on this statutory protection.

It is important to be mindful that a number of the young people involved in this case may be extremely vulnerable. Past hurt and the current well-being of all the young women are a real concern here. I don't believe that adding to their trauma by putting particulars into the public domain should be done without consultation with them, which is part of the process when publishing a report of this type.

I have been advised by Tusla that a sequence of meetings are to take place with the young people involved, and that the conclusion of the process will take their views and needs into consideration.

I share the Deputy's conviction that it is in the public interest for the learning in this case to be shared. It is also our responsibility to bear in mind the significant if unintended impact this could have on the young people at the centre of the case. I expect that the Chair of the Tusla Board will take into account both the public interest and the voice of these very vulnerable young people in his consideration of the report and its publication.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

26. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason for the delay to the affordable childcare scheme announced in October 2016; her plans to ensure the availability of childcare in all local communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14498/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): On 11th March, I announced the launch of the National Childcare Scheme- our pathway to truly accessible, affordable, quality childcare. The scheme will open to applications this October, with payments flowing from November.

As previously noted to the House, the provision of a timeline for the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme has always been dependent on having the necessary legal and ICT infrastructure in place. Good progress is currently being made in this regard.

Last July, the primary legislation establishing the Scheme, the Childcare Support Act, was signed into law. Detailed secondary legislation and policy guidelines made under the Act are now being finalised.

Last July, I also awarded a contract for the development of the Scheme's supporting IT system. The contractor, Codec, is currently working intensively with officials from my Department and Pobal to develop the scheme's supporting IT system so that it will be available on schedule in October.

In December, I signed regulations to provide, for the first time, for the registration of school-age childcare services with Tusla, and these regulations came into force on the 18th of February. This means that school age childcare services will be able to participate in the scheme from the outset.

A national communications campaign on the Scheme is also underway. This involves a sequenced programme of information, training and supports, to allow everyone- parents, pro-

viders and representative groups- to prepare for the Scheme. Key elements of the campaign in March included the launch of a new website- www.ncs.gov.ie - as well as a major nationwide training programme for providers, offering over 12,500 training places across 600 venues. I am happy to report that there is very strong interest in both the website and the training.

In September and October, my Department will run a large information campaign across a number of media channels to ensure there is full awareness amongst parents of their potential entitlements under the new Scheme.

In the interim, in order to fast-track many of the benefits of the National Childcare Scheme, and to ensure all Government investment was being fully utilised, in September 2017 I announced a series of enhancements to the existing targeted childcare subsidy schemes. These enhancements involved a new universal subsidy for children under 3 years and increases of up to 50% in targeted childcare subsidy rates. The interim measures exceeded our target and benefitted 84,000 children in the programme year September 2017- August 2018. These measures remain in place for the 2018 /2019 programme year and continue to experience high demand.

As stated above, the National Childcare Scheme is due to go live this October. As part of Budget 2019, I was pleased to have been able to further enhance the Scheme by raising the upper and lower thresholds for income related subsidies. These increases will poverty-proof the scheme for families on lower incomes, and enable more families with middle and higher incomes to access support.

I continue to work intensively with my officials to deliver this landmark scheme which will alter the landscape of early learning and care and school age childcare in Ireland, support families, provide a sustainable platform for investment and, crucially, allow us to continue to invest in giving our children the best start in life.

In parallel with this work, I will continue to support providers with regard to increased provision of early learning and care and school age childcare places. In 2019, I have secured a capital budget of €9.606m for the sector which will enable a focus on increasing the number of places available, and supporting the transition of services to the forthcoming National Childcare Scheme.

I am also very pleased to have ensured that childcare was identified as a strategic priority in the National Development Plan (2018-2027) and to have secured €250m in capital funding for early learning and care and school age childcare under the plan. This represents the kind of large scale investment in the sector by the State that has not been undertaken since the National Childcare Investment Programme that concluded in 2010.

This capital investment will be essential, I believe, to respond to the increased demand we expect as the National Childcare Scheme is introduced. Research is on-going in my Department to determine areas of specific need that the NDP funding will address when it comes on stream in the coming years.

Finally, many families and children opt for home-based rather than centre-based early learning and care and school age childcare. Continued access to childminding services is important. I will soon publish a Childminding Action Plan which will set out short, medium and long term objectives to regulate childminding in this country, hence enabling a larger volume of childminders access the NCS over time. This action plan will also set out the supports required to enable childminders meet the regulatory requirements that will be developed over an extended period.

27. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some parents that are availing of the ECCE scheme are being charged for a fourth hour even if they are not using the facility for a fourth hour in view of the fact the facility is open for four hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14497/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The ECCE programme is a universal programme available to all children within the eligible age range. It provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. The programme is provided for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks, free of charge to parents.

The rules of the ECCE scheme clearly state that:

2.4.7 Requirement to provide ECCE free of charge

ECCE must be provided free of charge to parents/guardians in return for the capitation.

2.4.8 Optional Extras

Childcare providers cannot charge for any activities/items which form part of the ECCE service. Childcare providers may charge for optional extras, but where a parent/guardian does not choose any of the optional extras, their child must be provided with the full ECCE service provision. Each optional extra must be identified individually on the fees list. Services cannot prioritise ECCE places on the basis of uptake of optional extras.

There is one exception to this rule pertaining to services who offer ‘sessional only’ (up to 3.5 hours childcare provision per day), as stated below.

2.4.9 Additional 30 minutes in sessional service

A sessional service provider may offer an additional 30 minutes per day but this must be categorised as an optional extra. Therefore the parent can choose to opt for paying for an extra half hour or equally, choose not to.

However, as per the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme grant funding agreement, part-time and full-time services may prioritise places for children who wish to avail of extra hours over those availing of the ECCE Programme only, on the principle that Early Learning and Care services are private enterprises and are therefore free to set their own admission policies which can include prioritising part-time or full-time places.

Parents who cannot access a free ECCE service are encouraged to look around for an alternative service that is in a position to offer it. Their local City or County Childcare Committee (CCC) should be able to assist them, or advise if there is no local alternative. The website www.myccc.ie can help parents locate their CCC. The City and County Childcare Committees in turn keep my Department advised on capacity issues and whether parental preferences are being met.

Child Detention Centres

28. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied that the non-publication of a report is in the best interests of the children in view of the fact that the authors of the report (details supplied) made a safeguarding referral during their visit to Oberstown Children Detention Campus on the basis of child welfare concerns. [14445/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am advised by Oberstown Children Detention Campus that prior to the visit by the reviewers to the Campus, they were advised about what action should be taken, should any child protection or welfare issues arise during their time there. This is in line with standard procedures in such circumstances. The Reviewers were advised to notify the Director of any such issues that they became aware of. During their visit, the reviewers became aware of an incident and met with the Director to notify him. The Director advised them that he was aware of the incident and a process was already underway to deal with the matter.

The Deputy will be aware of the extensive discussion on the Operational Review took place at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children on 30 January last. At that meeting, the Chair of the Board of Oberstown, Professor Ursula Kilkelly, gave a detailed update on the current situation. She outlined, among other things the serious legal difficulties associated with publishing the full report, for reasons which have been well set out on a number of occasions.

The Deputy will also be aware that I also met with the Joint Committee on the matter on 18 December last.

I would reiterate that the recommendations of the Operational Review, which are at the kernel of how we move forward, were published in July 2017 and are being implemented as part of a significant package of reform in Oberstown.

In addition to the Operational Review, the Board commissioned a number of other reports at the same time, with a view to engaging external expertise to support the development of the Campus. These reviews included security, health and safety and behaviour management.

Deputies will recall that I established a Review Implementation Group whose final report, received in December 2017, produced a coherent plan to implement the recommendations of the various reports.

An updated Action Plan from the Review Implementation Group was completed in May 2018 and was published on my Department's website. My Department continues to monitor the Review Implementation Group and the second report on the implementation of the recommendations was published on 29 January last.

My focus continues to be on ensuring that all of the key recommendations are implemented and to ensure that Oberstown observes best practice and international standards. I believe that this is the best way forward for the young people at the campus.

Childcare Services Provision

29. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to develop targeted supports for parents and guardians paying for childcare in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14274/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has a number of programmes and schemes in place to support parents and guardians with the cost of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare. These are available on a national basis through thousands of registered providers across all counties, including Wexford. They include:

- The universal pre-school programme, which provides children with 15 hours per week of pre-school education over a 38-week programme year. Since September 2018 children qualify

for two years of universal pre-school.

- The universal Community Childcare Subvention (CCSU) and the targeted Community Childhood Subvention (CCS), which provide weekly subsidies to offset fees charged by providers. CCS is available to families who hold a Medical Card or are in receipt of social welfare benefits.

- The Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes provide a weekly subsidy to offset fees charged by providers for parents on approved education or training courses, Community Employment schemes, or those returning to work who need school-age childcare.

- Specific supports are also in place for children in emergency accommodation, in accommodation centres provided by the State for persons in the protection process or programme refugee children in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres.

Radical reforms to the targeted schemes, based on the principle of progressive universalism, are in train. The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), when introduced this October, will replace the CCS and TEC schemes with a single, streamlined scheme.

Under the NCS, parents will continue to have access to the universal subsidy towards the cost of Early Learning and Care. This stands at €1,040 per annum currently for a child under 3 in full time registered Early Learning and Care. Targeted subsidies for children from 6 months to 15 years of age will be provided, with the level of subsidy determined by net household income and the age of the child (children). Households with a net income of less than €26,000 will receive the maximum subsidy. This can be as high as €5.10 per hour, available for up to 40 hours per week, for a child under one. Households with net income up to €60,000 will also benefit, but on a sliding scale from the maximum subsidy level available for incomes under €26,000. Further information is available at www.ncs.gov.ie.

In addition to these universal and targeted subsidies, the NCS allows for additional support for families where there is an identified need for Early Learning and Care on grounds of child development or child welfare. Families with high levels of need, who require Early Learning and Care for child welfare, child protection or family support reasons, may be referred for support by a specified “sponsor” body. Where such a referral is made, the family will automatically qualify for a subsidy for the number of hours considered appropriate by the sponsor without having to satisfy the scheme’s eligibility, income or enhanced hours requirements.

Recent analysis undertaken by the OECD has concluded that, when the NCS is introduced, the costs of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare to parents will come closer to the OECD average – from being one of the highest across the OECD. For example, we will move from being the most expensive country in the OECD for lone parents to 11th position (this research was conducted before Budget 2019 which increased investment by a further €89m). This demonstrates significant progress. The NCS, in creating a flexible platform for future investment in funding, will allow subsidies to be expanded over time and importantly further progress to be made.

Departmental Communications

30. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which and when she received correspondence that Tusla sent to an organisation (details supplied) on 18 February 2019 in respect of ongoing safeguarding concerns. [14492/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In the afternoon

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of Monday 25th February, during a telephone call on another matter, Mr Ian Elliott advised an official of my Department of the existence of the letter from Tusla (dated 18th February) and of his discussion about this earlier that day (25th February) with two officials of Tusla and with senior Gardaí. He was later asked by the same official to set out the details in an email. He sent an email on the morning of Tuesday 26th February to the official as requested.

Later that day another senior official of the Department responded to his email and asked that he furnish the Department with a copy of the letter from Tusla, Mr Elliott refused to do so. Another senior official of the Department was, in the meantime, in contact with Tusla and got a copy of the letter by email at 10.17a.m on 27th February 2019. This was forwarded to me and I received a copy by email at 10.27a.m. on 27th February 2019.

Question No. 31 answered orally.

Departmental Communications

32. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the communication she had with an organisation (details supplied) following the issuance of correspondence by Tusla on 18 February 2019 raising concerns regarding child protection procedures within the organisation; her plans to publish a redacted version of the report by the barrister into the handling of a sexual assault allegation by the organisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14339/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In the afternoon of Monday 25th February, during a telephone call on another matter, Mr Ian Elliott advised an official of my Department of the existence of the letter from Tusla (dated 18th February). He also informed the official of his discussion about this which took place earlier that day (25th February) with two officials of Tusla and with senior Gardaí. Mr Elliot was later asked by the same official to set out the details in an email. He sent an email on the morning of Tuesday 26th February to the official as requested.

Later that day another senior official of the Department responded to his email and asked that he furnish the Department with a copy of the letter from Tusla. Mr Elliott refused to do so. Another senior official of the Department was, in the meantime, in contact with Tusla and got a copy of the letter through that route.

An internal process review is being conducted by Scouting Ireland on foot of the report by the Barrister. The Minister has no plans to publish a redacted version of the report until such time as the review has concluded.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

33. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has considered the burial report from the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes; when she plans to publish it; her views on the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14338/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) submitted a Fifth Interim Report to me on 15 March 2019.

It is a substantial report which focuses on the burial arrangements of persons who died while

resident in these institutions. The report includes extensive technical reports prepared in the course of the Commission's investigations into the burial site associated with the institution formerly known as the Tuam Mother and Baby Home and the Commission's assessment of burial arrangements in respect of a number of other institutions within its remit. It also reports on burial arrangements in circumstances where the remains were initially transferred to educational institutions for anatomical examination.

I intend to seek formal Government approval to publish the report after I have the opportunity to discuss the report with the Commission and consult the Attorney General as appropriate. I will seek to conclude these considerations as soon as possible. Subject to this I intend to publish the report before Easter.

The dignity and memory of those who died in these institutions is central to my approach to these matters. I am mindful of the expectations of their families for an early publication date of the report.

My Department will advise representative groups, and those who have been in contact with the department on these matters, of developments prior to the publication of the report.

Given the importance and sensitivity of these matters, I do not propose to comment further on the contents of the report in advance of it being made public.

Adoption Data

34. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will act on the recommendation of the UN special rapporteur calling on Ireland to carry out a comprehensive national examination of forced and illegal adoptions, including audits of records in the hands of the State, while ensuring that persons whose birth records were falsified have access to information and redress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14444/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I welcome the Special Rapporteur's recommendation regarding illegal registrations. The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill, 2016 will address the recommendation regarding access to information for illegally registered people as they will be able to apply for an information and tracing service on the same basis as adopted people. However, we do know that the practice of illegal birth registrations can be extremely difficult to prove in most instances, often because there was also a deliberate failure of those involved to record any information about it.

The Deputy will be aware that a review of a sample of files within the custody of the State is currently taking place. This process is being overseen by an Independent Reviewer, Marion Reynolds, who is a former Deputy Director of Social Services in Northern Ireland. The findings of this review will assist me in reaching a decision about what, if any, subsequent action might be deemed necessary to identify more fully the scale of illegal birth registrations. I am expecting to receive the report before Easter.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

35. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the public information programme for the affordable childcare scheme will commence; if she is satisfied there will be sufficient places available nationally under the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14500/19]

39. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the affordable childcare scheme will be launched. [14493/19]

40. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the implementation of the affordable childcare scheme. [14505/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 35, 39 and 40 together.

On 11th March, I launched the National Childcare Scheme- our pathway to truly accessible, affordable, quality childcare. The scheme will open to applications this October, with payments flowing from November.

Good progress is currently being made in preparing for the Scheme's launch.

Last July, the primary legislation establishing the Scheme, the Childcare Support Act, was signed into law. Detailed secondary legislation and policy guidelines made under the Act are now being finalised.

Last July, I also awarded a contract for the development of the Scheme's supporting IT system. The contractor, Codec, is currently working intensively with officials from my Department and Pobal to develop the scheme's supporting IT system so that it will be available on schedule in October.

In December, I signed regulations to provide, for the first time, for the registration of school-age childcare services with Tusla, and these regulations came into force on the 18th of February. This means that school age childcare services will be able to participate in the scheme from the outset.

A national communications campaign on the Scheme is also underway. This involves a sequenced programme of information, training and supports, to allow everyone- parents, providers and representative groups- to prepare for the Scheme. Key elements of the campaign in March included the launch of a new website- www.ncs.gov.ie - as well as a major nationwide training programme for providers, offering over 12,500 training places across 600 venues. I am happy to report that there is very strong interest in both the website and the training.

In September and October, my Department will run a large information campaign across a number of media channels to ensure there is full awareness amongst parents of their potential entitlements under the new Scheme.

Under measures included in Budget 2019, I was pleased to have been able to further enhance the Scheme by raising the upper and lower thresholds for income related subsidies. These increases will poverty-proof the scheme for families on lower incomes, and enable more families with middle and higher incomes to access support.

I will continue to work intensively to deliver this landmark scheme which will alter the landscape of childcare in Ireland, support families, provide a sustainable platform for investment and, crucially, allow us to continue to invest in giving our children the best start in life.

In parallel with this work, I will continue to support providers with regard to increased provision of childcare places. In 2019, I have secured a Capital budget of €9.606m for the sector which will enable a focus on increasing the number of places available, and supporting the transition of services to the forthcoming National Childcare Scheme.

I am also very pleased to have ensured that childcare was identified as a strategic priority in

the National Development Plan (2018-2027) and to have secured €250m in capital funding for childcare under the plan. This represents the kind of large scale investment in the sector by the State that has not been undertaken since the earlier National Childcare Investment Programme that concluded in 2010. This investment will be essential, I believe, to respond to the increased capacity we expect as the new National Childcare Scheme is introduced.

Child and Family Agency Investigations

36. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the serious difficulties facing Tusla; the number of child protection notifications yet to be investigated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14279/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am glad to have an opportunity to set out the immense work that Tusla has undertaken since its establishment, the ongoing challenges it is facing and the immediate and longer term actions being put in place as I speak.

Tusla was established in 2014 with the task of bringing together 17 child protection service areas across the country, to operate as one Agency. It must be remembered that the different areas, although all in the HSE, had continued in reality to operate different practices and policies, reflecting their different health board origins. Tusla's task was to reform the 17 areas into a single organisation with new management structures, bring together nearly 4,000 staff from three separate organisations, (the HSE, the Family support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board) develop national operational policies and realign the new organisation to current need. All of this had to occur while providing the ongoing complex business of child protection services in the face of increasing referrals.

Tusla has been engaged in a programme of reform which involves the standardisation of business processes, the development of quality assurance mechanisms and improved data system to reflect service demand, outputs and outcomes. A National Child Care Information System (NCCIS) was rolled out to all 17 Tusla areas in July 2017. The NCCIS is producing high quality data and making child protection services more effective. Tusla has also implemented a national model for child protection, Signs of Safety, and, through its own auditing work, identifies practices that need improvement. Tusla now has common definitions and thresholds for child protection cases, which, for the first time, provide a true picture of children's need in our country. Knowing where the problems lie is an essential step in delivering improvements.

A major issue for the organisation since its establishment has been achieving a sufficient number of social workers to meet the ongoing rise in referrals for child protection and child welfare services. Tusla are finalising a Workforce Strategy to focus on future need to ensure they are in a position to address their statutory work.

HIQA have rightly identified issues in relation to retrospective cases and safety planning that need to be addressed in their Statutory Investigation published last summer. I established an Expert Advisory Group to advise me and the Board of Tusla on the progress that was being made in implementing actions. I met with the Chairperson of the EAG, Dr Moling Ryan, on Monday last and he provided me with a report identifying progress and areas needing further prioritising.

My officials are currently working with the education sector, including the five Universities and one Institute of Technology involved in qualifying social workers. The purpose of the work is to increase the future provision of social workers.

The Deputy also asks about the number of child protection and welfare referrals that have yet to be assessed. At the end of December 2018, over 6,000 cases were unallocated, representing 23% of all cases. All high-risk or urgent referrals do receive an immediate service and urgent response. Tusla has identified 5 of the 17 areas that between them hold the majority of unallocated cases. I have asked Tusla to make a presentation to me on the special measures it is putting in place in these areas to manage this worrying situation.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 7.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 17.

Questions Nos. 39 and 40 answered with Question No. 35.

Child and Family Agency

41. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of times she has met with senior management of Tusla since January 2019; and the subjects of discussion at those meetings. [14490/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have met with members of the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency Senior Management team on two occasions since the beginning of January 2019. The subject of discussion at one meeting was the allocation of the additional €1.5m in funding to Family Resource Centres (FRCs) this year. The second meeting related to the potential use of additional resources in 2019 to meet the requests of an individual Family Resource Centre.

However, I should clarify for the Deputy that I have met with members of Tusla senior management on a number of occasions since January. However, these were encounters in the course of the business of my Department.

For example, on 19th February I attended the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs of which the Deputy is a member. The Committee was considering the impact of Brexit. A representative of Tusla senior management attended the Committee along with me and my officials that day.

Earlier this week, I launched an Outcome Report of a Stakeholder Workshop on the Sustainable Development Goals through the Lens of the Child. The launch was in my Department in conjunction with the Geary Institute of University College Dublin. A representative of Tusla senior management attended the launch along with many other guests.

I had not organised meetings with Tusla senior management but I clearly met with members of Tusla senior management on those occasions.

Human Rights

42. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to address concerns that China has developed a significant network of detention camps in its northern province of Xinjiang in which an estimated one million Uighurs, a Muslim minority, are being incarcerated; if he has raised this issue with the Chinese ambassador; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14565/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The

Irish Government has been closely following reports regarding the situation in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, in particular, those relating to the detention of a significant number of Uighur Muslims in re-education camps in the region.

The protection and promotion of universal human rights is one of Ireland's core foreign policy issues. We take these reports very seriously and have raised our concerns with our Chinese counterparts, in bilateral and multilateral contexts, and as an EU Member State.

The subject of human rights were raised and discussed during political consultations held with China in November 2018, including our concerns regarding the situation in Xinjiang.

Ireland participated in China's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), also held last November. The UPR is the mechanism through which the United Nations Human Rights Council examines and addresses the human rights performance of its member states. In our intervention, in addition to expressing concern at reports of the treatment of ethnic Uighurs, in particular their detention in political re-education camps, we urged China to respect freedom of religion and belief and recommended that China grant access to the OHCHR to all regions of the country including Xinjiang.

The EU also continues to raise concerns regarding freedom of religion and belief on several occasions at bilateral and multilateral levels. During the last EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, held in July 2018, the restrictions on the Uighur and other Muslim minority populations were discussed. The next Human Rights Dialogue is expected to take place in early April.

At the most recent session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2019, the EU raised concerns about the existence of political re-education camps and widespread surveillance and restrictions particularly targeted at Uighurs in Xinjiang, and urged China to allow meaningful access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Ireland fully supports the EU position, and actively contributes to its actions and statements.

Through our ongoing contacts with the Chinese Embassy in Dublin and through our Embassy in Beijing, Ireland will continue to raise our concerns regarding the situation in Xinjiang with the Chinese authorities, along with our EU partners and other like-minded Member States.

Child Abuse Reports

43. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will publish the United Nations special rapporteur report on the sale and sexual exploitation of children in Ireland. [14546/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department, in conjunction with a number of other Government Departments and agencies, facilitated a visit of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children, Ms Maud de Boer-Buquiccio, from 14th to 18th May 2018.

The Special Rapporteur's Country Report on Ireland was formally presented to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on the 5th of March 2019 and is publicly available on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Human Rights

44. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to support a UN binding treaty on business and human rights in 2019 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14568/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Inter-Governmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises was established on foot of a resolution to the Human Rights Council in 2014, led by a number of developing countries, including Ecuador and South Africa.

Four sessions of the Inter-Governmental Working Group have taken place to date. In advance of the fourth and most recent session in October 2018, Ecuador circulated the zero draft of a legally binding instrument. The next session of the Group will meet in October 2019 and Ireland will work with our EU partners to look at how we might actively and constructively engage in the negotiation process, notwithstanding our serious concerns about the way in which the work of the Group has been conducted to date. While we are open to looking at options for progress on a legally binding treaty, we believe that all economic operators should be treated in a non-discriminatory manner. The draft treaty that has currently been circulated focuses on transnational corporations and it is Ireland's view that any new treaty should cover both companies engaged in purely domestic operations as well as transnational corporations.

We would wish to see essential human rights principles reflected in any possible instrument, which should reaffirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights and stress the primary responsibility of States under existing human rights obligations to protect against human rights violations.

Ultimately, if it is to achieve its objectives, any legally binding instrument should enjoy broad support among UN Member States to ensure its effectiveness as well as international coherence in the framework of business and human rights. On this point, I would note that of the 21 countries which to date have adopted National Plans on Business and Human Rights, 16, including Ireland, are EU Member States. We would like to see any new initiative build on, rather than duplicate, existing measures such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy. Above all we believe that it should be rooted in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. In this regard, we are of the view that the UN Working Party on Business and Human Rights and the annual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights provide appropriate fora for consideration of any new initiatives.

Passport Applications Data

45. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of passport applications for each of the past 20 years from persons resident in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14572/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of passport applications received from applicants who were resident in Northern Ireland at the time of application during the period 2006 to 2018 is detailed in the table below.

The Passport Service has provided the below figures from readily available data sets. Identifying the figures for the period prior to 2006 would require an extensive research process which was not possible to complete accurately during the time provided.

Passport applications received from Northern Ireland

Year	Applications
2018	84,855
2017	83,363
2016	68,270
2015	54,026
2014	48,475
2013	44,122
2012	41,124
2011	35,483
2010	39,047
2009	39,500
2008	40,150
2007	37,284
2006	31,998

Visa Applications

46. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the process for two Cambodian citizens to apply for a holiday visa to visit their daughter and grandchildren, who are Irish citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14667/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): A visa application from a Cambodian national who is currently resident in Cambodia should be made online and supporting documentation forwarded to the Embassy of Ireland in Hanoi, Vietnam for consideration. In circumstances where the applicant is visiting a family member in Ireland, the person concerned should apply for a “Visit family/friend” visa. Prospective applicants for these types of visas are advised to make their application no less than eight weeks before their intended travel to Ireland.

The INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie) contains comprehensive guidelines to assist the applicant with the application process. It should, however, be noted that the information contained on the website is intended to provide guidance only and does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications. The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that any visa sought should be granted.

Departmental Meetings

47. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has been contacted by representatives of the Chinese Administration with regard to the use of technology by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14678/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have not been contacted by representatives of the Chinese Government with regard to the use of technology by the company referenced by the Deputy.

I and officials in my Department frequently hold meetings, as well as other contacts, with representatives of the Chinese Government, where we engage in discussions on a broad spec-

trum of bilateral issues. These include our political engagement, our trade and investment relationship, cultural and educational exchanges and other matters of shared concern, including issues of regional and international interest. The issue has been raised briefly with officials in my Department in the course of such discussions.

Departmental Meetings

48. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has been contacted by representatives of the Administration of the United States of America with regard to the use of technology by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14679/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has regular, constructive contacts with the US Administration both through our Embassy and Mission network in the US and through the US Embassy here in Dublin.

As part of regular Government engagement in the US, I also travelled to New York and Washington DC last month for meetings with the US Administration and other political leaders. Those meetings, and all contacts at Ministerial and official level, cover the range of issues of on-going mutual interest, as well as foreign policy issues.

With regard to the use of technology by the company in question, this issue has been raised with me at meetings with Congressional leaders and at senior official level, and it has also been raised by the US Administration with officials in my Department.

Trade Strategy

49. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has been contacted by representatives of the Chinese Administration with regard to the belt and road initiative; if he has discussed the matter with members of the Italian Administration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14681/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Belt and Road Initiative has been raised with me by representatives of the Chinese Government on a number of occasions during the course of wide-ranging discussions on a range of bilateral and foreign policy issues, notably during my visit to China in March 2018, and during high level visits from China to Ireland. During these discussions, I welcomed the Belt and Road Initiative as an effort to expand connectivity between Asia and Europe, and indicated that Ireland would explore appropriate ways to cooperate.

In 2018, the EU published its own Joint Communication on “Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy”, which sets out the key elements of the EU’s approach towards connectivity with Asia. It places an emphasis on the need for connectivity projects to align with existing international standards and practices, and to be carried out on the basis of openness, transparency, and a level playing field for companies. It also stresses the importance of economic, social, fiscal, financial and environmental sustainability. We fully support efforts to foster synergies between the EU’s and China’s connectivity initiatives, and this approach will form the form the basis for Ireland’s engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative.

I have not been contacted by my Italian counterparts on this issue, but the broader issues of connectivity and broader EU-China bilateral relations were discussed by EU Foreign Ministers

at the Foreign Affairs Council on 18 March.

Tax Code

50. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to update the tax status of unmarried couples that are together for long periods of time and are taxed as single persons and not entitled to benefits such as tax breaks on inheriting assets, the widow's or widower's pension and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14533/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Where a couple is cohabiting, rather than married or in a civil partnership, each partner is treated for the purposes of income tax as a separate and unconnected individual. Because they are treated separately for tax purposes, credits, tax bands and reliefs cannot be transferred from one partner to the other. Cohabitants do not have the same legal rights and obligations as a married couple or couple in a civil partnership which is why they are not accorded similar tax treatment to couples who have a civil status that is recognised in law.

The basis for the current tax treatment of married couples derives from the Supreme Court decision in *Murphy vs. Attorney General* (1980). This decision was based on Article 41.3.1 of the Constitution where the State pledges to protect the institution of marriage. The decision held that it was contrary to the Constitution for a married couple, both of whom are working, to pay more tax than two single people living together and having the same income.

To the extent that there are differences in the tax treatment of the different categories of couples, such differences arise from the objective of dealing with different types of circumstances while at the same time respecting the constitutional requirements to protect the institution of marriage. Any change in the tax treatment of cohabiting couples can only be addressed in the broader context of future social and legal policy development in relation to such couples.

I have been advised by Revenue that from a practical perspective, it would be very difficult to administer a regime for cohabitants which would be the same as that for married couples or civil partners. Married couples and civil partners have a verifiable official confirmation of their status. It would be difficult, intrusive and time-consuming to confirm declarations by individuals that they were actually cohabiting. It would also be difficult to establish when cohabitation started or ceased. There would also be legal issues with regard to 'connected persons'. To counter tax avoidance, 'connected persons' are frequently defined throughout the various Tax Acts. The definitions extend to relatives and children of spouses and civil partners. This would be very difficult to prove and enforce in respect of persons connected with a cohabiting couple where the couple has no legal recognition. There may be an advantage in tax legislation for a married couple or civil partners as regards the extended rate band and the ability to transfer credits. However, their legal status has wider consequences from a tax perspective both for themselves and persons connected with them.

Tax Rebates

51. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners will consider a refund of VRT in which the value of the vehicle in real terms is lower than the rate applied by them; the situations in which the Revenue Commissioners will consider a refund of VRT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14547/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that any per-

son who pays Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) but considers the amount charged to be excessive has two appeal options. The first option consists of a re-examination of the original valuation by a Revenue official who had no previous involvement with the case. If the person is still unhappy after the re-examination has been completed, there is the option to submit a further appeal to the independent Tax Appeals Commission. Where either appeal option finds that the original valuation was excessive, Revenue will refund the overpaid amount to the taxpayer.

Further information on the VRT appeals process is available on the Revenue website at link, www.revenue.ie/en/importing-vehicles-duty-free-allowances/guide-to-vrt/appeals/index.aspx which may be of assistance to the Deputy.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

52. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the reason persons appealing a decision made on their primary medical certificates for tax relief for drivers with disabilities have to travel to Dún Laoghaire in County Dublin for an appointment in view of the fact that to be eligible for the scheme a person has to be significantly disabled; the reason appeal appointments are not held in various locations nationally as is done with other appeals; the actions he will take to make these appointments more accessible for persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14554/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Hearings of the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal are held on average twice a month at the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire, which has the appropriate facilities to cater for people with mobility impairing disabilities of the kind provided for under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme.

The Medical Board of Appeal holds regional clinics as demand arises. I'm informed that a clinic will be held in Cork City on the 4th April in St. Finbarr's Hospital. It is important that the Medical Board of Appeal conducts appeals in the appropriate clinical environment.

I would point out that Regulation 6(1)(e) of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations, 1994 (S.I. 353 of 1994) provides that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions.

Insurance Costs

53. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if a matter relating to insurance cover (details supplied) can be investigated and addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14561/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Both I and the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D., are very conscious of the difficulties that the cost and availability of insurance are having on many small businesses in this country, including those in the hospitality sector.

As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. I am not in a position to comment on individual cases, and neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the pricing or provision of insurance products, as these are matters of a commercial nature, and determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. These are considered by insurance com-

panies on a case-by-case basis. 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.

Notwithstanding the above, it was recognised with the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016 that the environment within which insurers conduct their business can be better shaped, in order to make the Irish insurance market a more competitive one and also make it more attractive for new entrants. This Working Group, now chaired by the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D., has undertaken an examination of the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance in order to identify what short, medium and long-term measures could be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses.

Following the publication of its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in 2017, the Working Group undertook an examination of the employer liability and public liability insurance sectors. This second phase culminated in the publication in January 2018 of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. The Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions, detailed in an Action Plan with agreed timelines for implementation.

The most recent Progress Update was published last week and shows that 24 out of the total of 26 action points which were due for completion during 2018 overall have been accomplished. Minister of State D'Arcy is confident that the two outstanding actions will be completed in the coming months, along with the three remaining action points with deadlines set for various quarters throughout 2019.

The actions implemented to date cut across a number of different areas and include:

- The publication of by An Garda Síochána of the Guidelines for the Reporting of Suspected Fraudulent Insurance Claims by Insurance Entities to An Garda Síochána

- The Law Reform Commission confirming that the subject of caps on damages for personal injuries litigation is included in its Fifth Programme of Law Reform and is being given immediate attention=

- Sections 8 & 14 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 have been amended to ensure defendants are appropriately notified of a claim having been submitted against their policy and to make it easier for businesses and insurers to challenge cases where fraud or exaggeration is suspected, respectively

- An Garda Síochána commencing the collection of statistics under the new “insurance fraud” category which has been added to the PULSE system

- The Courts Service confirming that it will publish a more detailed breakdown of awards in personal injury cases in its Annual Reports

Finally, I would like to assure the Deputy that the Cost of Insurance Working Group will continue to focus on implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in parallel with implementing those from the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. I am hopeful that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports' recommendations will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses, such as those in the hospitality sector, and a more competitive insurance market.

Fiscal Policy

54. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the position relating to EU fiscal rules when approval is provided regarding its multi-annual expenditure ceilings and amendments are regularly made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14570/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Commission assesses Member States' compliance with the fiscal rules on an ex-post basis in Spring using the outturn data for the previous year.

My officials prepare updates to the macroeconomic and fiscal forecast in Spring - Stability Programme Update (SPU) - and Autumn - Draft Budgetary Plan. These take into account the most up-to-date information available, including the expenditure ceilings.

The 2019 SPU will be published in April.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

55. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if the possible introduction of a tax on agricultural greenhouse gas emissions as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly is being examined; the stages at which such examinations are at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14601/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Decisions on tax policy take place every year as part of the annual budgetary process. The Environmental Taxes paper prepared annually for the Tax Strategy Group contains analysis on the tax policy options and this helps inform subsequent budget decisions.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action was established in 2018 to consider the third report and recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly regarding measures to tackle climate change. The Committee is due to report soon and their recommendations will be considered as part of the budgetary process.

Credit Availability

56. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to promotional practices of car dealers that have radio adverts for car finance available to persons with poor and bad credit history; and his views on whether this is predatory promotion for sub-prime credit. [14619/19]

57. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the status of progress regarding the assertion of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission that car dealers could have to check the financial situation of prospective car buyers and proposed greater regulatory oversight of the sector. [14620/19]

58. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the fact that some members of the public are signing up to complex PCP finance deals without understanding the details of the finance and the negative implications of prospective first-time buyers of having PCP being detrimental to them accessing a mortgage. [14621/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 to 58, inclusive, together.

The majority of hire purchase agreements, such as PCPs, are provided to consumers through

credit intermediaries. Under the Consumer Credit Act 1995, credit intermediaries are authorised by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) and when performing intermediary functions credit intermediaries are required to disclose certain information in writing to the consumer including the nature of the financial accommodation and details on the amount, number and frequency of payments, the total amount the consumer would have to pay under the agreement and, where applicable, the APR.

While intermediaries are frequently involved in the process, hire purchase agreements are ultimately provided by hire purchase providers and these providers are the entity which is the “owner” of the good let to the consumer under the hire purchase agreement. While hire-purchase providers themselves are not required to obtain a specific authorisation from the Central Bank (or the CCPC) for the provision of hire-purchase agreements, nevertheless this is an activity which is subject to statutory control and which contains important consumer protections. For example, Parts II and VI of the Consumer Credit Act provide that important information be disclosed in advertisements for hire purchase agreements and also in such agreements as entered into by consumers. This includes information on the cash price of the good, as well as the APR and hire purchase price.

Nevertheless, it is important to ensure that the regulatory framework governing the provision of PCP and hire purchase agreements is kept under review to ensure that the level of consumer protection continues to be robust. Following reports on the PCP market by the CCPC and the Central Bank, last summer I asked Mr. Michael Tutty to conduct a review of the PCP market and regulatory structure and his report was subsequently published by my Department last November. That report found that there was currently no evidence of consumer detriment arising from PCPs but nevertheless it set out a number of recommendations to help avoid possible problems arising in the future. The CCPC and Tutty Reports suggested that it would be desirable to ensure that certain provisions of the Consumer Protection Code (CPC), in particular the relevant provisions on “knowing the consumer and suitability” should be applicable to PCP and hire purchase agreements and that the appropriate legal means of doing so should be investigated further. I have previously indicated that I broadly accept the recommendations and conclusions of the Tutty report and my Department is currently consulting the Office of the Attorney General on some specific issues raised in the report (including those in relation to the CPC). When a response is to hand, my Department will further engage with the Central Bank, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the CCPC on this matter. Also, in relation to the requirement to check the financial position of the consumer before he/she may enter into a PCP or hire purchase agreement, as the Deputy will be aware the Markets in Financial Instruments Act 2018 now provides that hire purchase and similar type agreements now fall within the scope of the Central Credit Register.

It is also important to enhance the level of public awareness of PCP products and to provide information in relation to financial services more generally, including information in relation to the costs to consumers and the risks and benefits associated with the provision of those services. In this context the CCPC has conducted several awareness campaigns in relation to PCP car finance in 2016, 2017 and 2018, and I am advised that it is developing a further campaign for 2019. I am informed that part of the CCPC’s information campaigns relates to the implications of a poor credit rating on future financial requirements.

Legal Costs

59. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the body that will be liable for the losses in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[14624/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Notwithstanding that the Government profoundly disagrees with the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid case, the full recovery of the alleged State aid from Apple has been completed with approximately €14.3 billion deposited into the Escrow Fund. The funds will remain in the Escrow Fund pending a final determination in the European Courts over the validity of the Commission's Decision. The ultimate owner of the Escrow Fund will be determined at that point.

In general terms, all income/expenses, including any gains or losses will accrue to the Escrow Fund. The arrangements in the Escrow Framework Deed include the agreement that all claims of ownership and access to these vast sums of money is suspended until the European Courts have concluded proceedings that the Government and Apple have brought.

Central Bank of Ireland Data

60. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if table A.6 of the Central Bank money and banking statistics refers specifically to residential assets here that are securitised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14638/19]

61. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the value of securitised assets that are residential mortgages securitised by exam bank here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14639/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 61 together.

The Central Bank of Ireland has advised that Table A.6 of the Bank's Credit, Money and Banking Statistics includes both on-balance sheet loans for house purchase (column E) and loans for house purchase derecognised from the balance sheet of an Irish resident bank in a securitisation transaction where the servicing rights of the loan remain with the originating institution (column F). The data relates to loans advanced to Irish residents only. (The relevant explanatory note of the dataset can be found here:

https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/bank-balance-sheets/money-and-banking-statistics-explanatory-notes_january2016.pdf?sfvrsn=9).

At end-January 2019, the Central Bank indicates there was €21.4 billion outstanding in loans to Irish residents for house purchase that were derecognised from the balance sheet of Irish resident banks in securitisation transactions, and where the servicing rights of the loans remain with the originating institutions. (The relevant dataset is the Central Bank of Ireland, Credit, Money and Banking Statistics Table A.6, found here:

<https://www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/bank-balance-sheets/bank-balance-sheets-data>).

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

62. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the number of the first-time buyer help-to-buy scheme recipients since its inception by county; the value of the scheme by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14674/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the Help to Buy incentive (HTB), which came into effect on 19 July 2016 and is due to expire on 31 December 2019.

The information sought by the Deputy in terms of numbers of recipients of support by county is not immediately available. I will provide that information to the Deputy as soon as may be. In the meantime, data on the numbers of HTB claims made by county since the scheme commenced together with the value of approved claims by county is set out below.

Claims made by county since the scheme commenced

County	Number of Claims
Carlow	79
Cavan	81
Clare	149
Cork	1,117
Donegal	98
Dublin	3,793
Galway	456
Kerry	94
Kildare	1,059
Kilkenny	91
Laois	160
Leitrim	32
Limerick	350
Longford	40
Louth	343
Mayo	161
Meath	1,282
Monaghan	84
Offaly	102
Roscommon	71
Sligo	76
Tipperary	188
Waterford	261
Westmeath	144
Wexford	190
Wicklow	509
Total	11,010

Values of approved claims by county since the scheme commenced (These values are rounded to the nearest €100)

County	Value of Approved HTB Claims per County
Carlow	€888,400
Cavan	€892,900
Clare	€1,717,300

County	Value of Approved HTB Claims per County
Cork	€16,529,000
Donegal	€991,900
Dublin	€61,547,800
Galway	€5,736,700
Kerry	€1,150,600
Kildare	€16,519,000
Kilkenny	€1,175,400
Laois	€1,759,500
Leitrim	€290,600
Limerick	€4,278,000
Longford	€507,500
Louth	€4,075,700
Mayo	€1,982,900
Meath	€17,993,100
Monaghan	€945,100
Offaly	€1,105,300
Roscommon	€839,100
Sligo	€839,400
Tipperary	€2,094,600
Waterford	€2,893,900
Westmeath	€1,744,200
Wexford	€2,280,600
Wicklow	€7,611,100

I am advised by Revenue that further Help To Buy statistics are available on its website at the following link:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/index.aspx>

Mortgage Repayments

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has been informed of the miscalculation of mortgage repayments by a bank (details supplied); if so, when it was informed; if the number of impacted customers is 3,400; the amount these customers have underpaid as a result of the miscalculation; the way in which the Central Bank plans to proceed with the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14685/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Officials in the Department of Finance have received the following reply from the Central Bank of Ireland in response to the Deputy's question:

“The Central Bank of Ireland (‘Central Bank’) is aware of the error and is engaging with Bank of Ireland. We cannot comment on the specifics of any individual firm.

“Errors by regulated financial services firms are monitored by the Central Bank to conclu-

sion to ensure customers are treated fairly in line with the requirements of the Consumer Protection Code.

“In relation to any error, the Central Bank expects firms to have robust systems and controls in place and where issues that affect customers arise, they should be addressed and rectified, with the overarching objective of protecting consumers’ interests. Firms must also communicate clearly and promptly with affected customers and ensure that any identifiable loss is remediated. Any customer who considers that they have been affected by this error, should contact Bank of Ireland directly.

“If consumers are not satisfied with how they are treated, they are entitled to make a complaint to Bank of Ireland. If they are not satisfied with the response they receive, they can make a complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.”

Pension Provisions

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has a role in consumer protection for pension providers; if this is reserved for the Pensions Authority; if the Central Bank and the Pensions Authority have been informed by a company (details supplied) of the failure to pay bonus payments on pension fund plans; if so, when they were informed; if 2,000 customers have been affected; the amount of bonuses that were not paid in monetary terms; the way in which the Central Bank and the Pensions Authority plan to proceed with the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14686/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I will respond to the Deputy’s question in relation to the Central Bank of Ireland, however, the Pensions Authority is under the aegis of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and therefore any related queries should be directed to my colleague Minister Regina Doherty.

The Central Bank of Ireland does have a consumer protection role in respect of pension providers. For example, the Central Bank’s Consumer Protection Code 2012 applies, where relevant, to activities such as the sale and administration of third pillar pension products (consisting of private, individual, pension plans funded from personal savings) conducted by regulated entities operating in the state.

I have been informed that the Central Bank is aware of the error in relation to Irish Life and is engaging with the company. However, as the Deputy will be aware the Central Bank cannot comment on the specifics of any individual firm.

Errors by regulated financial services firms are monitored by the Central Bank to conclusion to ensure customers are treated fairly in line with the requirements of the Consumer Protection Code.

In relation to any error, the Central Bank expects firms to have robust systems and controls in place and where issues that affect customers arise, they should be addressed and rectified, with the overarching objective of protecting consumers’ interests. Firms must also communicate clearly and promptly with affected customers and ensure that any identifiable loss is remediated.

Any customer who considers that they have been affected by this error, should contact Irish Life directly.

If consumers are not satisfied with how they are treated, they are entitled to make a com-

plaint to Irish Life. If they are not satisfied with the response they receive, they can make a complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

As I stated at the outset, the Deputy's queries in relation to the role of the Pensions Authority in this matter should be addressed to my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Central Bank of Ireland Enforcement Actions

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the steps the Central Bank takes on a regular basis to ensure mortgage repayments and mortgage arrears are calculated correctly; if enforcement actions have been taken against lenders for these issues; if so, the lenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14687/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that the calculation of mortgage repayments and mortgage arrears are carried out by regulated entities in line with the terms and conditions of the loan agreement and any alternative repayment arrangement agreed with the borrower respectively.

The Central Bank's Statutory Codes of Conduct, including the Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (CCMA) do not prescribe how mortgage repayments or mortgage arrears are calculated. However, the CCMA defines 'arrears' as "**Arrears:** arise on a mortgage loan account where a borrower has not made a full mortgage repayment, or only makes a partial mortgage repayment, in accordance with the original mortgage contract, by the scheduled due date."

The overriding objective of the CCMA is to ensure that fair and transparent processes are in place for borrowers in or facing mortgage arrears and that due regard is given to the fact that each case of mortgage arrears is unique and needs to be considered on its own merits. Additionally, General Principle 2.1 of the Code states, "A regulated entity must ensure that in all its dealings with customers and within the context of its authorisation it acts honestly, fairly and professionally in the best interests of its customers and the integrity of the market."

I have also been advised by the Central Bank that it has not taken enforcement action under its codes of conduct in respect of the calculation of mortgage repayments. If any regulated entity has incorrectly calculated mortgage repayments, the Central Bank expects that, as an error, it is rectified speedily and accurately. In relation to any error, the Central Bank expects firms to have adequate systems and controls in place and where issues that affect customers arise, they should be addressed and rectified, with the overarching objective of protecting consumers' interests, including ensuring that they are not left out of pocket.

Brexit Preparations

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of additional customs officials that have been hired and are operational to deal with Brexit; the number that are undergoing training at the moment; the number that will be fully operational by 12 April 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14688/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In September 2018, the Government granted approval in principle for the phased recruitment of an additional 600 Revenue staff to meet the challenges posed by Brexit. Budget 2019 provided Revenue with the funding needed

for 270 of the additional 600 staff to be recruited during 2019 to manage an orderly UK withdrawal.

Following the Government decision to give greater priority to the preparations for a No Deal Brexit in December 2018, it was agreed to accelerate Revenue's recruitment plans.

Revenue has appointed over 400 staff from open recruitment and interdepartmental competitions since the start of 2019. 400 staff will have completed customs training in April 2019 in preparation for Brexit.

As serving staff are taking up their new Brexit related positions, Revenue is backfilling the vacancies created through panels of candidates established from its general recruitment activity.

In the event of a no-deal Brexit, Revenue plans to appoint a further 200 staff during the rest of 2019. This would bring the total additional staff recruited to the 600 staff required to deal with the UK withdrawal from the EU.

Brexit Issues

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of insurance companies that are prudentially regulated in the UK or Gibraltar but operating here under freedom of service; the number of customers of those companies that will be required to find new insurance companies upon renewal; if the Central Bank expects all such companies to move to be prudentially regulated here and or the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14689/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, it is important to note that while as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, my Department does not collect the type of information being sought by the Deputy. The day to day supervision of insurance undertakings is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland, and so I have consulted with it in respect of the information sought.

In this regard, I am advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that there are currently 139 UK and 26 Gibraltar authorised insurance undertakings with freedom of service notifications into Ireland. However, they note that not all undertakings with passporting notifications write business in Ireland. In this regard, they advise that 64 UK insurance undertakings and 17 Gibraltar insurance undertakings currently have Irish policyholders. Of these 81 undertakings, 12 undertakings to date, have not established a presence and sought authorisation in Ireland or another EU country. I do not have information on the number of policyholders in those undertakings.

With regard to the Central Bank's expectations, I am informed that the Central Bank has engaged with insurers and brokers on Brexit, and that it has instructed them to take appropriate contingency measures to ensure the continuity of services for cross-border insurance policies between the UK and other Member States of the EU; inform existing and new customers and beneficiaries of the implications of these contingency measures and provide customers with clear information on the contingency measures taken or planned and how they might affect policies. I understand also that the Central Bank is also working closely with UK and European regulators to exchange information about firms' plans and actions needed to address any consumer protection concerns.

Finally, the Deputy will be aware that my Department and the Central Bank are working closely to protect customers of insurance products in event of a "no deal" Brexit. In that regard, provisions in the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Conse-

quential Provisions) Act 2019 allow for a temporary run-off regime, which will allow certain UK and Gibraltar insurers and brokers to continue to service existing insurance contracts with Irish policyholders in the event of a “no deal” Brexit.

Personal Injury Claims

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the proportion of personal injury claims settled through the Personal Injury Assessment Board outside the court and settled and-or decided on by the courts, respectively based on the most recent data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14690/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, it is important to note that while as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, neither my Department nor the Central Bank of Ireland collect the type of information being sought by the Deputy. Currently, the only public information available in relation to awards are those settled by PIAB, and those awarded in Court. However what percentage these settlement channels make up of overall award levels, the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) was not able to establish. In its report on the cost of motor insurance, the CIWG indicated as follows “Claims details in relation to direct settlements between insurers and claimants are not publically available. Some commentators estimate that direct settlement comprise 60%-70% of all cases thus this represents a significant data gap”.

Consequently, the CIWG recommended that such information be collected as part of the National Claims Information Database. One of the key purposes of collecting claims data by settlement channels is to give greater insight into how costs and awards differ depending on the method of settlement.

The Deputy will be aware that the Oireachtas recently passed the legislation to provide relevant powers to the Central Bank of Ireland to establish the National Claims Information Database. Section 4 of the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018 sets out the different settlement channels through which a claim may be finalised. The breakdown of the various channels in the Section was identified as important to allow policymakers to see trends or distinctions in the costs related to these channels and to enable them develop more targeted response measures where necessary. This information is expected to include motor insurance claims information in respect of the last 10 years, including the number of claims reported and settled, the amounts paid on claims, the incurred cost on claims (i.e. the amount paid plus the outstanding amount to be paid, if any), and the actuarial estimate of the final cost of claims i.e. ultimate costs.

The Act was commenced by the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act 2018 (Commencement) Order 2019 (S.I. 2 of 2019) on Monday 28 January 2019. The required consultation by the Central Bank with regard to the publication of the relevant regulations to outline the scope of the Database took place in mid-March and I understand that the Bank is finalising arrangements to publish these regulations. The Central Bank plans to collect motor claims data from insurance undertakings in the first half of 2019, with a view to publishing its first annual report under the legislation in the second half of the year. The Central Bank will also as the Deputy is aware consider the feasibility of expanding the scope of the database to cover employer/public liability later this year.

To conclude, I believe that increasing transparency in and around the settlement channels is a key part of claims information, and having this information will allow policymakers have a better understanding of the way the market is evolving and thus enable them better identify and

take action to address trends in the market.

Stability Programme Update

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he plans to publish the stability programme update; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14692/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The draft Stability Programme Update 2019 (SPU) will be published in mid-April.

In accordance with the requirements of the European Semester, the final SPU will be submitted to the European Commission by 30th April 2019.

Insurance Coverage

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if an analysis has been undertaken on the potential cost of establishing a public insurance body to provide insurance for flooding to persons who are unable to obtain flood insurance similar to the model in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14693/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance carried out a review of policy in relation to flood insurance in 2016, which formed part of the Interdepartmental Flood Policy Coordination Group Interim Report, as approved by Government in November 2016. As part of the review, the Department examined a number of possible approaches including approaches in other jurisdictions. This work included examination of an insurance pool option which would involve setting up an insurance pool financed by an agreed percentage of insurance premiums being paid into it similar to Flood Re in the United Kingdom.

The first point to note is that the Flood Re model is basically an insurance scheme underwritten and administered by the industry which the UK Government helped establish. My Department has had some discussions, with the Irish insurance industry about an equivalent arrangement and they have made it very clear that they do not think it is feasible in an Irish context.

In addition it was concluded that even if industry were willing to participate, the State would have to be prepared to provide financial support in circumstances where the claims were above the level covered by the pool as it is unlikely that there would be sufficient capacity in the Irish reinsurance market to cover this extra amount. This is unlike Flood Re which uses a reinsurance backstop which is facilitated by the fact that there is a liquid reinsurance market in the UK. It is important to note also that certain significant exclusions apply in the UK scheme, such as small businesses and houses built after 2009.

In summary, the Department's review concluded that the approach of an Insurance Pool with State indemnification would lead to additional levies being imposed on all household insurance policies at a time of increasing insurance costs, and could potentially lead to a considerable financial exposure to the State in the form of a State backstop.

The Government continues to believe that its existing policy and investment in relation to flooding which is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems is the best way forward. This commitment is underpinned by a significant capital works investment programme by the OPW and Local Authorities, complemented by the exchange of information with the insurance industry on completed

flood defence schemes. This approach should lead to the increased availability of and lower cost for flood insurance and further improve the already high level of coverage in this country compared with many other jurisdictions.

Tax Code

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if expenditure on health and safety equipment by a company qualifies for capital allowances; the rules regarding capital allowances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14694/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a company may claim capital allowances on capital expenditure, which it incurs on plant and machinery, at a rate of 12.5% per year over 8 years.

In order to qualify for capital allowances, the plant and machinery must be in use at the end of the company's accounting period and in use for the purposes of its trade.

With regard to health and safety equipment, equipment such as fire alarms, hose reels and hoses, fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems and smoke detectors would qualify as plant. In general, capital expenditure on equipment required to meet health and safety requirements in accordance with health and safety legislation would qualify for capital allowances.

Insurance Costs

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if insurance companies permit business customers to pay on a monthly basis rather than a single payment; the average cost to the customer for such a facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14695/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My officials discussed issues arising from your question with Insurance Ireland, who stated at the outset that ultimately matters related to payment method options are contractual ones which rest between the individual insurance provider and policyholder.

Insurance Ireland also pointed out that the majority of personal consumer insurance products can be paid in instalments and that it was not aware of any major difference in this respect with regard to commercial insurance products.

In respect of the average cost to the consumer for such a facility, this is not data which is collected by the Department or industry. While insurers are permitted to apply administrative fees in such circumstances, the amount or proportion charged varies between different providers.

Insurance Coverage

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there are models in other jurisdictions by which companies that are unable to obtain an insurance quote can avail of insurance similar to the declined insurance mechanism; if public insurance models are used in other European jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14696/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My officials consulted with both the Central Bank of Ireland and Insurance Ireland on the Deputy's question. From that engage-

ment, I understand that neither body are aware of any models in other jurisdictions by which companies that are unable to obtain an insurance quote can avail of insurance similar to the Declined Cases Agreement. The Bank has also advised that there is no formal cross-European mechanism in place to deal with these situations.

In addition, we are not aware of any public insurance models used in other European jurisdictions. It should also be noted in this regard that any public insurance model, if it existed, would have to comply with the same prudential rules as apply to private insurers, namely the Solvency II Directive. Therefore, in such a scenario the public insurer's consideration about providing a particular type of cover and the price to offer it are unlikely to be significantly different to that of a private insurer.

The Deputy should note that unlike third party motor insurance, employer and public liability insurance is not a compulsory requirement in Ireland. Consequently, there is no equivalent arrangement in Ireland to the Declined Cases Agreement which operates at an industry level to ensure no motorists are unable to secure the third party motor insurance that they are legally required to hold to operate a motor vehicle. Such a proposal, if put in place, would in effect be a direct intervention by the State to force insurance companies to take on risk that they would not otherwise be willing to accept. A consequence of this is that they would price such risk at what they consider an appropriate level which almost certainly would be prohibitively expensive. It would not be possible in such circumstances for the Minister for Finance to direct that such cover be applied at lower levels, as neither he nor the Central Bank 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 the risks they are willing to accept. Another difficulty with such a proposal is that insurers generally operate in niche areas of the business market based on their risk appetite and their understanding of these areas. Therefore, forcing companies to take on risks outside of their expertise may result in them leaving the market and it may also discourage new entrants to the Irish market. On this basis, I believe such a proposal could be counterproductive over the longer term.

In conclusion, the Government is acutely aware of the difficulties that the cost and availability of liability insurance is having on businesses across the country and every effort is being made to implement the recommendations of the second Personal Injuries Commission Report in order to address the awards level differential between this country and England and Wales. It is hoped that once this is done, there should be a significant positive impact on pricing.

Garda Station Refurbishment

74. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the refurbishment and building works that will take place at Drogheda Garda station in 2019; the cost of the programme of works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14579/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Capital Investment Plan for An Garda Síochána (AGS) 2016 -2021, includes for the provision of a Property Exhibits Management Store (PEMS) at Drogheda Garda Station. It is also proposed to provide additional locker room facilities.

The deliberative process regarding the brief of requirements and scope of works between the Office of Public Works and AGS is now completed and AGS signoff to the proposed scheme has been received. OPW will now progress the Part 9 Planning Application and commence the tender process for procurement of the works.

An estimate of cost is not yet available and expenditure on the works is unlikely in 2019.

Office of Public Works Properties

75. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a property (details supplied); the specific uses that will be accommodated on the site; the current position that was at an early stage of development as confirmed in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 211 of 7 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14577/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is still considering the uses that will be accommodated on this site that would allow full flexibility on the future potential uses of the lands owned by the State at the Knockmay, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. OPW also confirmed that no decision had been made as to the specific uses that will be accommodated on the site.

Office of Public Works Properties

76. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a property registered in the name of a person (details supplied) forms part of a site that facilitates the offices of his Department and forms part of an overall site that also accommodates the offices of the Revenue Commissioners. [14605/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works are the registered owners of the properties contained in Folios WX22940F and WX21417F. These properties known as Government Offices, Anne Street, Wexford currently accommodate the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

These Government Offices are not contained within Raymond Corish and Co.'s Folio WX19285F.

As advised in PQ 10721/19 there are a number of complex title issues associated with these properties and the Deputy will be provided with any further relevant update once the matters are fully investigated and resolved.

Public Spending Code

77. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeframe for the review of the public spending code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14671/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Spending Code is reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that it continues to reflect best practice in project appraisal and evaluation and to ensure value for money in the use of public funds.

In particular, there has been extensive and ongoing review in relation to capital projects over recent months. I anticipate that this major phase of review of the Public Spending Code will be completed before the summer.

Office of Public Works Projects

78. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the historic gates to the Phoenix Park removed in summer 2018; when the original gates will be restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14675/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): In preparation for the Mass for the World Meeting of Families 2018 in the Phoenix Park, a number of historic Park gates were removed for health and safety reasons to ensure the safe and free movement of people attending the Mass and vehicles associated with the event on Sunday 26 August.

As part of the project plan for the event for the temporary removal and reinstatement of the gates under Section 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, the Office of Public Works plans to undertake conservation work at the following entrances:

- North Circular Road Gate (c1906)
- Grangegorman Gate on Blackhorse Avenue (c1906)
- Cabra Gate (c1835)
- Ashtown Gate (c1835)
- Castleknock Gate (c1834)
- Chapelizod Gate (c1833)
- Islandbridge Gate (c1833)

The gates are in need of significant refurbishment and it is a condition of the planning consent granted by Dublin City Council for the temporary removal of the gates that as part of the reinstatement phase each gate and entrance will be fully conserved and restored.

The OPW is providing Architectural (Conservation), Civil and Structural Engineering and Project Management services for this project with external architectural and quantity surveying support. Given the unique nature of the gates, railings, piers and abutment walls, a comprehensive specification for each gate, photographic records and detailed conservation reports have been developed by conservation specialists over the last number of months.

The works to repair and reinstate the gates and entrances will be contracted through a competitive tender process in compliance with public procurement requirements. The work is highly complex and OPW is resolved to complete the work to the highest possible conservation standards. Therefore, it is not possible at this stage to provide a definitive completion date. Further updates will be available to the public on the Phoenix Park website www.phoenixpark.ie and on our social media pages. It is also planned to post information panels at each entrance informing the public about what is happening, information about the history of the gates, the work involved and the indicative programme for the work once that is known.

Sports Organisations

79. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Comptroller and Auditor General has statutory authority to oversee and investigate the operations of independent sports organisations in cases in which those organisations are in receipt of

public moneys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14683/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Article 33(1) of the Constitution requires the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) to control all disbursements on behalf of the State: “There shall be a Comptroller and Auditor General to control on behalf of the State all disbursements and to audit all accounts of moneys administered by or under the authority of the Oireachtas.”

Pursuant to Article 33(4) of the Constitution the C&AG is obliged to report to Dáil Éireann at stated periods as determined by law. Thus, the principal duties of the C&AG are to control, audit and report.

While duties are imposed by the Constitution on the C&AG, further and additional duties have been imposed on him by statute in particular as set out under the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993 (“the 1993 Act”).

The core duties of the C&AG, in conducting an audit of central Government financial statements are to ensure the financial statements properly present the transactions and balances, and that transactions have been “regular”. The latter essentially means establishing that the State’s money was properly used or handled in accordance with lawful authority.

Section 8 of the 1993 Act permits the C&AG, at his discretion, to inspect the accounts of non-public bodies, including recipients of grant funding, but only where 50% or more of their gross receipts come from public sources. Such an inspection of accounts, books and records can only be undertaken in respect of a year (or period of account) where the “50% condition” is satisfied, and only for the purposes of ascertaining that the public money was spent for the purposes authorised by the Oireachtas and in accordance with any conditions specified by the Department through which the funds were allocated.

Child Abuse

80. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the Teaching Council can investigate and make a decision against a registered teacher under existing complaints procedures if it receives notification of an historic alleged complaint of sexual abuse by a student against a former teacher (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14559/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the Teaching Council Act 2001, the Teaching Council was established in March 2006 as the body with statutory authority for the regulation of the teaching profession.

In July 2016 Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act, as amended by the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015, was commenced. From that date the Teaching Council has power to investigate a complaint about a teacher and to conduct fitness to teach inquiries.

Any person, including a member of the public, an employer or a teacher may make a complaint about a registered teacher. In addition, the Teaching Council can itself make a complaint about a registered teacher. Grounds for complaint are set out in the legislation and can relate to such issues as alleged professional misconduct or poor professional performance.

The Teaching Council’s fitness to teach processes are not intended to replace the procedures that are already in place in schools to deal with issues of professional conduct and competence. Underperformance or misconduct will continue to be dealt with first at school level and while

generally school procedures should be exhausted before any inquiry by the Teaching Council takes place the Council can proceed where there are good and sufficient reasons.

In general, the Teaching Council's Investigating Committee has authority to consider complaints where the matters complained about took place on or after 25 July 2016. For complaints relating to professional misconduct and where the events took place before 25 July 2016, the Investigating Committee may decide to proceed to consider and investigate the complaint in exceptional circumstances, as follows:

(a) The conduct complained of is conduct that, if proven, would have constituted a criminal offence at the time that it occurred,

and

(b) The conduct complained of is of such a nature as to reasonably give rise to a bona fide concern that a child or vulnerable person may be physically, sexually or emotionally exploited or abused.

The Council will tell the registered teacher if it receives a complaint about them. The Council will send the teacher a copy of the complaint, all documents enclosed with it and any further information it receives about the complaint during the complaint process. The teacher will have an opportunity to respond to the complaint.

It is a matter for the Investigating Committee to decide whether or not to refer all or part of a complaint to the Disciplinary Committee for an inquiry before a panel of the Disciplinary Committee.

An inquiry takes place in public unless the teacher or a witness about whom personal matters may be disclosed requests the panel to hold the hearing or part of the hearing in private, and the panel is satisfied that it would be appropriate to do so.

At the conclusion of an inquiry the Council may find that there is no case to answer. Alternatively there is a range of sanctions available ranging from the teacher's removal from the register (and consequently removing the ability to be paid in a state funded teaching post) to the provision of advice to the teacher.

Other than where the lowest level of sanction has been applied, the teacher may apply to the High Court for an annulment of the Council's decision.

If, as a result of the Council's investigation and disciplinary process, a teacher is removed from the register of teachers, then the inquiry panel can make a decision that the teacher is not eligible to apply to be restored to the register before the expiration of a period of time specified by the panel.

When the specified period of time set by the inquiry panel has elapsed, the teacher may apply to be registered again. Registration includes a requirement for the applicant teacher to satisfy the Council that he/she is a fit and proper person to be a teacher.

Further information on the Teaching Council's process for considering complaints about registered teachers is available on their website at <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Fitness-to-Teach/>.

Teaching Qualifications

81. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made regarding funding for the shared learning bursary 2018 to 2019 for schools participating in the Droichead programme; his views on whether it should have been made available before now; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14622/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for professional standards at all stages of the teaching career. It has established standards for post-qualification professional practice, as set out in Droichead, the new model of induction and probation for newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers.

The Council has advised me that the Droichead bursary scheme, which operated as part of the Droichead growth phase until the end of the 2017/2018 school year, has not been authorised for the current school year, and that it is actively considering how best to support cultures of shared learning in the teaching profession, as outlined in its Strategic Plan 2018-2020. This includes how any such supports could support collaborative professionalism and innovation across the continuum of teacher education.

The Council provides many supports already through the CROÍ Research Series (Collaboration and Research for Ongoing Innovation), which includes free webinars and e-zines on a range of topics for schools. It also includes the John Coolahan Research Support Framework, through which the Council allocates up to €100,000 per annum to support teachers' engagement with and in research. It hosts the annual Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence (FÉILTE) attended by almost 1,000 people each year.

The Council is keen to ensure that any additional funding which it may approve to support collaborative professionalism would leverage these and other resources in the system to be of maximum benefit to all teachers and learners.

School Staff

82. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when his Department will meet with representatives of a union (details supplied) to discuss the need to review pay arrangements, policy and the terms and conditions of grant-funded school secretaries and caretakers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14632/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I recognise the very important work done by school secretaries, and indeed by other support staff, in the running of our schools and I am grateful to them for the contribution they make to our education system. I have spoken to a number of school secretaries about their employment conditions.

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of Clerical Officers and Caretakers in schools. The schemes were withdrawn completely in 2008. These schemes have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes. The current grant scheme was agreed in the context of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, published in 1991.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services under these grant schemes. It is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the grant funding for caretaking or secretarial purposes, any staff taken on to support those functions are employees of individual schools. Specific responsibility for the pay and conditions rests with the school.

On foot of a Chairman's Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. This arbitration agreement covers the period up to 31 December 2019.

The arbitration agreement was designed to be of greatest benefit to lower-paid secretaries and caretakers. For example, a Secretary or Caretaker who was paid the then minimum wage of €8.65 per hour in 2015 prior to the arbitration will, from 1 January 2019, be paid €13 per hour which is a 50% increase in that individual's hourly pay.

The FÓRSA trade union have requested a meeting with the Department to discuss pay arrangements for grant-funded Secretaries and Caretakers from 2020 onwards. The Department has acknowledged the letter and is considering the union's request.

Dual Citizenship

83. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are no barriers for a person (details supplied) to apply for dual citizenship between Ireland and Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14562/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland currently allows dual citizenship. However, the acquisition of Irish citizenship may have implications for other citizenship(s) held by the person concerned, including automatic loss of those citizenships. Accordingly, applicants for Irish citizenship are advised to check the position with the relevant authorities of the State(s) concerned.

Immigration Controls

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an impediment exists to a person (details supplied) being allowed entry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14575/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I understand that the person concerned is a non-EEA national and, therefore, subject to the provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004 that deal with entry to the State. The person is required, on arrival, to present to an immigration officer for permission to enter and be in the State.

In deciding whether to grant permission to enter the State, the immigration officer will take all relevant factors into account with the principal ones being: the purpose of the visit or stay, the duration of stay, the ability of the individual to support themselves during their stay, and proof that the person will exit the country on or before the expiry of any permission given. A person's previous immigration record may, if relevant, also be taken into account. Each application for entry to the State is assessed on its own merits. The Immigration Act 2004 sets out in section 3(4) the grounds on which an individual may be refused leave to enter the State.

Immigration Status

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to previous parliamentary questions and submissions in respect of a person (details supplied) and the

renewal of that person's permission to remain in the State on foot of production of a national passport, if alternative arrangements can be made to facilitate regularisation of the individuals' residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14642/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further one year period to 14 December 2019. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 07 January 2019. This permission was renewed to enable the person concerned to obtain a valid passport or alternatively submit evidence as to what effort they have made to secure a passport.

There is no record of the requested documentation having been submitted to date. The position in the State of the person concerned can be further considered upon receipt of the requested documentation.

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

Immigration Status

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to replies to previous parliamentary questions and submissions in respect of a person (details supplied) and renewal of that person's permission to remain in the State on foot of production of a national passport, if alternative arrangements can be made to facilitate regularisation of the individual's residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14643/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further one year period to 14 December 2019. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 07 January 2019. This permission was renewed to enable the person concerned to obtain a valid passport or alternatively submit evidence as to what effort they have made to secure a passport.

There is no record of the requested documentation having been submitted to date. The position in the State of the person concerned can be further considered upon receipt of the requested documentation.

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

Residency Permits

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure

to be followed to facilitate the restoration of stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14644/19]

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

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made. This decision will be made as soon as it is possible to do so.

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

Residency Permits

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if alternative means can be found to facilitate an application in view of the difficult experience in obtaining a passport from the home country in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14645/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a valid passport is normally required to enable an applicant to register their permission to reside in the State. Where an applicant does not hold a valid passport, a temporary permission can be issued at the discretion of an immigration officer, to give them time to arrange for a new passport.

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

Residency Permits

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 3 will be renewed or extended to stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14646/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the person concerned was granted immigration permission on 11 July 2018 under Stamp 3 conditions as the dependent family member of a non-EEA national. This permission may be renewed on Stamp 3 conditions at the local immigration office if the person can show they have obeyed the laws of the State and

have complied with the conditions set out in the decision letter.

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

Naturalisation Eligibility

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all relevant documentation required to facilitate an application for naturalisation has been received in the relevant section of his Department in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14648/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, as indicated in my response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question No. 113 of 21 February 2019, the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. Should further documentation be required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

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

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

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

Immigration Controls

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which provision is being made to transfer a person (details supplied) to Sweden; if the person's case will be reviewed with a view to clarification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14651/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a decision to transfer to the United Kingdom under Council Regulation

(EU) No. 64/2013, known as the Dublin Regulation.

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

Immigration Status

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 113 of 31 January 2019, if all pertinent documentation has been received by the relevant section in his Department in the case of a person (details supplied); the basis on which it has been suggested that this information is not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14653/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications or to provide comment on what stage such applications are at in the administrative process.

Under section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, it is an offence to identify an international applicant. As a result it would be contrary to national law for me or my Department officials to provide information which pertains to a protection applicant. The Chief International Protection Officer and his team of International Protection Officers are also bound by the confidentiality provisions of Section 26 of the 2015 Act to protect the identity of the applicant. The applicant or his legal representative should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office (www.ipo.gov.ie).

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

Naturalisation Applications

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or expected status in respect of leave to remain and-or naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14654/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation on behalf of the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 16 June 2020.

A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received, and every application is considered on its individual merits, regardless of whether the applicant had applied previously.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. There is no appeals process under the legislation. The fact that a person may have had an application refused does not preclude or disqualify them from submitting a fresh application in the future. Indeed, the letter advising an applicant of a negative decision also informs them that they may re-apply for the grant of a certificate of naturalisation at any time. The letter advises that, when considering making such a re-application, they should give due regard to the reasons for the refusal which were contained in the submission attached to the refusal letter and that any further application will be considered taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

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

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

IDA Ireland Site Visits

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of site visits by IDA clients to Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford in each year since 2012, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14531/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland hosted 607 site visits in 2018, with over 55% of these visits taking place in regional locations. The IDA always does everything it can - whether through site visits or in direct engagement with potential clients - to encourage overseas firms to locate or expand in regional areas. It is important to remember, however, that the final decision as to where to invest rests solely with the company concerned. It is also the case that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as a significant proportion of all new foreign direct investment (FDI) comes from existing IDA clients already present in the country.

That said, I want to emphasise that creating jobs in the regions remains a top priority for both the IDA and my Department. The energy and resources we have invested into regional growth is, as the evidence illustrates, producing results. In 2018, for example, the IDA delivered 113 regional investments with 56% of net new jobs created outside Dublin. The last four years have seen 44,500 new FDI jobs created outside the capital. We will continue to do our utmost to encourage further such job growth across all parts of Ireland in the time ahead.

The table below outlines the number of IDA site visits to Counties Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford in each year since 2012.

County	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Cork	38	31	30	48	49	51	61	308
Dublin	196	180	205	242	284	327	269	1703
Galway	18	15	19	41	42	62	54	251
Limerick	30	23	22	40	49	42	35	241
Waterford	26	14	11	31	17	11	21	131

Dental Services Provision

95. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14534/19]

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

Disability Definitions

96. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to recognise a condition (details supplied) as a disability; if his attention has been drawn to the distress and suffering caused as a result of the condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14535/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Fibromyalgia is a syndrome associated with wide-spread pain and fatigue. It is labelled a syndrome as fibromyalgia is a collection of signs, symptoms and medical problems that tend to occur together but are not related to a specific, identifiable cause. Fibromyalgia is not classified as a disability and there are currently no plans for the reclassification of fibromyalgia.

Health Services Provision

97. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has had that person's transport to hospital cut. [14537/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

98. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a

person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14539/19]

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.

Dental Services Provision

99. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14541/19]

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

Dental Services Provision

100. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14542/19]

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

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

101. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of new technologies that have yet to be approved by the NTPF for tackling waiting lists; the bodies that have made the applications for the use of technologies; when a technology (details supplied) is likely to be approved by the NTPF for use on patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14543/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by officials in my Department and will be provided to the Deputy directly as soon as it becomes available.

Dental Services Provision

102. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appoint-

ment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14548/19]

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

Dental Services Provision

103. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of orthodontic treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14549/19]

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

Dental Services Provision

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of orthodontic treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14550/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

105. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if an urgent intervention and appropriate follow-up with the HSE regarding the failure of child services, including CAMHS, to intervene properly and speedily in the case of a person (details supplied) will be carried out. [14553/19]

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.

Health Services Staff

106. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if it is a medical radiologist or a dentist holding a level 9 higher degree in dental and maxillofacial radiation such as the qualification held by the current dental adviser to the medical exposure radiation unit that should take clinical responsibility in circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14555/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection Against Dangers Arising from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 256 of 2018) transpose the medical provisions of the Basic Safety Standards Directive 2013/59/Euratom.

The Regulations place an obligation on an undertaking to ensure that all medical exposures take place under the clinical responsibility of a practitioner.

A person is prohibited from taking clinical responsibility for an individual medical exposure unless the person taking such responsibility is (a) a registered dentist within the meaning of the Dentists Act 1985, (b) a registered medical practitioner within the meaning of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, or (c) a person whose name is entered in the register established and maintained by the Radiographers Registration Board pursuant to section 36 of the Health and Social Care Practitioners Act 2005. Furthermore the Regulations require that an undertaking provides for a clear allocation of responsibilities for the protection of patients, asymptomatic individuals, carers and comforters, and volunteers in medical or biomedical research from medical exposure to ionising radiation.

A dentist taking clinical responsibility for making 2-dimensional radiation exposures must be in compliance with the European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection Against Dangers Arising from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018 and the Dental Council guidelines on the use of ionising radiation for dental purposes.

National Advisory Committee on Bioethics

107. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if the National Advisory Committee on Bioethics will be instructed to perform an analysis of the challenges relating to conscientious objection within the healthcare service; the reason the council has not published an analysis since March 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14560/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): No decision has been made regarding the next topic on the work programme for the National Advisory Committee on Bioethics. The National Advisory Committee on Bioethics last met on 24 September 2015. The most recent work published by the National Advisory Committee on Bioethics was the opinion document on nudging, which is entitled “Nudging in Public Health – An Ethical Framework”. This document was published in April 2016.

Home Care Packages Provision

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to providing an extra evening carer in the case of a person (details supplied), with particular reference to the need to have two carers at the same time in view of the person’s health circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14566/19]

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.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

109. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for overseas registration to the Nursing and Midwifery Board by a person (details supplied). [14567/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question refers to an operational matter, it has been referred to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

110. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the availability of the Spinraza treatment for SMA patients here who are sufferers of the degenerative disease spinal muscular atrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14569/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Minister for Health has no role or powers in relation to such matters.

Following detailed consideration of an application for the reimbursement of Spinraza and lengthy engagement with the company, the HSE recently decided that it was unable to reimburse Spinraza. The HSE concluded that the evidence for clinical effectiveness was still quite limited and that the price proposed by the manufacturer was not a cost-effective use of resources.

On the 21 February the HSE wrote to the company informing them of the HSE's proposal to refuse reimbursement of Spinraza at the current price offering. Under the terms of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 the company had 28 days to come back to the HSE with a new proposal.

I am advised by the HSE that the manufacturer, Biogen has been in contact with the HSE and has notified them that it intends to submit full and final representations.

To facilitate Biogen's request, the period for representations was temporarily extended to enable the company to submit their representations. This is in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The company has said that it will submit its representations to the HSE this week and the HSE will give these new representations their immediate attention.

Vaccination Programme

111. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a group (details supplied) will be provided dates for immunisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14571/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the question relates to a service issue, I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

112. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health when the results of the review to determine the next steps for reimbursement of the FreeStyle Libre glucose monitoring system will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14581/19]

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.

Autism Support Services

113. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the services and activities that a centre (details supplied) provides; if the HSE has plans to set up such a centre in County Kerry to be funded centrally by the Department; if similar activities on an ongoing basis for children with autism will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14582/19]

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.

Autism Support Services

114. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has plans to provide a counselling and advice service for families, in particular for the siblings of children diagnosed with autism in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14583/19]

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.

Medical Card Applications

115. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) has had a medical card reissued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14584/19]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

116. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the alternative local supports being put in place regarding a centre (details supplied); the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14585/19]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

117. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the status of the medical treatment available here or abroad for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14592/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health, I requested Dr Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to draft a report on the use of Uro-Gynaecological Mesh in the surgical treatment of stress urinary incontinence (SUI) and pelvic organ prolapse (POP) in women. The report covers the clinical and technical issues involved in ensuring both:

This report has been completed and was published on the Department of Health website on 21 November 2018.

The Report identifies that for many women, surgical procedures using synthetic mesh devices have provided a more effective and less invasive form of treatment than traditional SUI and POP procedures. However, mesh devices are associated with significant and severe complications in a minority of women. These are of concern given the difficulties of mesh implant removal.

The Report makes 19 recommendations including:

- the development of patient information and informed consent materials;
- surgical professional training and multidisciplinary expertise in units carrying out mesh procedures;
- the development of clinical guidance;
- the development of information systems to monitor the ongoing use of mesh devices;
- ensuring the reporting of mesh related complications; and
- ensuring timely, appropriate and accessible care pathways for the management of women with complications.

In advance of the report's completion, the HSE was requested in May 2018 to begin work immediately on the development of national standardised patient information and informed consent materials and the clarification and development of treatment pathways and appropriate referral services for women suffering serious complications. The HSE was also asked by the

Chief Medical Officer on 24 July to pause all mesh procedures where clinically safe to do so, until a number of key recommendations are implemented.

A Synthetic Mesh Devices Advisory Group has been convened by the HSE, to advise on and progress all of the recommendations. I am informed that an ongoing work programme for the development of appropriate patient information resources and consent materials, and the clarification and development of treatment pathways and appropriate referral services for women suffering from mesh-related complications is being progressed through this Group. The work being progressed by the HSE will include identifying the appropriate specialist clinical expertise and facilities required at hospital group level and nationally to provide comprehensive aftercare services. Pending the completion of this, the HSE will also examine the need to look at sourcing services from abroad to address any immediate shortfalls identified, either through utilisation of the treatment abroad scheme or by commissioning services from abroad.

The HSE has advised that many women have already engaged with this pathway system and have attended centres for second opinion and follow up appointments. The HSE has published a dedicated webpage about vaginal mesh implants, including contact information for women suffering complications, which I hope is a useful resource. This can be found at:

hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/woman-infants/vaginal-mesh-implants/vaginal-mesh-implants.html

The Secretary General of my Department wrote to the HSE on November 27 2018 to request that it prepare a detailed Implementation Plan for the complete set of recommendations set out in the CMO's Report, to be approved by the Leadership Team in the HSE and published on the HSE website within three months of receipt of the report, or sooner if completed. It was also requested that a copy of the Implementation Plan, together with an interim report on the implementation of those recommendations on which work has already commenced, should be submitted to the Department at the time of publication of the Implementation Plan.

I am informed that the HSE has advised that the final version of the Implementation Plan will be published on its website and submitted to my Department in coming weeks.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

118. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when new arrangements will be introduced and if legislation is required regarding changes to the rules for the fair deal scheme in order to introduce a three-year cap on the inclusion of productive assets in the assessment of or as part of the scheme in view of the fact that the matter is ongoing for some time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14593/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions based on farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. My Department is working on the development of draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of complex ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

A draft General Scheme of a Bill is currently with legal advisers for advice and legal quality control review. As the Deputy is aware, there is presently a focus on matters relating to Brexit, including planning and preparing in a legal and legislative context. Unfortunately, this is having some impact on progressing the Heads of Bill for the NHSS at this time. However, subject to legal advice, I expect to bring the heads of bill to Government at the earliest opportunity. The changes to the Scheme will come into effect in 2019 subject to the legislative process.

Autism Support Services

119. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the services available for children diagnosed with autism in County Kerry; if these services are continuous for each child in view of the fact that children in the county are only receiving a small number of appointments to the services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14597/19]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

120. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [14598/19]

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 Delays

121. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in receiving a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [14599/19]

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.

HSE Investigations

122. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the named officers within the HSE national office of nursing and midwifery who set in train the suspension of a person (details supplied) in 2014; and the authority of which named officer under which the was decision taken. [14611/19]

123. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the information produced relating to the practice of a person (details supplied); and the person or body that decided to underwrite and justify the decision to suspend in the person in 2014. [14612/19]

124. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the named officers in the HSE national office of nursing and midwifery who decided to pursue a systems analysis of the home birth records of a person (details supplied); the authority under which the decision to undertake a systems analysis was made; if the systems analysis was completed; if so, the location of the records of findings from the systems analysis; and if a copy of same will be provided. [14613/19]

125. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the cost to the HSE of the legal proceedings related to the case of a person (details supplied). [14614/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 to 125, inclusive, together.

As these questions refer to operational matters, they has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Maternity Strategy Implementation

126. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times, in light of the recommendations of the national maternity strategy, that the steering group for the implementation of the model of care has met since it was established. [14615/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Implementation of the National Maternity Strategy - Creating A Better Future Together 2016 - 2026 - is being led by the HSE National

Women & Infants Health Programme. I have therefore asked the HSE to reply to your query directly.

National Maternity Strategy Implementation

127. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the major outputs of the steering group for the implementation of the model of care to date. [14616/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Implementation of the National Maternity Strategy - Creating A Better Future Together 2016 - 2026 - is being led by the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme. I have therefore asked the HSE to reply to your query directly.

National Maternity Strategy Implementation

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health when the building work will commence on the first of the alongside birthing centres, which were a core recommendation for the supported care pathway of the national maternity strategy in view of the fact that there are only two midwife-led centres in the 19 maternity units. [14617/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Ireland's first Alongside Birth Unit, since the launch of Strategy, was opened in University Maternity Hospital Limerick in June last year. The rollout of the Supported Care Pathway is bringing increased choice to the women of this country and will make a real difference to how women and families experience maternity services here.

National Maternity Strategy Implementation

129. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE national office of nursing and midwifery will update its protocols on home birth to reflect the international evidence base included in the guideline planning to birth at home in Northern Ireland 2018. [14618/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question refers to an operational matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Data

130. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the proportion of persons classified as urgent referrals for colonoscopies being seen within the four-week target; the breakdown of performance against this target by hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14623/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by officials in my Department and will be provided to the Deputy directly as soon as it becomes available.

Medical Card Applications

131. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) has had a medical card reissued; the status of the medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14627/19]

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

132. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a general practitioner service (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14630/19]

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

Hospital Facilities

133. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the proposed new additional X-ray room at the newly developed extension to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda will be provided following the decision by HSE estates to withdraw the project in October 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14633/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to making tangible and sustainable improvements in our health services. This includes a major capital development at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda. This project is being completed in phases and in totality the Phase 2 development will consist of, three ward floors providing 81 fully compliant single patient ensuite rooms, an extension to the existing Emergency Department and a Theatre Suite comprising five fully compliant operating rooms. Phase 2 of this project has already seen 29 ward beds open in December 2017, and a further 29 bed ward opened in April 2018.

The Department of Health has been informed by HSE Estates that the provision of a second X-ray room was discussed with service user groups but could not be delivered within the capital allocation for this project and as such was not been included in the project brief. A capital submission for a second x-ray room can be considered at a later date and subject to the availability of funding could be progressed.

Future investment in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, will be considered within the overall acute hospital infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service.

Project Ireland 2040 provides €10.9 billion for Health capital developments across the country, including both national programmes and individual projects, across acute, primary and social care. Health capital projects and programmes currently underway will continue. As to be expected with such a plan, many proposals are at an early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning design and tender before a firm timeline or funding required can be established.

The planning and management of future health expenditure is considered as part of the annual estimates and budgetary process which seeks to balance available funding across all service areas to achieve the best possible outcomes for the greatest number of service users and

prioritise areas of greatest need.

Vaccination Programme Data

134. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to ascertain the number of persons diagnosed with narcolepsy as a result of receiving Pandemrix in 2011; and when it was reissued for use as the winter flu vaccine. [14640/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for monitoring the safety and quality of all medicines, including vaccines, that are licensed in Ireland. The HPRA has advised that, of the reports received to date with clinical information confirming a diagnosis of narcolepsy in relation to individuals vaccinated with Pandemrix, none of the reports where information on the date of vaccination was provided indicate a date of vaccination in 2011. However, there are a small number of reports which do not include information on the date of vaccination. Likewise, no medically confirmed cases of narcolepsy have been reported in association with the winter flu trivalent vaccine that contained a H1N1 component.

For information, the HPRA operates the national adverse reaction reporting system which relies on submission of reports by members of the public, healthcare professionals and Marketing Authorisation Holders (i.e. pharmaceutical companies that hold the licenses for medicines (MAHs)), with members of the public and healthcare professionals encouraged to report when they consider a medicine may have contributed to the effects experienced.

The composition of seasonal influenza vaccines is updated annually, if appropriate, to include relevant vaccine strains to provide appropriate protection against circulating influenza viruses. The strains included in the seasonal influenza vaccines are recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) each year and the HSE liaises with the manufacturers in relation to procurement of vaccines for use in Ireland based on this advice.

Vaccination continues to remain the most effective means of preventing infection caused by seasonal influenza viruses and can reduce severe disease that can lead to hospitalisation and even death.

Hospital Waiting Lists

135. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14697/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am conscious that waiting times are often unacceptably long and of the burden that this places on patients and their families. In this regard, I am committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

Budget 2019 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019.

The NTPF works with public hospitals, as opposed to with patients directly, to offer and provide the funding for treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an in-patient/day case waiting list for surgery, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic.

The key criteria of the NTPF is the prioritisation of the longest waiting patients first. While the NTPF identifies patients eligible for NTPF treatment, it is solely on the basis of their time spent on the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List. The clinical suitability of the patient to avail of NTPF funded treatment is determined by the public hospital.

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 re-examine the matter and respond to the Deputy directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

136. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a petition by a person (details supplied); if the HSE will be instructed to clarify the advice it has issued to a person caring for a person who suffers from a number of conditions; the status of progress regarding the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14700/19]

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 first part of the question relates to a service matter I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

In relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Ireland has now ratified the Convention which came in to force for Ireland on 19 April 2018. The Government's approach to meeting the terms of the Convention is one of sustained and ongoing improvement. Work is continuing on the reforms needed for an optimum level of compliance with the convention's requirements.

The Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016, which includes a series of provisions to ensure that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is fully implemented, completed Committee Stage on 30 January 2019. The Disability Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2016 includes provisions to establish the monitoring framework required by Article 33 of the Convention to promote, protect and monitor implementation of the UNCRPD. It requires the involvement and participation of civil society, in particular, persons with disabilities, in the monitoring process.

The monitoring framework will include both the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) and the National Disability Authority (NDA) and will be governed by a formal Memorandum of Understanding. The IHREC Act 2014 was designed to ensure that IHREC, as Ireland's National Human Rights Institution, fully meets the standard of independence in accordance with the Paris Principles, and is best placed to make periodic independent reports to the UN, supported by progress assessments and statistical information supplied by the NDA. The NDA has expertise and information resources in relation to reporting on disability issues.

The Equality Division in the Department of Justice and Equality will be the designated focal point as it has policy responsibility for the equality aspects of disability matters. The Division already provides the Secretariat to the National Disability Strategy Implementation Group (NDSIG) where the UNCRPD will be discussed regularly.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides for the establishment of new administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission. The Decision Support Service is working towards being operational and ready for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act in 2020. This lead in timeframe ensures that the necessary staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations will be in place so that the Decision Support Service will have the capacity to be up and running effectively.

Dental Services Staff

137. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the limitations that apply to the business of a dental technician; if dental technicians provide a service to dentist practitioners only and not directly to members of the public; the body with the responsibility of regulating same; the efforts being made to inform the public of the difference between a clinical dental technician and a dental technician; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14702/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Dental technicians manufacture dental appliances and devices according to a dentist's prescription. They may not provide such services directly to the public. The laboratories in which dental technicians work are regulated by the Health Products Regulatory Authority.

The Dental Council, established by the Dentists Act 1985, is the body responsible for regulation of the dental profession, including registered auxiliary dental workers (i.e. dental nurses, dental hygienists and clinical dental technicians). It is illegal for anyone other than a dentist or a registered clinical dental technician to fit a denture for a patient. The Dental Council recommends that members of the public obtain dentures only from a registered dentist or a registered clinical dental technician. The Dental Council publishes advice on its website, where a list of registered clinical dental technicians is available to download.

Services for People with Disabilities

138. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to changes in transport arrangements for persons attending a training facility (details supplied); if the costs now imposed on families will be removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14720/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

ment 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.

Animal Welfare

139. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider new legislation to provide for increased custodial sentences for those convicted of animal cruelty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14545/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The level of custodial sentence provided in the Animal Health and Welfare Act is imprisonment for a maximum of 6 months in respect of each offence in the District Court with cumulative maximum period of imprisonment of 2 years in cases where there are a number offences and a maximum sentence of 5 years in respect of a conviction on indictment.

This legislation was drafted under the advice of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel in the Attorney General's Office. Therefore these penalties are in line with the approach taken under Irish legislation more generally. I am satisfied that the level of sentence is appropriate and effective. Of course, the actual level of sentence in any particular instance, is a matter for the trial judge who is independent in the exercise of this and other judicial functions.

Animal Welfare

140. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied that there are adequate measures in place to combat cruelty to animals; if he is proposing new measures to deal with this problem; the funding provided to organisations with a brief for the welfare of dogs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14544/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am fully committed to promoting good practices that respect the welfare of all animals and my Department devotes considerable resources to protecting animal welfare and in dealing with breaches of animal welfare legislation. The Animal Health and Welfare Act provides the framework within which the welfare of animals can be safeguarded and I am hopeful that the substantial and significantly increased levels of penalties for offences of animal cruelty provided for under the Act will act as a deterrent to animal welfare abuses.

Officials from my Department are directly involved in monitoring animal welfare on farms as part of their inspection duties in the areas of animal health, food safety, transportation and welfare. My Department also actively works via the regional Early Warning System to ensure that potential welfare problems in farming are identified at an early stage and wherever possible avoided.

This work is further underpinned by the Animal Welfare Helpline which my Department operates, Lo-call 0761 064408, along with a dedicated email address, AnimalWelfare@agri-

culture.gov.ie, which facilitates the reporting by members of the public of concerns in regard to the welfare of animals. All calls received are treated in confidence. The animal welfare hotline exists for the reporting of specific incidents relating to animal welfare which come to the attention of members of the public, which they believe are in need of attention. All complaints received are investigated and followed up on.

Control in respect of animal welfare is a matter that is also dealt with by a wider range of organisations not just my Department. In the case of non-farmed animals, a vital role is played by An Garda Síochána, Local Authorities and authorised officers of the ISPCA and DSPCA. These latter organisations are some of the many recipients of substantial ex-gratia funding which my Department provides to underpin important work done by many organisations in the area of supporting animal welfare.

In December 2018, I announced the largest ever Department allocation of funding to animal welfare organisations of €2,751,000. A total of 108 organisations are benefitting under these arrangements. Some of these organisations are focussed on dogs but many deal with a wide range of animals.

Beef Industry

141. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cattle slaughtered here that qualify for the quality premium scheme; the percentage this represents of the overall number of cattle here in each of the years 2014 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14590/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A Quality Payment System (QPS) related to the beef grid was agreed between Meat Industry Ireland (MII) and the Irish Farmers Association (IFA) in 2009. The payment is based on the classification of the carcass in which a price differential is set between certain classification grades.

My understanding is that any additional bonus payments and the conditions attached to qualification for such payments are determined by processors and their retail customers. There are a number of conditions which pertain to such payments and may include age limits and restrictions on the number of movements allowed. These are commercial arrangements, and my Department has no role in their establishment, or in collection or analysis of the payments which are made.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

142. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is liaising with the Department of Finance on the role of agriculture in greenhouse gas emissions and policies on carbon taxation here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14600/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland has a comparative advantage in grass-based carbon efficient livestock production. The EU Commission JRC report (2010) found that Ireland is the most carbon efficient producer in the EU per unit of dairy production, and the fifth most carbon efficient producer per unit of beef. However, inherent challenges remain for the sector in terms of contributing to Ireland's climate change and renewable energy targets.

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In this regard, my Department is currently developing an environmental sustainability road-map for the agri-food sector to ensure that the future development of agriculture and the land-use sector, including forestry, will be built upon and contribute fairly to Ireland's climate and energy targets. This roadmap will be published later this year and will form a key element of the 2030 strategy. In parallel, my Department is also working on the development of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan, which in line with the EU Commission's proposals, will recognise that greater environmental and climate ambition is required.

Meanwhile, my Department continues to review options that will enable our farmers to transition to a low carbon economy. The recently published Teagasc report "An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030" is key to informing the type of measures we need to implement to continue to reduce the carbon footprint of the sector. My Department's approach is to focus on driving down the emissions intensity of Irish production through the deployment of innovative and efficient practices at farm level, combined with the practical application of emerging scientific knowledge.

The Minister for Finance announced in Budget 2019 that he intends to put in place a long-term trajectory for Carbon Tax increases out to 2030, in line with the recommendations of the Climate Change Advisory Council and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action.

I continue to liaise with colleagues across Government on policy approaches to climate action, in particular on the development of a new "All of Government Climate Plan" led by my colleague Minister Bruton.

Nitrates Usage

143. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the exceptional circumstances in the case of a person (details supplied) will be considered; if the ongoing mental health issues will be considered based on the medical report submitted; if the issue will be positively disposed of; and if he will expedite the matter. [14635/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is currently an open review case in relation to this person regarding a breach of the nitrates regulations (2017). The Department has been in contact directly with the individual as material provided did not relate to the year in question.

Once all relevant information is received, the review will be processed swiftly, taking all relevant facts into consideration.

Hare Coursing Regulation

144. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason officials of the hare coursing monitoring committee departed from their remit and interceded for the hare coursers when they wrote to Coillte seeking permission to capture hares on Coillte land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14641/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Irish Coursing Club (ICC) is recognised as being, subject to the provisions of the Greyhound Industry Act 1958, and of the constitution of the ICC and subject to the general control and direction of Bord na gCon, the controlling authority for the breeding and coursing of greyhounds.

The ICC is committed to maintaining high standards in the sport of coursing and it actively

promotes the protection and conservation of the Irish hare. Coursing operates in a highly-regulated environment coupled with a comprehensive set of rules directly applied by the club. Hares are sourced under licences from the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht which are issued annually and subject to a total of 26 conditions.

A Monitoring Committee on Coursing was established during the 1993/94 coursing season and is comprised of officials from my Department and representatives from both the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the ICC to monitor developments in coursing and, in that regard, the situation is kept under constant review to ensure that coursing is run in a well-controlled and responsible manner in the interests of hares and greyhounds alike. The Monitoring Committee meets annually and considers any issues arising from the previous season. Wildlife rangers from the NPWS and veterinary inspectors from my Department attend coursing meetings and report on their findings. The Monitoring Committee also arranges to have any complaints or reported incidents investigated.

In this case, officials from my Department contacted Coillte to ascertain on behalf of the Monitoring Committee if a mechanism existed whereby the ICC could request permission to net hares for the purposes of regulated hare coursing on Coillte-owned property.

In response, Coillte expressed the view that it would not be possible to grant the request without impacting on general access for recreation. This was my Department's only communication with Coillte on the matter.

European Council Meetings

145. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the issues discussed at the recent Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14703/19]

146. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposals he put forward at the recent Council of Ministers meeting in respect of the need to provide specific assistance to the agrifood sector in the event of a no-deal Brexit; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14704/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 and 146 together.

The Council held a public exchange of views on the CAP reform package on the basis of the Romanian Presidency's progress report, and revised drafting suggestions to the three Regulations i.e. the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation, the Horizontal Regulation and the Common Market Organisation Regulation. Agriculture Ministers were invited to comment on these documents and provide guidance to the Presidency on the next steps.

During the CAP debate, Ministers also discussed coupled income support on the basis of a paper presented by the Czech delegation. The Netherlands delegation also informed Council of the outcome of the Congress "CAP Strategic Plans – exploring eco-climate schemes" which was held in Leeuwarden in early February. Ministers also discussed the importance of the bio-economy.

The Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting on 18 March was an important opportunity to highlight to the Council, the Commission and to my fellow Ministers, the impacts of a no-deal Brexit on the agri-food sector in Ireland and with potential knock-on effects across the EU market as a whole. During the discussion on the meat market, I outlined the exposure of the Irish

beef sector in particular and called for the full suite of measures available under the Common Market Organisation, including targeted support for farmers, to be deployed rapidly in the event of a no-deal Brexit. I also referred to the need to protect the EU beef sector in trade discussions with Mercosur, against the background of the significant uncertainty arising from Brexit. I also highlighted the exposure of the Irish fisheries sector, and the need for careful joint EU management of fisheries resources, as well as financial supports for fishermen and their communities.

The Slovenian delegation presented a point of information under any other business to highlight the importance and uncertainty of small-scale fisheries in the context of the Commission's proposal for a new, post 2020, European and Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Commissioner Vella said that Small Scale Coastal Fisheries were an important sector for coastal communities and employment and as such enjoy preferential treatment in the EMFF proposal. Discussions on the EMFF proposal will continue in the Fisheries Council Working Party.

I also held bilateral discussions with Commissioner Hogan on the impact of Brexit and the Commissioner has confirmed the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland. This process of engagement is continuing, and the Government will not be found wanting when it comes to supporting the Irish agri-food sector.

Brexit Supports

147. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has had recent meetings with the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development regarding the need to implement measures to support the agrifood sector in the event of a no-deal Brexit; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14705/19]

149. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has had recent discussions with the European Commissioner for Trade regarding the difficulties that will arise for the agrifood sector in the event of a no-deal Brexit; if measures will be implemented to protect Irish trade with Britain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14707/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 149 together.

I have held a series of meetings with Commissioner Hogan, the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development where we discussed the potential impact a 'no deal' Brexit could have on the agri-food sector and the Commission's readiness to deploy support measures to help mitigate the potential impacts on farmers, fishermen and businesses in the sector.

Such measures could include traditional market supports and exceptional aid provisions under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, as well as increased flexibility under State Aid regulations. Commissioner Hogan did confirm that the EU was ready to respond positively and my officials are currently in regular contact with Commission officials as the situation evolves.

The Common Market Organisation regulation, which was put in place under the Irish Presidency of the EU in 2013, provides a comprehensive toolbox for dealing with market disruption and it includes measures such as Intervention, Aids to Private Storage and Exceptional Aid.

Brexit Supports

148. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has had recent meetings with the European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries regarding the issues arising for the fisheries sector here due to Brexit; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14706/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I met with Fisheries Commissioner Karmenu Vella in Brussels last month to discuss the potential negative impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish fishing industry.

We discussed a number of issues including potential loss of access for Irish and other EU vessels to the UK fishing zone, the need to ensure ongoing protection of fish stocks in the waters around Ireland from a subsequent increase in fishing activity, and potential mitigation measures at EU level.

We also discussed the recent EU Commission proposals concerning the possible use of temporary cessation measures, quota swapping with the UK and potential reciprocal access in a ‘no deal’ situation.

I emphasised the necessity for the Commission to continue its leading role in ensuring that there will be a coordination mechanism on the actual application of any temporary cessation, identifying fleets and stocks most vulnerable to a disorderly Brexit and exploring additional possible mitigation measures to safeguard these stocks.

There has been a number of meetings at official level between the EU Commission and the relevant Member States in recent weeks on these issues and my Department, with the support of our Marine Agencies, have been fully engaged in these. Further meetings are planned in the coming days and weeks.

I am also continuing to work closely with key stakeholders in the Irish fishing industry and am pleased at the level of unity on these key issues.

Question No. 149 answered with Question No. 147.

Marine Safety

150. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the €1.5 million development at a college (details supplied) in County Donegal will be approved for construction in view of the fact that the project is ready to proceed to construction; the status of the sea survival training unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14721/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): This project is currently under review by my Department in the wider context of the provision of existing professional sea survival training facilities within the State and the cost, both construction and operational, of such a facility. The professional sea survival training facilities based at the National Maritime College of Ireland, Ringaskiddy, Co Cork, are unique in Ireland and designed both for fundamental safety training and specialised survival training, to increase survival ability in emergency situations.

At the present time, there are no plans to proceed with this project and funding has not been provided in Bord Iascaigh Mharas’s (BIM) Vote in 2019, for this proposed additional sea survival training development.

Climate Change Policy

151. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the new all-of-government climate action plan; the time-frame for the report to be produced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14574/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, I am currently preparing an All of Government Climate Plan which will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. I am working with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives in electricity, transport, heat, and agriculture, as well as a range of other sectors.

The new plan will have a strong focus on implementation, including actions with specific timelines and steps needed to achieve each action, assigning clear lines of responsibility for delivery. The new plan will also be informed by successful approaches in other countries.

The Plan will build on the policy framework, measures and actions set out in both the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan and is to be completed in April.

Energy Schemes

152. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress he has made in considering the optimal next steps to achieve the level of ambition as set out in the NDP under the warmth and well-being programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14576/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Warmth & Wellbeing scheme is a joint policy initiative between my Department and the Department of Health and is being delivered under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. The main aim of the scheme, which began in 2016 is to validate, in an Irish context, the strong international evidence that making homes warmer, drier and more energy efficient can have on the health and wellbeing of people vulnerable to energy poverty, who are living with chronic respiratory conditions. The scheme is operating in the HSE Community Health Area 7 in Dublin postal areas 8, 10, 12, 22 and 24. €20m was spent between 2016 and 2018 resulting in the upgrading of almost 900 homes.

The process of evaluating the scheme is ongoing and is being overseen by a Steering Group comprised of my Department, the Department of Health, SEAI and HSE. Reports from the HSE have indicated that the upgrades are delivering benefits to the health and wellbeing of participants. Research by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine will further investigate the outcomes from the scheme. There are two strands to decision making around the future of the Warmth and Wellbeing approach, relating to health and energy. From the health perspective, the above mentioned measurement and evaluation of the data gathered from participants is necessary to validate the effectiveness of energy efficiency improvements in supporting better health outcomes. From the energy perspective key issues are, the development of effective delivery infrastructure by SEAI and the HSE, and on the ground learning about how to scale this up in the context of how we ramp up to meet the level of ambition in the NDP. Based on the outcomes of this research I will be considering the optimal next steps.

Sustainable Energy Communities Scheme

153. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of the 200 organisations and communities involved in the Sustainable Energy Community Network. [14580/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC) Programme is administered by SEAI on behalf of my Department. This Programme provides the first step for communities in learning how to develop local partnerships to manage and conserve energy before they apply to the Better Energy Communities Scheme. It facilitates the development of regional and national networks to allow for the sharing of knowledge and experience, fosters collaboration and helps communities to better pursue their goals. Since 2015 almost 270 community groups have signed up to the network and are availing of technical support and mentoring from the SEAI.

Details of the organisations and communities involved in the SEC Programme can be found in the document attached. In addition, the Deputy can view further details on all SEC programmes throughout Ireland on SEAI's website <https://www.seai.ie/sustainable-solutions/community-projects/sustainable-energy-communities/>

Postal Codes

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding post codes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14587/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post collects information on new and existing buildings, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland provides the geo-locations for these buildings. An Post GeoDirectory, issue a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, in accordance with their licence agreement.

Eircode have advised my officials that they will contact and liaise with the individual in question regarding an Eircode. The next quarterly update of Eircodes will be in May 2019 when each new address assigned an Eircode is published on the free to use Eircode Finder website, a notification letter with their Eircode is issued to the occupant and an updated Eircode Database is provided to licensed businesses for their use.

Eircode have informed my Department that 26,823 new addresses were assigned an Eircode in 2018.

My officials are working with An Post, Ordnance Survey Ireland, An Post GeoDirectory and Capita to improve and expedite the process of assigning Eircodes for new build properties

Renewable Energy Generation

155. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of renewable energy locations by county; the type of energy provided, for example, wind, solar and hydro; and the amount of energy generated as a percentage of the national renewable energy generated. [14591/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard

Bruton): Ireland has huge potential for renewable energy. Currently 30% of our electricity generation comes from renewable sources. I am now committing to a 70% by 2030 as part of the all of government climate plan.

Eirgrid (the Transmission System Operator) and ESB Networks (the Distribution System Operator) provide online data on size and location of windfarms connected to the national grid. While EirGrid and ESB do not compile information on a county basis, information on the size and location of each renewable energy plant is publicly available on their websites at www.eirgridgroup.com and www.esbnetworks.ie respectively.

Waste Management

156. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the body that has overall responsibility for the roll-out of brown compost bins to residential waste customers; the parts played by all State agencies and private waste companies in this process; the targets being worked to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14666/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015, household waste collectors are required to provide, or arrange for the provision of a separate collection service for food waste from households in designated brown bin areas.

Household & Commercial Waste Management Compliance has been a National Waste Enforcement Priority for 2018 and 2019. During this period the focus of this priority for the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) has been the roll out of the household food waste bin. From their inception in 2016 the WERLAs have coordinated local authority actions by way of compliance assistance and enforcement to support the effective roll out of the household food waste bin in the required agglomerations in accordance with the legislation and this work is on-going.

This focus is resulting in less organic waste going to landfill. The most recent figures show a 19% increase in organic waste recycling and recovery.

The provision of a brown bin collection service, where it is technically and environmentally practical to do so, continues to be monitored by my Department, together with the regulatory authorities and industry representatives

Mobile Telephony Services

157. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has issued directives to the Commission for Communications Regulation with regard to the roll-out of 5G technology and the use of a company (details supplied); if not, his plans to issue such directives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14676/19]

158. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of 5G technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14677/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 158 together.

Fifth generation (5G) networks are expected to be commercialised over the next few years. Roll-out of 5G technology in Ireland is primarily a matter for private mobile network operators, operating on a commercial basis. Mobile network operators function in a liberalised market in Ireland, regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

There are statutory provisions to ensure that operators of networks and services in Ireland take appropriate measures to manage risks to the security of their networks and services, and to guarantee their integrity. These requirements are set out in the European Communities (Electronic Communications Networks and Services) (Framework) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 333 of 2011). ComReg is responsible for ensuring compliance with these provisions.

Whilst Section 11 of the Communications Regulation Act 2002 provides that ComReg is statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions, I do have the power to issue policy directions to the Regulator under Section 13 of the same Act, reflecting my responsibility for policy for the sector. I have not issued and currently do not propose to issue such a policy direction in relation to the issue raised by the Deputy.

Departmental Meetings

159. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has been contacted by the Administration of the United States of America with regard to the use of technology by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14680/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As Minister for Communications, I meet with my international colleagues on a variety of issues and in a variety of fora, as appropriate. In that context, I met with US Chargé d'Affaires on 25 January 2019 for a wide-ranging discussion, during which the US views on the company in question were briefly raised.

At a domestic level, it should be noted that there are statutory provisions to ensure that operators of networks and services in Ireland take appropriate measures to manage risks to the security of their networks and services, and to guarantee their integrity. These requirements are set out in the European Communities (Electronic Communications Networks and Services) (Framework) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 333 of 2011). The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is responsible for ensuring compliance with these provisions, and ComReg is statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions (as provided for in Section 11 of the Communications Regulations Act 2002).

At an international level, the European Commission published a Recommendation on a common EU approach to the security of 5G networks on 26 March 2019, which is presently being evaluated. My officials will engage with relevant stakeholders, fellow Member States and the EU institutions in discussing that recommendation, and in progressing any related actions. EU initiatives which impact across various sectors and areas of ministerial responsibility at national level will be assessed across Government, as appropriate.

Electric Vehicles

160. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of electric vehicle charging stations operating in County Clare; his plans to increase the number of such charging points in the county; the date for delivery of ad-

ditional charging points in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14699/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Providing adequate charging infrastructure is critical to ensure continued growth in electric vehicles.

Home charging is the most cost-effective way to charge an electric vehicle and is the primary method of charging for the majority of electric vehicles both internationally and in Ireland. A Government grant of up to €600 is available, via the SEAI, to the purchasers of new and second-hand electric vehicles to support the installation of home chargers.

There are currently over 650 standard public charge points and 78 fast chargers as a part of the ESB eCars network. In addition there are public chargers provided by local authorities, retail outlets and private companies.

Figures provided to my Department by ESB eCars, indicates that there are currently 16 publically available standard charge points and four fast charge points on the eCars network in Co Clare.

Under the first call for applications from the Climate Action Fund, I approved funding of up to €10 million to support ESB eCars to develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network. The project includes the installation of 90 high-power chargers, upgrading 50 existing standard chargers to fast chargers and replacing over 250 existing standard chargers with next generation high reliability models.

At the end of 2018, there were over 7,600 electric vehicles on the road in Ireland – a doubling of the total from the previous year. It is estimated that the implementation of the ESB eCars project will provide the necessary fast charging infrastructure to support at least 40,000 electric vehicles.

This project successfully completed the assessment stage and the validation stage is now underway. On completion of this stage further detail on the project, including information in relation to the location of chargers and a timeline, will be set out.

Funding for public charging in local communities is available through the Better Energy Communities Scheme. The scheme, which is administered by the SEAI, supports community-based partnerships, many of which include local businesses and enterprises. In addition, my Department, in conjunction with the SEAI, is working on how best to support the provision of greater levels of on-street public charging.

RTÉ Services

161. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has discussed with RTÉ the need to address the concerns of viewers in Northern Ireland regarding restrictions placed on them for some services hosted by RTÉ; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14701/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): RTÉ is an independent national public service broadcaster whose remit, obligations, principal objects and associated powers are set out in the Broadcasting Act 2009.

Section 98 provides that RTÉ shall be independent in the pursuance of these objects, subject to the requirements of the Act. As such, I, as Minister, have no function in RTÉ's management

of its day to day affairs.

This is an operational matter for RTÉ and not one in which I have a role.

Transport Policy

162. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the planned Cork metropolitan area transport strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14532/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the draft Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy is currently being finalised by Cork City Council and Cork County Council, in partnership with the National Transport Authority. The strategy will provide a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services across the Cork Metropolitan Area, for the period up to 2040.

I understand that the draft Strategy will shortly be published for public consultation and I look forward to its finalisation and adoption by the relevant local authorities.

Road Traffic Legislation

163. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason persons under 25 years of age with a full licence cannot hire a car at an airport here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14540/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Car hire companies are private companies. The hiring of a car and the terms under which it is offered are commercial matters for such companies and are not within the scope of road traffic law or road safety. As such, do not fall within the remit of my Department.

Vehicle Registration

164. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 447 of 5 March 2019 and 201 and 267 of 6 March 2019, the details of the research he has requested the Road Safety Authority to carry out; the scope of this research; the timeline for the completion of the process; if the Road Safety Authority or his Department plans to engage in public consultation on the matter; if so, the format the public consultation will take; when it will be carried out; when he will be in a position to examine whether or not to amend existing legislation in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14558/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As previously advised to the House, I have asked the Road Safety Authority to research how so-called e-scooters, which are classified as mechanically propelled vehicles in the Road Traffic Acts, are dealt with in other countries, particularly other Member States.

I am keen to understand the road safety implications of the use of such vehicles on public roads, especially alongside larger vehicles including cars, HGVs and buses. It is also important assess their possible impact on the safety on other vulnerable road users, such as cyclists and pedestrians, whether on segregated or shared road space.

Any decisions I make in relation to e-scooters will depend on the outcome of the Road Safety Authority's research, which will be provided to me on completion. The Authority has competing demands on its time, and this project will take its place amongst other high-priority tasks to hand.

The methodology of the research is a matter for the Authority.

Rail Network Expansion

165. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans by Irish Rail to reopen and upgrade the Limerick to Foynes railway line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14594/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is probably aware that Shannon Foynes Port Company has been leading on work in relation to a potential reinstatement of the Limerick to Foynes rail line as part of the port's overall masterplan redevelopment.

The detailed design process and associated reports commissioned by Shannon Foynes Port Company were completed at the end of 2018.

The completion of this detailed design can now inform the commercial case for potential reinstatement and allows Shannon Foynes Port Company (in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann) commence a detailed market review of potential future users.

Railway Stations

166. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for Kilmallock railway station; if he will consider reopening the station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14595/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

Operational matters such as those described by the Deputy are a matter for Iarnród Éireann, in co-operation with the National Transport Authority as required.

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

Road Projects Status

167. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the western corridor has been reinstated in the TEN-T funding programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14602/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): At present, the Western Rail Corridor has not been re-instated on the Trans-European Transport Network. During negotiations on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council es-

tablishing the Connecting Europe Facility and Repealing Regulations (EU) No 1316/2013 and (EU) No 283/2014, the European Parliament proposed an amendment to the Annex. The Parliament's proposed amendment was to include the alignment of Derry - Sligo - Galway on the North Sea - Mediterranean Core Network Corridor. This amendment was deemed unacceptable by the European Commission on the grounds that alignments of the core network corridors can only include elements of the core TEN-T network, which as presently defined does not include any of Derry, Sligo or Galway. A number of similar proposed amendments by the Parliament concerning other Member States were also rejected on the same grounds.

In late February 2019, my Department received correspondence from European Commissioner for Transport, Violeta Bulc, which stated that the European Commission is considering advancing the review of the comprehensive TEN-T Network, which is due to take place no later than the end of 2023, as stipulated in the TEN-T Regulation. The Commission's review process will include: an evaluation study, to be launched this month and to conclude in spring 2020; a public stakeholder consultation process, opening this month and concluding in June 2019; and targeted consultation with Member States and a wide range of stakeholders, commencing in the second half of 2019. My Department intends to be fully engaged in all stages of this review process.

In addition to our participation in this process, my Department will be making a formal submission to the European Commission shortly, calling for an early review of the TEN-T Network as outlined in the Programme for Government, taking into account our National Development Plan, our National Planning Framework and the implications of Brexit.

The Western Rail Corridor was originally included under the Transport 21 Initiative and was to be developed in Three Phases. Phase 1 involved the reopening of the 36 mile stretch of railway line between Ennis and Athenry and this is part of the TEN-T comprehensive network. This line was opened to the public in March 2010. Exchequer funding of €106.5 million was approved for Phase 1.

The plan for Phase 2 involved the development of the line from Athenry to Tuam. However, this development together with a number of other transport projects was postponed in 2011 due to the economic and fiscal crisis. Phase 3 involved the development of the line from Tuam to Claremorris.

As the Deputy is aware, both the 'Programme for a Partnership Government' and the recently-published 'National Development Plan' commit to an independent review of the costings for a proposal to extend the existing Western Rail Corridor. A process for an independent financial and economic evaluation of WRC phase 2 has commenced and this will include broad consultation. Having conducted a procurement process for contracts of this nature, Irish Rail anticipate the appointed consultants will commence work at the end of the month. The study will take 5 to 6 months to complete and will include a comprehensive public consultation exercise.

Anti-Social Behaviour

168. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of anti-social behaviour incidents reported on public transport services in 2018, in tabular form. [14609/19]

169. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost arising from anti-social behaviour incidents that occurred on public transport services in 2018. [14610/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 169 together.

The safety and security of passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour, are matters for the transport operators, in conjunction with, as appropriate, An Garda Síochána.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann and to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), which has contracted Transdev to operate the Luas, for their direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Funding

170. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount paid to each sport organisation in each year since 2011; the level of oversight his Department has of same; if his officials have statutory authority to oversee the operations of sporting organisations; if this is solely an issue for Sport Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14682/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport in Ireland. This includes responsibility for the allocation of funding across its various programmes and governance oversight of the National Governing Bodies of Sport. Sport Ireland is also responsible for establishing the terms and conditions for its funding schemes and for ensuring that appropriate processes, procedures, controls and accounting mechanisms are in place in relation to that funding.

My officials have no statutory role in relation to the operations of sporting organisations.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Public Transport Initiatives

171. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of converting the public rail network fully to electricity in terms of the cost of the trains and the infrastructure required, respectively; the estimated cost of converting the entire State-owned bus fleet, that is, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus to fully electric by the cost of the buses and the infrastructure cost, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14684/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for ensuring the development and delivery of public transport infrastructure including the purchase of rail and bus fleet.

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

Child and Family Agency Data

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which the various files in respect of children at risk or otherwise are up to date in terms of follow-up and investigation; if an intervention is necessary to expedite the process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14656/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the statutory body with primary responsibility for child protection in Ireland. I can advise the Deputy that a significant action has been taken in relation to record keeping and file management within Tusla.

A National Child Care Information System, (NCCIS) has been developed as a technology solution to record all case history of every child, whether it be the subject of child protection or welfare referral to Tusla, to facilitate the integration and sharing of information on child protection and welfare between the relevant social work departments and to be a pathway to generate reports between local and national level all in real time.

The system allows social workers to record work and track the progress of the case of each child including any concerns that may arise. All case notes, attached documents, relevant information are held on NCCIS as the Master File and the system can be searched nationally by Tusla child protection and welfare staff, facilitating integration and sharing of information across the country. The system also allows social work team leaders and principal social workers to monitor case records.

Effective information governance and quality information are central to improving the quality of services provided to vulnerable children and families. The further roll out of the National Child Care NCCIS to all 17 Tusla areas this year, replacing paper-based systems and legacy electronic systems, will benefit Tusla. For the first time, Tusla social workers are working off an integrated national IT system for child protection and welfare services which facilitates the integration and sharing of information. The system replaces all previous methods of record keeping and my officials will be updated on the roll out, integration and further development of this system.

Children in Care

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which accommodation remains available in respect of children at risk, whether through fosterage or institutional care; the degree to which places remain readily available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14657/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection, and if necessary, to receive a child into the care of the State.

A range of care placements are available to meet the needs of children in care. Children and young people, depending on their identified needs, may be placed in foster care, either with relatives or general foster carers, in residential care, or special care. The majority of children are placed in long term stable placements and currently over 92% of children are placed in foster care.

A key part of the social worker role is to ensure the quality and safety of the child's placement, and to meet with the child on a one to one basis on all visits. There are safeguards surrounding each child's care placement, whether foster or residential care and all placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker.

There are regular area recruitment campaigns to meet the ongoing need to continue to recruit foster carers as carers retire from fostering. Fostering teams are responsible for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers. When an assessment is complete, a report is presented to the Foster Care Committee who decide whether or not to approve the applicant.

The recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers is part of Tusla's business plan. Tusla are particularly interested in recruiting foster carers with the skills required to look after children with complex needs, or from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The recently published HIQA overview inspection of Tusla foster care services found that a range of approaches were being employed locally to recruit a wider range of foster carers.

For children who cannot live either at home or in foster care, there are a number of types of residential care settings that may be appropriate, of which secure care is one type.

Youth Services

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains in contact with the various youth organisations with a view to the provision of necessary dialogue and an ability to respond to the various concerns of the organisations concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14658/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department maintains close contact with the national youth organisations and I and officials from my Department meet formally with these organisations twice a year to share knowledge and information on developments in the youth sector. A separate meeting is held on that day with national organisations in receipt of targeted youth funding to keep them updated on the ongoing work on the Value for Money and Policy Review reforms. The next meeting with the national youth organisations is scheduled for Thursday 11th April 2019.

Youth Officers of the Education and Training Boards provide an important support role to my Department in the co-ordination and administration of youth services at local level across the country. In order to keep my Department informed of their ongoing work, officials hold quarterly meetings attended by all Youth Officers from across the country. These meetings assist my Department in identifying service needs and emerging issues, particularly for vulnerable young people. The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department has set up a working group with five Youth Officers focused on strategic planning for future capital funding for the youth sector.

My Department holds scheduled meetings with Youth Work Ireland twice a year in relation to the important work of this organisation. There is also ongoing active engagement between my Department and the youth constituency of the of the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures Advisory Council. A small number of national youth organisation representatives are members of this Council.

Officials from the Youth Affairs Unit are engaged with programmes run by the National Youth Council of Ireland, such as the Youth Arts Strategic Review and Plan Advisory Steering Group and the National Health Programme Strategic Planning Working Group, both of which receive funding from my Department. Officials from my Department also meet with youth organisations on an individual basis when the need arises.

Child and Family Agency Services

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which a satisfactory conclusion is achieved and remains achievable in respect of children referred to the relevant section of her Department for attention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14659/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I understand the Deputy's question relates to referrals made to Tusla and how these are dealt with.

Tusla's response to all reports of child welfare and protection is detailed in the Tusla Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook, which is available on the Tusla website (www.tusla.ie). This covers both the immediate and initial areas of consideration and the various responses Tusla offer to children and families to ensure child protection and welfare concerns receive the right response at the right time for the right reasons.

A child welfare concern can be a problem experienced directly by a child, or the family of a child, that is seen to impact negatively on the child's health, development and welfare, and that may need assessment and support, but is not presenting as child protection.

A child protection concern arises when there are reasonable grounds for believing that a child may have been or is at risk of being physically, socially or emotionally abused or neglected.

The first consideration when receiving a referral is the immediate safety of the child. All referrals to the Social Work Service of Children and Family Services are screened on the day they are received irrespective of the source.

The Deputy will appreciate that the parents of children referred to Tusla often have serious difficulties themselves. These include problems with addiction, mental health and in many situations, violence in the home. Tusla is dependent, in the main, on services provided by other agencies to assist parents with their difficulties, in order for satisfactory conclusions to be reached regarding the children. Where parents are not in a position to provide safe and appropriate care for the children Tusla may apply to the courts for a care order or may enter into an agreement with the parent for the child to be received into voluntary care.

Child and Family Agency Services

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the structures available through her Department or bodies under the remit of her Department for children at risk or children that may not be brought to the attention of her Department with a view to achieving a compassionate and early response in respect of issues raised by such children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14660/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the statutory body with responsibility for child protection in Ireland. If I, or my officials, become aware of a situation in which a child is at risk, that risk is communicated to Tusla as a matter of urgency.

If a child appears to be at risk of harm or neglect, concerns should be reported to Tusla. Anyone can report a concern about a child to Tusla, and information on how to do so is available on the Tusla website. If a child is at immediate risk or in danger, the Gardaí should be alerted

without delay.

Tusla act immediately on notification of an immediate risk to a child. Children who are in a situation of immediate risk may initially be dealt with by An Garda Síochána or by Tusla, but in the main both agencies work together in such cases. Tusla, when alerted to a child at immediate risk, for instance a young child left alone at home or abandoned, will contact AGS if the child needs to be removed from that situation.

Gardaí have specific powers under Section 12 of the Child Care Act to remove a child from a situation of danger, and under Section 13 of to deliver that child into the custody of Tusla. Tusla will at that point carry out an assessment to determine the child's needs. This may in some cases include applying for an Emergency Care Order. In all cases, a plan will be put in place to ensure that the child is safe from harm.

Tusla are implementing a child protection methodology, Signs of Safety, which has at its core the involvement of the child in any assessment and decision making process.

In 2015, the Children First Act placed key elements of the Children First National Guidance on a statutory basis. The Act provides for a number of key child protection required measures including mandated reporting of child protection concerns to the Child and Family Agency by designated persons, compliance with best practice in child protection as set out in the Children First Guidance, and development of an organisation-specific Child Safeguarding Statement. Organisations providing service to children are obliged to identify areas of risk to children in their services and to set out mitigating factors. The Safeguarding Statement is to be made available publicly.

Child and Family Agency Data

177. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of child abuse cases brought to the attention of her Department or bodies under the remit of her Department in each of the past three years to date; the extent to which a full investigation and remedial action was achieved in respect of each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14661/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to advise the Deputy, that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is the statutory body with responsibility for child protection services in Ireland. Where I, or my officials, are made aware of child protection concerns, those concerns are referred to Tusla for their appropriate attention.

Table 1 outlines the number of referrals received by Tusla in relation to abuse, for the period of Q1 2016 until Q2 2018*.

Table 1 : Referrals relating to abuse, received by Tusla, Q1 2016-Q2 2018

Year	Referrals relating to abuse
2015	18,235
2016	19,087
2017	20,537
2018 (Q1 + Q2)*	11,806

It should be noted that these figures include situations where several referrals may be made

in relation to the same child.

Tusla child protection duty social work teams screen each referral to determine whether it meets the eligibility criteria for Tusla. All urgent cases are assigned immediately to a social worker.

After screening, a duty social worker carries out a preliminary enquiry, gathering information about the referral, to determine whether the report meets the threshold for harm for child protection. If the preliminary enquiry finds that the family would benefit from a welfare support and that a child protection response is not merited, the case could be diverted for a welfare response at this point. The preliminary enquiry also determines the priority status of each case.

Cases that are cannot be immediately allocated to a social worker are overseen by duty social work teams, and about one fifth of cases may be dealt with as “active on duty” where specific actions by the social work team are taking place, including information gathering and visits to see the child.

Tusla collate data on the number of referrals that proceed to preliminary enquiry and initial assessment. Table 2 lays out the number and percentage of referrals that had a preliminary enquiry and initial assessment.

Table 2: Number and percentage of referrals proceeding to preliminary enquiry and initial assessment

Year	Number of referrals that had a preliminary enquiry	Referrals requiring an initial assessment following a preliminary enquiry
2015	17,761 (97%)	9,956 (56%)
2016	18,753 (98%)	10,154 (54%)
2017	20,252 (99%)	9,110 (45%)
2018 (Q1 + Q2)**	11,764 (98%)	3,914 (33%)

*Referral data is reported quarterly in arrears.

Youth Services Provision

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she continues to interact with an organisation (details supplied) and associated bodies with a view to the provision of enhanced supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14662/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2019, €60.4m has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services, an increase of €1.5m on 2018. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. Funding to staff led youth services has generally been targeted at areas of disadvantage and not in proportion to the youth population of a given area. Funding allocations for 2019 are currently being finalised by the Youth Affairs Unit of my Department. Letters of allocation will issue shortly.

In 2018, an amount of €539,282 was allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services, which operates under Youth Work Ireland. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas.

Future development and investment in youth services will be informed by the mapping exercise completed in 2017, which mapped youth service provision across the State as well as an Area Profiling, Needs Assessment and Service Requirement tool currently being used by Kildare Wicklow ETB. This mapping and tool will assist the Department and the relevant ETB in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. My Department is committed to working with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board to identify need and explore ways to address this need where it emerges.

Departmental Budgets

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the budget of her Department to meet the likely challenges now and in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14663/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Revised Estimate for Public Services 2019 makes provision for a gross funding allocation of €1.478 billion for my Department which represents an increase of just under €107 million, or 8%, over the 2018 provision.

Approximately half of the Vote is targeted towards public services that protect our children and provide for their welfare. Another significant portion is to continue our journey to build an accessible, affordable and high quality Early Learning and Care system.

Just over half of my Department's funding is targeted at services within Tusla, the Child and Family Agency to protect our children and to provide for their welfare. Tusla will receive additional funding of €31 million in 2019 bringing its overall allocation to €785 million. In addition to this, I am making a further €3 million available to Tusla for specific developments in 2019 in relation to Family Resource Centres and Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services.

An additional €59 million is being provided for early learning and care programmes in 2019 which will bring early learning and care funding to just under €575 million. Children, parents and providers are all set to benefit. The increased resource allows me to continue to meet the growing demand for universal and targeted supports. It also enables me to widen the thresholds of the new National Childcare Scheme that I will introduce later this year

In addition to these areas, my Department's Estimate for 2019 contains provision for almost €63.6 million for Youth Services. These resources will fund youth services throughout the country, including services for those at risk of disadvantage and help address some of the remaining challenges faced by LGBTI+ young people.

Other key areas of expenditure include €26 million for the costs of Irish Youth Justice Service, including operational costs for the Oberstown Children Detention Centre; €19 million for the operational costs of my own Department; €9.5 million for Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes (which now includes the Area Based Childhood Programme and the PPFs

Programme); €7 million for the Intervention Programme for Children and Young People; €5 million for the Adoption Authority of Ireland; €4 million for the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes; and just under €3 million for the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

I am satisfied that the significant additional resources secured for 2019 will enable my Department and its agencies build on the good work achieved to date. The extra funding continues this Government's commitment to provide high quality services for children and young people.

Child and Family Agency Services

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which her Department and bodies under the remit of her Department have the ability to respond rapidly to issues brought to their attention, with particular reference to children at risk in all areas nationally; if the experience of the past two years is supportive in this context; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14664/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the statutory body with responsibility for child protection in Ireland. If I, or my officials, become aware of a situation in which a child is at risk, this information is communicated to Tusla as a matter of urgency.

If a child appears to be at risk of harm or neglect, concerns should be reported to Tusla. Anyone can report a concern about a child to Tusla, and information on how to do so is available on the Tusla website. If a child is at immediate risk or in danger, the Gardaí should be alerted without delay.

Tusla act immediately on notification of an immediate risk to a child. Tusla, when alerted to a child at immediate risk, for instance a young child left alone at home or abandoned, will contact AGS if the child needs to be removed from that situation.

Gardaí have specific powers under Section 12 of the Child Care Act to remove a child from a situation of danger, and under Section 13 of to deliver that child into the custody of Tusla. Tusla will at that point carry out an assessment to determine the child's needs. This may in some cases include applying for an Emergency Care Order. In all cases, a plan will be put in place to ensure that the child is safe from harm.

All foster care services and statutory residential centres are subject to inspection by the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA). Private and voluntary residential centres are inspected by Tusla against National Standards. Inspection reports of children's residential centres, fostering services and child protection services are also reviewed and analysed by my officials. The overview of these reports provides me with a level of assurance on the overall capacity of Tusla to identify and provide services to families and children who are at risk.

Tusla also has a dedicated Quality Assurance Team. This team produces monthly, quarterly and annual reports in respect of Tusla's functions, including detailed reporting on child safety and protection services. Tusla provides monthly, quarterly and annual information on children in care, their placement type, care status and allocation of social workers. Within my Department there is a Unit which scrutinises these reports and briefs me and senior officials on issues of note. The reports provide statistical evidence of improvements to child welfare and protection services and highlights challenges and areas where further improvement is required, such as the recruitment of additional social workers.

Officials from my Department meet Tusla management on a regular basis to review the level of service provision, including areas in need of improvement.

Children in Care

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in care; if in institutional or foster care, the number due for transition to alternative status on age grounds; the provisions in place to facilitate easy, safe and compassionate transition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14665/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can advise the Deputy that, at the end of December 2018, the most recent date for which information is available, there were 6,026 children in the care of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Since 1 September 2017 Tusla has been required by law to satisfy itself as to each eligible child or young person's need for aftercare assistance and to prepare a plan that identifies those needs for aftercare supports. An eligible child is defined as a child aged 16 years or over who has spent at least 12 months in the care of the State between the ages of 13 and 18. An eligible adult is defined as a person aged 18, 19 or 20 (inclusive) who was in the care of the State for at least 12 months between the ages of 13 and 18.

When confirmed eligible, an assessment of need will be undertaken jointly by the child's social worker and after care service within four months, or six months prior to their 18th birthday. The aftercare plan will be determined by each young person's assessment of need.

The assessment of need determines the level of support which the young person will require as part of an aftercare plan. It encompasses all categories of need including, at a minimum:

- Education
- Financing and budgeting matters
- Training and employment
- Health and wellbeing
- Personal and social development
- Accommodation.
- Family/emotional support

The assessment of need will determine whether the young person requires an allocated aftercare worker.

Following the assessment of need Tusla will prepare an aftercare plan, if required. An aftercare plan is a written plan that is prepared by the aftercare worker and the young person in conjunction with their social worker and other key people in their lives. These plans can be reviewed at the request of the young person or a person acting on their behalf.

Tusla reports in Q3 2018 that almost half of young people, aged 18 to 22, remained living with their former foster carers. This indicates a strong support in the transition for these young people.

Aftercare services provided by Tusla include:

- An allocated aftercare worker from the age of 17 years up to the age of 21 years and up to 23 years if in education/ training (depending on the assessment of need)

- A drop-in service - which will provide advice guidance, support and signposting when required to all young people eligible for aftercare provision.

- Financial support based on a financial needs assessment and eligibility for those in education or accredited training up to the age of 21 years, or until completion of their course of education up to the age of 23 years.

- Tusla provide a young person in aftercare in education or training with an allowance of €300 per week.

Other financial benefits

- Young people in aftercare are also eligible for the higher SUSI grant. Unemployed young people in aftercare are eligible for the over 25 year old rate of unemployment benefit.

Comhairle na Tuaithe

182. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the reason Comhairle na Tuaithe has not met since the middle of 2018; his plans to reconvene same; and his views on the role of the advisory body. [14552/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department was established on 19th July 2017. Since then, I met with the members of Comhairle na Tuaithe on 13th February 2018, and Comhairle met on two further occasions, 16th May 2018 and 5th July 2018.

The group was also due to meet on the 16th October 2018. However, due to members' diary commitments, this meeting had to be postponed.

My meeting with Comhairle on 13th February was to hear directly from the members their views on the recommendations of the independent review of Comhairle and the Countryside Recreation Strategy which was finalised in March 2016. I also heard the members' views on the future direction of Comhairle and on the development of the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland generally. That meeting was very constructive in helping me to formulate proposals for the future development of the sector.

My officials presented initial proposals to the Comhairle members at the meeting of 16th May 2018 and, through my officials, I received detailed feedback from the members on those proposals. I have considered that feedback in the context of a wider focus on the development of the rural recreation sector and I will make a final decision regarding the future structure, operation and mandate of Comhairle na Tuaithe shortly.

I anticipate that my officials will arrange a further of meeting of Comhairle na Tuaithe in the coming weeks to outline my decision.

Departmental Schemes

183. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the towns selected and the number of units in each town for the pilot scheme to encourage per-

sons to return to living in town centres launched in October 2018. [14672/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Early last year, I established a Steering Group to examine the introduction of a pilot scheme to encourage people to return to living in town centres.

A lot of consideration was given by the Group to the best approach to developing a model which would deliver on the objective of increasing town centre living.

The Steering Group noted that some schemes which have specifically attempted to focus on the renovation of vacant properties have had a disappointing take-up. It is clear that if we are to successfully encourage people to return to living in town centres, an integrated solution involving all aspects of town living and supporting infrastructure needs to be considered.

The Steering Group therefore agreed that a pilot scheme, which takes a holistic approach to town centre living, should be developed in a small number of towns initially, with a view to a wider roll-out over time. This approach goes beyond simply identifying specific property units, and will allow a number of Local Authorities to develop and test different models which they feel are appropriate to a number of selected towns of different sizes and in different locations.

The learnings from this approach will help to provide an indication as to what might work well for similar types of town on a wider scale.

Six rural towns were invited to participate in the initial pilot scheme which was launched in October 2018. These are:

1. Boyle, Co. Roscommon
2. Callan, Co. Kilkenny
3. Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo
4. Banagher, Co. Offaly
5. Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan
6. Cappoquin, Co. Waterford.

My Department has made funding of up to €100,000 available to each participating Local Authority of which €75,000 has been paid to date. The funding will assist the Local Authorities to engage with their communities and local businesses, and arrive at practical solutions that can be delivered to achieve the objective of increasing the number of people living in our rural towns.

Representatives from each of the six Local Authorities involved in the pilot have had a number of meetings with my Department with a view to developing the detailed schemes. It is envisaged that the solutions identified through the six pilot towns could lead to the development of more substantive proposals for funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in due course.

Leader Programmes Data

184. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated to each LAG under the 2014 to 2020 Leader programme; the amount expended under the 2014 to 2020 Leader programme in each LAG based on the latest data; the

spend as a percentage of the amount allocated to each LAG to date based on latest data; the amount expended to date on project costs by each LAG based on the latest data in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14708/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme with a total budget of €250 million over the period 2014-2020. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. This core funding is allocated to the LAGs for the full period of the programme.

The remaining €30 million is available for thematic schemes to be delivered at a national level and is allocated as projects are approved.

Table 1 below provides details of:

- The core allocations to the each of the LAGs under the LEADER 2014-2020 programme;
- The total expenditure to date by LAG which includes project costs, the administration costs of the LAGs and the cost associated with their engagement with promoters to develop projects;
- The total expenditure to date expressed as a percentage of the LAGs' allocation; and,
- The total expenditure to date incurred in respect of projects.

The figures do not include expenditure under national-level thematic schemes which operate on a competitive bid basis.

There was a significant increase in both project approvals and expenditure in 2018. I am confident that the progress now being made by the LAGs in approving projects, along with the administrative improvements introduced by my Department, will result in a continued increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme during 2019.

Table 1: LEADER expenditure data as of 24th March 2019

Local Action Group	Total Allocation	Total Spend	% of Allocation Spent	Project Spend
Carlow	€6,416,803	€1,461,568	23%	€871,066
Cavan	€8,522,286	€1,337,606	16%	€630,488
Clare	€8,920,225	€2,032,250	23%	€613,914
Cork North	€5,091,846	€1,429,607	28%	€514,484
Cork South	€3,831,303	€834,268	22%	€213,124
Cork West	€5,015,674	€1,095,573	22%	€196,938
Donegal	€12,913,878	€3,728,230	29%	€2,122,541
Dublin Rural	€6,370,438	€1,165,923	18%	€401,712
Galway East	€7,655,851	€1,088,380	14%	€38,024
Galway West	€4,540,033	€633,852	14%	€143,852
Kerry	€10,219,868	€2,756,655	27%	€1,127,766
Kildare	€5,261,600	€656,202	12%	€110,037
Kilkenny	€7,791,573	€1,981,479	25%	€674,184
Laois	€7,124,587	€1,421,471	20%	€699,089
Leitrim	€5,998,475	€1,111,097	19%	€433,716

Local Action Group	Total Allocation	Total Spend	% of Allocation Spent	Project Spend
Limerick	€9,276,594	€2,307,910	25%	€796,036
Longford	€7,597,623	€856,749	11%	€111,398
Louth	€6,101,862	€1,129,107	19%	€389,346
Mayo	€11,121,432	€2,380,966	21%	€692,008
Meath	€6,903,124	€1,007,676	15%	€113,876
Monaghan	€7,592,720	€1,196,205	16%	€516,742
Offaly	€8,036,764	€2,010,154	25%	€1,050,077
Roscommon	€8,852,659	€1,209,569	14%	€325,312
Sligo	€7,655,648	€1,449,975	19%	€791,919
Tipperary	€10,103,443	€1,796,796	18%	€649,777
Waterford	€7,522,796	€2,507,106	33%	€1,598,618
Westmeath	€7,384,206	€1,163,426	16%	€348,887
Wexford	€9,840,141	€1,439,575	15%	€576,777
Wicklow	€6,336,549	€1,006,628	16%	€211,000
Grand Total	€220,000,000	€44,196,002	20%	€16,962,709

Leader Programmes Data

185. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of projects approved to date by each LAG under the 2014 to 2020 Leader programme in tabular form. [14709/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme which has a total budget of €250 million over the period to 2020. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to each of the individual Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver LEADER. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes to be delivered at a national level and is allocated as projects are approved.

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the number of projects approved by each Local Action Group to date.

The level of project activity under the LEADER programme has increased significantly since the start of 2018, and 1,784 projects have now been approved for funding of over €61 million. A further 389 project applications, requesting an additional €23.5 million, are at various stages in the approval process.

Table 1: Total LEADER Approvals by LAG as of 24th March 2019

Local Action Group	No. of Projects Approved
Carlow	24
Cavan	47
Clare	115
Cork North	46
Cork South	18
Cork West	24

Local Action Group	No. of Projects Approved
Donegal	104
Dublin Rural	46
Galway East	41
Galway West	27
Kerry	190
Kildare	21
Kilkenny	54
Laois	57
Leitrim	54
Limerick	72
Longford	44
Louth	57
Mayo	103
Meath	34
Monaghan	38
Offaly	111
Roscommon	39
Sligo	81
Tipperary	112
Waterford	45
Westmeath	49
Wexford	95
Wicklow	36
Grand Total	1,784

CLÁR Programme

186. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated to each local authority under the CLÁR programme in 2017 and 2018; the amount paid to each local authority to date based on the latest information for each allocation in question in tabular form; the amount paid out to date as a percentage of the amount allocated to each local authority in each such year based on the latest data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14710/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As the Deputy will be aware, CLÁR is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and focuses on areas which have suffered the greatest levels of population decline.

The table below details the amount of funding allocated and paid to each Local Authority to date under the CLÁR Scheme in the years 2017 and 2018, and the payments expressed as a percentage of the allocations.

It should be noted that while Local Authorities were the applicants under certain measures funded under the CLÁR programme, other measures were targeted at community-based groups, such as first responders. Full details of the funding allocated to approved projects in each county are available on my Department's website at www.drzd.gov.ie/clar/.

County	Amount Allocated CLÁR 2017	Total CLÁR 2017 Paid to Date	% of 2017 Allocation Paid to Date	Amount Allocated CLÁR 2018	Total CLÁR 2018 Paid to Date	% of 2018 Allocation Paid to Date
Carlow	€178,760	€156,445	87.52%	€337,707.00	€132,490	39.23%
Cavan	€288,731	€288,469	99.91%	€551,489.00	€508,653	92.23%
Clare	€323,132	€323,132	100.00%	€371,598.43	€253,425	68.20%
Cork	€195,600	€175,000	89.47%	€611,191.00	€394,315	64.52%
Donegal	€70,590	€70,590	100.00%	€461,841.00	€219,060	47.43%
Galway	€519,792	€519,493	99.94%	€603,614.57	€100,000	16.57%
Kerry	€134,188	€134,188	100.00%	€431,677.07	€0	0.00%
Kilkenny	€161,932	€107,030	66.10%	€303,464.00	€281,900	92.89%
Laois	€51,395	€51,396	100.00%	€508,313.00	€417,306	82.10%
Leitrim	€457,552	€457,553	100.00%	€380,236.00	€76,033	20.00%
Limerick	€161,730	€160,925	99.50%	€343,840.00	€293,540	85.37%
Longford	€238,417	€237,067	99.43%	€414,181.00	€95,120	22.97%
Louth	€245,869	€155,370	63.19%	€266,207.00	€252,887	95.00%
Mayo	€628,230	€596,637	94.97%	€624,166.50	€399,305	63.97%
Meath	€104,000	€104,000	100.00%	€226,440.00	€81,069	35.80%
Monaghan	€536,784	€528,987	98.55%	€503,164.00	€222,182	44.16%
Offaly	€186,954	€185,665	99.31%	€259,639.00	€259,638	100.00%
Roscommon	€320,555	€311,516	97.18%	€312,465.00	€292,447	93.59%
Sligo	€274,650	€271,746	98.94%	€376,895.00	€353,820	93.88%
Tipperary	€191,258	€187,979	98.29%	€361,355.00	€293,317	81.17%
Waterford	€313,365	€313,365	100.00%	€528,840.00	€491,641	92.97%
Westmeath	€77,096	€77,096	100.00%	€324,867.00	€251,825	77.52%
Wicklow	€33,300	€6,300	18.92%	€130,590	€42,795	32.77%
TOTAL	€5,693,880	€5,419,949	95%	€9,233,780.57	€5,712,765.92	61.87%

CLÁR Programme

187. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of projects approved under CLÁR measures 1, 2, 3 and 4 since the programme was re-established on an annual basis by county; the number of projects that were not approved by county; the funding allocated for approved projects in each county under the CLÁR programme annually; and the final amount expended on approved projects annually to date in each county under CLÁR in tabular form. [14711/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As the Deputy will be aware, CLÁR is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and focuses on areas which have suffered the greatest levels of population decline.

The programme was effectively closed for new applications in 2010. However, I re-launched CLÁR in 2016, and, since then, more than 1,200 projects have benefitted from funding of €25 million under the programme. The types of projects which have been funded include safety measures around schools and other community facilities, multi-use play areas, supports for voluntary first-response emergency organisations, targeted community infrastructure needs and funding for vehicles to transport people with mobility issues and to cancer care centres.

The table below summarises the number of projects approved, the number of unsuccessful projects, and the amounts paid out under the programme in each calendar year from 2016 to 2019, on a county basis in the main. It should also be noted that awards of funding under the

programme were also made to entities other than Local Authorities that operate across County boundaries, and relevant details relating to these projects are given under the term “National/Regional Organisations”.

Details of the funding allocated to all approved projects since 2016 in each county are available on my Department’s website at www.drcd.gov.ie/clar/.

County	No. of projects approved	No. of unsuccessful projects	Amount Paid	Amount Paid	Amount Paid	Amount Paid
	2016-2018	2016-2018	2016	2017	2018	2019
Carlow	33	3	€80,000	€97,864.20	€58,579.89	€132,489.54
Cavan	60	20	€498,184	€295,030.10	€296,353.51	€227,189.15
Clare	52	18	€284,000	€189,070.76	€468,638.17	€101,344.81
Cork	67	71	€562,222	€61,582.31	€555,606.17	€99,168.24
Donegal	106	73	€878,632	€228,864.20	€236,711.00	€0.00
Galway	92	24	€392,000	€609,845.82	€346,621.50	€100,000.00
Kerry	73	116	€744,964	€143,067.93	€384,759.13	€60,529.00
Kilkenny	24	12	€223,000	€107,030.00	€212,465.00	€69,435.00
Laois	43	17	€148,900	€39,208.00	€12,187.00	€417,306.49
Leitrim	53	17	€274,800	€447,600.50	€189,302.54	€78,079.61
Limerick	53	30	€235,000	€179,727.77	€137,660.00	€156,888.85
Longford	44	19	€237,560	€141,896.65	€227,931.00	€49,755.00
Louth	28	17	€173,520	€31,379.00	€188,481.96	€109,051.32
Mayo	87	60	€976,869	€664,832.73	€628,607.36	€4,834.96
Meath	22	7	€127,600	€104,000.00	€81,069.00	€0.00
Monaghan	63	27	€356,440	€303,236.55	€368,862.20	€136,607.24
Offaly	36	21	€123,398	€185,664.80	€259,638.23	€0.00
Roscommon	57	23	€406,497	€260,177.48	€337,711.11	€23,461.20
Sligo	73	21	€598,400	€299,712.60	€173,488.00	€228,931.79
Tipperary	78	19	€371,000	€181,283.71	€357,111.69	€159,682.62
Waterford	48	21	€261,600	€329,518.00	€286,925.00	€204,715.76
Westmeath	37	27	€214,280	€57,549.00	€203,089.30	€96,083.50
Wicklow	15	20	€70,000	€98,586.43	€28,395.00	€20,700.00
National/ Regional Or- ganisations	27	16			€295,524.60	€116,939.34
Totals	1,271	699	€8,238,866	€5,056,728.54	€6,861,229.71	€2,593,193.42

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

188. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated to each local authority under the local improvement scheme in 2018; the amount paid to each local authority to date based on the latest information in tabular form; the amount paid out to date as a percentage of the amount allocated to each local authority in each such year based on the latest data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14712/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As the Deputy will be aware, there was no dedicated funding for the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) or a number of years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country.

I reintroduced the LIS in September 2017 and allocated a total of €17.5 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads in that year.

In 2018, I allocated over €20 million for LIS roads in two phases. To date over €17 million of this allocation has been paid to the Local Authorities.

The table below details the allocations and payments to date in respect of the 2018 LIS. The table also includes the percentage of each Local Authority's allocation that has been paid to date. Final payments are made only on full completion of projects.

LIS 2018

County	LIS 2018 Allocation	2018 Allocation Paid to Date	2018 Allocation Percentage Paid to Date
Carlow	€528,279	€410,597	77.72%
Cavan	€636,680	€500,008	78.53%
Clare	€1,038,844	€1,023,900	98.56%
Cork	€1,700,000	€1,344,107	79.07%
Donegal	€1,792,516	€1,360,232	75.88%
Galway	€1,942,000	€1,542,000	79.40%
Kerry	€1,209,990	€1,011,739	83.62%
Kildare	€329,591	€297,754	90.34%
Kilkenny	€679,683	€533,810	78.54%
Laois	€568,255	€440,352	77.49%
Leitrim	€550,120	€430,072	78.18%
Limerick	€684,349	€575,009	84.02%
Longford	€472,217	€382,350	80.97%
Louth	€250,000	€249,984	99.99%
Mayo	€1,843,235	€1,447,941	78.55%
Meath	€773,404	€607,642	78.57%
Monaghan	€540,841	€540,841	100.00%
Offaly	€644,654	€502,930	78.02%
Roscommon	€820,968	€639,662	77.92%
Sligo	€606,870	€476,922	78.59%
Tipperary	€794,400	€713,368	89.80%
Waterford	€607,047	€477,028	78.58%
Westmeath	€607,224	€477,134	78.58%
Wexford	€511,410	€417,211	81.58%
Wicklow	€668,135	€668,135	100.00%
TOTAL	€20,800,712	€17,070,730	82.07%

Local Improvement Scheme Data

189. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of rural roads that have received funding under the LIS in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by local authority in tabular form; the projected number of road projects to be completed in 2019; the number of projects approved under the LIS since re-established on an annual basis by county; and the number of projects that were not approved by county. [14713/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or

non-public roads in rural areas. The scheme is funded by my Department and is administered through the Local Authorities.

As the Deputy may be aware, there was no dedicated funding for this scheme for a number of years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country.

I reintroduced the LIS in September 2017 and allocated a total of €17.5 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads in that year. In 2018, I allocated over €20 million for LIS roads in two phases.

Local Authorities themselves determine which roads they wish to prioritise from the funding allocated to them under LIS, and to ensure that all roads meet with the scheme criteria. Approval of LIS projects, or otherwise, is therefore entirely a matter for the relevant Local Authority.

Based on the most up to date information available to my Department, approximately 1,254 roads have been completed under the 2017 and 2018 schemes. Local Authorities have until the 31st of March this year to complete works on more than 350 roads under Phase 2 of the 2018 scheme. The breakdown of these figures on a county-by-county basis is provided on the table below.

On 7th February 2019, I announced a sum of €10 million for LIS 2019. Allocations on a county by county basis can be found on my Department's website at <https://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/local-improvement-scheme/>

The Local Authorities have been asked to submit their final lists of roads for 2019 on or before 1st April 2019.

LIS roads 2017 and 2018 by county

County	2017 Roads Completed	2018 LIS Roads Completed	2018 Roads for Completion by 31 March
Carlow	20	14	13
Cavan	10	6	6
Clare	28	30	0
Cork	21	42	15
Donegal	164	56	51
Galway	57	30	39
Kerry	41	36	25
Kildare	0	8	4
Kilkenny	16	8	7
Laois*	21	10	TBC
Leitrim	18	12	10
Limerick	18	10	12
Longford	18	13	12
Louth	8	6	0
Mayo	89	77	62
Meath	22	8	13
Monaghan	21	28	0
Offaly	20	13	18

County	2017 Roads Completed	2018 LIS Roads Completed	2018 Roads for Completion by 31 March
Roscommon	41	40	36
Sligo	16	10	12
Tipperary*	9	24	TBC
Waterford	17	12	7
Westmeath	23	9	13
Wexford	18	14	3
Wicklow	7	15	0
TOTAL	723	531	358

*Laois and Tipperary Local Authorities have to confirmed their final lists of roads for completion under Phase 2 of the 2018 scheme.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

190. **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. [14714/19]

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. Last month 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 finalising milestones and schedules with the successful lead applicants as part of due diligence and contractual arrangements. Payment dates are also being 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
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

County	Lead Applicant	Location	Total RRDF Funding
Clare	Clare County Council	Ennistymon	€1,023,300
Clare; Donegal; Galway; Kerry; Mayo; Wicklow	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gael- tacht	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	Údarás 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
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 Coun- cil	Thomastown	€2,080,486
Kilkenny	Kilkenny County Coun- cil	Callan Town	€561,750
Laois	Office of Public Works	Emo, Emo Court	€1,200,000
Limerick	Limerick City and County Council	Abbeyfeale, Newcas- tlewest, 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 Coun- cil	Edgeworthstown	€1,269,019
Longford	Longford County Coun- cil	Granard	€2,872,434
Louth	Louth County Council	Ardee Castle	€2,147,000
Mayo	Mayo County Council	Ballinrobe	€825,000
Mayo	Sligo LEADER Partner- ship 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	Castlerea	€1,545,000
Sligo	Sligo County Council	Yeats Trail	€500,000
Sligo	Sligo County Council	Strandhill	€615,752

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County	Lead Applicant	Location	Total RRDF Funding
Tipperary	Tipperary County Council	Tipperary Town	€600,000
Wexford	TEAGASC	Johnstown Castle	€658,696

Table 3. List of Successful Category 2 Projects

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/Co-laiste Iosagain	€180,000
Cork	Avondhu Blackwater partnership CLG	Rathormac	€122,025
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

County	Lead Applicant	Location	RRDF Funding
Kerry	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Gaeltacht Uibh Rathaigh/Iveragh Taskforce	€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

County	Lead Applicant	Location	RRDF Funding
Wexford	Wexford County Council	Gorey	€95,224
Wexford	Wexford County Council	Ferrycarraig and the Hook Peninsula	€1,087,340
Wexford	Wexford County Council	New Ross	€328,407
Wexford	Wexford County Council	Gorey	€429,145

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

191. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated to each local authority under the town and village renewal scheme in 2017 and 2018; the amount paid to each local authority to date based on the latest information for each allocation in question in tabular form; the amount paid as a percentage to date out of the amount allocated to each local authority in each such year based on the latest data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14715/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Town and Village Renewal Scheme forms an important part of the Action Plan for Rural Development and the Government's Project Ireland 2040 Programme for Rural Regeneration. It has the potential to stimulate economic recovery and job creation in towns and villages across rural Ireland.

The tables below detail the funding allocated to each Local Authority under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in 2017 and 2018 and the amount paid to date to each Local Authority by my Department.

It should be noted that projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme can typically take 12 to 18 months to complete. The allocations under the 2018 scheme were announced on 5 October 2018 and are expected to drawn down funding up to March 2020. Payments are only made when Local Authorities meet a certain threshold of expenditure on projects. Final payments are made on full completion of the project.

Table 1 - 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme

County	Funding allocated	2017 allocation paid to date	Amount paid as % of allocation
Carlow	€884,488	€842,668	95%
Cavan	€929,688	€555,062	60%
Clare	€944,000	€540,000	57%
Cork	€1,347,827	€960,466	71%
Donegal	€1,159,000	€399,796	34%
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	€80,000	€80,000	100%
Fingal	€252,000	€224,211	89%
Galway	€1,004,231	€948,231	94%
Kerry	€868,472	€375,925	43%
Kildare	€416,403	€287,204	69%

County	Funding allocated	2017 allocation paid to date	Amount paid as % of allocation
Kilkenny	€873,364	€387,307	44%
Laois	€983,407	€764,182	78%
Leitrim	€1,098,538	€711,639	65%
Limerick	€1,087,943	€850,872	78%
Longford	€637,400	€447,400	70%
Louth	€775,726	€697,154	90%
Mayo	€1,348,178	€920,089	68%
Meath	€901,724	€664,874	74%
Monaghan	€580,000	€420,000	72%
Offaly	€300,000	€200,000	67%
Roscommon	€575,508	€420,300	73%
Sligo	€1,063,968	€830,000	78%
South Dublin	€20,000	€20,000	100%
Tipperary	€857,384	€649,622	76%
Waterford	€625,800	€546,300	87%
Westmeath	€596,000	€356,213	60%
Wexford	€1,157,525	€624,077	54%
Wicklow	€262,828	€118,827	45%
Total	€21,631,402	€14,842,425	69%

Table 2 - 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme

County	Funding allocated	2018 allocation paid to date	Amount paid as % of allocation
Carlow	€786,118	0	0%
Cavan	€530,000	0	0%
Clare	€581,000	0	0%
Cork	€1,001,800	0	0%
Donegal	€1,100,000	0	0%
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	€100,000	0	0%
Fingal	€597,960	0	0%
Galway	€900,000	0	0%
Kerry	€476,000	0	0%
Kildare	€520,000	0	0%
Kilkenny	€652,280	0	0%
Laois	€872,094	0	0%
Leitrim	€737,520	0	0%
Limerick	€963,918	0	0%
Longford	€593,856	0	0%
Louth	€892,157	0	0%
Mayo	€1,183,615	0	0%
Meath	€670,834	0	0%

County	Funding allocated	2018 allocation paid to date	Amount paid as % of allocation
Monaghan	€868,500	0	0%
Offaly	€1,300,000	0	0%
Roscommon	€880,000	€50,000	6%
Sligo	€1,138,400	0	0%
Tipperary	€913,266	0	0%
Waterford	€756,000	0	0%
Westmeath	€452,000	0	0%
Wexford	€1,334,798	0	0%
Wicklow	€518,004	0	0%
Total	€21,320,121	€50,000.00	

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

192. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of projects approved under the town and village renewal scheme since established on an annual basis by county; and the number of projects that were not approved by county in tabular form. [14716/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was introduced in the second half of 2016 and, to date, almost €53 million has been approved under the scheme for more than 670 projects across the country.

The table below details the number of applications approved and the number not approved under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, broken down by county.

In 2016, Local Authorities were each allocated a similar amount of funding and were invited to submit up to 8 proposals for approval. All applications received in 2016 were approved for funding.

In 2017, Local Authorities were invited to submit up to 15 applications to my Department for consideration on a competitive basis, and in 2018 up to 12 applications were invited for consideration on a competitive basis.

The reasons why some applications were not approved include the overall level of funding available and the quality of the proposals received.

I intend to launch the 2019 Town and Village Renewal Scheme shortly.

County	T&V 2016 Approved	T&V 2017 Approved	T&V 2017 Not Approved	T&V 2018 Approved	T&V 2018 Not Approved
Carlow	7	11	1	9	3
Cavan	7	13	0	7	5
Clare	4	9	0	4	2
Cork	8	15	0	10	2
Donegal	5	13	2	11	1
Dublin	7	6	3	8	3

County	T&V 2016 Approved	T&V 2017 Approved	T&V 2017 Not Ap- proved	T&V 2018 Approved	T&V 2018 Not Ap- proved
Galway	8	13	2	8	4
Kerry	6	13	2	6	6
Kildare	6	5	5	8	0
Kilkenny	4	11	1	5	2
Laois	7	12	1	11	1
Leitrim	8	12	0	9	3
Limerick	8	13	2	9	3
Longford	8	10	2	8	4
Louth	8	12	0	12	0
Mayo	4	14	1	11	1
Meath	8	15	0	8	4
Monaghan	8	10	1	9	2
Offaly	4	3	0	12	0
Roscommon	8	7	0	7	2
Sligo	4	14	1	11	1
Tipperary	5	13	2	8	4
Waterford	6	9	0	9	1
Westmeath	7	10	2	5	7
Wexford	8	14	1	12	0
Wicklow	7	4	3	7	5
Total	170	281	32	224	66

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

193. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications permissible by county and local authority for schemes (details supplied) in 2019 in tabular form. [14717/19]

194. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated by current and capital expenditure in 2019 to schemes (details supplied); and the amount expended in each such scheme to date in tabular form. [14718/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 194 together.

The question refers to the 2019 figures for a number of schemes funded by my Department. The information requested on these schemes is provided in the table below:

Questions - Written Answers

Scheme/Programme	Number of applications permissible by county and local authority for schemes	Amount allocated by current expenditure in 2019 to schemes	Amount allocated by capital expenditure in 2019 to schemes	Amount expended in each such scheme in 2019.
Town and Village Renewal Scheme	Detail not yet available - 2019 scheme not yet launched.	Nil	€15M	€1.3M
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme	Detail not yet available - 2019 scheme not yet launched.	Nil	€10M	Nil
Walks Scheme	Walks Scheme is not open to Local Authority applications.	€4M	Nil	€467,625
CLÁR Programme	LA can submit up to 15 applications under Measures 1 & 2 and there is no limit to the number of applications they can submit for Measure 3c.	Nil	€5M	Nil
Local Improvement Scheme	No particular number of roads as long as the Local Authorities work within their funding allocation and within the scheme criteria.	Nil	€10M	Nil
Community Enhancement Programme The RAPID and Communities Facilities Schemes are no longer available; the Community Enhancement Programme replaced these two earlier schemes.	No limit to number of applications.	Nil	€4.5M	Nil

Walks Scheme

195. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the current and capital funding allocated to the walks scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the allocation for 2019, in tabular form; the amount expended on the scheme in each such year; the number of trails per county covered by the scheme; and the number of participating landowners in each such year of the scheme. [14719/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Walks Scheme is an innovative response to facilitating the development and maintenance of some of Ireland's key walking trails. The scheme provides modest payments to landowners to maintain these trails, based on agreed individual work programmes.

A current allocation of €2 million per annum was provided for the scheme each year from 2016 to 2018 inclusive to cover these payments.

The Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to increase the number of walks covered by the scheme. In line with this commitment, funding for the scheme was doubled in Budget 2019 - from €2 million to €4 million - to allow this expansion to proceed.

My Department has recently advertised for expressions of interest from Local Development Companies and Local Authorities for walks that might be considered for inclusion in the expanded scheme. My Department will consider these Expressions of Interest under a number of criteria, including the strategic importance of the trail, landowner agreement to participate, state of readiness, etc.

In addition to the core €2 million funding, there are other costs associated with the scheme, including salary costs for Rural Recreation Officers who help to implement the scheme at local level, and small capital costs.

Table 1 below outlines the expenditure on the Walks Scheme from 2016 to 2019. Payments to landowners are made twice yearly - mid-year and at the end of the year. Hence, no payments have yet been made in 2019.

Table 2 below outlines the number of walks and the number of participants per county on the Walks Scheme from 2016 to 2018. It should be noted that the Scheme currently operates on 39 walks in total. However, a small number of the walks included in the scheme cut across county and administrative boundaries, and are therefore recorded under all relevant county headings in the table below. There is no duplication in the number of participants covered by the scheme.

Table 1 - Walks Scheme Expenditure 2016- 2019

Year	Current Expenditure	Capital Expenditure	Total Expenditure
2016	€2,305,615	€101,500	€2,407,115
2017	€2,416,501	€150,100	€2,566,601
2018	€2,526,046	€130,100	€2,656,146
2019	€0	€0	€0

Table 2 - No. of walks and participants by county

COUNTY	Scheme Walks per County	Participants 2016	Participants 2017	Participants 2018
CLARE	4	96	87	92
CORK	5	628	629	641
DONEGAL	2	79	79	79
GALWAY	2	52	54	54
KERRY	4	291	292	297
KILKENNY	3	29	29	29
LAOIS	1	13	13	13
LEITRIM	1	3	3	3
LOUTH	1	60	60	60
MAYO	5	229	230	230
OFFALY	1	27	26	26

COUNTY	Scheme Walks per County	Participants 2016	Participants 2017	Participants 2018
ROSCOMMON	3	163	162	160
SLIGO	2	67	68	68
TIPPERARY	9	114	115	115
WICKLOW	1	60	58	59
Total	44	1911	1905	1926

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

196. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a jobseeker's allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14529/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that it is envisaged that a decision will be made by an Appeals Officer in this case within the next week. The person concerned will then be notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for a carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14530/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 9 August 2018.

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

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

The evidence submitted in support of the application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 7 November 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision on 18 December 2018 and submit-

ted additional evidence in support of his application.

The outcome of the review is that the original decision is confirmed. On 1 March 2019 the person concerned was notified of this outcome and of his right of appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for a disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); when the process is likely to conclude; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14536/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 24 January 2019. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was disallowed on medical grounds as it was not found that this lady was substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 20 March 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent social welfare appeals office (SWAO). No request for an appeal or review has been received.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

199. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension appeal by a person (details supplied). [14538/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for this lady on 23 January 2018. Her claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on 05 July 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review or appeal.

She requested a review of this decision on 24 July and submitted further medical evidence in support of her request. Following a review of all the information available it was decided that there was no change to the original decision. She was notified on 22 October 2018 of the outcome of the review and of her right to appeal the decision.

She requested a review and appeal of this decision and submitted further medical evidence on 11 December 2018 in support of her request. Following a review of all the information available it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision and a submission is being prepared by the Department and will be forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) for determination. She was notified on 25 March 2019 of the outcome of the review.

The SWAO will be in touch with her directly in relation to the progress of her appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

EU Directives

200. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the institutions for occupational retirement provision, IORP, II directive regulations will be transposed into law; when they will be enacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14557/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The transposition of the IORP II Directive will result in significant improvements to the regulation and governance of funded occupational pension schemes in Ireland. This Department, supported by the Pensions Authority, is managing the transposition process of the IORP II Directive. The drafting of regulations is at an advanced stage and codes of practice will also be issued by the Pensions Authority following approval of the Minister. The Department is working towards transposing the Directive as early as possible. Primary legislation will not be necessary to transpose the Directive.

To ensure that schemes are informed of their obligations under the Directive, the Pensions Authority will also undertake a communication campaign on the implementation of the Directive. The Authority will engage and consult with industry stakeholders and trustees on implementation of the new regulatory regime and related codes of practice. The emphasis of this engagement will be on providing sufficient support, time and information in order for industry and trustees to plan for and make the changes needed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

201. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a farm assist payment for a person (detail supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14578/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Previous representations were made in respect of the person concerned for answer on 27/02/2019, rep no. 9928/19. It was advised at that time that the file had been referred to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and I can confirm that a submission by the Deciding Officer was submitted on 11/03/2019 for decision.

Customers are obliged to supply information to allow the inspector to determine projected earnings. In this particular case the person concerned submitted his mother's accounts as supporting material.

The Deputy has asked if the purchase of animal's pedigree or commercial is allowed for farm assist. I understand that the loan interest on same has been allowed, as per legislation.

Age related payments do not apply to Farm Assist.

The profit and loss accounts are used for the purposes of income tax assessment however the departments assessment is based on average projected earnings. As previously advised, the file

has been forwarded to the Appeals Office and this issue will be examined as part of the appeal.

The figures referred to by the Deputy will be considered by the Appeals Office.

I trust that this clarified the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

202. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an appeal hearing will be held in respect of a person (details supplied); if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14628/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on 06 September 2018. Her claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on 26 November 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review or appeal.

The lady concerned appealed the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) and submitted further medical evidence in support of her appeal. Following a review by a deciding officer of this medical evidence in conjunction with all information available to date, it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision. A submission is being prepared by the Department and will be forwarded to the SWAO for determination as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

203. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if matters relating to the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed. [14636/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment while Carer's benefit (CARB) is a social insurance payment made to full-time employees who leave the workforce.

The person concerned was in receipt of CA from 28 June 2007 to 18 October 2017 in respect of her daughter at a reduced rate due to an assessment of her means.

However, following a review of her claim in October 2017, her entitlement to CA ceased, as her means were determined to exceed the statutory limit. She was assessed with means of €334.94 which exceeded the statutory limit of €223.90 at the time.

The person concerned re-applied for CA on 7 December 2017. The application for CA was disallowed as her means were assessed as €323.16 which exceeded the statutory limit of €232.61.

The person concerned was notified on 18 April 2018 of this decision the reason for it and her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned applied for CARB on 16 November 2018. There are a number of qualifying conditions for receipt of CARB including a requirement of having paid a certain amount of PRSI.

Through her employment, this condition has been satisfied.

However, there is a further condition which requires that the applicant must have been engaged in remunerative employment as an employee for at least 16 hours per week in 8 weeks out of the 26 week period immediately before the date from which the claim is intended to commence. This application was disallowed because the person concerned failed to show that she satisfied this condition.

The person concerned was notified on 26 February 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and her right of review and appeal.

The request by the Deputy for a review of CARB is ongoing at present and when complete the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

Should the means of the person concerned reduce in the future it is always open to the person concerned to re-apply for CA and a deciding officer of my Department will examine her entitlement.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of rent support payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14647/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of the correct Rent Supplement payable, i.e. the rate applicable for a single person resident in the Kilcock area of County Kildare.

The Rent Supplement claim is currently being reviewed and the Community Welfare Officer has requested supporting documentation from the person concerned in order to maintain the correct Rent Supplement payable.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if appropriate child dependant allowance is being paid in the case of a disability allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14649/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has had her Increase for Qualified Child Allowance (IQC) re-instated with effect from 28 November 2018. The first payment will be made by her preferred payment method on 3 April 2019.

Arrears of payment due has issued to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will be considered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14650/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Community Welfare Officer (CWO) advises that as no application for an exceptional needs payment (ENP) has been received from the person concerned.

An application form has issued to the person concerned this week (25th March 2019).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which it transpired that a person (details supplied) is having an alleged overpayment recovered at the rate of €50 per week and-or month and is also being pursued through the courts notwithstanding those payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14652/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of a One Parent Family (OPF) payment from 4/11/2010 until 7/6/2017.

Following an investigation into undeclared means relating to employment her OPF claim was discontinued in accordance with Departmental procedures and an overpayment of €20,664 was raised for the period 2/7/2015 to 26/4/2017. A notification letter of the overpayment incurred issued to the person concerned, dated 6/9/2017. The person concerned was offered the opportunity to provide further documentary evidence that might be relevant to the case. She was also offered the opportunity to appeal the revised decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The person concerned is making repayments towards recovery of this overpayment in the amount of €50 per month. It is normal practice for the Department to take legal action where it is deemed that an offence has occurred. The fact that a person is making repayments towards a debt incurred as a result of an offence does not impact on this legal action going ahead.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the total entitlement in respect of disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14655/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following an appeal, the second named person has been awarded

disability allowance (DA) with effect from 18 July 2018. An increase for qualified adult (IQA) has been awarded in respect of the first named person. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 17 April 2019.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

209. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the promised pension home care credit will be introduced and full pension entitlements restored. [14722/19]

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 based 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.

Wherever possible reviews will be processed using information already held by my Department. In some cases additional information is being requested to ensure people receives the best rate possible. Approximately 25,000 requests for information have issued to date. It is important that prompt responses are received to those requests so that the reviews can be completed as quickly as possible.

Reviews commenced from 13 February 2019, the day after I signed the necessary regulations which together with provisions in the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Act 2018, allows the increased payments to be made. The most recently available figures show that as at week ending 22 March 2019, 8,367 reviews have been completed.

It will take a number of months to complete all the reviews due to the number involved and the individual nature of social insurance records. Over 100 temporary staff have been recruited to help with this work. Outcomes will issue to all pensioners in writing when their review is complete.

Regardless of when a review is conducted, where an increase in payment is due, the person's rate of payment will be adjusted without delay and arrears issued backdated to 30 March 2018, or the pensioner's 66th birthday if later. Where a person's rate does not increase following a review, the person will continue to receive their existing rate of payment.

Given the scale (90,000 pensioners) involved, the fact that each case requires close individual examination and that some cases are more complex than others, it would not be reasonable to expect all to be processed immediately. While this work will take a number of months to complete, it will continue until all pensioners have been notified of the outcome of their review in writing.

Where possible, reviews will be processed based on information already held by the Department. For the majority of pensioners the next letter they receive from the Department (after the first letter) will be a review outcome letter. Where additional information is required to complete the review, a written request is being sent to the pensioner directly. Almost 24,000 re-

quests for information issued in January and another 11,000 will be issuing to customers in the coming weeks. I would urge anyone who has yet to provide additional requested information to the Department to do so as soon as possible so that their review can be processed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

210. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a decision will be made on a funding application for a group water scheme (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14551/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details of the measures being funded under the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021 were notified to local authorities by my Department on 8 February 2019. Local authorities were invited to submit their bids for the funding of schemes or projects in their functional areas, with the deadline for receipt of proposals set as 14 March 2019.

Donegal County Council has included the scheme in question in its application to my Department under the new Programme.

My Department is currently considering local authorities' bids for funding allocations. An Expert Panel has been put in place to support the evaluation process. In addition to providing an expert perspective, the Panel brings independence, openness and transparency to the bids evaluation process which is done on a national prioritised basis. The Expert Panel's membership includes Departmental, stakeholder and independent representation.

The Expert Panel will make recommendations to my Department on the suitability of schemes and projects for funding based on objective criteria which are set out in the framework document issued to local authorities when requesting proposals. My Department will then consider the recommendations of the Panel, and based on these, will propose allocations for my consideration as Minister. I expect this process to be completed in the second quarter of 2019.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

211. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of households that had HAP payments ceased due to arrears; the average length of time the households were in arrears before payment was ceased; the average rent owed by households at the time rent was ceased in each of the years since the scheme was introduced; the steps taken by local authorities to address the arrears issue while maintaining the tenancy; and the guidance provided to both a centre (details supplied) and the local authorities to deal with such arrears while at the same time sustaining the tenant. [14556/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Tenants in the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme are required to sign a rent contribution agreement to pay a weekly rental contribution to the relevant local authority, in line with the local authority's differential rent scheme. As set out in the rent contribution agreement, this weekly rental contribution must be paid by them so that they remain eligible for the HAP scheme. HAP recipients are required to set up automatic electronic rent payment arrangements.

The rent contribution agreement stipulates that "the HAP claimant acknowledges that the Local Authority will immediately suspend or cease making the Housing Assistance Payment to

the landlord on behalf of the HAP Claimant in respect of the tenancy at the Property. Upon the Local Authority ceasing to make the Housing Assistance Payment the HAP Claimant shall immediately become liable for all and any rent payable to the landlord.” In practice, however, suspension would not normally take immediate effect and engagement with the tenant is initiated.

The HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages the collection of all HAP tenants’ differential rents, on behalf of the relevant local authority, and the payment of all HAP rents to landlords on behalf of tenants supported by the HAP scheme. The HAP SSC applies a very clear communication policy if rental arrears issues arise. This policy includes regular and early written communication with tenants, landlords and the relevant local authority.

Apart from issuing the formal notification letters, there would always be attempts to contact the tenants by phone and by email to settle accounts and avoid escalation of the debt process. Depending on the particular arrears in question, both the relevant local authority and the landlord are informed when an account has not been cleared and of possible suspension and/ or cessation of the HAP payment. However, in the vast majority of cases a payment plan to deal with the arrears is agreed between the tenant and the local authority, before there is any necessity to advise the landlord.

If the tenant does not contact their local authority or does not enter into a payment arrangement within 8 weeks of the arrears commencing, both the landlord and the tenant are informed that the HAP payment may be ceased.

My Department is satisfied that the practice of the SSC is appropriate, measured and effective and that local authorities, as housing authorities, have the expertise and resources to discharge their responsibilities towards social housing households including consideration of changed financial positions for households in HAP. There is no requirement for guidance from my Department to be issued regarding implementation of the debt collection process which is a matter for Local Authorities and the SSC operating on their behalf.

In relation to the average time in, and amount of, arrears outstanding at the time of cessation, the SSC advise that this information is not readily available from their system as they operate from a live system. They have not historically extracted specific information at the exact point at which the tenancy is ceased and what the balance is at that point in time. Information is only recorded on the current balance which will more than likely have changed since the tenancy was ceased if a write off of the amount outstanding had been approved or if the tenant began to pay off the arrears.

To date, the approach taken by the HAP SSC has been very effective with minimal levels of rent arrears arising for HAP tenants. In 2018, the scheme had a 98% differential rent collection rate, with minimal arrears arising for tenants or local authorities. Therefore, only a very small number of tenants have fallen into difficulty with their differential rent. Since HAP was rolled out in 2014 to end 2018, HAP support has been ceased for 665 tenancies due to tenant differential rent arrears. This represents 1.2% of all tenancies set up during that period.

Tenancy sustainment is a very important factor in relation to keeping households in their homes. This is why the SSC operate, on behalf of the 31 local authorities, a graduated approach to cessation rather than the immediate cessation outlined in the rent contribution agreement. There are a number of avenues for a tenant experiencing financial difficulty including early engagement with the relevant local authority or the Community Welfare Officer. Notwithstanding the assistance available to tenants, there is a fundamental need for a tenant to acknowledge and make the maximum effort to fulfil their personal responsibilities and requirements in relation to contributing to their accommodation costs and to engage early when difficulties arise. The rent contribution that a household is asked to pay is calculated by the local authority having regard

to the financial circumstances of the household and affordability. The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of the contributions from households and exchequer funding, so it is absolutely critical that additional unnecessary burden is not placed on the exchequer to offset non-payment of differential rent.

As the HAP scheme grows, the SSC are continuously working to improve systems and processes, including debt management processes. My Department, with the assistance of stakeholders, including the Housing Agency, HAP Practitioners from local authorities and also the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, will continue to work with the SSC to ensure that the debt management process is reasonable and effective and that the appropriate tenancy sustainment options are in place.

Local Authority Housing Rents

212. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it is standard practice for local councils to postpone rent reviews for a decade or more, leading to large increases in rent in cases in which the postponed review does take place as in the case of County Longford; his views on whether this is best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14586/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The making and amending of rent schemes is the responsibility of housing authorities as an integral part of their housing management functions, subject to guidelines issued from time to time by my Department.

Rent reviews are also a matter for individual housing authorities. Guidelines entitled “Rent Assessment, Collection, Accounting and Arrears Control” were published by the Housing Unit (which subsequently became part of the Housing Agency) in January 2001. These guidelines, developed in conjunction with my Department and the City and County Management Association, set out good practice in the administration of rent related matters. The Guidelines stated that local authorities should review the rent assessment of all existing tenants at least annually to ensure that all tenants are paying the correct rent and to update rents to reflect changes in tenants’ incomes and in housing management costs.

It will normally be a part of the tenancy agreement that the tenant should inform the local authority of any change in circumstances, including increases in family income. When this is done by the tenant, any change in rent that is warranted can be applied promptly.

The above Guidelines also state that arrangements for the repayment of rent arrears should be determined primarily by the tenants’ ability to pay.

My Department has undertaken a review of the potential for a draft national differential rents framework for the purposes of section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Such a framework has as its main aim the harmonisation of local authority rents, including a set of standardised income disregards, whilst retaining the general principle of rents related to household income. The overall objective is to ensure that housing supports are fair and sustainable and prioritise those on lowest incomes.

I expect that the review will be completed in the near future.

Fire Safety

213. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a fund will be set up to assist owners of apartments to deal with serious fire safety issues and building defects; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that problems have emerged in respect of a number of apartment schemes on the south fringe of the Dublin City Council administrative area; the measures that have been taken to improve the building regulations in respect apartment developments; if action can be taken at this stage to hold developers accountable for defective complexes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14596/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In the first instance, I would like to acknowledge the stressful circumstances which the owners and residents of buildings face when defects occur in their homes.

However, in general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved: the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control, it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters.

Local authorities have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, the Housing Acts and the Planning and Development Acts, all of which may be relevant where fire safety concerns arise in residential developments. Fire services may inspect buildings in cases of defects or complaints in respect of fire safety. They work with building owners to ensure immediate risks are addressed, and a plan put in place for works to bring buildings into compliance. They have enforcement powers for cases where co-operation is not forthcoming, or progress cannot be made on an agreed basis. Local authorities are independent in the use of their statutory powers.

In the interest of supporting owners and residents living in developments where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise, it was agreed that a review be undertaken by an independent fire expert to develop a framework for general application. In August 2017, the Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings was published, which is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. The Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors, both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations. The Framework is available on my Department’s website at the following link: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/framework_for_enhancing_fire_safety_in_dwellings.pdf.

In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017, and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, my Department’s National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management was asked to convene a Task Force to lead a re-appraisal of our approach to fire safety in Ireland. In its report, the Task Force acknowledges the importance of fire safety in apartment buildings and makes a number of recommendations in this regard and I have tasked the Directorate’s Management Board with implementation of the recommendations within its remit, and oversight of the implementation of other recommendations. The Task Force Report is available on my Department’s website at the following link: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_of_the_fire_safety_task_force.pdf.

In addition, in relation to the Building Regulations, work has been on-going to review Part B – Fire Safety and a new Part B/ TGD B Volume 2 (2017) came into force on 1 July 2017.

This Volume 2 applies to dwellings only. A revised Volume 1, dealing with buildings other than dwellings, which includes apartments, is being prepared for public consultation.

Finally, in response to the building failures that have emerged over the last decade, my Department has advanced a robust and focused Building Control Reform Agenda, including:

- Amendments to the Building Control Regulations;
- Establishment of a shared services National Building Control Management Project; and
- The ongoing development of new legislation through the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill.

These reforms have already brought, and will continue to bring, a new order and discipline to bear on construction projects, creating an enhanced culture of compliance with the Building Regulations.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

214. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an application will be considered for funding from South Dublin County Council to purchase land (details supplied) in order to increase the volume of social and affordable housing in the SDZ. [14625/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Once local authorities have identified a need to acquire additional lands, they may seek to borrow the required finance from the Housing Finance Agency. In accordance with Section 106 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, the decision to borrow is a reserved function of the elected members of the local authority concerned, who have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions and are accountable for all expenditure by the local authority. As such, it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process, having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

Section 106 of the said Act also provides that local authorities must obtain the consent of the appropriate Minister to undertake borrowing. In this regard, a request to borrow for housing land acquisition can be submitted by the local authority to my Department. Sanction may be granted based on an assessment of the financial viability of potential loans insofar as individual local authorities are concerned, and an assessment as to whether the borrowing can be accommodated within the context of the fiscal rules.

It should be noted that there is currently an appeal to An Bord Pleanála in relation to the Clonburris Strategic Development Zone. Following an oral hearing, a decision is not expected until the middle of 2019. Accordingly, I am not in a position to comment further on the matter at this time.

Local Area Plans

215. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if Meath and Louth county councils have adopted a local area plan for the area of interest that was the subject of the Drogheda boundary commission report published in 2017; if an implementation group has been formed by both councils to implement the proposals from the

review; if he is satisfied with progress to date on developing a unified vision for the area that was subject of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14631/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The report of the Drogheda Boundary Committee was published in February 2017 and it recommended no change to the existing boundary, subject to the implementation of a programme of structured cooperation between Louth and Meath County Councils. Similar reports were produced at that time on Athlone, Carlow and Waterford.

Given the strategic importance of such towns and cities where development and population overspill across county boundaries has occurred, it is my intention to introduce statutory joint structures to address boundary issues. This would entail a framework of statutory requirements to deal with the development and other interests of the areas concerned, rather than alteration of county boundaries or reliance solely on existing inter-authority co-operation. This would mainly involve functions similar to those which might be performed through inter-authority arrangements but on a more comprehensive, permanent and formalised basis under primary legislation.

It is envisaged that such urban area structures would have responsibility for certain key strategic matters beyond the existing standard functions of local authorities, especially in relation to spatial and economic planning and development and in relation to transportation strategy, forward planning and land use designation, retail strategy, and other such matters as the relevant local authorities agree.

A specific local area plan has not been adopted for the cross-boundary area of Drogheda and, while an implementation group specifically targeting the Boundary Committee report is not established, there is strong ongoing cooperation between Louth and Meath County Councils. I have very recently met with the respective chief executives, and with chief executives from other local authorities with cross-boundary towns and cities, and I plan to make further progress on strengthened urban area structures for cross-boundary towns and cities in the coming months.

Departmental Staff Data

216. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of staff engaged in the housing delivery office per annum since its establishment; the average length of service in the office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14668/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In line with the commitment under Action 2.9 of Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a dedicated Housing Delivery Office (HDO) was established within my Department, in August 2016, to support the accelerated delivery of housing across the social and private sectors, and tenure spectrum, in an integrated and timely manner. Working with the broader Housing and Planning Divisions in my Department, other key agencies, local authorities and the construction sector, the HDO supports the roll-out of complex projects, including identifying and resolving barriers to delivery, and monitors progress across key sites as they progress.

At the time of its establishment, the HDO comprised a team of 4 people with extensive expertise in project management, finance, planning and local government, including staff seconded from the local government sector and the National Development Finance Agency.

Having carried out a range of initial initiatives, and taking account of the fact that some as-

signments to the office were time-limited, the HDO was refocused in September 2017 to work more closely on supporting local housing delivery and land management. In that context, the current team of 3 comprises 1 civil servant and 2 officers with experience of housing delivery and the local government sector. These officers have service ranging from 9 to 28 months in the HDO. In addition to this complement of staff the HDO draws on supports from other relevant Business Units in my Department and other relevant public bodies and this can give rise to movements of staff resources between these connected areas from time to time.

As with all critical areas of activity in my Department, the resources available to the HDO are kept under regular review in the context of the ongoing evolution of the Office's role.

Social and Affordable Housing

217. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the cost rental pilot project has gone out to tender; when construction is due to commence; the number of units due to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14669/19]

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 (Respond and Túath) are working on a project at the Enniskerry Road, Dublin, which will deliver 50 cost rental homes. This project is providing very valuable learning and is helping to shape the contractual model and specifications for future larger-scale projects. Planning permission is currently in place and tenders have been assessed. An application submitted by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council for funding under the Serviced Sites Fund last year in relation to the project was successful. It is anticipated that construction will commence on this project in the second quarter of 2019.

The second project, St. Michael's Estate, Emmet Road in Inchicore, is estimated to have the potential to accommodate circa. 470 homes in a high quality development. The current tenure mix as agreed with by my Department is 30% Social and 70% Cost Rental. It is expected that the procurement process for the design team will get underway in Q2 2019.

It is estimated by the National Development Finance Agency that rents of between 15-25% below market are achievable. The new apartment guidelines were applied to all units. The European Investment Bank is also working on this project in terms of financial and advisory services.

Departmental Projects

218. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average length of time taken to process a cost-benefit analysis in 2017 and 2018; the number of such analyses received; the number accepted and rejected, respectively in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14670/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Public Spending Code, where a capital project exceeds €20m, the Sponsoring Agency (the local authority) is required to submit a Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) or a Cost Effectiveness Analysis (CEA) prior to receiving Departmental Approval in Principle. The purpose of a CBA is to assess whether or not the social and economic benefits associated with a project are greater than its social and economic costs. The CBA compares the costs of alternative ways in which an objective, or set of objectives, can be achieved, to determine the optimum path for the project.

My Department received CBAs/CEAs in relation to eleven housing projects over the period 2017/2018, of which just one was submitted in 2017. Of these eleven CBAs/CEAs, two have been approved over an average timeframe of ten weeks. Engagement is ongoing on the examination of the remaining CBAs between my Department, the relevant local authority and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER).

Simultaneously, my Department is currently preparing detailed sectoral guidance to support local authorities on the appraisal process for social housing projects. My Department is also actively working with Dublin City Council to progress what could be used as a blueprint CBA/CEA. This guidance and blueprint CBA/CEA will support all local authorities in carrying out such appraisals on housing projects through a standardised approach in order to streamline the review process undertaken by my Department and DPER. It will ensure that all of the available options are fully appraised and evaluated with the best approach being followed from a value for money, housing and sustainable communities viewpoint.

Rural Resettlement Scheme

219. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to fund a rural resettlement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14673/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development: Realising our Potential, has a clear objective of working across Government Departments to deliver a co-ordinated group of strategies and actions to ensure the success of vibrant rural communities across Ireland. My Department works closely with the Department of Rural and Community Development on rural housing issues.

In relation to social housing, it is already possible for households to move and relocate between local authority areas, including relocating from an urban to a rural location, under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme.

Under the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, a household may apply to one housing authority only for social housing support, at a time. Currently it is not possible for a household on the waiting list of one housing authority to transfer its application to another authority and to carry the time spent on the previous list.

A commitment has been given to examine the possibility of introducing a "housing passport". The basic premise is that households in receipt of, or qualified for, social housing support in one local authority area could potentially transfer to, or be allocated, social housing in

another local authority area. My Department is currently developing proposals in relation to this matter, details of which will be outlined when the work involved is complete.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

220. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 623 of 24 April 2018 and 1448 of 7 September 2018, the status of discussions on a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14589/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department is continuing its discussions with the various interests with a mast presence in the area in question. The aim of these discussions is to address the issue of payment and enhancing the overall care and management of the site. As outlined in the previous response, these discussions are significantly advanced and nearly concluded. As the discussions have not yet reached their formal conclusion, it would be inappropriate to provide further details publicly at this time. The NPWS intend to conclude the matter shortly and I will be in touch with the Deputy at that point.

In the meantime, I want to thank the Deputy for his continuing interest in the matter.

Hare Coursing Regulation

221. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason her Department is providing a club (details supplied) with copies of the conservation rangers' reports prior to their publication. [14603/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) officials of my Department monitor compliance with the licences issued to the organisation concerned relating to its affiliated clubs which hold regulated hare coursing events during the period of the licences. For a number of years, prior to the publication of these monitoring reports on the NPWS website, it had been the practice of my Department to provide the organisation in question with copies of these reports for its attention and for any follow up actions required by it; in some cases there may have been issues highlighted in reports which required clarification for my Department and which necessitated further correspondence with the organisation in question.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments

222. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if payment will issue to a person (details supplied) who made an application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting scheme in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14629/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question. With respect to 36 raised bog natural heritage area sites, the qualifying criteria for the scheme are that:

- The applicant must have had a legal interest (ownership or a turbary right (right to cut

turf)) in one of these sites on 25 May 2010 and must have had the right to cut and remove turf from the property on that date;

- The applicant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the relevant five year period up to 14 January 2014;

- The turf resource on the site has not been exhausted; and

- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

I am advised that an inspection of the plot of bog in respect of which the applicant has applied for compensation is scheduled to be undertaken shortly. My Department will be in a position to further process the application when this inspection has been completed.

Contact has been made with the applicant to advise her of the position.