

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.

Questions Nos. 11 to 35, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 36 to 43, inclusive, answered orally.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

44. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to address the issue of social housing for persons with mental health issues; his plans to provide additional housing in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51111/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Government recognises that mental health issues can give rise to specific housing needs and this is reflected in the development, by my Department and the Department of Health, of a National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability. The strategy sets out the Government's framework for housing delivery for people with disabilities, including mental, physical, intellectual and sensory disabilities. It was developed in conjunction with the Government's mental health policy, 'A Vision for Change'.

Flowing from the Strategy, local authorities have been mandated to set up Housing and Disability Steering Groups which are tasked with achieving a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a disability, including mental health difficulties. The Housing Agency has also developed a manual to assist local authority staff to support people with mental health difficulties to access housing.

While not all people with mental health difficulties require a specific type of housing, in many cases social care supports are required to assist with adjusting to independent living, which includes issues such as maintaining a tenancy. Together with the Department of Health, my Department currently co-funds a Tenancy Sustainment programme nationally to assist persons with mental health difficulties transitioning from HSE facilities into mainstream social housing to maintain their tenancies.

The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability will be reviewed in 2020 and housing for people with mental health difficulties will again form part of the considerations in that review.

Questions Nos. 45 to 47, inclusive, answered orally.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

48. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if housing schemes that were listed on the original local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, scheme and submitted by the local authority can be prioritised for funding under the urban regeneration fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51875/19]

76. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the next opportunity for applications under the urban regeneration fund will open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51876/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 76 together.

The Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) was designed to activate housing supply by putting in place the enabling public infrastructure necessary to ensure that large scale development could take place on key sites in urban areas of high housing demand. Funding of €200 million was originally made available under LIHAF, of which €150 million would be provided by the Exchequer with local authorities providing matching fund of €50 million. Approval was given for 30 projects under LIHAF in 2017 and these projects will stimulate the development of approximately 20,000 homes across 14 local authorities.

The LIHAF projects are progressing, with two projects completed and almost half of all projects at construction stage. My Department is currently reviewing progress on the remaining projects and will complete a LIHAF update by the end of the year. Over 1,800 homes associated with the infrastructure delivery have been delivered to date, with a further 4,000 homes expected to be delivered in 2020.

The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), announced in November 2018, is a flagship element of Project Ireland 2040 and is supported by funding of €2 billion over the period to 2027. The URDF was established to support more compact and sustainable development, through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland's five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan. This will ensure that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest and to visit. While it is not intended that the URDF would provide direct support for particular housing projects, public infrastructure that might previously have been appropriate to a LIHAF application could be included in a URDF application in support of compact urban growth. Through the Fund, successful applicants are being offered targeted integrated support for applicant-led projects that will contribute to the regeneration and rejuvenation of our cities and towns.

Although submission of funding applications and the advancement of each project is, in the first instance, a matter for each applicant, my Department is working closely and actively with them to ensure that the projects receiving URDF support come to fruition as soon as possible. The 88 projects approved under the first call offer a good regional spread, and span a number of themes. I will be announcing a second call for proposals under the URDF shortly.

Question No. 49 answered with Question No. 45.

Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 47.

Vacant Properties

51. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to encourage the use of vacant housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51107/19]

95. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant privately owned homes that have been brought back into use through programmes, including the repair and lease and the acquisition of vacant properties, through the Housing Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51803/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51 and 95 together.

Rebuilding Ireland sets out a range of measures to assist in meeting Ireland’s housing needs by ensuring that our existing housing stock is used to the greatest extent possible. A central action within it is a commitment to develop a National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy. This Strategy, which I published July 2018, strives to provide a targeted, effective and co-ordinated approach to identifying and tackling vacancy across the country and draws together all of the strands of ongoing work into one document, with a clear vision for moving forward in the next few years. In addition, each local authority has established a Vacant Homes Office and prepared a Vacant Homes Action Plan, supported by dedicated funding provided by my Department.

This approach has allowed the development of innovative approaches, such as the website vacanthomes.ie developed by Mayo County Council in July 2017 on behalf of the local government sector. This site acts as a central portal for individuals to log possible vacant homes and is proving useful in supplementing the country-wide analysis on vacancy and in mobilising communities to assist local authorities in developing and implementing a targeted approach. Some 3,422 properties have been registered to date.

The website provides useful information for property owners on how to bring their vacant properties back into use and on available financial supports. This includes a number of schemes developed by my Department to incentivise reactivating suitable dwellings into the liveable housing stock. In that regard, by the end of Q3 2019:

- The Repair and Leasing initiative resulted in 1,510 applications; 129 homes have been brought back into use and tenanted, with 155 agreements for lease signed.

- The Buy & Renew Scheme has facilitated local authority purchase 470 vacant properties for social housing purpose; - Through the revolving acquisitions fund of €70 million managed by the Housing Agency since January 2017, a total of 669 properties have been made available to Approved Housing Bodies and a further 116 properties are in the process of being secured; and

- The Housing Agency has also supported local authorities to acquire a further 374 vacant properties from financial institution for social housing purposes with a further 112 proceeding through to sale.

This effectively means that in addition to the 600 properties brought back into use to date under the Buy & Renew and Repair & Leasing Schemes, more than 1,200 other vacant properties held by financial institutions have been secured for social housing use since 2016. Local authorities are also bringing homes into use by acquiring dwellings in unfinished estates, liaising with financial institutions on their vacant property portfolios and utilising CPO powers to acquire empty properties. In overall terms, CSO data indicates that reconnections of properties

vacant for at least 2 years and completions of homes in unfinished estates account for some 13,800 of the 70,800 new homes that have become available for use in the period 2016 to Q3 2019.

Tackling vacancy will continue to be the focus of targeted attention by my Department and local authorities over the remaining years of Rebuilding Ireland.

Questions Nos. 52 and 53 answered with Question No. 47.

Credit Union Lending

54. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review group of establishing a special purpose vehicle to enable credit union funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51866/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that Credit Unions can play in housing finance and supported the efforts of the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current investment restrictions as appropriate, including for housing.

Credit Union bodies have set out proposed means by which funding could be provided by the sector to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the development of social housing. This follows on from the amendments introduced by the Central Bank to the regulatory regime within which Credit Unions operate.

My Department referred the Credit Unions' representative bodies to the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) with a view to both sectors sharing, as far as practical, the benefits of their respective work in this area, including the work undertaken by the ICSH on the development of special purpose vehicles for social housing financing purposes. The work of the ICSH was supported by grant funding from my Department. In addition, both my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, and I have met with the Credit Union movement and the AHB sector on this matter.

The ICSH, along with 6 Tier 3 AHBs, have worked with specialist financial advisers to establish a funding mechanism or vehicle which would source suitable sources of non-state finance to fund the delivery of social housing by AHBs, based on best value for money. Market testing undertaken revealed good interest in lending to the AHB sector from various lenders including banks, institutional investors and the Credit Union sector. So far, one AHB has set up an SPV, 2 AHBs have sourced private finance from a private institution and there are 2 AHBs looking at the next phase of establishing a structure to work collectively in securing private finance. As such, the work in this area is ongoing and has led to individual AHBs establishing SPVs for financing social housing.

The Credit Union sector is one potential funder whose terms are assessed as part of the process of market testing to establish best value for money and optimum terms and conditions from lenders. While my Department will continue to be available to provide any clarifications that may be required in relation to social housing delivery, it falls to the relevant parties, i.e. the AHBs, on the one hand, and potential investors on the other, to agree a workable and mutually acceptable approach in order to bring potential investment possibilities to a successful conclusion.

Building Regulations Compliance

55. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider introducing a one stop shop for homeowners who discover latent defects that would provide information, advice, mediation and adjudication to ensure that, in the first instance, the developer responsible for the defects covers the remediation. [51758/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I want to acknowledge the very stressful circumstances which owners and residents face when defects occur in their homes.

Building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, that is the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. The statutory position is very clear in terms of where responsibilities lie under the Building Control Acts, the Fire Services Acts, the Housing Acts, the Planning and Development Acts and the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011, all or some of which may be relevant in individual cases of building defects. The Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014, in particular, have brought further clarity in relation to the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in construction projects.

Local authorities have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under many of the legislative codes referred to in order to ensure that parties discharge their statutory responsibilities. But it would not be appropriate for local authorities to take on a role of the kind suggested in adjudicating or providing mediation on the matters involved, particularly when the issues arising when homeowners discover defects in their homes can involve complex legal matters, with potential implications also for insurance.

The State has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings. Nor could the taxpayer afford such a role. It is not possible for the State to take on responsibility/liability for all legacy issues nor would it send the right message to the industry regarding their responsibility for compliance.

Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 41.

Land Development Agency

57. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the land and homes on a site (details supplied) will remain in public ownership into the future in view of the possible transfer of a site to the Land Development Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51873/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Land Development Agency (LDA) is currently working with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council on a delivery plan for the site referred to. This site can yield approximately 600 homes, which are likely to be primarily social and affordable housing. Ultimately, any decision regarding the ownership and development of the site will be a matter for the local authority.

As provided for under Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, any decision to dispose of local authority land, including to the LDA, is a reserved function of its elected members.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government recently carried out pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme of the LDA Bill. It is important to note that the General Scheme provides that the shareholders (i.e. owners) of the LDA will be the

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Water Quality

58. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the recent large-scale boil water notice that affected over 600,000 residents in counties Meath, Kildare and Dublin; the measures undertaken to prevent such an occurrence again; the steps taken to ensure that residents have a clean, safe and reliable water supply; and if the EPA recommendations have been acted upon. [51855/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Fingal County Council, on behalf of Irish Water, operates the Leixlip water treatment plant. Following the recent incidents, water provided by the Leixlip plant is currently safe, and is not subject to a restriction. However, the plant remains in need of improvement works that will make it resilient and prevent future issues.

I remain concerned about the vulnerability of this plant. My focus is firstly, to ensure that Irish Water continues to prioritise and progress the improvement works; and secondly, that appropriate protocols are in place to deal with any future issues at the plant while the works are underway.

Irish Water is undertaking improvements to the plant as recommended by EPA audits as quickly as is practical. While works are progressing on the plant, water production has been reduced by c30 million litres per day. Irish Water has increased water production from other plants, particularly Ballymore Eustace, to compensate. These are operational matters for Irish Water.

In relation to the recent boil water notices, I and my Department have engaged with all the organisations involved to review the response to the incidents. In addition, I have in recent days, received the EPA's report on the two boil water notices which I requested from the Agency. I am meeting with the EPA, the HSE, Irish Water, Fingal County Council, the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities and An Fóram Uisce today to agree actions following the EPA report.

While the water being produced at Leixlip is safe, the risk of further boil water notices continues until the upgrade works are finalised in the first half of next year.

The EPA will continue to provide regulatory oversight of Irish Water, and work closely with Irish Water and the HSE to ensure the protection of human health.

It should be noted that, overall, the additional water capacity available in the Greater Dublin Area is extremely low. Irish Water has medium and long term plans to increase the supply to the Greater Dublin Area and to improve the resilience of the existing infrastructure, in particular through the development of the proposed Midlands and Eastern Water Supply Project. In the meantime, Irish Water and the local authorities are monitoring demand and supply capacity on a daily basis and will continue to balance the network to minimise possible impacts on customers.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

59. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of work within his Department and local authorities for the provision of serviced sites, particularly in rural areas, to assist with the delivery of affordable housing; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [51859/19]

84. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the provision of affordable housing schemes nationwide and particularly in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51860/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 84 together.

Land utilisation and activation, including the development of land for the delivery of more affordable private housing, is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant local authority and its elected members. Moreover, local authorities are required to frame the planning policies in their development plans in a balanced and measured way to ensure that long-term strategic housing needs are met across all types and tenures within their functional area. This applies to both urban and rural locations.

In line with the commitments in Rebuilding Ireland to support the delivery of homes to buy or rent at prices which are discounted on market values, the Government has allocated €310 million under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) to provide infrastructure to support the delivery of some 6,200 more affordable homes on local authority lands. This funding is being made available in areas where local authorities have demonstrated a requirement for affordable housing and the viability to deliver such housing from their sites.

To date, I have allocated SSF funding of €127 million, in support of 35 projects in 14 local authority areas, for infrastructure works that will support the delivery of almost 3,200 affordable homes. This funding was awarded to local authorities on a competitive basis.

One of these projects includes a bid from Kildare County Council for the development of a site at Ardclough Road, Celbridge. This project received approval in principle in August 2019 and will facilitate the delivery of 10 affordable homes. The overall cost and the timing of delivery for this and other projects is contingent upon the completion of design, planning and procurement in the first instance, and Kildare County Council is working to achieve delivery as quickly as possible. I anticipate that a further call for proposals under the SSF will issue in 2020.

Another project at Maynooth in County Kildare is being funded under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) at a cost of over €14.5m. This public infrastructure project will be key to the delivery of approximately 720 cost reduced homes.

These schemes complement some of the other key Government affordability initiatives, such as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, and the Help to Buy Scheme, which have supported over 16,500 households nationally.

In addition, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, which is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, seeks to support ambitious and strategic projects which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities. The Government has committed €1 billion over 10 years to the Fund and €315 million is allocated to the Fund for the period 2019-2022. In this area, my Department will also work with the local authorities and other infrastructure providers to develop a programme of serviced sites to attract people to build their own homes and live in smaller towns and villages as mandated by the National Planning Framework.

Local Authority Housing Data

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of direct build and new local authority houses rented to tenants in each of the past four years to date by county; the number of houses purchased by each local authority for allocation to tenants in the same period; the number of houses acquired by local authorities for such allocation under Part V; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51826/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland will deliver over 50,000 new social homes by the end of 2021 through a combination of Build, Acquisition and Leasing. In 2019 alone, 10,000 new social homes will be delivered utilising these methods, including 6,545 build homes delivered by Local Authorities nationwide, in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies.

My Department publishes comprehensive quarterly statistics in a range of formats across multiple platforms. On the Department's website, comprehensive data on social housing delivery can be viewed and downloaded, including information on build by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, as well as information on social homes delivered through Part V and Acquisitions. This information can be accessed at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

More granular detail on build activity is available on the Quarterly Social Housing Construction Status Report (CSR) which is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website and can be accessed at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

It should be noted that the process for tenanting these homes, and the day to day re-tenanting of existing stock, is solely the responsibility of each local authority.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Implementation

61. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the implementation of the mica redress scheme for affected homeowners in County Donegal; the progress made to date with regard to the implementation arrangements with Donegal County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51221/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Last year, the Government agreed in principle to introduce a scheme to support affected homeowners in the counties of Donegal and Mayo to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been significantly damaged due to defective concrete blocks.

Budget 2020 provides funding of €40 million to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme and this new scheme to address the issues identified in Donegal and Mayo.

The full terms and conditions of the scheme are currently being finalised in consultation with the Attorney General's Office and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, including the development of the necessary regulations. This process takes account of the engagement that my Department is currently having with both Donegal and Mayo County Councils, who will operate and administer the scheme. In this regard, my Department continues to meet with both local authority teams to conclude implementation arrangements for the scheme. Final engagement will take place over the coming weeks.

The aim will be to complete the outstanding work without delay in order to ensure that the scheme can get underway, as early as possible.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

62. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if income limits for access to the social housing waiting lists will be examined in view of recent reports that show the difficulty of persons accessing affordable housing and the inability of many to qualify for mortgages but who are above income limits for local authority housing waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51863/19]

94. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to ensure that income eligibility for public housing is raised to ensure that those on middle incomes have access to safe and secure housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51872/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 94 together.

Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

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

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

However, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is under way. The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

The Government has introduced a number of affordability measures to support people who wish to purchase their own homes. In particular, following a review of the previous two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, a new loan offering, known as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, was introduced with effect from 1 February 2018. The loan enables credit worthy first time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The

low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not have otherwise been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

As with previous local authority house purchase loan finance, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns for the RIHL. Local authority approval means that an official letter of offer has been sent to a borrower (and therefore relates to a specific property and loan amount). Information on the RIHL up to Quarter 2 2019, including in relation to the number and value of mortgage approvals and drawdowns and also average loan amounts, is available on the Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity> .

Additionally, the Help To Buy (HTB) incentive, announced in Budget 2017, is designed to assist first-time buyers with the deposit required to purchase or self-build a new house or apartment to live in as their home. The incentive provides for a refund of Income Tax and DIRT paid over the previous four tax years, limited to a maximum of 5% of the purchase value. The HTB refund is capped at €20,000. As of 30 November 2019, 15,903 HTB claims had been approved, to a value of €236m.

The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure extended the initiative in its current form in Budget 2020. This means that the HTB initiative will remain in place for another two years until 31 December 2021.

Local Authority Funding

63. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address the funding shortfall experienced by several city and county councils following the change in Irish Water rate funding; and the way in which he plans to tackle same on a long-term basis. [51858/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Since 2015, the revenue of local authorities has grown from approximately €4 billion to €5 billion. This mainly comprises income from goods and services, commercial rates, Government grants and Local Property Tax.

Between 2015 and 2019, Irish Water was not liable for commercial rates and approximately €47m p.a. was paid to local authorities to compensate them for the water services-related rates income they would have previously received. Having regard to a recommendation from the local government sector that this exemption from rates should be removed, Irish Water will become liable for commercial rates from 2020 and the compensation-related funding will cease. Irish Water will pay commercial rates directly to individual local authorities, following the global valuation process undertaken by the Commissioner for Valuation, in a similar arrangement as applies to other utilities. The majority of local authorities are expected to see an increase in their rates income arising from this process.

Of course, this is just one of a number of variables that feed into local authority budgets. For example, there have also been revaluations of other utilities and all of the local authorities likely

to lose rates income from the Irish Water valuation would be likely to see their rates income increase from the ESB revaluation. In addition, there is funding made available from the Local Government Fund (LGF) and the Exchequer funding of €156m being made available through the Local Government Fund (LGF), on a like-for-like basis, will see local authorities receiving €23 million more in Exchequer funding when compared to 2019.

My Department has kept the anticipated financial impact of the changed approach to the rating of Irish Water under review, liaising directly with sectoral representatives and with the most impacted authorities, particularly in the case of the seven authorities who are expected to receive less in the resulting commercial rates than they received previously. Taking account of other expected changes in incomes and the financial positions of the authorities concerned, Waterford City and County Council and Wicklow County Council were identified as facing significant challenges to deliver balanced budgets in the first year of the changeover.

Therefore, Minister Murphy and I are providing a once-off special payment of €2 million to Waterford City and County Council and €300,000 to Wicklow County Council to assist them in 2020 and to allow more time for the necessary rebalancing of income and expenditure.

Income from commercial rates is for use by local authorities at their discretion and, owing to its nature, is subject to fluctuations from time to time. My Department will continue to monitor the financial impact of the transition of Irish Water to a global utility undertaking for rates purposes, as part of its wider role in supporting local authorities. It is also my intention to consider this issue and other relevant issues when the work of the Local Government Funding Baseline (Review) Group falls to be considered.

Vacant Sites Levy

64. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied with the number of sites listed on the vacant site registers of local authorities; his views on whether each site that should be on the register has been listed and is subject to the levy; if he will consider putting the onus of such sites to self-declare with appropriate penalties on those that fail to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51801/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the vacant site levy provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, planning authorities are empowered to apply a vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of relevant vacant sites where a site exceeds 0.05 hectares in area, was in the planning authority’s opinion vacant or idle in 2018, and is in an area identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. As signalled in Budget 2018, the rate of the levy has been increased to 7% for sites on a local authority vacant sites register from 2019 onwards, to which site owners will become liable with effect from January 2020.

My Department does not maintain a central register of vacant sites, as each local authority administers the vacant site register in respect of their functional area. As provided for under the Act, the register in respect of each local authority is available for inspection at its offices and online on its website. However, on foot of a recent review of the on-line vacant site registers across all local authority areas, I understand that there are collectively over 340 individual sites currently on the local registers. Over 80 of these sites were entered on registers on 1 January 2018 and are therefore subject to the levy in 2019, unless development works were activated in the interim.

While application of the levy provisions is a matter for individual local authorities, my De-

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

My Department will continue to engage proactively with local authorities to ensure the vacant site levy achieves its full potential. However, I have no plans to further amend the vacant site levy provisions at this time.

Water Abstraction Regulation

65. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of water that private bottled water companies extract here; the locations in which they extract water; the amount they pay for extraction; the person or body they pay; if they are exempted from payment; if the information is not available, if a small scoping group will be set up to report to Dáil Éireann regarding same. [51798/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The abstraction of water is governed by the Water Supplies Act 1942, which deals with the abstraction of water for public drinking water supply purposes only. Under this Act, there are no requirements to be met in respect of licensing or charging for abstractions for bottled water, or indeed for other purposes.

However, the Water Framework Directive requires that abstractions of surface water or groundwater which are likely to have a significant effect on water status must be regulated. My Department has been examining how best to address this requirement in a proportionate and efficient way. After approval in 2018 of a General Scheme of a Water Environment (Abstractions) Bill which would introduce a control and registration system over the abstraction of water, my Department undertook a public consultation, which resulted in 28 submissions.

Following examination of those submissions and refinement of the policy approach, I will be returning to Government shortly with a revised General Scheme to give effect to our obligations under the Directive and to introduce a licensing and control system over the abstraction of water generally.

In advance of the primary legislation, and in order to build up a nationwide picture of abstractions, a requirement to register water abstractions in excess of 25 cubic metres per day with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has already been introduced by way of secondary legislation under the European Union (Water Policy) (Abstractions Registration) Regulations 2018. This has been put in place to enable the EPA to assess where particular water pressures as a result of abstraction might exist and, accordingly, better manage abstractions in areas of high risk in the future. The register is maintained by the EPA and I understand that it does not provide for the specific identification of abstractions for the purposes of bottled water.

There will be further opportunity to contribute to development of the provisions to be contained in the planned legislation when I submit the revised General Scheme of the Water Environment (Abstractions) Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny.

I expect that a proportionate abstraction control regime will effectively manage abstraction risks and pressures without imposing an unnecessary regulatory burden. Recognising the relatively low abstraction pressures in Ireland, the proposed regime will focus on the most significant volumes and pressures.

It should be noted that requirements in relation to the standards of bottled waters are laid out in the European Union (Natural Mineral Waters, Spring Waters and Other Waters in Bottles or Containers) Regulations 2016, which are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Planning Guidelines

66. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the new rural planning guidelines will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51868/19]

83. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to introduce new rural housing guidelines in view of the Flemish Decree judgment of the European Court of Justice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51116/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 and 83 together.

Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the European Court of Justice ruling in the “Flemish Decree” case, a working group was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The working group comprises senior officials from the Planning Division of my Department and senior officials from the Planning Divisions of local authorities, nominated by the local government sector.

In parallel, my Department is reviewing the Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities, to update guidance in light of both legislative changes and the introduction of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. In line with the NPF objective 37, my Department is also working on guidance on preparation of Housing Need Demand Assessments, which will inform housing strategies and associated land use zoning policies.

Thereafter, I propose to finalise revisions to the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines, taking account of the engagement with the European Commission, the relevant European Court of Justice rulings and the completion of the ongoing deliberations by the working group.

Departmental Offices

67. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the housing delivery office; the relationship of the office with the Land Development Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51865/19]

306. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the housing delivery office; the relationship of the office with the Land Development Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51988/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 306 together.

A dedicated Housing Delivery Office (HDO) was established within my Department to support the accelerated delivery of housing across the social and private sectors, in an integrated

and timely manner.

Working with the broader Housing and Planning Divisions in the Department, other key agencies, local authorities and the construction sector, the HDO has supported the roll-out of complex projects, including identifying and resolving barriers to delivery, and monitors progress across key sites as they progress. The HDO has worked with all key stakeholders involved in the delivery of housing, including from key disciplines such as architecture, planning, engineering and building control, project and construction management, quantity surveying, capital programme delivery and administration.

In the context of the increased delivery ambition in terms of social and affordable homes, my Department has been working with the City and County Management Association (CCMA) in terms of reviewing the most effective future operating platform for the HDO. While the Department has a pivotal role in terms of policy, legislation and the finance to enable local authorities deliver, the day to day delivery is a matter for local government and, with increased targets and delivery accelerating, the clear demand for an enhanced support structure is recognised.

The CCMA recently submitted a proposal to my Department setting out the benefits that a revamped and reconfigured HDO more closely situated within the local government sector could have in terms of supporting increased delivery. This approach could have significant benefits in terms of addressing a number of delivery challenges including:

- Leasing;
- Social Housing Specification and Design;
- Procurement/ Contract Management/ Project Management; and
- Utilising Landbanks/ Achieving Mixed Tenure.

Given the similarities between these objectives and other established Project Management Offices, I have agreed with the CCMA that the HDO will therefore transition to the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). The CCMA and LGMA are working to a Quarter 1 2020 initiation of the new office. We are fully agreed that the new unit will work closely, not only with my Department, but also with other key sectoral stakeholders, including the Land Development Agency and the Housing Agency, to align activity, share knowledge and expertise and drive efficiencies in the housing delivery process.

Local Authority Staff

68. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the role of his Department in the provision of a dangerous substance officer within county councils; the role of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51135/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers aggregate quarterly data on staff whole time equivalent numbers in each local authority. However, granular data, in terms of the specific role and function of each individual staff member, is not collected and

consequently is not available in my Department.

This information should be available directly from local authorities themselves.

An Bord Pleanála

69. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the fact that the quorum in An Bord Pleanála is only three members, which means that two members of the board are making decisions on major planning applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51870/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in general, the quorum of the Board of An Bord Pleanála is three persons, with an option for a two-member meeting, subject to Board approval, in circumstances where the Chairperson considers it necessary to ensure the efficient discharge of duties of the Board.

Separate legislative provisions apply to the divisions of the Board dealing with planning applications for strategic infrastructure development (SID) and, more recently, strategic housing development (SHD). Section 112A of the 2000 Act provides that the quorum for a meeting of the Strategic Infrastructure Division shall be three members. Furthermore, section 11 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 also provides that the quorum for a meeting of the Strategic Housing Division is three members.

Both Acts provide that at any stage before a decision is made by either the Strategic Infrastructure Division or Strategic Housing Division, where a case is considered to be a matter of particular complexity or significance, it may be transferred for consideration to a meeting of all available members of the Board.

No changes to these arrangements were recommended by the organisational review of An Bord Pleanála carried out by an independent review group in 2016. I am satisfied with the existing arrangements and have no plans to amend them at this time.

Housing Policy

70. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the findings of a report published by an organisation (details supplied); the way in which he plans to address the concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51704/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Earlier this month, I received email correspondence from Social Justice Ireland which contained a link to the Videos and Papers from the 32nd Social Policy Conference - The Challenges of Success.

I note the papers included the Challenges of Success conference booklet, which contains a ‘Review of the Government’s Housing Strategy from the perspective of young and old’. My Department keeps its housing policies and programmes under regular review and I have asked that the Social Justice Ireland papers be considered in that context.

Rent Pressure Zones

71. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider amendments to the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 in order that the expiry date of each deemed and designated rent pressure zone, RPZ, can be reviewed prior to 31 December 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51800/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector recognises that rapidly increasing rental inflation is the most significant challenge to security of tenure in the rental sector and that there was a need for a targeted, time-bound and transparent policy response to the issue of rising rents. To address this, the Government introduced the Rent Predictability Measure. This measure, which was provided for by the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, introduced the concept of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) to moderate the rate of rent increases in those areas of the country where rents are highest and rising quickly.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 was enacted on 24 May 2019 following extensive debate in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Given the ongoing housing and homelessness crisis, I have no immediate plans to amend the RPZ expiry date of 31 December 2021 provided for in that Act. The position will be reviewed nearer the expiry date in light of prevailing rent levels at that time.

The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation as Rent Pressure Zones in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

72. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the summary of the 2019 social housing needs assessment. [51755/19]

89. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the most recent figures on the housing waiting list for four Dublin councils (details supplied). [51371/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 89 together.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are set out in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA).

The most recently conducted SSHA details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 24 June 2019 (the count date). Since the count date, the Housing Agency have been examining the figures submitted by Local Authorities. The Agency recently submitted their report to me which provides information on the characteristics of the households on the list. The full report, including breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories, is available on my Department's website at the following link: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2019_dec_2019_web_1.pdf.

The final numbers provided by the Housing Agency regarding the 2019 assessment show that 68,693 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 3,165 households or 4.4% on the last assessment in June 2018. Indeed, since the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan was launched in 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 68,693, a reduction of 25%.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists. Local authorities have provided 90,000 social housing supports in the period of Rebuilding Ireland to date.

The undertaking of the SSHA assists in providing a more strategic picture of the dynamics of the numbers applying for social housing supports and emerging trends. The purpose of the SSHA is to capture the total number of households qualified for social housing support across the country whose social housing need is not being met, in order to better understand the level of need for such support. The data garnered through the Summary will allow my Department to target the delivery of social housing supports under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to those most in need.

Seanad Reform

73. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for the implementation of the Seanad reform group proposals; and the timeline for same. [51857/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): In April 2018, the Taoiseach established an Implementation Group on Seanad Reform (SRIG) to consider the Manning Report (formally known as the Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform) and to develop specific proposals to legislate for Seanad reform. The SRIG's report, together with a draft Bill, was published in December 2018.

The SRIG Report contains recommendations in relation to electoral reform of the Seanad, as well as recommendations for non-statutory reforms in regard to the way the Seanad conducts its business. The Report was noted by Government at its meeting on 30 April 2019. Government also noted that the Report includes four statements from various groups outlining where their position was not in line with recommendations of the Report.

Statements on the SRIG Report were held in the Seanad on 24 September 2019 and in the Dáil on 7 November 2019. The Government will reflect on the views of the Oireachtas with a view to considering early in 2020 the next steps to be taken.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

74. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to ensure the figures of those on the RAS and HAP transfer lists are included on the list of those awaiting social housing by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51874/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Consistent with the provisions in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is considered to be a social housing support and consequently households in receipt of a payment under the scheme are not eligible to remain on the main housing waiting list. However, acknowledging that some households on the waiting list, who avail of HAP, have expectations that they would receive a more traditional form of social housing support, Ministerial directions have issued to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP recipients can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list.

Furthermore, local authorities were also directed that HAP recipients who apply to go on the transfer list should get full credit for the time they spent on the waiting list and be placed on the transfer list with no less favourable terms than if they had remained on the waiting list.

In relation to the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 gives legislative recognition to rental accommodation availability agreements, which underpin RAS, as a form of social housing support. Consequently, since 1 April 2011, RAS tenants are now considered to be in receipt of social housing support and should not generally remain on main housing waiting lists for new applicants for social housing.

Recognising that tenants housed through RAS prior to this change might have had reasonable expectations in regard to retaining access to traditional local authority rented accommodation, guidance issued from the Housing Agency in 2011 recommended that there should be a special transfer pathway for pre-2011 RAS tenants to other forms of social housing support. The arrangement effectively allowed these households to be designated as a 'transfer' applicant and to maintain their position for allocation as they had on the main waiting list.

All tenants allocated RAS accommodation post 1st April 2011 (and thus under the provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009) were informed at the time of offer and allocation that because RAS is now a social housing support, their housing need is met and that they will no longer remain on the main social housing waiting list.

However, it is recommended that allocation schemes also provide a 'transfer pathway' for new RAS tenants, whereby households in RAS have access to the transfer list in the same way as tenants in local authority accommodation.

The practical operation of transfer lists is a matter for each local authority to manage, on the basis of their own scheme of letting priorities. The making of such schemes is a reserved function of the local authority and as such is a matter for the elected members.

HAP and RAS continue to be key vehicles in meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme outlined under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Home Loan Scheme

75. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the most up-to-date figures on the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the number of loans applied for; the number of loans approved; the number drawn down; and the average loan amount in the three categories. [51757/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications.

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

I have asked the Agency to compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and recommended to approve since the scheme began. In 2018, the Housing Agency assessed 3,036 valid applications. Of these, it recommended 1,550 for approval. For 2019, as

of end-November 2019, the Housing Agency have assessed 2,476 valid applications of which 1,225 have been recommended for approval.

My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Local authority approval means that an official letter of offer has been sent to a borrower (and therefore relates to a specific property and loan amount). Information on the RIHL up to Quarter 2 2019, including in relation to the number and value of mortgage approvals and drawdowns and also average loan amounts is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 48.

Housing Estates

77. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the taking in charge of housing estates process will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51117/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The most recent amendments to the taking in charge provisions of the planning code were made in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 with a view to further strengthening and streamlining the taking-in-charge process.

Residential developments consisting of two or more dwellings that have been granted planning permission under section 34 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) may be eligible (depending on the grant of planning condition) for taking in charge. The taking in charge of residential estates by local authorities is provided for under section 180 of the 2000 Act as amended and is a reserved function of the elected members.

Under Section 180 (1) of the Act, the planning authority is obliged to initiate taking in charge procedures where requested by either the developer or by the majority of owners of the dwellings. However, this is subject to the development being completed to the satisfaction of the authority and in accordance with the permission and any conditions.

Circular PD 1/08 updates the earlier policy guidance issued by the Department and replaced circular letters PD 1/06 and 5/06 which directed planning authorities to develop a policy on taking in charge. All planning authorities were required to develop or update, as appropriate, their policy on taking in charge by the end of June 2008 on the basis of the framework set out in Circular PD 1/08.

Ultimately, however, progression of individual developments through the taking-in-charge process is a matter for the relevant housing developer, the residents in such developments and the relevant local authorities, following the procedures laid out in section 180.

I have no current plans to conduct a review of the taking-in-charge provisions of the Act.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 46.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

79. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding will be considered for a second bridge into Newbridge, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46783/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is a flagship element of Project Ireland 2040. Under the stewardship of my Department, the Fund was established in 2018 to support more compact and sustainable development, through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland's five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan (NDP).

In July 2018, bids for URDF funding support were invited from public bodies. The application process was competitive and in the event, out of a total of 189 applications received by my Department, 88 proposals were approved for URDF support.

As part of this first call, Kildare County Council submitted 7 proposals and was awarded URDF support for 4 of these. One of the Council's unsuccessful proposals related to a link road from Great Connell Road to Athgarvan Road in Newbridge.

A second call for proposals under the URDF will be announced shortly.

In the context of the second call it will be a matter for Kildare County Council to consider the projects it may wish to submit for consideration. In that regard, and taking account of the assessment of its previous proposal, the Council can, of course consider again submitting the Newbridge Link Road as part of a broader integrated urban development proposal.

Legislative Measures

80. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for progressing the housing and planning and development (amendment) Bill; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Bill adds many requirements and restrictions that will make it much harder for persons and environmental NGOs to take cases against developments; the way in which he can address the various concerns outlined by NGOs and private citizens regarding the fundamental changes to the current system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51705/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The reforms set out in the General Scheme for a Housing and Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill are part of a series of ongoing reforms to ensure that the planning system operates in a streamlined and efficient manner, delivering timely decisions with effective public engagement. The proposed reforms largely emanate from a steering group established by the Department of An Taoiseach on Data Centres and Judicial Review and an associated multi-Departmental and Agency working group mandated by that Group, which was chaired by my Department.

The proposals in the General Scheme are not intended to inhibit actions by any person directly impacted by a proposed development who has participated in the planning process. Prior participation can be waived subject to certain reasonable exclusions. With regard to NGOs, the proposals are to ensure that there is clarity on the standing of NGOs in the process and to ensure that NGO provisions do not result in judicial review challenges being brought forward by bodies or organisations engaged in competitive or economic activity. The proposed cost capping measures are designed to provide a reasonable and proportionate balance in relation to the costs exposure for all parties and also enable the Courts to determine if a case is prohibitively

expensive.

I recently launched a public consultation on the General Scheme of the Bill. The consultation enables all interested parties to make submissions on the proposed legislation. This will inform the further development of the draft legislation which will be completed following the conclusion of the consultation process.

Local Authority Facilities

81. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact the CEO of Dublin City Council is proposing that depot sites be sold to facilitate the capital programme (details supplied); the reason it is not policy to use appropriate public land held by the council to build public housing in view of the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51825/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The development of major local authority residential sites, including in the Dublin City Council area, where undersupply and the greatest affordability issues are being experienced, is a major priority for the Government. This includes making maximum use of public land for the purpose of delivering social and affordable homes for those who need them.

In the first instance, it is a matter for each local authority and its elected members to agree the optimal approach to development and financing of its land bank, including the viability of sites for development. Notwithstanding this, my Department has been working closely with all local authorities, including Dublin City Council, to ensure that new social and affordable homes can be delivered from the public land bank, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the greatest potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term.

In addition, the Land Development Agency have also been working with local authorities, including Dublin City Council, to ensure increased delivery of social and affordable homes on public lands.

As set out in the details supplied by the Deputy, Dublin City Council's intention is to ensure that those sites whose zoning allows for residential development are to be developed for social and affordable housing through Approved Housing Bodies.

Local Authority Rates

82. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has had meetings with Louth County Council regarding an anomaly by which County Louth is the only local authority to have three different rateable values, given the detrimental effect this is having on businesses in some parts of the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50131/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Local authorities have a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority.

The elected members of local authorities have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, including adopting the annual budget. Setting the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) is a key part of the budgetary process.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for rates harmonisation to cater for differences between ARVs of former town councils and county councils. The new structures of local government, including the establishment of municipal districts, provided an opportunity to achieve a more coherent approach to rates and charges on a county-wide basis.

In 2015, local authorities began the process of harmonisation to cater for differences between ARVs of former town councils and of county councils. Changes in rates liability, due to harmonisation, are being phased in over a period of up to 10 years. An adjustment mechanism is provided to phase in increases and decreases to be known as the Base Year Adjustment (BYA). The adoption of the ARV and BYA in respect of each financial year are reserved functions of local authority members.

Three local authorities have yet to complete the rates harmonisation process, including Louth County Council. It is expected that the remaining authorities will make progressive steps over the next budgetary periods to complete the harmonisation process within the legislative requirements. In that context, the specific timeframe for the completion of the process is a matter for each local authority and the issue of a meeting with the Council on this matter does not arise.

My Department liaises with local authorities on financial matters and with the sector generally on an ongoing basis, while at all times respecting the mandate of elected representatives to carry out their reserved functions.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 66.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 59.

Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 43.

Home Loan Scheme

86. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to ensure that Meath County Council has sufficient funding to approve applications for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51856/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans would be approximately €200 million over three years. However, this loan product has proved to be more successful than initially anticipated. In the context of the scheme's success my Department engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance with regard to the allocation for 2019.

I engaged early as I said I would. While discussions commenced in October 2018 on additional funding, the first tranche of €200m was only fully drawn down in August of this year. My Department wrote to all 31 local authorities on 15 August 2019 sanctioning an additional €363 million in funding for the Loan. This brings total funding for the Loan to €563 million for 2018 and 2019 combined, allowing the allocation for Meath to be increased to €35.8m for the same period.

Local Authority Housing Provision

87. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the new build targets set by Galway City Council and Galway County Councils in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number built by each local authority in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51820/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Strategy (SHS), which was the precursor to Rebuilding Ireland, set social housing delivery targets, on a local authority basis, for the period 2015 to 2017. Over this period, local authorities were tasked with the delivery of some 23,000 social housing supports, with an investment commitment of over €1.5 billion.

The table below sets out the 2015-2017 targets for Galway, as issued in April 2015, under the SHS:

-	Capital	Current	Total
Galway City Council	136	382	518
Galway County Council	144	464	608

It should be noted that the targets set under the SHS were not disaggregated into build, acquisition, leasing, HAP and RAS. Therefore, they are not readily comparable with the targets and outputs set under Rebuilding Ireland. However, details of social housing delivery for each local authority in the years 2015 to 2017 have been published on my Department's website and are available at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, a target was set to deliver 50,000 social housing homes nationally over the 6 years of the Action Plan, supported by funding which is now well over €6 billion.

In 2018, I published targets for the period 2018-2021, broken down by local authority, which are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

Delivery outputs are also published, on a quarterly basis, and these are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Rental Sector Strategy

88. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to fund the affordable cost-rental project in St Michael's Estate, Inchicore, Dublin 8; and if the rents can be brought below €900 per month. [51756/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Dublin City Council-owned land at Emmet Road, Inchicore, which is largely comprised of the former St Michael's Estate, is a cost rental 'pathfinder' pilot development. It is estimated that this site can accommodate 484 homes in a high quality mixed-tenure development. It is envisaged that 375 homes will be cost rental, with the remaining homes reserved for social housing. Taken together with an adjacent development of integrated social housing for older people,

the overall tenure mix for the area will be 30% social and 70% cost rental.

The homes at Emmet Road will be complemented by commercial, retail, community and open space, including the existing Inchicore Community Sports Centre. To facilitate community engagement, Dublin City Council has established the Inchicore Regeneration Consultative Forum, bringing together local residents, business owners, and civil society organisations. It is envisaged that the development will form a central element in the longer term economic and social regeneration of the Inchicore and Kilmainham areas.

Based on the agreed tenure mix, it is anticipated that the funding for the 30% social housing units will be provided by my Department through existing funding programmes. The 70% of homes that will be available for cost rental will be funded through borrowing, and officials from Dublin City Council and my Department have recently met with the EIB who have reiterated their interest in being involved in supporting this cost rental pilot.

Cost rental is housing where the rents charged cover the cost of delivering, managing and maintaining the homes only. It is not designed to replace traditional social housing provision for low-income households, which remains a priority for the Government. Cost rental is a new tenure option for Ireland, and is one of several schemes which my Department is pursuing to deliver on the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan and ultimately provide more affordable housing.

While noting that the financial modelling for projects of this level is heavily influenced by the base case assumptions made, it is my understanding that initial projections by advisers engaged by Dublin City Council have estimated that rents of up to approximately 40% below market rates are achievable.

In order for this project to succeed as a cost rental development, it is important that project funds are recouped on an ongoing basis. As the rent paid by a household in a cost rental tenancy simply reflects the cost of delivering, managing and maintaining the property, a number of measures can be used at the outset of a development in order to make rents more affordable. In the case of St Michael's, this includes the provision of land; the design of housing with value engineering and long term maintenance in mind; a potential State contribution to development costs via the Serviced Sites Fund, and the availability of low-cost, stable finance that is paid back over a long period of time.

In relation to current progress on this project, a Development Framework Plan has been completed on behalf of Dublin City Council. Cost consultants have also completed a report on the construction costs of the plan and assessed the scheme in light of the objective to develop a pilot Cost Rental scheme. The Council is in the process of developing a Stage 1 Capital Works Management Framework application for the social housing element of the development and will submit this to my Department. The Council is also procuring an architect-led integrated design team, who will be responsible for designing the development and taking it as far as the planning stage. Tenders are due before year end and it is envisaged that the design team will be appointed in January 2020.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 72.

Housing Assistance Payment Applications

90. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the waiting times for processing of HAP applications by each local authority; the additional resources he will release to ensure that waiting times are reduced down to one to two weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51113/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Limerick City and County Council provide a highly effective HAP transactional-shared service on behalf of all local authorities. The HAP Shared Services Centre (HAP SSC) manages all HAP-related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Once a HAP application has been received and confirmed as valid by the relevant local authority, it is then processed by the HAP SSC. On average, HAP applications are processed by the HAP Shared Service Centre within 2 -3 working days of receipt. Any rental payment arising for a given month will then be made to a landlord on the last Wednesday of that month.

Under the HAP scheme, eligible households source their own accommodation in the private rented sector and the tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord. The HAP application form comes in two parts; Section A to be completed by the applicant tenant and Section B to be completed by the landlord or agent. An application for HAP will only be accepted by the local authority when both Section A and Section B are completed, signed and returned, along with the required supporting documentation. Any delay in tenants and landlords supplying this information will impact on the processing time of the HAP application. The earliest date a HAP payment to the landlord will apply from is the date a complete and valid HAP application has been received by the local authority.

HAP application processing times within local authorities may vary. Once a HAP application has been received and confirmed as valid by the relevant local authority, it is entered on the system by the local authority and then submitted for processing and payment by the HAP Shared Service Centre. If there are delays at the processing stage within a local authority, payment to the landlord will be backdated to the date on which a complete and valid application form was received by the local authority. The landlord is therefore not penalised for any delay.

An analysis of data from the HAP SSC indicates that the average processing time at the end of Q3 2019 within the 31 local authorities is 34 days. My Department has recently written to all local authorities to remind them of the critical need to keep processing times under review at a local level to ensure times are minimised to the greatest extent possible.

To support local authorities in the implementation of the HAP scheme, my Department provides a once off administrative payment of €150 per HAP household to all local authorities. This administrative payment recognises the resources required to manage the HAP process. The payment is made directly to local authorities, to offset HAP staffing and administrative costs. Since 2015 over €9m has been provided to local authorities in this regard.

At the end of Q3 2019, there were over 50,000 households having their housing needs met via HAP and some 29,000 separate landlords and agents in receipt of monthly HAP payments. My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 45.

Electoral Process

92. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans with regard to the regulation of political advertising on social media platforms further to the recent meeting of the International Grand Committee on Disinformation and Fake News. [49415/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Following a detailed proposal from the Interdepartmental Group on the Security of Ireland's Electoral Process and Disinformation, the Government agreed on 5

November 2019 that my Department would prepare the General Scheme of a Bill which would provide for the display of specified information in respect of the use of paid political advertising in online media during electoral periods. It is anticipated that a draft General Scheme will be available by the end of the second quarter in 2020.

The proposal from the Interdepartmental Group was developed having regard to submissions received during a public consultation held in the autumn of 2018 and the holding of an open policy forum on the regulation of transparency of online political advertising which was held on 6 December 2018. The two reports from the Interdepartmental Group, the submissions from the public consultation and a report on the forum's deliberations are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/7a3a7b-overview-regulation-of-transparency-of-online-political-advertising-/#open-policy-forum-6-december-2018>

In summary, the proposal, as set out in the Interdepartmental Group's most recent progress report (November 2019), provides that the legislation will apply to online platforms, as sellers or intermediaries of political advertising, and to the buyers of political adverts. It is envisaged that an obligation will be placed on sellers to determine that adverts fall under the scope of the legislation. Online paid-for political advertisements commissioned for use during electoral periods will be required to be labelled as such and clearly display specified information, or a link to that information, in a transparent and conspicuous manner.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 47.

Question No. 94 answered with Question No. 62.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 51.

Civil Service Renewal Plan

96. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the way in which his Department provides collective leadership to the Civil Service renewal programme. [51616/19]

The Taoiseach: The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform has overall policy responsibility for the Civil Service Renewal Programme.

The Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) provides collective leadership of the Civil Service Renewal Programme.

The CSMB is chaired by the Secretary General to the Government and its membership is comprised of all Departmental Secretaries General and Heads of major Offices in the Civil Service.

The CSMB has met on 43 occasions since its establishment in October 2014.

Staff in the Social Policy and Public Service Reform Division of the Department of the Taoiseach provide secretarial support to the CSMB.

They work closely with the Civil Service Renewal Programme Management Office in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in this regard.

The Civil Service Renewal Programme Management Office co-ordinates and drives the Civil Service Renewal Programme, with regular progress reports provided to the CSMB.

Achievements to date include the establishment of OneLearning; implementation of a range of initiatives to improve gender balance across the civil service; Organisational Capability Reviews; a Common Governance Standard for the Civil Service; the Civil Service People Strategy; structured and transparent talent management programmes; the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards; a Civil Service-wide mobility scheme for Clerical Officers and Executive Officers; and Civil Service Employee Engagement Surveys.

Detailed Progress Reports on the Civil Service Renewal Programme and CSMB Annual Reports and minutes of CSMB meetings are available on gov.ie.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

97. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he or his officials have met political leaders from Northern Ireland regarding the Northern Ireland Assembly. [51617/19]

The Taoiseach: I met with Sinn Féin along with the Tánaiste on Tuesday, 26th November in Leinster House. Our discussions focussed on the political situation in Northern Ireland and on a time frame for post-election talks. I emphasised the Government's full commitment to all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. I believe that there is a real potential window of opportunity very shortly to reach agreement between the parties on the restoration of the Good Friday Agreement Institutions.

As I reported to the House on 27 November, I last met DUP leader Arlene Foster at the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies in Enniskillen on Sunday, 10 November, when we both participated in the laying of wreaths at the cenotaph and attended a remembrance service in St. Macartin's Cathedral.

I spoke to SDLP leader Colum Eastwood by phone on 9th December 2019, when we discussed Brexit, the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and the influence of Irish MPs in Westminster. I also recently met with Claire Hanna of the SDLP in Government Buildings.

In November, I wrote to the new UUP Leader Steve Aiken to congratulate him on his appointment as party leader.

I have not been in contact with the Alliance Party in recent weeks, although I spoke by phone with Naomi Long Alliance Party leader, on 8 October.

The Tánaiste is in regular contact with all the Northern Party Leaders and keeps me fully briefed on developments. There are also ongoing contacts at official level.

The Tánaiste and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have confirmed that the two Governments are ready to take talks in Northern Ireland forward again immediately following the UK general election.

We believe finding final agreement on the issues outstanding in these talks can be done in a short period of time. A substantial talks process has already taken place during the period 2017 through 2019. Notwithstanding this, a successful outcome in the weeks ahead will require political will and leadership by the parties.

The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the restoration and effective operation of all of its institutions.

Cabinet Committee Meetings

98. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the Cabinet committee that discusses agricultural matters; and when it last met. [51618/19]

The Taoiseach: Issues relevant to the agriculture sector can arise, as required, at a number of Cabinet Committees, including the Cabinet Committee on the Economy, which most recently met on Wednesday 4 September, the Cabinet Committee on Brexit, Foreign and European Affairs, which most recently met on Monday 9 December, and the Cabinet Committee on the Environment, which most recently met on Monday 2 December.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

99. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52125/19]

The Taoiseach: Below is a table listing the figures requested by the Deputy.

2019

Item	Total Cost	Digital component
Budget 2019 - public information	1355.46	1355.46
Draft language Scheme - public consultation notices	624.2	
Budget 2020 - public information	9901.5	9901.5
Vótáil 100 - video production and creative costs	17207.7	
Nomination of President of the Circuit Court - adverts placed in national newspapers	3506.26	
Video production and administration costs associated with launch of North-East Inner City Initiative	8302.50	

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

100. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video which highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52142/19]

The Taoiseach: Below is a table listing the figures requested by the Deputy.

There are no video commissions currently planned for 2020 relating to schemes operated by my Department. However my Department will participate in all appropriate programmes in 2020.

2019

Item	Total Cost
Budget 2019 - public information	1355.460
Budget 2020 - public information	9901.50
Vótáil 100 - video production and creative costs	17207.70
Video production and administration costs associated with launch of North-East Inner City Initiative	8302.50

Departmental Expenditure

101. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the associated costs incurred by his Department in hosting the special Cabinet meeting in Trim, County Meath, on 6 December 2019; and the breakdown of the costs including transport, accommodation, food, drink, information technology, public relations and media in tabular form. [52168/19]

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet meeting in Trim on 6th December last was held in the OPW Head Offices and therefore no rental/hire cost was incurred. There were no accommodation costs.

Travel, catering and incidental costs related to the holding of this meeting cannot be fully reported yet as no invoices and claims have been received and processed since the meeting.

Departmental Advertising Campaigns

102. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the Government of Ireland-branded information initiatives to date in 2019 that carried out functions (details supplied) involving advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; the level of expenditure for each initiative; and if his officials or officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade were involved in giving instructions and advice in promoting such initiatives. [52170/19]

The Taoiseach: Below is a table listing the figures requested by the Deputy. Officials from my Department, including the Government Information Service, have a coordinating and supporting role for national, cross-Government communications.

2019

Item	Total Cost	Digital component
Budget 2019 - public information	1355.46	1355.46
Budget 2020 - public information	9901.5	9901.5
Vótáil 100 - video production and creative	17207.7	
Video production and administration costs associated with launch of North-East Inner City Initiative	8302.50	

Departmental Advertising Campaigns

103. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the Government of Ireland-branded infor-

mation initiatives planned in 2020 that will carry out functions (details supplied) involving advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each initiative [52171/19]

The Taoiseach: There are no Government of Ireland branded information initiatives planned for 2020 in my Department. However my Department will participate in all appropriate initiatives as required, and in light of events such as, for example, developments on Brexit.

Departmental Staff Data

104. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52033/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It has not been possible in the time available to compile all of the necessary information requested by the Deputy. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Ministerial Travel

105. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the occasions on which he and each Minister used the Government jet from May 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the date of each trip; the location and purpose of each trip; the costs incurred in respect of the use of the aircraft for each trip in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52045/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Ministerial Air Transport Service provides the Government and the President with an independent and flexible air transport service to assist in meeting national and international obligations.

Requests for the use of the service are made to the Taoiseach's office where they are examined with regard to the need and purpose of travel. Once approved all operational matters are settled directly between the Minister in question and my Department.

Information in relation to Ministerial Air Transport flights is publically available via a link entitled "Routinely Published Information" on the Department of Defence website where it is updated on a monthly basis: www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-defence/.

My Department does not hold details in relation to the purpose of other Minister's Ministerial Air Transport Service travel. However, in relation to my usage of the Ministerial Air Transport Service in my capacity as Minister with responsibility for Defence, the table below outlines the details of travel undertaken and the purpose of the travel in the period referred to by the Deputy.

Departure Date	Return Date	Ministerial Time on Board (Minutes)	Route	Department	Passengers	Purpose
21/12/2017	23/12/2017	735	Baldonnel - Naples - Beirut - Naples - Baldonnel	Taoiseach/ Defence	Taoiseach, MoS plus 5	Visit to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)
10/07/2018	12/07/2018	485	Baldonnel - Pristina - Sarajevo - Baldonnel	Defence	MoS plus 5	Visit to Irish Troops in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina
30/01/2019	30/01/2019	255	Baldonnel - Bucharest - Baldonnel	Defence	MoS plus 3	Informal Meeting of the EU Defence Ministers

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

106. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52115/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department carries out an annual Be Winter Ready campaign each winter. The table below sets out the full costs for the campaign for Winter 2019-2020. This is the only campaign or programme of this nature carried out by my Department.

Winter Ready Information Campaign Costs	Costs
Irish Translation of Be Winter Ready leaflets, Ministers speeches and Q&A's	€388.02
Promotional Mugs	€487.08
OEP Stand at Ploughing Championship	€2,709.37
HiViz waistcoats with Be Winter Ready logo	€3,965.78
Sign Language Interpreter for Be Winter Ready Campaign Launch	€276.75
Radio Advertisements (16 x 20secs slots over 4 days)	€27,897.98
Two page 'Be Winter Ready' article in the Irish Independent	€7,995.00
Distribution of leaflets with Irish Independent	€15,498.00
Total	€59,217.98

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

107. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52132/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department has not created any video content for any schemes or programmes during 2019 and, at present, none is planned for 2020.

EU Budgets

108. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the severe cuts to defence and climate policy areas in view of the latest draft EU budget plans for 2021 to 2027 for the EU long-term budget; and if he has discussed same with his EU counterparts. [51849/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): This week's European Council will discuss the MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) on the basis of a revised proposal put forward by the Finnish Presidency. This is the most recent iteration of the draft proposal by successive Presidencies in these complex negotiations, which are likely to continue well into 2020. The Presidency has proposed an overall level of 1.07% of EU27 GNI for the next MFF period 2021-2027 and has maintained or slightly increased the allocations for Cohesion and CAP, which are priority areas for Ireland. To maintain CAP and Cohesion spending at the level proposed by the Commission, the Presidency has proposed adjustments to a range of other programmes, including in the defence area. I am pleased that the revised proposal confirms that at least 25% of the EU budget should be devoted to climate action. The MFF negotiations feature regularly on the agenda of my bilateral meetings with EU counterparts so that we can explain and understand our respective priorities.

Northern Ireland

109. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the implementation of the St. Andrews and Fresh Start agreements. [51853/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Full and effective implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements, including the 2006 St Andrews Agreement, the 2014 Stormont House Agreement and the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, is a key priority for the Government, as reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

Progress in implementing the provisions of the Fresh Start and Stormont House Agreements and outstanding commitments from earlier Agreements are to be considered at Review Meetings, co-convened by the two Governments with the participation of the Executive. Unfortunately, due to the absence of the Executive since early 2017, it has not been possible to convene a Review Meeting since December 2016. Nevertheless, work on implementation has continued as appropriate in each jurisdiction, and to the extent possible in the absence of the Executive.

A key element of the Fresh Start Agreement relates to the ending of the legacy of paramili-

tarism. On 13 September 2016, the Irish and UK Governments signed an international agreement to establish the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) and it was subsequently given effect to by legislation in both jurisdictions. The IRC reports annually on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland, and it published its second report on 4 November. This second IRC report is a sobering reminder of the continuing adverse impact that paramilitarism continues to have on society in Northern Ireland and brings an important and timely focus on what remains to be done to tackle it. The IRC has been active in pursuing its remit and has had a wide engagement with a range of relevant stakeholders, both North and South, and I commend the Commission for its valuable work so far and the efforts it has put into fulfilling its mandate.

The Fresh Start Agreement also provided for the establishment of the Joint Agency Task Force on cross-border crime. That Task Force was launched in Dublin in December 2015, and is bringing forward operational actions in the six priority areas that have been agreed as the focus of operations: Rural Crime; Immigration-related Crime; Excise Fraud; Drugs; Financial Crime; and Human Trafficking. These priorities are, of course, kept under review. There has been very considerable operational activity, with a variety of different operations undertaken across all of the priority areas since the establishment of the Task Force. The Joint Agency Task Force is an important example of the extensive and vital North-South co-operation that is undertaken between An Garda Síochána, the PSNI and other law enforcement agencies in both jurisdictions aimed at tackling crime and enhancing the safety of all communities on this island.

The Fresh Start Agreement affirmed the parties' commitment to implementation of the Stormont House Agreement provisions for dealing with the past. Victims and survivors have had to wait for far too long for a suitable and effective system in Northern Ireland to deal with the legacy of the Troubles. I have engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with all of the political parties to support a way forward to implement the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework. The Government remains firmly committed to the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework, and will continue to engage with the next British Government to see this finally achieved.

Under the Fresh Start Agreement, the Government made a number of financial commitments in support of the agreement, including €75m in respect of the construction of the A5 through Northern Ireland, exploring the development of the Ulster Canal and the Narrow Water Bridge, and funding of €2.5m to support the North West Development Fund. The latter commitment has been provided and the others are being progressed, overseen by a group of senior officials from the Government and the Executive as provided for under the Agreement.

A number of elements of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreements have not yet been fully implemented, and the Government also continues to work to see this achieved. This includes the provision in the St Andrews Agreement in 2006 for an Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland to be enacted by the British Government. Regrettably to date, there has been no agreement within the Executive to take forward what is now a devolved matter. In the successive discussions at Stormont that have been held since March 2017 to support the formation of a new Executive, the Government made consistently our support for an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland, as envisaged under the St Andrews Agreement.

I have engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland throughout these talks processes to encourage the parties to reach an accommodation. The multi-party inclusive talks process convened by the two Governments in May has included a specific working group to seek to reach agreement on rights, language and identity issues, which have proved intractable to date.

All five political parties have engaged constructively in the talks process over the last number of months and progress has been made across a range of important issues. However, some key outstanding issues remain and finding final agreement on these issues will require genuine and courageous dialogue and leadership by the party leaders in Northern Ireland.

I remain in regular and ongoing contact with Secretary of State Smith on how the two Governments can support the parties in reaching an agreement that will get all of the institutions of the Agreement up and running again. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I have confirmed that the two Governments are ready to take talks in Northern Ireland forward again immediately following the UK general election. It is envisaged that talks will commence as soon as possible after the UK election, potentially on 16 December. This of course depends to some extent on the outcome of the UK election.

People want the devolved power-sharing institutions up and running again to represent their interests and address issues of concern in Northern Ireland at present, including the implementation on an agreed basis of commitments from previous Agreements. The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions and the full and effective implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements.

Diplomatic Representation

110. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the meetings the special envoy to the United States of America has had since his appointment; the date and locations of meetings; the travel costs incurred as a consequence of their appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52019/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Taoiseach appointed Deputy John Deasy as Special Envoy to the United States Congress on the Undocumented Irish in June 2017. In this role, Deputy Deasy reports directly to the Department of An Taoiseach on the outcomes of his visits. He is supported, however, from a logistical perspective, by my staff in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Since 2017, Deputy Deasy has made 18 trips to the US in connection with his role as Special Envoy to the US Congress: four in 2017, ten in 2018 and four so far in 2019. He will again travel to Washington, D.C. the week beginning 9 December.

Deputy Deasy's travel and subsistence expenses are covered from within the existing resources of my Department, as and when he undertakes activities in connection with his role as Special Envoy. The total costs for Deputy Deasy's flights, accommodation and subsistence in 2017 were €13,784.25. The cost in 2018 was €30,295.90 and the cost, to date, in 2019 has been €10,729.76. Therefore the total costs incurred by Deputy Deasy to date in connection with his role as Special Envoy amount to € 54,809.91. This includes supporting some engagements with high level US contacts that have visited Ireland.

The focus of Deputy Deasy's engagements in the US has been advocating on behalf of the Government and informing high-level US officials and politicians on the Government's dual priority for seeking legal pathways for Irish immigration, such as through E3 visas, and on relief for the undocumented Irish. In this regard, Deputy Deasy meets with key contacts in the US Administration as well as political leaders in the House of Representatives and Senate. These meetings are therefore primarily in Washington D.C.

Brexit Negotiations

111. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the post-Brexit relationship talks planned as part of the December 2019 Foreign Affairs Council meeting; his policy objectives for same; and if he has met his officials to discuss same. [51850/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The future relationship between the UK and the EU will be discussed at the European Council on 13 December, but was not an item for discussion at the Foreign Affairs Council. It is expected that the European Council will adopt Conclusions on preparations for the negotiations on the future relationship with the UK post 31 January 2020.

While awaiting the outcome of the UK General Election, the EU is preparing for the upcoming negotiations on the future relationship. The EU has indicated it is ready to open negotiations immediately after ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. These will aim at a broad, deep and flexible EU-UK partnership – with a comprehensive and balanced Free Trade Agreement at its core. To this end, the Commission has established the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom, led by Michel Barnier, which will coordinate the Commission’s work on Brexit and establishing the future relationship with the UK. The Task Force will also look at necessary work on the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement during the transition period.

Ireland wants to see the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK, while also ensuring adequate level playing field provisions to facilitate fair competition. Work is underway on and elaborating on our priorities for the future relationship negotiations.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

112. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department, including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52119/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade engages in public awareness advertising campaigns where there is important information that needs to be brought to the attention of the public. In that regard, two significant campaigns took place in 2019 and will be ongoing in 2020; the new “Passport Online” campaign and the “Getting Ireland Brexit Ready” campaign.

In the case of the former, the objective is to build continual awareness of the Online Passport Service for Irish citizens, which is now expanding to include children and first time adult applications. This campaign has a multi-faceted approach, including promotion on social media platforms, national and regional print and broadcast media, and outdoor advertising. Expenditure to date in 2019 on this campaign is approximately €564,000.

Expenditure on the “Getting Ireland Brexit Ready” Public Information campaign was approximately €1.5 million in 2019. While the costs of the 2019 campaign were borne by my Department, this is a whole of Government campaign prepared and executed in partnership with other Government Departments and Agencies, in particular, the Department of the Taoiseach. The public information campaign will continue pending the outcome of the General Election

in the United Kingdom and subsequent political developments and decisions. Campaign details and projected expenditure in this area will be made available once those plans have been finalised.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

113. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52136/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department primarily uses videography to augment information campaigns that promote Ireland's economic, political and cultural interests and to engage with the Global Irish community. In 2019, campaigns that included video production and promotion were the Rugby World Cup in Japan, the Global Programme for St. Patrick's Day and 'Getting Ireland Brexit Ready.'

My Department uses in-house resources for videos whenever possible. Otherwise, my Department procures the services of external agencies via the updated Multi-Supplier Framework Agreement for the provision of Professional Photography and Videography, which is centrally operated through the Office of Government Procurement.

The cost of video production and promotion to my Department for events which took place in 2019 to date is listed in Table 1 below.

St Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day is a unique opportunity to engage with the global Irish community and to promote Ireland's economic and political interests overseas, with levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the National Day of any other country. This year's programme had the largest number of countries ever visited for St. Patrick's Day. The Taoiseach and I, along with 13 Ministers, 19 Ministers of State, the Attorney General, Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach visited 56 countries across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and the Asia-Pacific region. These programmes allowed us to promote trade, investment and tourism with Ireland, to increase visibility in new markets, and to promote our values and our influence in global institutions, notably in support of our campaign to become a member of the United Nations Security Council. It also allowed us to deepen our connections with Irish people and friends of Ireland all over the world.

Team Ireland overseas delivered a total of 1,796 events in support of Ireland's interest over the 2019 St. Patrick's Day period in this context. To coincide with and complement these activities, a small amount of expenditure was incurred by my Department in relation to online promotion of an accompanying St. Patrick's Day video as outlined in Table 1 below.

Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for the US and Canada 2019-2025 and Global Ireland Summit

'Global Ireland' is an all-of-Government programme which aims to double Ireland's impact in the world by 2025. The programme was launched by the Taoiseach and myself and Ministers Humphreys, Madigan and McEntee in June 2018 and sets out Ireland's ambitions in relation to how we trade, the bilateral and multilateral partnerships that we seek to build and our wider contribution to the world.

Global Ireland: Ireland’s Strategy for the US and Canada 2019–2025 is Ireland’s first whole-of-Government strategy for the US and Canada. Its aim is for Ireland to build strong, strategic political partnerships with the US and Canada and assume a lead role in building stronger trans-atlantic relations.

To coincide with the programme of St. Patrick’s Day-related activities held there earlier this year, my Department incurred a small amount of expenditure in relation to the production and online promotion of a video which outlined the Strategy’s key objectives insofar as the US is concerned.

In July, to mark the 1st anniversary of the launch of Global Ireland programme, my Department held the Global Ireland Summit in Dublin Castle. At the Summit it was announced that Ireland plans to double its impact in the Asia Pacific region, as part of the next phase of Global Ireland 2025. The Taoiseach and I, as well as Government Ministers, Ambassadors and key stakeholders addressed the Summit. To coincide with this event a video was produced and promoted via social media.

Common Travel Area - ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’

Irish and British citizens will still be able to move freely, live and work between the two countries. This video was shared across social media and Ireland, the UK and the EU all agree that the Common Travel Area will continue in all circumstances.

2019 Rugby World Cup

In 2019 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade coordinated a multi-agency promotional campaign to promote Ireland as a great place to invest, study, trade with, and visit during the Japan Rugby World Cup. This collaborative Team Ireland promotional campaign was a digital-led effort in the Japanese language to raise the visibility of Ireland amongst a Japanese audience at the Rugby World Cup and to win business for Ireland.

Japan is the third-largest economy in the world. It is Ireland’s 11th largest trading partner, and is the largest source of foreign direct investment into Ireland from the Asia Pacific region. The Rugby World Cup presented a significant opportunity to increase awareness about Ireland and to build a positive reputation for Ireland in Japan. This Global Ireland integrated Japanese language initiative successfully increased Ireland’s reach in Japan and is supporting the development of a stronger economic partnership with Japan. The digital resources developed will continue to be drawn on by Team Ireland in its ongoing promotion efforts in the country.

Campaign detail	Total
Global Ireland: St Patrick’s Day	€18,526.50
Global Ireland: Ireland’s Strategy for the US and Canada	€ 5,047.00
Global Ireland Summit video	€ 8,579.25
Global Ireland: Rugby World Cup Ireland promotion video	€ 45,180.29
Getting Ireland Brexit Ready, Common Travel Area video	€12,238.50

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

114. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to extend the first-time buyers help to buy incentive scheme to cover second-hand houses and apartments and not just new builds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51925/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): An increase in the supply of new housing is fundamental to resolving the current crisis; one of the main aims of HTB is to help encourage the building of additional new properties. By restricting HTB solely to new dwellings and new self builds, the resulting increase in demand for affordable new build homes encourages the construction of an additional supply of such properties. If the HTB were also available for second-hand properties, it would limit the incentive effect on the provision of additional supply.

I have no plans to extend the Help to Buy incentive (HTB) to second-hand properties.

Illicit Trade in Tobacco

115. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage of illicit tobacco products and-or non-Irish-paid tobacco here in tabular form; the percentage of these products that are cigarettes, illicit whites or counterfeit; the relevant applicable breakdown for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51957/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it jointly conducts an annual survey with the HSE's Office of Tobacco Control to provide an estimate of the level of illegal tobacco usage in Ireland.

Based on the annual survey results, the information requested by the Deputy for the years 2009 to 2018 is available on the Revenue website at link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/tobacco-products-research-results-2018.pdf>.

Results from the 2019 survey, which is currently in progress, are expected to be published in the first half of 2020.

Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman

116. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether it is appropriate for the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman to acknowledge and respond to routine representations from Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas; if the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman is obliged to have a dedicated email address for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas to make representations on behalf of persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51973/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO) is independent in the performance of his statutory functions. I have no role in the day to day workings of the office or in the decisions which he takes.

The Ombudsman has informed me that the FSPO adheres to the framework set out in the *"Protocol for the Provision of Information to Members of the Oireachtas by State Bodies under the aegis of Government Departments/Offices"* – circular 25/2016.

I understand that the FSPO wrote to all members of the Houses of the Oireachtas informing them of the Protocol for the Provision of Information to Members of the Oireachtas by State Bodies and providing a dedicated email address for the timely provision of information to members of the Oireachtas. The e-mail address for Members of the Oireachtas is oireachtas@fspoi.ie.

On the issue more generally, the FSPO acknowledges and responds to representations from

members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and has communicated with Deputies asking various question on a number of occasions.

It should be noted that due to data protection legalisation the FSPO cannot discuss the details of a complaint with any person other than the party to the complaint without written authorisation of the party to the complaint.

The FSPO welcomes and encourages feedback on the services it provides. There is a wealth of information on its website www.fspo.ie. In addition, its Publication Scheme has been prepared under Section 8 of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 2014. It is designed to facilitate the provision of information to the greatest extent possible, except for information exempted under the FOI Act. Under the FOI legislation, the FSPO cannot comment on individual complaints.

Tax Reliefs Costs

117. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reintroducing the tax relief for trade union subscriptions based on 2010 figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52001/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The following table sets out details of the cost of the tax relief for trade union subscriptions in the seven years immediately prior to its end, including 2010 (in which year, the measure cost some €26 million):

Year	Cost (€ million)	No. of Claims
2004	10.7	248,300
2005	11.8	272,100
2006	19.2	294,300
2007	20.7	316,300
2008	26.4	341,900
2009	26.7	345,800
2010	26	337,500

I am advised by Revenue that while these figures may not provide an accurate indicator of future costs of a new scheme, there is no other basis available to Revenue on which to estimate such costs.

Capital Allowances

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if accelerated capital allowances or other tax incentives are available for businesses that purchase and use newly manufactured fully electric mini-diggers; if the matter will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52021/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that an annual allowance (known as a wear and tear allowance) is available for capital expenditure incurred on the provision of machinery or plant for business purposes. The allowances are granted at a rate of 12.5% per annum over 8 year. The item of plant or machinery must be in use at the end of the period for which the allowance is being claimed.

An acceleration of this allowance is available to businesses for capital expenditure incurred

on certain energy efficient equipment (EEE). An accelerated capital allowance (ACA) of 100% of the capital expenditure incurred on such equipment can be claimed for the year in which the equipment is first provided and used for business purposes. The qualifying equipment, which must be new, must be included in the Triple-E register, a register containing the product list for eligible energy-efficient equipment, maintained and published by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

The SEAI administers the ACA EEE scheme on behalf of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. Its operation includes an online system which facilitates submissions of products by providers. Submissions are reviewed by a panel of technical experts (appointed by SEAI) who review the documentation supplied to ensure product performance meets published criteria. The expert panel engage directly with providers to resolve data or technical issues which may arise.

The register is available on the SEAI's website (<https://www.seai.ie/business-and-public-sector/business-grants-and-supports/accelerated-capital-allowance/>). There are currently 10 broader product categories within the scheme which provides the framework for the register, as set out in Schedule 4A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Electric mini diggers are not specifically listed, and more information would be required to ascertain whether their technological components are eligible for the accelerated allowance under the scheme.

I would also note that the ACA EEE scheme is due to be reviewed under my Department's tax expenditure guidelines in 2020, and this process will commence early next year.

Carbon Tax Implementation

119. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the legislative steps he is taking to ensure hypothecation of carbon tax revenues and ongoing allocation to climate-related expenditure; if his attention has been drawn to commitments set out in sections 6.6.3 and 6.8.3 of the 2019 report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action regarding the hypothecation of such revenues through legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52077/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In Budget 2020 I announced that the revenues from the increase in the carbon tax from €20 to €26 per tonne CO₂ would be ringfenced and the funds used to:

- Protect the most vulnerable in society;
- A Just Transition; and
- Investing in low carbon transition

To this end, on 9 October 2019, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published "The carbon tax increase - what it will be spent on", which sets out specific details in relation to where the ringfenced monies will be going. This can be accessed at: <https://assets.gov.ie/35942/a72c67a62786496686fa9257b3f6fa64.pdf>.

These are increases that would not have taken place in the absence of an increase to the carbon tax and the increased funding is additional to that provided by the National Development Plan. All funds are ring-fenced for these schemes only. Departments will not be allowed to use the carbon tax revenues for any other purpose. This guarantees that all funds raised by the carbon tax will go towards climate action.

I am satisfied that this approach will enable the continued ringfencing of additional carbon tax revenues to just transition and climate mitigation areas in future years.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

120. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52118/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that my Department has incurred the following expenses to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives which highlight schemes and programmes operated under its auspices:

Description	Amount
Provision of specialist advice on the use of social media in international contexts for the international launches of the Government of Ireland's Ireland for Finance strategy. (Note: Contract does not cover any work by the contractor in implementing the communications strategy.)	€24,395.00 (Inc. VAT)
Webhosting for the Switch Your Bank* campaign.	€1,918.80 (Inc. VAT)

*The cost of the Switch your Bank campaign is fully recoupable by AIB and Permanent TSB in the context of their restructuring plans. These costs relate to a Public awareness campaign as part of a range of competition measures agreed with the European Commission to raise awareness and promote customer switching of financial products. The Department of Finance facilitates this campaign as part of its remit to ensure that consumers are protected within the financial sector in Ireland and to ensure a healthy level of competition.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

121. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52135/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has not incurred any expense to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video which highlighted schemes and programmes operated as no such video has been commissioned.

Furthermore, to date, there are no such videos commissioned by my Department for 2020.

Living Wage Expenditure

122. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of introducing a living wage of €12.30 per hour for all workers in the Civil

Service. [51997/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The suggested wage at €12.30 per hour based on the Civil Service 37 hour standard net working week equates to an annual salary of €23,747.

Civil servants currently on an annual salary of less than €23,747 may be receiving remuneration in excess of the suggested living wage through additional premium payments in respect of shift or atypical working hours or are on salary scales that progress to the suggested living wage and above through incremental progression.

It should also be noted that in the context of the Living Wage, future pay increases under the Public Services Stability Agreement 2018-2020 include: 0.5% for those earning under €32,000 in January 2020 and 2% in October 2020.

Department data estimates that 0.3% of civil service staff are on salaries of less than €23,747. To bring them up to the living wage it would cost an estimated **€452,348** (€407,705 plus 10.95% ER PRSI).

Living Wage Expenditure

123. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of introducing a living wage of €12.30 per hour for all workers in the public sector. [51998/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The suggested wage at €12.30 per hour based on the Civil Service 37 hour standard net working week equates to an annual salary of €23,747.

Public servants currently on an annual salary of less than €23,747 may be receiving remuneration in excess of the suggested living wage through additional premium payments in respect of shift or atypical working hours or are on salary scales that progress to the suggested living wage and above through incremental progression.

It should also be noted that in the context of the Living Wage, future pay increases under the Public Services Stability Agreement 2018-2020 include: 0.5% for those earning under €32,000 in January 2020 and 2% in October 2020.

The detailed costings sought in this request would require detailed data on the position of staff on each salary scale across the public service and details of the standard working hours per week for each individual grade. This data is not available to the Department.

Civil Service Staff Data

124. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons employed in the Civil Service. [51999/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There were 42,541 civil servants, including 1,509 civil service industrials, employed in the civil service on a full-time equivalent basis, as of end-September 2019, the most recent quarterly figures available.

Public Sector Staff Data

125. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons employed in the public sector. [52000/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): According to the most recent quarterly returns available, there were 337,720* public servants employed on a full-time equivalent basis in the public sector as of end-September 2019.

Civil Servants	41,032
Civil Service Industrials	1,509
Defence Sector	9,100
Education Sector	108,849
Health Sector	119,126
Justice Sector	14,554
Local Authorities	29,353
Non-Commercial State Agencies	14,197

* All figures rounded to nearest whole number.

Public Procurement Regulations

126. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the requirements set down by the Office of Government Procurement or other bodies for contracting parties to publish details on an annual basis or at other intervals of its activities in respect of public procurement using Article 20 of the 2014 EU public procurement directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52014/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the EU Procurement Directives, contracting authorities may decide to reserve the right to tender for any contract to a sheltered workshop which is now defined as one in which at least 30 per cent of the employees are either disabled or disadvantaged. Contracting authorities may also reserve certain contracts for health, social and cultural services to organisations such as not-for-profit organisations which meet certain conditions, namely the pursuit of a public service mission linked to the delivery of the relevant services and reinvestment of profits in the organisation.

The Procurement Directives also set out the reporting obligations applicable to any above threshold procurements that lie within the scope of the EU Directive on public procurement.

It is a matter for individual contracting authorities to ensure that their public procurement activities are discharged in line with procurement rules and procedures which includes reporting. The OGP supports contracting authorities in this regard by making them aware of their legal and policy obligations in respect to public procurement.

The OGP has been promoting the inclusion of social considerations, including reserved contracts and sheltered workshops. Last October, the OGP published Circular 20/2019: Promoting the use of Environmental and Social Considerations in Public Procurement. The circular was the latest development following publication of an Information Note on Incorporating Social Considerations into Public Procurement last December and the establishment of the cross Departmental Social Considerations Advisory Group in March this year. These developments promote and facilitate the inclusion of social considerations in a structured manner and are aimed at helping policy makers and procurement practitioners understand how procurement

can be used to support advancement of existing social policy objectives, the wider context and the implications of including them in procurement projects.

Public Procurement Contracts Social Clauses

127. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeframe the social considerations advisory group is working towards for completion of its work on the incorporation of social considerations into public procurement projects; the progress made by the group on social considerations in respect of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52015/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Social Considerations Advisory Group, chaired by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), meets quarterly and brings together relevant officials from policy Departments with procurement practitioners to facilitate the process of incorporating social and environmental considerations into public procurement. Established in March, this cross-departmental group has met three times in 2019. Members are in the process of identifying pilot projects or appropriate social policy objectives in which social considerations can be advanced through the group.

To further support the incorporation of social considerations into public procurement, my Department published in October, *Circular 20/2019: Promoting the use of Environmental and Social Considerations in Public Procurement*. The circular highlights the possibilities for Departments to deliver wider social and environmental aims through public procurement including in relation to employment and training opportunities for disadvantaged groups, disability access, promoting social inclusion and social enterprises.

To help policy makers and practitioners understand how procurement can be used to facilitate the advancement of existing social policy objectives as well as the wider context and implications of including them in particular procurement projects, the OGP published an information note on incorporating social considerations into public procurement last December which is available on ogp.gov.ie.

In addition to the work of the Social Considerations Advisory Group, officials from the OGP have also engaged in bilateral meetings with Government Departments to promote the inclusion of social considerations in public procurement.

It is worth noting that OGP cannot decide for other contracting authorities, or at a whole-of-Government level, what social considerations should be included in the frameworks and contracts that it puts in place on their behalf. The OGP requires guidance from policy departments (and Government approval as appropriate) as well as the agreement of individual contracting authorities who are responsible for managing their own contracts and the associated costs. The appropriateness of including social considerations needs to be examined on a contract-by-contract basis and there needs to be sufficient flexibility to allow each individual contracting authority to decide what, how, and when social considerations can be used. The OGP can help facilitate the process of incorporating those objectives, once agreed, into planned procurement projects.

Derelict Sites Data

128. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of vacant or derelict properties by county that are in the ownership of the State and under

the management of the Office of Public Works. [52059/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The OPW actively manages a portfolio of some 2,500 properties throughout the country, that ranges from office accommodation to heritage properties, visitors centres to Garda stations, among others. At any given time, it is normal that a number of properties are vacant. In the case of the OPW portfolio, there are 89 properties currently vacant.

The majority of these are former Garda stations closed under the 2012/13 closure programme. As these stations were subject to examination under the recent policing review, the OPW was specifically requested not to dispose of them. Now that this review is completed, the future of the remaining stations will be determined.

A full list of vacant properties by county is shown below. This list only includes vacant properties owned by the Commissioners of Public Works or Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Number of Vacant Properties by County

County	Number of Vacant Properties
Cavan	2
Clare	5
Cork	14
Donegal	6
Dublin	7
Galway	7
Kerry	5
Kilkenny	1
Leitrim	4
Limerick	7
Longford	2
Louth	3
Mayo	5
Meath	2
Monaghan	6
Offaly	1
Roscommon	4
Sligo	2
Tipperary	1
Waterford	2
Wexford	1
Wicklow	2
Total	89

Departmental Budgets

129. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the funding and expenditure not spent by each Department and returned to the Exchequer in 2019. [51923/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As set out in the most recent *Fiscal Monitor*, at the end of November, total net voted expenditure amounted to €47.95 billion, and was €664 million or 1.4% below profile.

The *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2019* set out an overall full year net voted allocation of €53.95 billion across the 42 Votes this year. In addition to this, 13 Substantive Supplementary Estimates and 4 Technical Supplementary Estimates with an aggregate value of €634 million have been presented to Dáil Éireann, and are scheduled to return to the Dáil on the 12th of December, following completion of consideration by the relevant Committees.

As outlined in *Expenditure Report 2020*, and in line with previous years, it is anticipated that there will be underspends across the system which will partially offset the Supplementary Estimates to be approved by the Dáil. The end-year Exchequer Returns, published in early January, will provide an indication of the scale of such underspends for this year, with the final amount to be surrendered by Vote determined in the Appropriation Accounts.

€396 million of the net voted expenditure underspend versus profile at the end of November, relates to capital expenditure. Under the capital carryover facility Departments may carry over from the current year to the following year unspent capital up to a maximum of 10% of voted capital. The capital to be carried over into 2020 will be set out in this year's Appropriation Bill.

Garda Stations

130. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding OPW approval for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52071/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the former married quarters adjoining the Garda station in Carrick-On-Bannow, Co. Wexford was sold to a private individual in 1991.

The owner is currently selling the property. During this process, a mapping discrepancy was identified between that property (former married quarters) and the Garda station property. This discrepancy needs to be rectified by way of a Deed of Rectification in order for the sale to proceed.

This matter is being progressed by the Office of Public Works, the Chief State Solicitor's Office and solicitors acting for the owner .

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

131. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a person (details supplied) will receive an incremental salary payment owing based on service accrued in the European Civil Service at an analogous grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52093/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is a matter in the first instance for the employing department to apply the provisions of circular 21/2004, Agreement on incremental credit for previous service for entry levels at Clerical Officer, Executive Officer or equivalent grades represented by the Civil and Public Services Union (CPSU) and Public Services Executive Union (PSEU).

My department can provide advice to employing department if the employing department requires guidance on the application of the circular.

Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory

132. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 176 of 15 October 2019, if the contract has been awarded; if so, when the contractors will be on site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52103/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Further to my response to Parliamentary Question No. 176 of 15 October 2019 regarding the Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory Project at the Backweston campus, the delivery of this project is managed by the Office of Public Works. A preferred Main Contractor and Mechanical, Electrical and Clean-Room Contractor have been identified. The Lift Reserved Specialist tender submissions were received and a Letter of Intent has issued on 9 December 2019. Please note that no contract will be awarded until that process is complete and the necessary pre-contract meeting takes place and required assurances are subsequently received. It is expected that this process will be complete this month, December 2019. It is anticipated that construction will start in early Q1 2020 with a view that construction be complete in late 2021/early 2022.

Data Centres

133. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 141 of 12 November 2019, if tenders have now been invited for the project; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52107/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Tenders have not been invited for the State Data Centre, Backweston, Co. Kildare. Kildare County Council granted planning permission on 24/10/2019 for the development, with conditions attached. A number of these conditions have been appealed to An Bord Pleanála and as a consequence the tender process has been paused.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

134. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52123/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of my Department and the bodies under its aegis is set out in the table below.

I have been advised that the Office of Public Works will reply to the Deputy directly.

Initiative	Television	Radio	Newspaper	Online
Public Service Reform Programme – Our Public Service 2020 website				€17,165
Public Service Reform Programme – Our Public Service 2020 video case studies				€23,499
Office of Government Procurement				
Catering Contract Advert			€1,649	
eInvoicing Promotion				€5,706
Bodies under the Aegis:				
Public Appointments Service				
International Women’s Day Video				€8,000
Administrative Officer Graduate Campaign Video			€5,000	€60,000
Higher Options 2nd Level			€1,414	

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

135. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52140/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below.

Scheme or Programme	Overall Cost to Date for Videos Commissioned in 2019
Project Ireland 2040	€14,750
Case studies on innovation and public service development under the auspices of Our Public Service 2020	€23,499
2019 Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards	€15,129
Launch of research report on the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey	€3,044

Scheme or Programme	Overall Cost to Date for Videos Commissioned in 2019
Launch of the Civil Service Renewal Final Progress Report	€1,968
People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017-2020	€1,273
Office of Government Procurement:	
eInvoicing Promotion	€3,000

Any videos to be commissioned in 2020 and the associated costs have yet to be determined.

Office of Public Works Expenditure

136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the associated costs incurred by his Department and the Office of Public Works in hosting the special Cabinet meeting in Trim, County Meath on 6 December 2019, in tabular form. [52169/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The costs incurred by the Office of Public Works in hosting the special Cabinet meeting in Trim, Co Meath on 6 December 2019 are set out in the table below:-

Expenditure Item	Cost (incl. VAT)
Blackout vinyl for Cabinet Meeting Room	€565.80
Electrical Contractor on standby	€395.00
Total	€960.80

Pension Provisions

137. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the pension entitlements to the spouse of a retired teacher in cases in which a teacher has retired in advance of a divorce from a first marriage and subsequently enters a second marriage also pre-retirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52024/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Officials from the Pension Unit of my Department contacted your office seeking clarification in relation to your question, from which I understand that the query relates to the spouse of a retired teacher, where the retired teacher divorced and re-married after retirement.

In general the pension entitlements of spouses of retired teachers who retire in advance of a divorce from a first marriage and subsequently enter a second marriage are determined by the pension scheme of which their spouse is a member.

Staff in the Pension Unit of my Department maybe contacted for clarification in regard to the provisions of the original or revised Spouses' and Children's Pension Schemes for serving and retired teachers on my Department's payroll, which are contained in S.I. No 434 of 2009, Primary School Teachers Pension Scheme 2009, and S.I. No 435 of 2009, Secondary, Community, and Comprehensive School Teachers Pension Scheme 2009.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

138. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to

reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in DEIS band 1 schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51899/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The DEIS programme allows for a reduced class size in Urban Band 1 primary schools with the application of a preferential staffing schedule to these schools of 20:1 at junior classes and 24:1 at senior classes to support those students at the highest risk of educational disadvantage.

As the Deputy may be aware, DEIS Plan acknowledges the allocation of teaching resources to DEIS primary schools with the highest concentrations of children at risk of educational disadvantage has served to improve learning outcomes. It also commits to the evaluation of the level of teaching resources for schools participating in DEIS to be undertaken to inform future policy in this area.

In order to facilitate this a Class Size Working Group was established comprising representatives from the Education Partners, the Educational Research Centre and the relevant Business Units in my Department. This group has met on a number of occasions to consider class size in the context of improved learning outcomes of those most at risk of educational disadvantage.

A report on the work of this group is currently being finalised, and will take into consideration the feedback and observations of the working group members. It is intended that this will be finalised in the coming weeks and its findings will inform future policy direction in this area.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

139. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the restrictions experienced by Irish citizens who do not meet the residency time limits criteria with regard to the lower tier of third level registration and tuition fees; his plans to reform the regulation in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51984/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to qualify for funding towards tuition fees, students must be first-time undergraduates, hold inter alia EU/EEA/Swiss nationality or certain permissions given by the Minister for Justice and Equality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course.

Where students do not qualify for free fees funding they must pay the appropriate fee - either EU or Non-EU, as determined by each higher education institution. These institutions are autonomous bodies and the level of fee payable by students who do not meet the requirements of the free fees scheme is a matter for the relevant institution to determine.

My Department responded previously in relation to the impact of the Free Fees Initiative eligibility criteria on Irish nationals who had, for occupational or economic reasons, to move abroad, requiring them to take their children out of the Irish education system in the process.

To this end, in March 2014 my Department requested the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to advise the higher education sector that full-time undergraduate students who:

- Hold EU/EEA/Swiss nationality but do not meet the residency clause of the Free Fees Initiative; and

- have completed five academic years of study (at either primary or post-primary level) in an EU/EEA/Swiss State; and

- commence their first undergraduate course of study in an approved institution here from the following academic year onwards,

should be charged the EU rate of fee rather than the higher non-EU rate by their higher education institution.

MY Department has commenced a review under the EU Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) to look at increased sustainability in higher and further education, including an economic assessment of the funding options outlined in the Cassell's report. Pending the completion of this review my Department is not planning to amend the qualifying criteria of the Free Fees Initiative.

Higher Education Institutions Staff

140. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the staff to student ratio in publicly-funded higher education institutions here; the corresponding ratios from 2009 to 2014; the comparator figures from benchmark EU countries such as Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52012/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the attached table. Data for Ireland is available from 2011 onwards. The latest internationally comparative data available relates to the period 2013 - 2017. Relevant data is sourced from Higher Education Authority and OECD sources as appropriate.

[Staff to Student ratio]

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

141. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application was received for emergency works submitted by a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; if so, when a decision is likely to be made with respect to the application; if his attention has been drawn to the need to have this project expedited in view of the unsuitable nature of the existing accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52020/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school to which he refers has submitted an Emergency Works Application. This application was assessed and the Department wrote to the school authority in that respect in July 2019. The school authority was informed that some of the proposed works did not fall within the scope of the scheme. However, it was also informed that the remainder of the proposed works can be considered under the Emergency Works Scheme. Further information was sought in that respect and a response is awaited.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

142. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps that can be taken by the family of a child (details supplied) in circumstances in which no suitable school place is available for them in September 2020. [52026/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The provision of education

for children with special needs, including those with Autism, is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs.

Since 2011 investment in Special Education supports has increased by 50%, which is significantly above the 7% increase in total student numbers over the same period.

As a result the numbers of special education teachers, special needs assistants and special class and school places are at unprecedented levels.

The majority of children with Autism attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

But some students may find it difficult to manage full-time placement in mainstream and so placement in a Special Class or Special School setting may be deemed appropriate where placement in mainstream class is not in the best interests of the child.

The NCSE has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide and has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents. Accordingly, my Department is not involved in the placement of individual children in school.

The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Nationally, 167 new special classes opened this school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011.

Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

Provision in our 124 special schools has also increased from 6,848 placements in 2011 to 7,872 this year.

In Westmeath alone, there are 31 special classes and 4 Special Schools providing specialist support to children with more complex special educational needs.

The NCSE is planning a further expansion of special class and school places in Westmeath to meet identified need for next year. This process is ongoing.

The NCSE has informed the Department that, in general, they are satisfied that they have planned sufficient ASD post primary special class placements to meet identified need in Westmeath for next year.

I understand that the local Special Education Needs Organiser is working with the family and will continue to be available until a suitable placement has been secured.

As the matter raised by the Deputy refers to a particular child, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the National Council for Special Education for their attention and direct reply.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

143. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of

the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52030/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

144. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if suitable SNA supports will be allocated for a person (details supplied). [52061/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

Questions - Written Answers
Psychological Assessments

145. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a NEPS assessment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [52062/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

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

I have made enquiries in relation to the child, the subject of the Deputy's question, and can confirm that the school's NEPS psychologists has been consulting with his parents and the school in relation to the concerns raised in his regard. A meeting with the parents took place in this regard on 5th November last and another is scheduled for today. However the child has been referred to the School Age Team for a full diagnostic assessment which is required to underpin an application for an SNA. The School Age Team, as you will be aware, falls under the HSE and the question as to an assessment appointment is one for my colleague the Minister for Health.

I can, in the interim, assure you of the continuing input of the NEPS service to the child, his parents and school in relation to his ongoing maintenance and support in school.

School Transport Eligibility

146. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52088/19]

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

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of the Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet their special educational needs. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO).

The pupil in question was deemed ineligible for school transport under the terms of the above scheme as, per the information provided in the application, he is not attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet his special educational needs.

The decision was referred to the School Transport Appeal Board and the appeal was disallowed by the Board.

The attachments in the email referred to by the Deputy were originally submitted to the School Transport section in October 2019 and forwarded to the SENO for review. Following review of this information, the SENO advised that the position remains unchanged.

The terms of the school transport scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Schools Building Projects Status

147. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 183 of 19 November 2019, if the accommodation brief has been finalised; if so, the details of same; when a design team will be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52094/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is currently finalising the accommodation brief for the proposed building project for the school in question. My Department will be in contact with the school authority when this process has been completed.

School Enrolments

148. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 182 of 19 November 2019, if an application for temporary accommodation has been lodged to deal with the shortage of school places for September 2020; if so, when a decision will be made on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52095/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware from my previous response of the building project at the school to which he refers. I can confirm to the Deputy that a request for temporary accommodation has been received from the school. It has been advised to incorporate decanting solutions into its Design Plan for this building project and any identified need for temporary accommodation will be provided in that context.

Schools Site Acquisitions

149. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 154 of 12 November 2019, if there has been further progress in resolving the technical considerations; if a joint meeting has been held between his Department, Kildare County Council and the landowner to develop a framework and masterplan for the site; when a design team will be put in place for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52096/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department continues to engage with the landowner and Kildare County Council in regard to the technical considerations crucial to the delivery of the site and the commencement of architectural planning.

It is a priority for my Department to commence the architectural planning process for this site at the earliest possible stage. For the time being - given the commercially sensitive nature of site acquisitions in general, I am unable to elaborate further.

Schools Building Projects Status

150. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 169 of 17 September 2019, if authorisation has issued to invite tenders for the project; if so, when tenders will be invited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52098/19]

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

The Department understands that the Design Team is currently finalising the tender documentation and it is expected that this documentation will be submitted to the Department for review shortly.

However, due to the passage of time since the pre-qualification process, to select a shortlist of candidates, the Department has recently advised the school and its Design Team to run a new pre-qualification process. This can be carried out in parallel with the completion, submission and review of the finalised stage 2(b) documentation.

Upon receipt and review of the stage 2(b) documentation and the completion of the new pre-qualification process, my Department will be in contact with the Board of Management of the school regarding the progression of the project to the next stage of architectural planning, Stage 3 - tender stage.

Schools Building Projects Status

151. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 170 of 17 September 2019, if approval has now issued for the invitation of tenders for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52099/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): This building project referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's Construction Programme which is being delivered under the National Development Plan.

The major building project is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b – Detailed Design, which includes securing Planning Permission, Fire Certificate and Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of tender documents.

The process of Pre-Qualification of contractors to compile a shortlist of suitable candidates is now complete and the final checks on the tender documents are being carried out. The next step for this project will be progression to Stage 3 – tender stage.

In that context, the Department will shortly be in contact with the school and Design Team to update them on the further progression of this major building project.

Schools Building Projects Status

152. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 172 of 17 September 2019, if the accommodation brief has been finalised; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52100/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's school building programme to be delivered as part of the National Development Plan.

The details of the accommodation to be provided at the school in question are expected to be determined shortly. My Department will be in direct contact with the school authority at that point.

Schools Building Projects Status

153. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 153 of 12 November 2019, the number of tenders received for the building project by the closing date of the end of November 2019; the estimated time it will take to review the tenders and award a contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52101/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The project to which the Deputy refers is currently at tender stage. The closing date for tenders has now passed and six tenders have been returned. The Department expects that the Tender Report will be submitted by the Design Team in the coming weeks.

Subject to no issues arising, it is anticipated that construction will commence in the 1st quarter of 2020 and the project is expected to take approximately 20 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

154. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 156 of 12 November 2019, when work will be completed on the project in view of the fact a contractor is now on site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52102/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the delivery of the project at Naas Community College has been devolved to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB).

Work began on site in November and it is expected that the building will be completed in August 2021.

Schools Building Projects Status

155. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 96 of 24 October 2019, if a definitive date for completion of phase 1 of the project has been given; when phase two will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52104/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school building project to which the Deputy refers is currently on site.

The first phase, consisting of the construction of the new 8 classroom school is due for completion in Quarter 4 2019 with handover anticipated in the coming weeks. The second phase is due for completion in Quarter 2 2020.

Schools Building Projects Status

156. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 95 of 24 October 2019, if stage one has been completed; if stage 2A has commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52108/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the delivery of the project for St. Farnan's Post Primary School has been devolved to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB).

The Stage 1 (preliminary design) process is ongoing and will need to be completed prior to the project commencing Stage 2A.

School Accommodation Provision

157. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 175 of 17 September 2019, if approval has issued for the provision of additional mainstream and specialist accommodation for the school; if so, the details of the accommodation approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52109/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has received an application, from the school in question, for capital funding. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the project brief has been finalised and the school authority will be informed of the decision shortly.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

158. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52116/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Department's costs in relation to communications strategy initiatives in 2019 are set out below.

2019 Costs

Campaign	Cost
Teaching Transforms advertising campaign which aims to help address the shortage of teachers in specific subjects and the increasing need for more qualified graduates.	€117,699.96
STEM Awareness Campaign in conjunction with Science Foundation Ireland to raise awareness of STEM. In this regard "This is STEM" a video based campaign featuring eight role models from industry and academia, capturing how a STEM career is not a typical day job has been developed by SFI.	€73,000
Facebook promotional posts in relation to the post-primary schools patronage process	€70
Total	€190,769.96

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

159. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52133/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The costs incurred by the Department in relation to video commissioning, development and production in 2019 are set out below. The Department also produced a number of videos in-house during the year which did not incur any additional costs.

Date	Video Subject	Company	Cost
10/04/2019	Action Plan for Education promotion	Custodian Consultancy	€1,119.30
26/07/2019	Small schools symposium video recording	PI Communications	€1,451.40
			€2,570.70

Garda Deployment

160. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank attached to CPU, Coolock Garda station, Dublin 5 as of 1 January 2019 and 2 December 2019, in tabular form; if the number of gardaí attached to the unit has decreased over the past 18 to 24 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51918/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is important to be clear that under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibility for personnel matters and the distribution of personnel across the various Garda Divisions.

I have requested a report from the Commissioner in relation to the matter referred to by the

Deputy and I will write to him directly when it is to hand.

Garda Transport Data

161. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of extra Garda public order unit vans allocated to the north Dublin metropolitan region, DMR, following the allocation of new public order unit vans early in summer 2019; the number of public order vans attached to DMR north as of 2 December 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51919/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The resources by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion, increasing to an unprecedented €1.88 billion for 2020. Very significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána, including a total of €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021.

I understand from the Garda authorities that this year's capital allocation of €10 million for the Garda fleet is being used for purchase and fit-out of over 300 new vehicles for operational use this year. I recently indicated that a further €1 million funding for the fleet will be included in additional funding to be provided to the Garda Vote before the end of the year. A further €9 million capital funding has been allocated for the Garda fleet in Budget 2020.

This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for management and control of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles, in accordance with operational demand. As Minister, I have no role in these matters. I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that no Public Order Vans have been allocated to DMR North Division in 2019 to date. I am further informed that during the same period, 15 Public Order Vans have been purchased and allocated to the Garda fleet.

I am further informed that there are currently 19 Public Order Vans assigned either to the Dublin Metropolitan Region and the National Public Order Unit (Harcourt Square).

Finally and while the question raised by the Deputy referred specifically to public order vans, the Deputy may also wish to be aware that 42 additional vehicles with a capacity for 4-5 Garda members and two individual cells for the transportation of prisoners were added to the Garda fleet in 2018 and a further 4 such vehicles were added to the fleet in 2019. I am further advised by the Garda authorities that an additional eight such vehicles are due for allocation before year end.

Garda Transport Data

162. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times an on-duty Garda vehicle has been involved in an accident o date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51962/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the number of times an on-duty Garda vehicle has been involved in an accident while on duty in 2019 up to and including 30 November is 496.

The following table provided to me by the Garda authorities provides a breakdown of the different incidents involving on-duty Garda vehicles in 2019. The table includes information on ramming incidents and malicious damage, as well as accidents and serves to illustrate the dangers facing members of An Garda Síochána while using vehicles while carrying out their duties in the protection of the safety of citizens.

-	Accidents	Ramming	Malicious Damage	Total
2019 (as at 30 November)	424	59	13	496

Gambling Legislation

163. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the gambling control Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51965/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Government has indicated on a number of occasions that it recognises the need to proceed with comprehensive reform of our outdated gambling licensing and regulation.

On 10 January, 2018, the Government approved the updating of the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill. The proposed updating follows on from the review work undertaken in my Department and from the consultations held with interested stakeholders. The Government also approved the concept of the establishment of a new gambling regulatory authority as an independent statutory body operating under the auspices of the Department of Justice and Equality.

The proposals in the General Scheme were reviewed by the Inter-Departmental Working Group on the Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling. The Group's Report was approved and published by the Government on 20 March 2019. The Report contained a number of significant recommendations concerning all aspects of gambling activity. In particular, it recommended that future responsibility for licensing and regulation of all forms of gambling, including online gambling, rest with a proposed new gambling regulatory authority.

I hosted a major seminar on the future licensing and regulation of gambling at Farnleigh House on 15 May 2019, bringing together a large number of interested and concerned stakeholders to discuss the Report of the Working Group and further developments.

Work on revising the revised General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill is underway in my Department. This is a complex area and we must be certain that any reforms will be achievable and effective. At the time of publication of the Working Group Report, An Taoiseach indicated that work on revising legislation, taking account of the Working Group's recommendations, would likely take a period of about 18 months to bring to completion.

Separately, I have brought forward the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2019, an interim reform measure to amend the 1956 Gaming and Lotteries Act. Report and Final Stages of the Bill will be taken in the Seanad today. This is the final Oireachtas Stage. I hope to complete the enactment of the Bill swiftly thereafter.

Naturalisation Applications

164. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by a person (details supplied) in view of the fact all documents have now been submitted as requested; if an update on the matter will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52013/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): An application for a certificate of naturalisation was received in my Department from the person referred to by the Deputy on 28 March 2019. Applications are processed, in the chronological order in which they are received, with a view to establishing whether the applicants meet the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation. The application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible once processing is completed.

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.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to 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 is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Garda College

165. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the planned dates for attestation of probationary gardaí at Templemore in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52105/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for management and control of An Garda Síochána, including responsibility for personnel matters and by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members.

The Commissioner has indicated that there will be four attestations in 2020, most likely on the following dates: 21 February 2020; 3 July 2020; 4 September 2020; and 27 November 2020.

However, it should be noted that given this very early stage, these dates are provisional and are subject to change.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

166. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52122/19]

167. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52139/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 166 and 167 together.

My Department engages in public information campaigns, where appropriate, in order to draw attention to important issues in the Justice and Equality sector.

The main awareness campaign the Department runs aims to target domestic, sexual and gender based violence. The ‘No Excuses’ campaign is a high impact media campaign designed to reach a national audience featuring TV, cinema, radio, outdoor, social and digital advertising. The ‘No Excuses’ campaign was preceded by the domestic violence awareness campaign ‘What Would You Do?’ which ran for three years from 2016 to 2018.

The current total cost of the ‘No Excuses’ campaign in 2019 is €1,120,459, which includes €170,915 from the Dormant Accounts Fund.

Funding of €950,000 has been secured to run the campaign in 2020. In addition, funding of €300,000 has been awarded under the Dormant Accounts Fund to localise the campaign message. It is intended, subject to the necessary funding being made available, that the campaign will continue up to 2021.

Two newspaper adverts also ran 7 – 8 December 2019 to highlight the application process for funding for the provision of services supporting victims in the criminal justice system. The cost of this was €2,280.

The use of digital marketing allows the Department to reach audiences that might not be as likely to see or hear traditional forms of marketing such as newspapers, television and radio, and draws greater attention to matters such as domestic violence and human trafficking.

My Department runs an annual Fireworks Awareness Campaign in the run up to Hallowe’en. The total cost of this campaign is €12,491. As traditional print media advertising can fail to reach important target audiences, in particular those under 21, spend was evenly split between print and social media.

In respect of video content, the Press and Communications Office of my Department has been developing its capacity to develop and disseminate such video and digital media content internally since 2016. External videography services are only used exceptionally as in the case of larger campaigns such as ‘No Excuses’ and are procured in line with public procurement guidelines set out by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). There are currently no plans to outsource further video productions for 2020.

Work Permits Data

168. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the quota of 500 horticultural work permits has been filled; if she will increase the amount of work permits within the horticultural sector owing to labour shortages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51900/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In May 2018, a pilot quota-based scheme was introduced to remove the occupations of horticulture worker, meat processing operative and dairy farm assistant from the ineligible occupations list. The scheme allows workers from non-EEA countries to access employment opportunities. The application of a quota-based system is to ensure that in the longer-term, strategies are put in place to source labour supply from both the domestic and European labour markets and to invest in innovative technologies for the sector. To date this pilot scheme has proved very successful and a total of 500 permits has been made available to the Horticulture sector; 150 to Dairy Farm Assistants and 1,500 permits for Meat Processing Operatives. In addition, from July 2019, a further quota of 300 permits for Meat Deboners were made available.

The quota for horticulture workers is almost exhausted and before consideration can be given to extending the quota, the sector needs to submit a business case clearly demonstrating that the recruitment difficulties are shortages across the EEA not to other factors such as salary and/or employment conditions. The sector also needs to detail the strategies in place for training/upskilling/career development within the industry and show that it is engaging systematically with the employment services of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The views of the lead policy Government Department for the sector, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, are an important part of the decision-making process. I understand that sector representatives are currently preparing a business case for submission to the Department.

Workplace Relations Services Data

169. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding allocated to the Workplace Relations Commission in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the budget allocated for 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52002/19]

170. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of workplace relations inspectors employed in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number that will be employed in 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52003/19]

171. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff employed by the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number that will be employed in 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52004/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 to 171, inclusive, together.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body which was established on 1st October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015. The WRC assumes the roles and functions previously carried out by the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA), Equality Tribunal (ET), Labour Relations Commission (LRC), and the first-instance functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT).

As the WRC was established late in the fiscal year of 2015, the budgets of the individual workplace relations bodies remained unchanged until the following year. The pay/non-pay budget allocations of the individual workplace relations bodies which were amalgamated to form the WRC in 2015, were as follows:

Table 1:

Pay and non-pay budget allocation for Workplace Relations Bodies 2015:

2015	Non- pay €000	Pay €000	Total €000
National Employment Rights Authority (NERA)	862	5,183	6,045
Labour Relations Commission (LRC)	814	4,130	4,944
Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT)	422	2,960	3,382
Equality Tribunal (ET)	239	1,460	1,699

Table 2:

WRC budget allocation for pay and non-pay in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)	Non- pay €000	Pay €000	Total €000
2016	2,489	10,081	12,570
2017	2,314	11,065	13,379
2018	2,314	11,700	14,014
2019	2,614	12,340	14,954
2020	2,614	12,340	14,954

The WRC's Inspection and Enforcement Division carries out inspections of employer records with a view to determining compliance with employment rights legislations. These inspections arise

- In response to complaints received of alleged non-compliance with relevant employment rights legislation;
- As part of compliance campaigns which focus on compliance in specific sectors or specific pieces of legislation, or
- As routine inspections, which act as a control measure.

The aim is to achieve voluntary compliance with employment law through the provision of education and awareness, inspection of employers' employment records and enforcement where necessary. Table 3 sets out the number of inspectors employed at the WRC in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019.

Table 3:

The number of workplace relations inspectors employed at the end of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019 is as follows:

Number of Inspectors in WRC	2015	2016	2017	2018	To date in 2019
HEO/AO Inspection Team Managers	7	7	7	7	6

Number of Inspectors in WRC	2015	2016	2017	2018	To date in 2019
Executive Officer Inspectors:	48	48	51	49	49

The Labour Court is an independent statutory body under the aegis of my Department. In addition to its role of court of last resort in industrial relations cases, with the enactment of the Workplace Relations Act 2015, the Labour Court is now also the sole appellate body in employment rights cases.

Both the Labour Court and the WRC are staffed by civil servants of my Department. In addition, the WRC's adjudication services are supplemented by a cohort of 44 independent external adjudicators. The Labour Court also has a cohort of 13 statutory appointees of Chairman, Deputy Chairs and Ordinary Members who constitute the tripartite adjudicating Divisions of the Labour Court.

Details of the staff employed by the WRC and the Labour Court at the end of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019 are set out in Tables 4 and 5 respectively.

Table 4:

The number of staff employed by the WRC at the end of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, is as follows:

Number staff in the WRC	2015	2016	2017	2018	To date in 2019
Headcount	168	162	173	182	183
Full time equivalents (FTE)	159.96	154.36	165.09	174.64	175.1

Table 5:

The number of staff employed by the Labour Court at the end of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, is as follows:

Labour Court Staff*	2015	2016	2017	2018	To date in 2019
Headcount	28	29	32	33	34
FTE	25.5	26.5	30.4	30.6	32

*Numbers include statutory appointees of Chairman, Deputy Chairmen and Ordinary Members.

My Department has initiated the process to recruit additional adjudicators and to fill inspector vacancies at the WRC in 2020 and will continue to work closely with the WRC and the Labour Court monitoring the staffing and budgetary requirements of both bodies to ensure that they are supported and adequately resourced to fulfil their roles.

Retail Sector

172. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation

the work she is undertaking to assist small businesses in the retail sector to develop an online presence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52031/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Chair of the Retail Consultation Forum, I am conscious of the impact of digital transformation for the retail sector. The growth in demand for shopping online domestically and globally is driving the retail sector more broadly to develop its online capability in order to enhance its competitiveness.

To enable retailers to increase their customer base and build a more resilient business, I introduced a new pilot Online Retail Scheme in 2018 administered by Enterprise Ireland. The Scheme, with a fund of up to €1.25m over two Calls, provided funding to 40 retailers across Ireland, with grants of between €10,000 and €25,000 on a 50 percent match fund basis. Eligible expenditure under the Scheme included activities required to strategically enhance retailer's online offering, and included: research, strategy development, implementation and relevant training. The Pilot Online Retail Scheme concluded this year and my Department and Enterprise Ireland will review its effectiveness.

Additionally, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) undertake a number of activities to encourage businesses, including retail businesses, to build their online presence and compete online. The Trading Online Voucher Scheme administered by the LEOs and funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, is designed to help micro businesses trade online to boost their sales and reach new markets. The Scheme is a matched-funding opportunity with up to €2,500 available, with training provided by Local Enterprise Offices. Funding can be used towards eligible costs such as digital marketing strategies, e-commerce websites or app development.

LEO Measure 2 supports including training in digital marketing, management development, Lean4Micro, Productivity Voucher and mentoring are available to all sectors including retailers.

I recently announced the successful projects under the LEO Competitive Fund. One project - the eCommerce Cluster project has a primary objective to support and educate online retailers in the North-East. Led by LEO Monaghan, in collaboration with LEO Cavan, Louth and Meath, the project will bring online retailers in the these counties together, to share experience and best practice, access online expertise and support members to develop and grow their online business domestically and internationally.

As set out in Future Jobs Ireland 2019, all businesses, regardless of size or sector, in today's digital environment need to focus on building competitive online capability. In line with this, my Department has commenced a study on the retail sector to understand the full extent and impact of disruption to pre-existing business models in light of digital transformation.

I will continue to engage with the retail sector in relation to business developmental needs and objectives through the Retail Consultation Forum.

Retail Sector

173. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the impact online shopping and digital transformation are having on the retail sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52032/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Chair of the Retail Consultation Forum, I am acutely aware of the transformation which the re-

tail sector is undergoing. The growth in demand for shopping online domestically and globally is driving the retail sector more broadly to develop its online capability in order to enhance its competitiveness. Retailing supports jobs in every city, town and village in the country, with one in every seven people at work in the retail sector. Therefore, it is critical that our retail sector is both productive and competitive to sustain employment across the country, in the long term.

Technological breakthroughs, as one of the global megatrends, has greatly affected retailing. The pace and progress of technological change has never been greater, and it is clear that this transformation – although exciting, is challenging for the sector. The digital economy provides a different retail experience for consumers across Ireland and beyond. Digitalisation has increased the scope for competition in the retail sector, domestically and internationally, as reflected in the growth in online shopping and changing consumer preferences in terms of how people are shopping in town centres. Sustaining physical retail outlets requires adaptation: many retailers now offer multiple sales channels to sell their goods, from physical stores, to social media, mobile apps and websites.

I want Irish based retailers to compete at the forefront of the digital revolution and have prioritised supporting the retail sector to develop their online capability, in order for them to expand their market reach nationally and internationally and enhance their competitiveness. To enable retailers to increase their customer base and build a more resilient business, I introduced a new pilot Online Retail Scheme in 2018 administered by Enterprise Ireland. The Scheme, with a fund of up to €1.25m over two Calls, provided funding to 40 retailers across Ireland, with grants of between €10,000 and €25,000 on a 50 percent match fund basis. The Pilot Online Retail Scheme concluded this year and my Department and Enterprise Ireland will review its effectiveness.

Additionally, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) undertake a number of activities to encourage businesses, including retail businesses, to build their online presence and compete online. The Trading Online Voucher Scheme administered by the LEOs and funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, is designed to help micro businesses trade online to boost their sales and reach new markets. The Scheme is a matched-funding opportunity with up to €2,500 available, with training provided by Local Enterprise Offices. Funding can be used towards eligible costs such as digital marketing strategies, e-commerce websites or app development.

LEO Measure 2 supports including training in digital marketing, management development, Lean4Micro, Productivity Voucher and mentoring are available to all sectors including retailers.

I recently announced the successful projects under the LEO Competitive Fund. One of the projects - the eCommerce Cluster project has a primary objective to support and educate online retailers in the North-East. Led by LEO Monaghan, in collaboration with LEO Cavan, Louth and Meath, the project will bring online retailers in these counties together, to share experience and best practice, access online expertise and support members to develop and grow their on-line business domestically and internationally.

As set out in Future Jobs Ireland 2019, all businesses, regardless of size or sector, in today's digital environment need to focus on building competitive online capability. In line with this, my Department has commenced a study on the retail sector to understand the full extent and impact of disruption to pre-existing business models in light of digital transformation. I look forward to seeing the results of the research study and continuing to work with the Retail Consultation Forum and its focus on the current and future developmental needs of the retail sector.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

174. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of her Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52111/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of expenditure incurred by my Department during 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives which highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of my Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online are set out in the attached table.

Many of the acquired videos are retweeted at various intervals on social media platforms or shown at related events to ensure continued promotion of my Department's strategies. My Department also produces in-house video for social media.

[Reply]

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

175. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video which highlighted schemes and programmes operated by her Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52128/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of expenses incurred by my Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of videos which highlight schemes and programmes operated by my Department are set out in the attached table. Many of the videos are retweeted at various intervals on social media platforms or shown at related events to ensure continued promotion of my Department's strategies. My Department also produces in-house video for social media. No videos have been commissioned for 2020.

[Reply]

Ministerial Travel

176. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the countries visited by her, her predecessors, the Minister of State with special responsibility for trade, employment, business, the EU digital Single Market and data protection and the Minister of State with special responsibility for training, skills, innovation, research and development since May 2016; and the travel, phone and accommodation costs incurred for each visit in tabular form. [52172/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of foreign travel during the period in question by the Ministers and Ministers of State in the

Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation are published on my Department's website at the following address:

<https://dbei.gov.ie/ga/Ce-muid-fein/Na-hAiri/Ministers-Expenses/>

Mental Health Policy

177. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the Mind-Out mental health programme in secondary schools; the areas in which the programme is being implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52076/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is an operational matter for the Health Service Executive, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Executive for attention and direct reply to her.

HSE Reports

178. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 350 of 15 October 2019 and 160 of 23 October 2019, if he has received a briefing from his officials on the HSE valproate response project report; if a decision has been made to publish or not publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51897/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE's report on its Valproate Response Project has been considered within my Department, and I have received briefing from officials. The report describes the HSE's work on sodium valproate issues since the Valproate Response team was established in May 2018. This work has included the provision of an expert support service for people with concerns about exposure to sodium valproate; developing a diagnostic pathway for foetal valproate syndrome; and improving the structures in place to support families affected by valproate syndrome. The HSE has also begun the development of a Programme for Women's Health in Epilepsy, which will coordinate the national response to issues relating to sodium valproate.

I understand that the HSE intends to publish its report in the near future.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

179. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements made to replace a person (details supplied) who is due to leave his position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51902/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Children's Health Ireland to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Delays

180. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that the person has been on the waiting list for over three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51913/19]

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

181. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a procedure; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51917/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

182. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive an appointment at University Hospital Galway for a procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51926/19]

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.

Community Pharmacy Services

183. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51927/19]

221. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the outcome of his recent meeting with an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51975/19]

249. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when he will enter negotiations with an organisation (details supplied) regarding the provision of a new pharmacy contract which will improve the sustainability of the service and expand the range of community pharmacy services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52167/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183, 221 and 249 together.

I recognise the significant role community pharmacists play in the delivery of patient care and the potential for this role to be developed further in the context of health service reform and modernisation. Community pharmacy is recognised as the most accessible element of our health service with an unequalled reach in terms of patient contact and access.

Regulations governing the current pharmacy fee structure were made under section 9 of the FEMPI Act 2009 and are set to expire at the end of 2019. Under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, these regulations must be replaced on 1st January 2020 to maintain a statutory basis for contractor payments and to prescribe the fees payable from that date.

In keeping with my obligations under Section 43 of the 2017 Act, my officials have undertaken a process of consultation with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU), as the representative body for the profession. My officials have met with an IPU delegation on two occasions where proposed fee restructuring was discussed. A detailed submission was received from the IPU. This consultation process has now concluded.

I met with the IPU on the 5th December, where I reiterated my intention to move beyond the arrangements underpinned by the FEMPI regulations and to commence a comprehensive review of the pharmacy contract. In this context I also communicated my intention to maintain the current fee structure from 1 January 2020.

The comprehensive review of the pharmacy contract in 2020 will address the role to be played by community pharmacy in the context of Sláintecare. It will consider all aspects of pharmacy service provision including delivery of a multi-disciplinary model of service delivery for patients, ensuring clarity of roles and achieving optimum value for money.

However, any publicly funded pharmacy service expansion should address unmet public healthcare needs, improve access to existing public health services or provide better value for

money or patient outcomes. Accordingly, any measures to be considered must be evidence based.

New secondary legislation is currently being drafted in order to give effect to the prescribed fee structure, as required under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017.

Psychological Services

184. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will receive an appointment for psychiatric services in view of the length of time the child has been on the waiting list. [51929/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospitals Data

185. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries cancelled in each hospital in each month January to November 2019; and the reason for cancellation in tabular form. [51930/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Maintaining scheduled care access for all patients is a key priority for hospitals. I fully acknowledge the distress and inconvenience for patients and their families when elective procedures are cancelled, particularly for clinically urgent procedures.

While every effort is made to avoid cancellation or postponement of planned procedures, the HSE advise that planned procedures and operations can be postponed or cancelled for a variety of reasons including capacity issues due to increased scheduled and unscheduled care demand, medical reasons, and patient choice.

In relation to the specific question raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to the Deputy directly.

Hospitals Discharges

186. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of patient discharges from hospitals in which patients were discharged to no fixed address, including bed and breakfasts, hostels, hotels and so on to date in 2019, in tabular form. [51931/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Addiction Treatment Services

187. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons treated for gambling addiction to date in 2019. [51932/19]

217. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated to help treat persons with gambling addiction in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51964/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 187 and 217 together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Addiction Treatment Services

188. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will undertake a dedicated nationwide gambling prevalence survey in order to identify the number of problem gamblers, ascertain the scale of problem gambling and put the correct supports in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51933/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Responsibility for government policy on gambling lies with the Department of Justice and Equality. The Department recently published the report of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on the Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling. The report considered the social impact of gambling and the protection of vulnerable persons. The Group recommended that a Social Fund should be established to fund research on problem gambling.

The report notes that the 2014/15 Drug Prevalence Survey provides the first comprehensive set of data on the extent of gambling in Ireland, as the final achieved sample comprised of 7,005 respondents. The results indicate that 64.5% of the population report some form of gambling in the 12 months prior to the survey, with 41.4% gambling on a monthly basis, or more often. The survey further found that prevalence of problem gambling in the general population was 0.8%.

The survey is being repeated for 2018/2019 under the auspices of the Health Research Board (HRB) with initial findings expected to be published in 2020.

The regulation of gambling is the responsibility of my colleague, Minister David Stanton, in the Department of Justice and Equality. I am happy to facilitate the Dept in the collection of data on problem gambling in the drug prevalence survey.

Hospital Beds Data

189. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds in the National Rehabilitation Hospital; the number occupied, empty and closed, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51934/19]

190. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if funding issues are causing beds at the National Rehabilitation Hospital to remain empty or not staffed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51935/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 and 190 together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in ac-

cessing 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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Facilities

191. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 716 and 717 of 26 July 2017, the number of medical facilities, including maternity theatres, hospital wards, surgical theatres and so on built by the State but that have never been opened or become operational; the location of same; the length of time they have been closed or non-operational; the reason they are not in operation in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51936/19]

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

Respite Care Services Data

192. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of day respite care sessions provided to date in 2019; and the way in which this compares with 2018 by CHO and LHO in tabular form [51937/19]

193. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of overnight respite care sessions provided to date in 2019; and the way in which this compares with 2018 by CHO and LHO in tabular form [51938/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 193 together.

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

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy

Hospitals Data

194. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of cataract surgeries cancelled nationally by hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date 2019, in

tabular form. [51939/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Maintaining scheduled care access for all patients is a key priority for hospitals. I fully acknowledge the distress and inconvenience for patients and their families when elective procedures are cancelled, particularly for clinically urgent procedures.

While every effort is made to avoid cancellation or postponement of planned procedures, the HSE advise that planned procedures and operations can be postponed or cancelled for a variety of reasons including capacity issues due to increased scheduled and unscheduled care demand, medical reasons, and patient choice.

In relation to the specific question raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to the Deputy directly.

Hospitals Data

195. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ENT surgeries cancelled for children nationally by hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date 2019, in tabular form. [51940/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Maintaining scheduled care access for all patients is a key priority for hospitals. I fully acknowledge the distress and inconvenience for patients and their families when elective procedures are cancelled, particularly for clinically urgent procedures.

While every effort is made to avoid cancellation or postponement of planned procedures, the HSE advise that planned procedures and operations can be postponed or cancelled for a variety of reasons including capacity issues due to increased scheduled and unscheduled care demand, medical reasons, and patient choice.

In relation to the specific question raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to the Deputy directly.

Hospitals Data

196. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on ENT surgery waiting lists nationally by hospital in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date 2019, in tabular form. [51941/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In this regard, the Government is committed to improving waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures.

Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2020.

My Department is working with the HSE and the NTPF to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020, which will include ENT services. The National Service Plan 2020 will set out HSE planned activity level for the year ahead, while the NTPF will work with the hospital system to provide additionality to improve access to inpatient/daycase treatment.

In this regard, I would encourage all hospital groups and individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify waiting list proposals for the remainder of this year and for 2020.

The information requested by the Deputy has been provided to my Department by the NTPF and is provided below.

[ENT Children]

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

197. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the length of time each person has been on the waiting list for cataract surgery nationally by hospital; the length of time people have been waiting by month in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51942/19]

198. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the medically advised waiting time for cataract surgeries compared to the waiting times for cataract surgeries nationally and by hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51943/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 and 198 together.

Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. In recent years, my Department has worked with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and made considerable improvements to access for patients waiting for high volume procedures and life limiting procedures including cataracts.

At the end of July 2017, the number of people waiting for a cataract procedure was 10,024. Since then the numbers waiting have consistently improved and at the end of October 2019 they stand at 4,480. Of these, 494 patients are waiting over 9 months which represents a reduction of 90% when compared to July 2017, when the number waiting over 9 months stood at 4,371.

More broadly, Budget 2020 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF increasing from €75 million in 2019 to €100 million in 2019. The year-on-year increase in funding to the NTPF since Budget 2017 reflect this Government's priority to improve waiting times for patients to access hospital treatment. The Department of Health is working with the HSE and the NTPF to develop the Scheduled Care Access Plan 2020, which will include ophthalmology services.

In relation to the specific matter raised by the Deputy, the HSE National Clinical Programme for Ophthalmology has advised that there is no specific medically advised waiting time for cataract surgery. A patient with a cataract is advised to have it removed when it significantly impacts on their activities of daily living and this can vary from patient to patient. Once a patient's vision drops to below 6/12 in the better eye, they are advised to have the cataract removed if they wish to continue driving.

The attached table provides a breakdown of the number of people awaiting cataract surgery by time band nationally by hospital at the end of October 2019.

[CataractWL]

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

199. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the speech and language therapy assessment waiting list; and the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively, by LHO in tabular form. [51944/19]

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.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

200. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy first-time assessment waiting list in each local health office area; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged zero to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and 65 or more years of age, respectively in each category in tabular form [51945/19]

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

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

201. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy first-time assessment waiting list; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged under four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and more than 65 years of age, respectively by category and by LHO in tabular form. [51946/19]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

202. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the speech and language therapy initial assessment waiting list; and the number waiting less than 4, 4 to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively by LHO in tabular form [51947/19]

203. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the speech and language therapy further treatment waiting list; and the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively by LHO in tabular form. [51948/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 202 and 203 together.

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

Crime Data

204. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of assaults recorded against front-line staff, including nurses, doctors, social workers, ambulance staff and other health professionals, to date in 2019, by hospital, geographic location and profession in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51949/19]

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

Primary Care Centres Data

205. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the operational status of each primary care centre under construction, planning phase, opened and so on; the healthcare and medical staff working in each operational primary care centre by occupation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51950/19]

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

Hospital Beds Data

206. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the additional beds opened under the winter plan 2019-2020 to date; the hospitals the beds are located in; the number open in each hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51951/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November. The aim of the Winter Plan is to ensure that service providers are prepared for the additional external pressures associated with the winter period, including the prolonged holiday period, severe winter weather, seasonal influenza, and the spread of norovirus and other healthcare associated infections.

Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals.

The HSE Winter Plan is supported by an additional €26m in winter funding nationally. This winter funding will support access to the Fair Deal scheme and will provide additional home support and transitional care to facilitate timely hospital discharge and reduce congestion in EDs over the winter period.

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) has agreed to support the funding of addi-

tional beds for three months over the winter period. This initiative will support the commitment by the HSE and my Department to alleviate winter pressures. Hospitals have been invited to make submissions to the NTPF and the NTPF are currently examining these proposals.

National Children's Hospital Status

207. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his future plans for the site of Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; if the hospital will remain in use within the public health system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51952/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the legislation establishing Children's Health Ireland, the boards of Crumlin and Temple Street hospitals voluntarily transferred their assets and liabilities to the new entity. As such, the Crumlin hospital campus has transferred to Children's Health Ireland. On completion of the new children's hospital on the campus shared with St James's and the two paediatric outpatient urgent care centres at Connolly in Blanchardstown and Tallaght Hospital, paediatric services will no longer be provided at the Crumlin and Temple Street sites.

The HSE entered into Memoranda of Understanding with Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin and Temple Street Children's University Hospital to ensure that the State's investment to date in the hospitals is protected when the paediatric services are transferred to the new children's hospital. Future uses for the Crumlin site has not yet been determined.

Hospitals Building Programme

208. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed maternity hospital to be co-located at the St. James's Hospital site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51953/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In line with best international practice, it is Government policy, as set out in the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026 that standalone maternity hospitals should be co-located with acute adult hospitals.

Following a detailed review undertaken the Government decided that the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital would be relocated to the St James's Hospital campus.

The National Maternity Strategy reaffirms the commitment to tri-location of maternity, paediatric and acute adult hospital services on the St James's site campus by relocating the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital to the campus, following the development of the new Children's Hospital.

As part of the Strategic Assessment stage of the project, it is the intention of the HSE to progress the Project Brief for the re-location of the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital in 2020.

It is important to recognise that all capital development proposals, including the relocation of the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital to the St. James's site, must progress through a number of approval stages, in line with the Public Spending Code, including detailed appraisal, planning, design and procurement.

Hospitals Building Programme

209. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new national maternity hospital to be co-located at the St. Vincent's University Hospital site; if he has been contacted by the Vatican or the religious orders on matters in relation to the hospital; if so, their response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51954/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is fully committed to the development of the new National Maternity Hospital (NMH) on the campus of St Vincent's University Hospital at Elm Park. As such, this project is encompassed within Project Ireland 2040, as well as the HSE Capital Plan 2019-2021.

My Department continues to engage with the NMH and St Vincent's Healthcare Group (SVHG) to develop a legal framework to protect the State's significant investment in the new hospital. SVHG has agreed to provide the State with a 99-year lease of the land upon which the new maternity hospital will be built, and this will allow the State to retain ownership of the new facility. The State will, in turn, provide an Operating Licence to the NMH DAC and SVHG to enable the provision of health services in the newly constructed building.

Construction work commenced on site earlier this year on the new pharmacy and the car park extension and these works will be completed in 2020. However, the tender documents for the construction of the new maternity hospital will not issue until such time as the legal framework is agreed.

The governance arrangements for the new NMH will be based on the provisions of the Mulvey Agreement. That Agreement provides for the establishment of a new company - *National Maternity Hospital at Elm Park DAC* - which will have clinical and operational, as well as financial and budgetary independence in the provision of maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services. The Agreement ensures that a full range of health services will be available at the new hospital without religious, ethnic or other distinction.

While my Department has not had any engagement with the Religious Sisters of Charity or the Vatican, at a recent meeting the Chair of SVHG provided an update to my Department in relation to the transfer, by the Religious Sisters of Charity, of their shareholding in SVHG. I am advised that the Sisters have requested the Vatican to approve their decision to transfer their shareholding and they are confident that such approval will be forthcoming.

Hospitals Building Programme

210. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a compulsory purchase order of the lands at St. Vincent's University Hospital has been considered in view of possible opposition to the new national maternity hospital by the Vatican; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51955/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is fully committed to the development of a new maternity hospital on the St Vincent's University Hospital campus at Elm Park. The buildings at Holles St. are no longer fit for purpose and therefore the new National Maternity Hospital must be moved forward to provide the necessary infrastructure to enable the delivery of a modern, safe, quality maternity service for women and infants.

I am satisfied that agreement can be reached in relation to progressing the relocation of the National Maternity Hospital to the St Vincent's campus without the need for a compulsory purchase order.

Engagement is ongoing between my Department, the HSE, St Vincent's University Hospi-

tal and the National Maternity Hospital in relation to the legal framework which will be put in place to protect the State's investment in the new hospital.

Tender documents for the new maternity hospital will not issue until such time as the legal framework is agreed.

Electronic Cigarettes

211. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the most up-to-date evidence and advice in respect of e-cigarettes; when same will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51956/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The current position on e-cigarettes in Ireland is based on advice from the Health Information and Quality Authority ('HIQA') in its 2017 *Health Technology Assessment of Smoking Cessation Products and Services*.

In relation to the safety of e-cigarettes the HIQA assessment concluded that this remains an evolving area of research; while potentially safer than smoking, evidence on long-term safety has yet to be established. In relation to e-cigarettes as an aid to smoking cessation HIQA advised as follows:

"Although the currently available results for e-cigarettes are promising, there is insufficient evidence at present to reliably demonstrate their effectiveness as an aid to smoking cessation."

Although the HIQA assessment was published only in 2017, the evidence on e-cigarettes is rapidly evolving. In that context I have asked the Health Research Board to undertake a review which will examine the evidence in relation to the health harms of e-cigarettes, their effectiveness as an aid to smoking cessation and whether there is evidence that they act as a gateway to smoking tobacco cigarettes. The evidence review is expected to be completed in April 2020.

HSE Agency Staff Expenditure

212. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the spend on agency staff in the health service from January to November 2019 by occupation, hospital and community health-care organisation in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51958/19]

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

Hospital Overcrowding

213. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times a full-capacity protocol was invoked to date in 2019, by hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51959/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE National Escalation Framework, issued to the system in late 2015, consists of a tiered and incremental suite of actions to be adapted and implemented in hospitals with an ED during times when such hospitals are challenged in matching capacity and demand for acute inpatient care.

The full capacity protocol is the last escalation step in the HSE National Escalation Frame-

work

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

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

214. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the emergency department waiting times greater than 24 hours for persons over 75 years of age to date in 2019; if the targets were met; if not, the number of persons over 75 years of age who had a wait of more than 24 hours in an emergency department to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51960/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year. For the first ten months of 2019, the number of patients over the age of 75 attending hospital EDs increased by 3.3% compared to the same period last year. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group.

However, the National Service Plan 2019 includes an expected activity target that 99% of patients aged 75 and over attending at an Emergency Department are discharged or admitted within 24 hours and any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

There are a number of factors which may affect the waiting times for older patients. In particular, people in the older age category presenting to EDs are more likely to have complex needs and be admitted then the population generally. Consequently, a higher number of these patients may have to be accommodated on trolleys, pending their admission to a ward. There are also issues around delayed discharges of care which can cause congestion within hospital emergency departments.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

Ambulance Service Data

215. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times an on-duty ambulance, rapid response vehicle or intermediate care vehicle has been involved in an accident while on duty to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51961/19]

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

Public Relations Contracts Data

216. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by the HSE and his Department on external public relations companies to date in 2019, in tabular form; the name of each company; the service provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51963/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The amount spent on external public relations companies to date in 2019 by the Department of Health is as follows:

Company	Service	Cost
Q4PR	Communications support and strategic advice for Sláintecare	3,078.08

As amount spent by the HSE is a service matter this has been referred to the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 187.

Community Pharmacy Services

218. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if the pharmacy cuts set to be imposed, which will see the service of phased medication for vulnerable persons significantly reduced or wiped out, will be overturned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51967/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I recognise the significant role community pharmacists play in the delivery of patient care and the potential for this role to be developed further in the context of health service reform and modernisation. Community pharmacy is recognised as the most accessible element of our health service with an unequalled reach in terms of patient contact and access.

Regulations governing the current pharmacy fee structure were made under section 9 of the FEMPI Act 2009 and are set to expire at the end of 2019. Under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, these regulations must be replaced on 1st January 2020 to maintain a statutory basis for contractor payments and to prescribe the fees payable from that date.

In keeping with my obligations under Section 43 of the 2017 Act, my officials have undertaken a process of consultation with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU), as the representative body for the profession. My officials have met with an IPU delegation on two occasions where proposed fee restructuring was discussed. A detailed submission was received from the IPU. This consultation process has now concluded.

I met with the IPU on the 5th December, where I reiterated my intention to move beyond the arrangements underpinned by the FEMPI regulations and to commence a comprehensive review of the pharmacy contract. In this context I also communicated my intention to maintain the current fee structure from 1 January 2020.

The comprehensive review of the pharmacy contract in 2020 will address the role to be played by community pharmacy in the context of Sláintecare. It will consider all aspects of pharmacy service provision including delivery of a multi-disciplinary model of service delivery for patients, ensuring clarity of roles and achieving optimum value for money.

However, any publicly funded pharmacy service expansion should address unmet public healthcare needs, improve access to existing public health services or provide better value for money or patient outcomes. Accordingly, any measures to be considered must be evidence based.

New secondary legislation is currently being drafted in order to give effect to the prescribed fee structure, as required under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017.

Medicinal Products Availability

219. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding access to medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51969/19]

236. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to ensure the swift provision of new medicines to persons with multiple sclerosis. [52035/19]

237. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the continued delay in access to medication for persons with multiple sclerosis in view of the fact drugs have recently become available and accessible in other EU countries, for example, siponimod; the steps he will take to expedite access of such drugs for patients; and the timeframe for same. [52036/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 219, 236 and 237 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess a drug's clinical and cost effectiveness as a health intervention.

As a country, we invest heavily in medicines, to the tune of almost €2 billion annually. In 2019 to date, the HSE has approved 31 new medicines and 5 new indications for existing medicines for reimbursement in the public healthcare system. The approvals to date represent an additional investment by the HSE over five years of approximately €220m in providing access to new and innovative treatment for Irish patients. It is expected that over 3,000 patients will benefit from access to these new medicines over the next 5 years.

Notwithstanding the significant progress on drug costs achieved from price reductions under the pricing framework agreed with industry and commercial negotiations conducted by the HSE, the Health Service is still facing very significant challenges in relation to the affordability of medicines. The industry continues to develop very expensive products, particularly in the high-tech medicines area and the costs involved are a challenge for health systems even in countries with much greater resources than Ireland.

The HSE has received 2 applications for pricing and reimbursement of ocrelizumab (Ocrevus). Application 1 is for use of Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of Multiple Sclerosis (RMS) with active disease defined by clinical or imaging features. Following a number of rounds of commercial negotiations, an agreement was reached in relation to the commercial terms which will apply to this indication. The HSE intends to progress ocrelizumab for the RMS indication, which has been approved for funding from October 2019, on a patient-specific basis for this indication.

Application 2 is for the use of ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) in terms of disease duration and level of disability, and with imaging features characteristic of inflammatory activity. On 4 October 2018 the NCPE completed its assessment for this indication. They did not recommend that ocrelizumab

be reimbursed for this indication.

The HSE and the manufacturer have had a number of rounds of commercial negotiations in relation to this indication. Commercial discussions have concluded and the medicine has been reviewed by the HSE Drugs Group. The HSE Senior Leadership Team have received the Drugs Group recommendation. The HSE's final decision on reimbursement will take into consideration the criteria contained in the 2013 Health Act.

The HSE has also received an application for reimbursement of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol/Cannabidiol, THC/CBD (Sativex) which is indicated as treatment for symptom improvement in adult patients with moderate to severe spasticity due to multiple sclerosis who have not responded adequately to other anti-spasticity medication and who demonstrate clinically significant improvement in spasticity related symptoms during an initial trial of therapy.

The HSE commissioned a full HTA with respect to this indication in April 2018. On 12 August 2019, the NCPE received the applicant's submission and the HTA is currently underway.

On 14 November 2019, the EMA's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) recommended the granting of a marketing authorisation for the medicinal product siponimod (Mayzent), intended for the treatment of adult patients with secondary progressive multiple sclerosis (SPMS) with active disease. The EMA's decision on whether to grant marketing authorisation for siponimod will take into account CHMP's recommendation.

The Government wants new and innovative medicines to be available to our citizens as quickly as possible but this can only be achieved if medicines are priced by the pharmaceutical industry in a viable and sustainable manner.

My Department and the HSE are working on making greater efficiencies in medicines usage through a range of initiatives both domestically and internationally to ensure the greatest possible access to new treatments for patients in Ireland.

The HSE's Medicines Management Programme (MMP), incorporating the Preferred Drugs initiative, is overseeing the implementation of a number of actions to bring about greater value for the taxpayer through cost-effective provision of medicines. These measures include the designation of preferred products with a focus on high-cost prescribing areas, in particular optimising the use of biosimilars.

I and officials have also been engaging over the past number of years with a number of voluntary EU forums. In June 2018, I signed the Beneluxa Initiative on Pharmaceutical Policy. This Agreement is in line with my objective to work with other European countries to identify workable solutions, in an increasingly challenging environment, to secure timely access for patients to new medicines in an affordable and sustainable way. In June 2019, Ireland became a Founding Member of the International Horizon Scanning Initiative which is being established as part of the work programme of Beneluxa.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

220. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application by a person (details supplied) for inclusion on the fair deal scheme will be expedited. [51974/19]

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.

Question No. 221 answered with Question No. 183.

Hospital Appointments Delays

222. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a procedure; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51977/19]

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.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

223. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a nurse (details supplied) at Cavan General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51978/19]

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

Medical Card Data

224. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards in issue in which the entitlement arises under EU regulations in respect of persons in receipt of social security pensions from other countries in the EU, the EEA or Switzerland or that are working and paying social insurance in one of the countries; the relevant countries in this regard in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51985/19]

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

National Children's Hospital

225. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the new children's hospital has chosen to install a surveillance system (details supplied), including specialised facial recognition cameras; the further reason it was decided to use facial recognition cameras;

and his views on whether it is necessary or acceptable. [51995/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The safety of patients, visitors and staff at the new children's hospital is of paramount importance to everyone working on the new children's hospital project.

Stanley Security Systems, who have been working in this area for more than 25 years, were successful in the competitive procurement process for the installation of the security systems at the new children's hospital.

There continues to be significant technological developments and innovation in the area of security systems and, as would be expected, the procurement process undertaken sought to ensure that the equipment procured is fully future proofed.

Less than 3% of the cameras procured for the new children's hospital have the potential for high definition facial recognition capabilities. These cameras have many capabilities, and can also be used in the same way as remaining 97% of the cameras, which do not have facial recognition capabilities.

It has not yet been decided which aspect of the security systems' capabilities will be used. This decision will be taken nearer the opening of the hospital by Children's Health Ireland and will be fully in line with Irish and European data protection and privacy legislation and guidelines, to ensure that the occupants of the hospital have the appropriate protections and security afforded to them, in line with their privacy rights.

National Children's Hospital

226. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that the new national children's hospital will install a surveillance system manufactured by a company (details supplied), including specialised facial recognition cameras, in view of the recent human rights sanctions and alleged control of the company by the Chinese Government. [51996/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The safety of patients, visitors and staff at the new children's hospital is of paramount importance to everyone working on the new children's hospital project.

Stanley Security Systems, who have been working in this area for more than 25 years, were successful in the competitive procurement process for the installation of the security systems at the new children's hospital.

There continues to be significant technological developments and innovation in the area of security systems and, as would be expected, the procurement process undertaken sought to ensure that the equipment procured is fully future proofed.

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It has not yet been decided which aspect of the security systems' capabilities will be used. This decision will be taken nearer the opening of the hospital by Children's Health Ireland and will be fully in line with Irish and European data protection and privacy legislation and guide-

lines, to ensure that the occupants of the hospital have the appropriate protections and security afforded to them, in line with their privacy rights.

Disability Services Funding

227. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if he has secured funding for an organisation (details supplied), which is the first disabled persons organisation here and the only one to be composed of and directed solely by persons with intellectual disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52005/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The National Platform of Self-Advocates is an advocacy service for people with intellectual disabilities which was established and is run by people with intellectual disabilities.

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. The Department of Health does not fund organisations directly while the HSE can only fund organisations for the purpose of providing health services on its behalf.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Discharges

228. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting one week, one, three, six and 12 months, respectively, to be discharged from each hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52006/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Delayed transfers of care (previously referred to as delayed discharges) occur when patients have been deemed clinically fit for discharge from an acute bed but their discharge is delayed because they are waiting for some form of ongoing support or care following their discharge. There are many reasons for this, such as a patient undertaking the application process for NHSS, awaiting assessment for a home support package, homelessness, ward of court application, and the availability of resources.

When possible, the HSE will use transitional care to accommodate the patient during the period between discharge and the finalisation of new care arrangements, but there can often be a delay, especially in cases where the patient and family are coming to terms with the new circumstances.

This year, services are being stretched more than ever, with demand consistently outstripping supply, and we have seen an increase the number of delayed transfers of care. While the HSE maximises the use of resources, prioritising those requiring discharge from acute hospitals, there is a growing demand for egress support. In response, and in the context of planning and preparing for the challenges of the winter period, the Department and the HSE have been considering a comprehensive approach to the current high-level of DTOCs. However, recognising the urgency of the situation, approval was provided to the HSE to begin actions immediately to the value of €5m in 2019. As part of these measures the HSE released a significant number of funding approvals within NHSS in September, and provided additional home care and transitional care beds.

In addition, the HSE Winter Plan was launched on Thursday 14 November. The aim of the

Winter Plan is to ensure that service providers are prepared for the additional external pressures associated with the winter period, including the prolonged holiday period, severe winter weather, seasonal influenza, and the spread of norovirus and other healthcare associated infections.

Nine Winter Action Teams, each aligned to a Community Healthcare Organisation and associated acute hospitals and Hospital Groups, have prepared Integrated Winter Plans. These plans focus on demand management and reduction, staffing availability, timely access to the most appropriate care pathway for patients, and appropriate timely discharge from acute hospitals.

The HSE Winter Plan is supported by an additional €26m in winter funding nationally. This winter funding will support access to the Fair Deal scheme, and will provide additional home support and transitional care to facilitate timely hospital discharge and reduce congestion in EDs over the winter period.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the requested information.

Hospital Car Parks

229. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation plan of his Department and the HSE to accompany the review report by the HSE of hospital car parking charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52007/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have made it clear I want to see progress made in this area and I am working with my Department and the HSE in this regard. As such, I requested the HSE to conduct a review of hospital car parking charges with a view to establishing clear national guidelines in the area. My Department and the HSE are currently engaging on a draft implementation plan to accompany the review report.

Health Services Reports

230. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the person or body responsible for the implementation of the HSE report on lymphoedema and lipoedema treatment in Ireland 2018; the details of the implementation plan; the timeline for same; his plans to ensure access to services for lymphoedema, primary and secondary patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52011/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is undertaking a 'proof of concept' project in advance of the roll-out of the full Model of Care for the Treatment of Lymphoedema and Lipoedema. As such, I have referred your question to the HSE for direct reply.

Abortion Services Provision

231. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the consultation with service providers regarding safe access to termination of pregnancy services and safe access zones around the facilities of service providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52016/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is my absolute intention that people can access termination of pregnancy services safely. I wish to assure women and healthcare staff

that there is existing legislation in place to protect them and to protect patients.

My Department and An Garda Síochána have been closely monitoring the situation since termination of pregnancy services commenced in January this year.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department is conducting a targeted consultation on safe access to termination of pregnancy services. The consultation is ongoing as it is important that the experiences of service providers in both community and acute hospital settings are included.

Medicinal Products Availability

232. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of his commitment to provide universal access to contraception; if a decision has been made on the three policy approaches identified by the Working Group on Access to Contraception in its report; his plans to implement the policy; the timeframe for the development and roll-out of a contraception scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52017/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to expanding access to contraception and moving toward the provision of a free contraception service. At this time, no decision has been taken on the parameters of any scheme. A number of regulatory, legal and policy issues must still be addressed, while further consultation with potential providers would also be required. It remains my intention to work toward the implementation of enhanced contraception provision in 2021.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

233. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will receive speech and language therapy. [52023/19]

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 Aids and Appliances Provision

234. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in approving a mobility scooter for a person (details supplied). [52029/19]

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

Ambulance Service

235. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the procedure for deciding the hospital to which a patient is brought in an ambulance; if the decision can be given to the doctor who calls the ambulance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52034/19]

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

Questions Nos. 236 and 237 answered with Question No. 219.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

238. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to replace the only pain management consultant (details supplied) here for children when he vacates his post at the end of 2019; his further plans to ensure immediate funding for a multidisciplinary team for pain management clinics in children's hospitals here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52037/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Children's Health Ireland to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Ministerial Meetings

239. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he has received a request from organisations (details supplied) seeking a meeting; if so, if the meeting will be scheduled as soon as possible in order to discuss matters pertaining to a recently finalised report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52057/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My office is in contact with the organisations referred to by the Deputy in order to arrange a meeting.

Nursing Home Services

240. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter regarding a nursing home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52068/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Minister for Health has no remit in relation to the operation of private nursing homes. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent authority established under the Health Act 2007. All nursing homes, both public and private are registered with and inspected by HIQA.

Matters relating to the regulation of nursing homes, including changes to their registration are set out in the Health Act 2007.

Hospital Appointments Status

241. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52070/19]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

242. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for extra home help by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52072/19]

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.

Hospital Beds Data

243. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when the first beds will have patients in them at the modular unit development at South Tipperary General Hospital; the number of beds that will be operational on that date; the sequence, date and number of beds by phase until the 40-bed unit is fully operational; the difficulties including recruitment that could see the 40-bed unit not fully operational by the end of February 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52075/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Capacity Review published last year was clear on the need for a major investment in additional capacity in both hospital and community – combined with a wide scale reform of the manner and the location of where health services are provided.

As part of the 2017/2018 Winter Initiative, funding was allocated for the provision of a 40-bed modular unit in STGH in Clonmel. HSE Estates have advised that equipping and commissioning is now underway. It is expected that the modular unit will be operational by the end of 2019 and that services will commence in Quarter 1 2020.

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

Employment Support Services

244. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to sustain the programme of individual placement and support beyond the service reform fund funding period; if joint funding with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has been considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52083/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) employment model is an evidence-informed approach to supported employment for people who have severe mental health difficulties. It supports individuals to remain in or gain access to employment and at the same time supports employers to address recruitment and retention issues.

The IPS model, which is currently funded through the Service Reform Fund, is being used by the HSE to enhance social inclusion outcomes for service users by providing meaningful engagement with employment which is an enabler for personal recovery.

A national data collection system has been implemented and this will feed into an overall evaluation of the efficacy of IPS in achieving the desired objectives. Subject to a positive evaluation of the model, discussions will be held with stakeholders to consider how best to extend the programme into the future.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

245. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allow nicotine patches on the drugs payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52090/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Tobacco consumption is the largest avoidable health threat in Ireland and one in two smokers will die from a tobacco related disease. The policy document “Tobacco Free Ireland” sets out over 60 recommendations, with the overall aims of de-normalising smoking in our society, protecting children from the harms of tobacco, enforcing, regulating and legislating for tobacco activities and products, educating about the dangers of tobacco and assisting those who smoke to stop.

One of the key recommendations in “Tobacco Free Ireland” is to make nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) more widely available, including in outlets where tobacco products are sold.

NRT is currently available, on prescription, to eligible medical cardholders on the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme. Alternatively, NRT products are also available as over the counter items in pharmacies, without the need for a prescription.

In 2014, the Health Products Regulatory Authority announced that it had licensed some NRT items for sale in non-pharmacy outlets.

In addition, two non-nicotine prescription medicines are authorised in Ireland to assist in smoking cessation, and these are available to eligible persons on the GMS and Drug Payment Scheme.

Disability Services Provision

246. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the group home in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan, has not opened since it was completed in 2016 and 2017; when the home will open; and if it will have the necessary resources and funding it needs to assist the persons that need services. [52092/19]

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

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

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

247. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on TV, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52120/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Please see attached table of information in reply to your query.

Initiative/strategy	Supplier	Consultancy	Advertising (production)	Promotion (Incl radio magazine)	Cinema	TV	Outdoor	Online	Total
Pitch to Sláintecare	Facebook Ads							€50.00	€50.00
Skin cancer prevention plan Healthy Ireland								€35.00	€35.00
Advance Nurse Practitioner Launch Chief Nurses Office								€50.00	€50.00
Healthy Ireland Awareness Ad Campaign 2019	PHD Media			€73,331.37	€46,851.41	€20,982.2	€131,328.37	€51,251.80	€323,745.15
Healthy Ireland Awareness Ad Campaign 2019	Cawley Nea TBWA		€148,436.40						€148,436.40€472,343.55

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

248. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52137/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The majority of videos highlighting schemes and programmes of the Department for use online are produced in-house by the Press and Communications Office. As a result, there are no commissioning, developing or production costs associated.

External production and promotion of any Healthy Ireland videos have been included in

the overall online costs for the Healthy Ireland awareness campaign 2019. (Please see table attached)

External video commissioning, development, production, promotion costs under Sláintecare are provided for in table attached.

In 2019 the Dept. of Health promoted 3 videos on its Facebook page. Total cost amounting to €135. (Further details on table attached)

There are no plans for any external video production in 2020 at this time.

Initiative/strategy	Supplier	Commissioning	Development	Production	Promotion	Online Sharing
Pitch to Sláintecare	Facebook Ads					€50.00
Skin cancer prevention plan -Healthy Ireland	Facebook Ads					€35.00
Advance Nurse Practitioner Launch - Chief Nurses Office	Facebook Ads					€50.00
Healthy Ireland Awareness Ad Campaign 2019	PHD Media					€51,251.80
Video of Staff Engagement event - Sláintecare	W1 Design Ltd (One Productions)			€1,951.85(ex. VAT)		
Video of Citizen Engagement event in Galway - Sláintecare	Morgan Creative			€615.00(ex. VAT)		
Regional Health Areas – Sláintecare	Detail Design			€6,566.00(ex. VAT)		

Question No. 249 answered with Question No. 183.

Health Strategies

250. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to incorporate into his women's health task force the concerns and views of women who were adopted and therefore have no access to their biological medical information (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52176/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I established the Women's Health Taskforce in the Department of Health to improve health outcomes and experiences of healthcare for women. The Taskforce has been established for a two year period and is meeting regularly, there have been three full meetings to date in September, October and December.

The Taskforce is at an early stage of its work and is considering the full range of issues affecting women's health in Ireland. The Taskforce will tackle a wide range of issues impacting women's health outcomes in Ireland and will work on these on a phased, prioritised basis. Priorities will be decided by the Taskforce in consultation with stakeholders including the public.

Early public feedback has raised a number of issues of importance to women, including 'the need to feel heard' and Taskforce members are committed to keeping women's voices at the centre of their work.

The first action of the Taskforce is to lead a 'radical listening' exercise inviting women in Ireland to share their experiences of and solutions for the health system. This will commence in early 2020 and all women will be encouraged to provide their perspectives. This process will also target a number of different groups with unique perspectives. I intend that women who were adopted will be included in this process and I hope they take the opportunity to participate.

There will be multiple additional opportunities for anyone interested to feed into the work of the Taskforce and I would encourage them to do so. The work of the Taskforce, as well as opportunities to engage, can be tracked on the Taskforce's webpage.

Information and data gathered through engagement with stakeholders, combined with the other available evidence will form the basis for future policy and action to improve women's health in Ireland.

Beef Industry

251. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a group (details supplied) will be included in the beef markets task force talks, which commenced in December 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51911/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I established the Beef Taskforce to monitor the implementation of the beef sector agreement of 15 September.

The Taskforce is comprised of the Independent chair, Michael Dowling, representatives from my Department and relevant State agencies, farmer representative organisations and representatives from the processing sector.

I am satisfied that the current composition of the taskforce is sufficiently representative of all parties and I will not be extending membership to any additional groups outside of those already invited to submit nominees.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

252. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on the review of a decision of an appeal by a farmer (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51916/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office operates independently of my Department.

A review of the Appeals Officer's decision is required to determine if the Appeals Officer made an error of fact or law in that decision or, in cases where new information is provided, if

the decision was erroneous in the light of new evidence or of new facts submitted since the date on which the decision was given.

Requests for reviews are generally dealt with in chronological order. A number of requests for reviews were received prior to the request concerned. I am advised that every effort is being made to finalise the review of the case concerned as soon as possible and that it is anticipated that a decision will issue shortly.

Brexit Supports

253. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if section 9.2 of the terms and conditions of the beef exceptional aid measure can be changed to ensure that the immediate previous owner of an animal presented for slaughter within 30 days of it being purchased will receive the €100 payment regardless of whether the person who purchased the animal was an agent, dealer or farmer; his views on whether the terms and conditions are fair in circumstances in which an animal can be purchased and killed from a farm herd number within 30 days of it being purchased and the new owner can receive the €100 payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51966/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The objective of the BEAM measure is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132.

Section 9.2 of the terms and conditions of the beef exceptional aid measure state that ‘Where an (eligible) animal (under 9.1.1) has been presented for slaughter by an agent or by a dealer within 30 days of purchase, including those purchased in the mart, payment may issue to the immediate previous herdowner or in respect of the previous eligible herd number, where that herdowner is an applicant.

This is expressly designed to try to ensure that the farmer who raised or finished the animal is the one that get the payment. As the scheme has launched and is operational, it is not possible at this juncture to amend any of the terms and conditions. However, an appeals mechanism was made available to applicants through the scheme and this is the appropriate means of clarifying any questions around eligibility.

Fisheries Protection

254. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the licensed depuration facilities available to aquaculture producers around the Irish coast; and if Bord Iascaigh Mhara is considering proposals or funding programmes to increase the number of such decontamination sites. [52060/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The approval of establishments for the depuration of live bi-valve molluscs is a matter for the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). The SFPA is an independent statutory body and I am precluded by statute from interfering in the performance by the SFPA of a function assigned to it or exercising any power or control in relation to individual or groups of cases with which the Authority may be concerned.

I understand that on receipt of an application from an individual or a commercial entity, a

standardised approval process is undertaken by the Authority to ensure compliance with applicable food safety legislation and approved establishments are subject to an on-going inspection regime. The Authority publishes a listing of approved establishments at the link below, with depuration facilities marked with the activity code 'PC'.

www.sfpa.ie/What-We-Do/Seafood-Safety/Registration-Approval-of-Businesses/List-of-Approved-Establishments/Approved-Establishments.

Supports to the Irish seafood sector are provided under my Department's €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Operational Programme.

Financial supports for depuration facilities involving a licensed aquaculture site are available under the EMFF Sustainable Aquaculture Scheme, implemented by BIM. The Scheme aims to promote the sustainable growth of the aquaculture sector by providing financial supports for capital investment in aquaculture sites. Details are available from BIM at the following link:

www.bim.ie/schemes/sustainable,aquaculture,scheme/.

Financial supports for depuration facilities involving a seafood processing premises are available under the EMFF Seafood Capital Investment Scheme, which aims to promote competitiveness and value adding in the seafood processing sector through the provision of financial supports for capital investment in seafood processing premises. Details are available from BIM at the following link:

www.bim.ie/schemes/seafood,processing,capital,investment,scheme/.

GLAS Payments

255. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52087/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has received payments in respect of scheme years 2016 - 2018, including GLAS + payments.

All GLAS claims must pass validation checks, including checks against the associated Basic Payment Scheme application, before a payment can be made. In this case, the application has not cleared the GLAS validation checks for 2019 due to an issue relating to commonage parcels on the applicant's 2019 BPS application which are therefore ineligible for GLAS.

The person named has been notified that the commonage claims have been withdrawn from the GLAS contract. Processing of the 2019 payment will be made for the remaining GLAS actions.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

256. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and

online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52110/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provides public information about the Department's wide range of schemes and programmes.

The table below lists my Department's communications initiatives for 2019 which highlighted schemes and programmes of importance to the farming community. The advertisements were primarily placed in the specialised farming press, provincial and national newspapers and, on occasion, in the form of radio and online advertisements. Decisions on the placement of notices are made on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the advertisement and the target audience.

Scheme/Programme	Costs incurred to date in 2019
Calls for proposal for promotion of Forestry	€2,336.94
BPS Clinics nationwide	€20,077.80
2019 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector	€2,092.14
Call for Research Proposals	€923.64
Getting Brexit Ready	€9,015.61
Closing date for ANC scheme	€4,904.64
Department's online services	€16,605
UN International Day of Forests	€6,547.23
Ex-Gratia funding of Animal Welfare Organisations	€2,396.86
Organic Farm Demonstration	€2,133.39
Celebrate Biodiversity	€4,305
A to Z of Climate Action Booklet	€25,000
Demo Farm Walks	€7,500.07
Farm Handbooks - Afforestation	€2,091
Wood Improvement Scheme	€4,944.60
Afforestation & Woodland Improvement	€2,072.55
One Health - Antimicrobial Resistance Awareness	€15,375
Forestry Information Farm TV at NPC	€12,287
Forestry Information Farm TV	€25,830

In addition to highlighting the schemes and programmes set out above as part of our strategic communications initiatives, my Department publishes statutory notices, public consultation notices and other public notices.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

257. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52127/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provides public information about the Department's wide range of schemes and pro-

grammes. Video is one of the formats used to communicate this information and is primarily produced in-house by staff as part of their normal duties.

My Department engages external service providers for specific projects in line with the Department's business needs and having regard to the nature of the work. These videos are primarily posted on the Department's website and social media channels.

The information requested is outlined in tabular form.

Scheme/Programme	Costs incurred to date in 2019 (incl. VAT)
Bovine TB Disease Eradication Information series	€8,250
Control of Pesticides	€811.80
Forestry - Woodland Environmental Fund series	€13,999.86
Brexit Preparedness Information	€799.50
Ireland's Agri-Food Strategy to 2030 – An Open Policy Debate – Key Speakers recorded	€4,775

In 2020, my Department will continue to produce videos in-house and, if required, engage external service providers in respect of producing public information videos.

Air Pollution

258. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the specific actions he is taking to protect public health in response to EPA monitoring data that show dangerous levels of air pollution in several towns due to burning of residential solid fuel (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52078/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Transitioning away from fossil fuels and to more renewable, sustainable energy sources is at the heart of the Climate Action Plan. The Plan includes a number of actions which will also have a significant impact on reducing emissions and improving air quality, including:

- Putting 180,000 electric vehicles on our roads by 2025 and almost 1m by 2030
- Ensuring the EV charging network underpins public confidence
- Creating an early public procurement framework for EVs
- Accelerating steps to decarbonise the public transport fleet
- Establishing a Cycling Project Office, develop a 5 year cycling strategy and roll out 200km of new cycle lanes through bus connects
- Developing a new Park and Ride Strategy, to reduce congestion and lower journey times
- Developing a regulatory framework on low emission zones and parking pricing policies, and provide local authorities with the power to restrict access to certain parts of a city or a town to zero emission vehicles only
- Legislating for no new fossil fuel vehicles to be sold from 2030 onwards.

Further to the above, work is currently continuing on the National Clean Air Strategy, which

will be the first all of government response reducing air pollution and promoting cleaner air.

Extending the ban on the use of smoky coal would have a positive impact on air quality, particularly in built up areas.

As I have said on a number of occasions recently, I am disappointed at the threats by a number of coal companies relating to the proposed nationwide extension of the ban, given the benefits it would bring for public health and air quality. My officials and I are continuing to work with the Attorney General to finalise a legally robust plan, which will improve air quality by reducing air pollution, without jeopardizing the existing ban and this plan will be published shortly.

My Department is also funding the Environmental Protection Agency's roll-out of the Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme, which will greatly improve the data available on air pollution in Ireland, facilitating the design and targeting of appropriate policy measures to tackle it.

Cybersecurity Policy

259. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has spoken with EU leaders, particularly of the UK and Italy, regarding the use of technology (details supplied) in view of the reports following the NATO conference held in London recently. [51852/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): 5G (5th Generation) deployment of network technologies is a major enabler for future digital services and a priority for the Digital Single Market strategy. 5G networks represent a technological shift and will provide new opportunities for the economy and society of Europe, enabling innovation and advancement in many key sectors. 5G networks will form part of Europe's critical infrastructure and underpin key services in sectors such as energy, healthcare, agriculture and transport, and ensuring the cybersecurity of 5G networks is an issue of strategic importance for the EU in the wider context of the ongoing threats posed by cybersecurity incidents.

The European Commission published its Recommendation on the Cybersecurity of 5G Networks on 26th March 2019. The first step of the Recommendation was for Member States to carry out national risk assessments on the cyber security risks affecting 5G networks and to forward these to the European Commission for collation. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) completed this review in respect of Ireland in close collaboration with other EU Members States, including the UK and Italy, EU Institutions, ComReg, and Mobile Telephone Operators in order to ensure that a comprehensive and evidence based review was carried out.

The European Commission will publish an EU toolbox of recommended measures in the coming weeks that will be informed by the outcome of the EU risk assessment. Ireland will continue to contribute towards the development of these measures to address these risks and looks forward its publication. In addition, as part of the 2019 National Cyber Security Strategy, Ireland will be bringing forward a series of measures in relation to 5G security and Critical National Infrastructure.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

260. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied) relating to the provision of broadband for a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51915/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the Government's plan to rollout high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in the nearly 540,000 premises including almost 100,000 businesses and farms, along with 695 schools where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

The Deputy's Question relates to a premises which is located in the AMBER area on the NBP High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER area represents the area to be served by the network to be deployed under the NBP State led Intervention, the contract for which was signed on 19 November with National Broadband Ireland (NBI).

Work has already begun and a deployment plan will be made available by NBI shortly. All counties will see premises passed in the first 2 years and over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next four years.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connections Points (BCPs), including schools, library hubs and local sports halls in every county in Ireland, will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband. The BCP locations are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

By the end of 2021, NBI plans to pass approximately 115,000 premises, with 70,000 - 100,000 passed each year thereafter until rollout is completed. NBI has indicated that the network rollout will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

With regard to the fibre installation close to the premises referred to by the Deputy, eir's rural deployment of high speed broadband is a commercial undertaking and not part of the planned State Intervention network. It is not funded by the State and is not planned, designed or directed by the Department in any capacity. The decision as to what areas and premises are served was made by eir internally and on a commercial basis. The Department has no statutory authority to intervene in that process.

Energy Efficiency

261. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to reintroduce a scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51972/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The SEAI, funded by the government, supports LED lighting upgrades as an important energy saving measure for businesses through the Communities grant and the EXEED Scheme.

The SME LED Lighting Upgrade Scheme was a pilot scheme that ran from 2017-2019. The results from the pilot are now being evaluated and a multiple measure grant scheme aimed at the SME market, which may also support LED upgrades will be announced early in the new year.

Energy Policy Review

262. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the terms of reference of the review of energy security and sustainability will be published; if he will undertake a public consultation as part of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52079/19]

263. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the specific actions he will take to prevent conflicts of interest in evaluating the suitability of actions and investments by State bodies in terms of the review of energy security; if he will examine the long-term security of energy supply that is provided by increasing energy efficiency and penetration of renewable energies; if the review will address the risk to the security of supply of possible stranded assets in the energy sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52080/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 262 and 263 together.

The review of the security and sustainability of energy in Ireland is on-going in my Department. As part of this review I have already sought the input from the State energy organisations on the challenges involved. The technical analysis for the review will be conducted by independent consultants to be commissioned following a public procurement exercise. The full terms of reference for this technical analysis of energy security and sustainability are being finalised. As I recently advised the House, I expect the terms of reference will be finalised in early 2020; a public consultation process may form part of the review process.

The review into Ireland's energy security and sustainability will:

- Consider the optimal actions that need to be taken, in reaching 70% renewable electricity, to ensure Ireland's electricity system is backed up in a secure, safe and sustainable way.
- Assess the role of gas during the transition, as the lowest CO2 emitting fossil fuel, and consider how and from where it is sourced.
- Review the role that other technologies can play in the transition, including battery storage, pumped storage, the role of interconnection (both gas and electricity) and the possibilities for hydrogen and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).
- Consider what the roadmap for renewable electricity looks like in the period from 2030 to achieving carbon neutrality in 2050.

With regard to the Deputy's concerns regarding any conflict of interest by State Bodies, the normal process of policy development and formulation is through engagement with stakeholders, which includes State Agencies and Bodies having statutory responsibility in relation to energy security. In relation to any investments in energy projects by State bodies under the aegis of my Department that may materialise as a result of the review, these will be evaluated, where Ministerial consent is required, in the context of Government policy, including from security of supply, competitiveness and sustainability perspectives.

In relation to energy efficiency, it is universally accepted that the first step towards security of supply and reduced emissions is to reduce the amount of energy used. Actions set out in the Climate Action Plan, which I launched in July, include the energy efficiency of buildings, including the upgrading of 500,000 homes to B2 rating, the delivery of efficient district heating systems, and the reduction in car journeys through better planning, better public transport

and promoting home working, all of which are directed towards the efficient use of energy. The Plan also provides for 70% electricity from renewable sources, for 400,000 heat pumps, and for 950,000 electric vehicles by 2030.

The review will have regard to the Climate Action Plan and other relevant information. The outcome of the review will feed into the formulation of future policy on the security and sustainability of our energy systems and structures.

Ministerial Communications

264. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of his engagement, including meetings held with small and medium-sized business organisations, coffee shop owners, waste companies and environmental NGOs, regarding levies proposed for disposable cups prior to the commencement of the public consultation on proposed levies announced on 6 November 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52081/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): How we use and dispose of our resources is crucial – in fact it accounts for 60% of our emissions. We must be more conscious of the impact we are having by the daily choices we make. Sustainable alternatives exist to disposable cups and the purpose is to shift behaviour towards the use of these alternatives.

A targeted consultation is underway on the proposals, with key stakeholders such as those referred to in the question, in addition to a public consultation and it is open to all interested parties to have their say.

I also held a forum on the future of Ireland's waste on the 16th of September. At that forum, stakeholders from industry, local authorities, waste collectors, NGOs and regulators were invited to discuss how we can deliver on our ambitious targets. There were six breakout sessions on the day and one of the items discussed was a suggestion to examine levies as a policy tool to reach targets.

Furthermore, in the context of raising awareness of Directive 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain products on the environment - commonly referred to as the Single Use Plastic (SUP) Directive, my Department has engaged and continues to engage with a range of stakeholders. This Directive includes an obligation on all EU Member States to introduce measures to achieve an ambitious and sustained reduction in the amount of single use plastic cups for beverages.

Landfill Sites

265. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 533 of 17 September 2019, if tenders have now been invited for the project; the closing date for receipt of tenders; the number of contractors invited to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52097/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the reply to Question No 435 of 12 November 2019 and previous response to Question No 530 of 15 October 2019. As Kildare County Council has extended the tender period until 14 February 2020, the position remains unchanged.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

266. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52113/19]

267. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52130/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 266 and 267 together.

The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Rail Network Safety

268. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are limits on the number of passengers an intercity or passenger train can carry; if they are communicated to station staff and passengers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51920/19]

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

The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Network Safety

269. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the relevant health and safety legislation or regulations that apply to the operation of train carriages. [51921/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The railway sector in Ireland is subject to a considerable body of national and EU safety legislation. The essential requirement of the statutory framework is that railways must be run safely and within the regulatory framework which applies to the entire sector, including railway companies, network infrastructure (including rails), rolling stock (including trains and carriages), and any railway operations. Primary responsibility for safe rail operations lies with the relevant rail operator, and is overseen by and subject to the regulatory framework of the Commission for Railway Regulation (CRR), which is the independent, statutory national railway safety regulatory authority for this country.

I understand that the Deputy is specifically interested in the issue of passenger numbers in carriages. Train carriages come within the definition of “rolling stock” under the Railway Safety Act 2005 and are subject to independent safety assessment by the CRR. While there is no specific legislative provision governing capacity for passenger numbers in train carriages, train operators are required to run their services safely and the CRR, as the independent national railway safety authority, can carry out capacity loading inspections of train services to see if passenger numbers are within the design capacity of the rail vehicles.

Rail Network Safety

270. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Irish Rail maintains public liability insurance for its passengers; and if so, if the insurance policy sets out passenger limits that must be obeyed. [51922/19]

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

The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Safety

271. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has engaged with the Road Safety Authority regarding the decision to turn off lights near the junction 17 near Athenry, County Galway; and if safety assessments were carried out in advance of this decision. [51979/19]

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

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

Road Safety

272. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the slipway and sleeper lanes in the area near the M6 plaza have been closed; if this has an impact on road safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51980/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the day to day operations and management of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Cycling Policy

273. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the cycling design office planned to be operational during quarter 4 of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52008/19]

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 statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure, including the establishment of the office referred to by the Deputy, and I can confirm that office has now been established.

Private Bus Operators

274. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a company (details supplied) that has taken over routes in County Kildare is continuing with the same service routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52038/19]

275. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an official timetable will be provided for the routes in County Kildare taken over by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52039/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 and 275 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding relating to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operation of public transport.

The issues raised are a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Funding

276. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the sponsorship deal for the public bike scheme in counties Cork, Limerick and Galway is due to expire; and when talks will commence on the renewal of same. [52074/19]

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 active travel and public transport infrastructure. The management of public bike schemes is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA).

Noting the NTA's responsibilities in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Funding

277. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 165 of 26 September 2019, when the projects that will be grant aided under the large-scale sport infrastructure fund will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52106/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund opened for applications on 19th November 2018 and the closing date for receipt of applications was 17th April 2019.

Details of all applications received have been published on the Department's website. The detailed evaluation process has also been published on the Department's website. As set out in this evaluation process, applicants were given an opportunity to provide corrected and amended documentation, where necessary, in support of applications. This part of the process is now complete and detailed assessment work of the applications is continuing. I expect this work will be complete in the coming weeks with an announcement of allocations to follow shortly thereafter.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

278. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52126/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A list of all external expenditure which includes any expenditure on advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online can be found on my departments website at the following link

External Expenditure [<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/30ae9c-expenditure-on-external-services/>]. Details of expenditure on external services by the Department for the period January-September 2019 will be published on our website in the coming weeks. Details of all expenditure on external services for 2019 will be available in 2020.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

279. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video.. [52143/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport(Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to advise the Deputy that the officials in my Department are currently collating this information and will forward it to him within 10 working days.

Adoption Data

280. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention was drawn to the number of adoptees here; the percentage of those who also had a sibling who was placed for adoption; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52173/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Based on figures provided by the Adoption Authority of Ireland, there has been over 44,000 adoptions in Ireland since the commencement of the Adoption Act 1952. 72 adoption orders were granted in 2018. The Authority advise that there is no data on the number of individuals that also had a sibling placed for adoption.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland operates the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR). The NACPR was set up in 2005 as a way for people affected by adoption to make their wishes known about having contact with their birth family members. Where a match is made on the register between two people seeking contact (including siblings) the individuals will be put in contact with each other.

Adoption Records Provision

281. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the policy in place allowing the automatic disclosure to an adoptee that he or she has a sibling who was also placed for adoption; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52174/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In relation to adoption records, there is no automatic release of birth or other information. However, individuals can apply to the agency that holds their records for their own information. There is no automatic access to personal information relating to other individuals, which would include a sibling placed for adoption, as data protection provisions apply.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland operates the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR). The NACPR was set up in 2005 as a way for people affected by adoption to make their wishes known about having contact with their birth family members. Where a match is made on the register between two people seeking contact (including siblings) the individuals will be put in contact with each other.

Health Services Provision

282. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the screening in place for adoptees in view of the fact adoptees have no access to their medical backgrounds or genetic information; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52175/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are no specific screening programmes for adoptees. Adoptees are entitled to avail of all existing medical screening programmes on the same basis as any other citizen.

In terms of access to medical or other information, adoptees may apply to the agency which holds their records (which may include medical or genetic information, where this exists) for their own information. Where the original adoption agency is closed, Tusla or the Adoption Authority of Ireland will be able to assist the individual.

Childcare Services Data

283. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of unregistered crèches in operation in each county in tabular form; the length of time they have been in operation; if they are in the registration process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51898/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the matters to which the Deputy refers are an operational matter for Tusla, I have requested Tusla to respond to the Deputy directly within 10 working days.

Children in Care

284. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of a service (details supplied). [51912/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to thank the Deputy for his question, and can confirm that I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for their direct reply.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

285. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of her Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52112/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested is being collated by officials in my Department and I will revert to the Deputy in due course.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

286. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by her Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52129/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested is being collated by officials in my Department and I will revert to the Deputy in due course.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

287. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers

and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52124/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As part of my Department's Statement of Strategy, we have committed to improving our communications with all our stakeholders, most notably with communities across the country. In particular, we have prioritised raising awareness of the range of supports that are available to assist communities and those in rural Ireland.

In that respect, we have implemented a number of successful communications initiatives which have sought to deliver on these objectives. Amongst these was the Rural Opportunity roadshow and campaign run from March to May this year. Rural Opportunity was a cross-Government initiative designed to highlight the opportunities available for rural communities to access funding for projects in their areas, through the range of funding programmes provided across Government. In addition, the Department also partnered with Pobal to deliver a complementary series of workshops, entitled Helping Hands, which were undertaken at a number of regional venues over April and May. These workshops were aimed at organisations and community groups who have had difficulty unlocking funding from the various programmes and provided guidance on how to make suitable applications.

As part of my Department's overall communications strategy, and in support of initiatives such as those outlined above, the Department incurred expenditure in relation to video production and online and print advertising. Details of the costs incurred in that regard are out in the table below.

Item	Amount spent to date in 2019
TV advertising	Nil
Online advertising	€7,152
Radio advertising	Nil
Print Advertising	€12,087
Video Production and design	€49,759

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

288. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52141/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is promoting rural and community development through a range of funding schemes and initiatives. It has, as outlined in its published Statement of Strategy, prioritised communicating with the general public in relation to the range of supports available to assist communities and those in rural Ireland.

For example, my Department administers the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, a €1 billion investment by government in rural Ireland over the period 2019 to 2027. We are also delivering schemes such as the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme (€250 million) and Community Development Programmes, to which my Department will allocate €158 million in 2020 alone.

In order to better inform rural communities about the supports available, my Department

led and delivered the Rural Opportunity roadshow and campaign from March to May this year. This was a cross-Government initiative designed to highlight the opportunities available for rural communities to access funding for projects in their areas, through the range of funding programmes provided across Government.

A complementary series of workshops, entitled Helping Hands, was also undertaken at a number of regional venues over April and May. These workshops were aimed at organisations and community groups who have had difficulty unlocking funding from the various programmes and provided guidance on how to make suitable applications.

In order to raise awareness among communities of the opportunities which exist and to inspire them to develop a vision for their areas, my Department also created a series of five case study videos which showcased successful projects already delivering in rural Ireland. The videos were shared through my Department's Twitter account over the course of the campaign and the response from stakeholders was encouraging.

The costs associated with these videos are laid out in the table below

-	Cost
Production costs	€19,557
Promotion	€4,079

To build on the progress achieved in raising awareness of funding programmes, my Department commissioned a further 10 case study videos which highlighted further examples of successful rural and community-based projects. The costs associated with these videos are laid out in the table below.

-	Cost
Production costs	€30,202
Promotion	€5,000 allocated (€500 per video) for online promotion.

Some of these videos have already been shared through my Department's Twitter account with the remainder due to be shared over the coming weeks.

While the business planning process is ongoing in my Department, there are currently no plans to commission further videos of this nature in 2020.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

289. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress of the community employment supervisors pension claim in respect of the sanctioning of funding for the community employment supervisors pension gratuity claim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51968/19]

304. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures being put in place for the provision of a pension scheme for community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors under the community employment programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52166/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 and 304 together.

The Community Employment Scheme (CE) is an active labour market programme designed

to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and others with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

The programme is delivered through independent Community Employment Sponsoring Bodies. The contract agreement between the Department and the Community Employment Sponsoring Body establishes their role as an independent contractor, responsible for all purposes and all persons recruited by them.

CE Supervisors are not employed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. CE Supervisors have always been employees of Community Employment Sponsoring Bodies which operate in the community and voluntary sector.

I am very aware of the valuable and dedicated service that Community Employment (CE) sponsor organisations provide in running CE Schemes across the country. CE supervisors, as employees of these organisations, are an integral part of that good work.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Department is currently engaging with representatives of CE supervisors to discuss issues arising following that 2008 Labour Court Recommendation and that all parties agreed that the detail of all discussions undertaken by the group should remain confidential until the process had completed. I would ask Deputies to respect these wishes and allow the talks to continue free from speculation.

Illness Benefit Applications

290. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when illness benefit payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51901/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department has received a medical certificate from the person concerned, however, an application form for Illness Benefit (IB1) has not yet been received from him.

An application for Illness Benefit form has been posted to the person concerned for completion and his claim will be processed as soon as it is received by the Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

291. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 466 of 26 November 2019, if a companion free travel pass application by a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51914/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for a Companion Free Travel Pass on 26 August 2019. The application was assessed by the Department's Medical Advisor on 07 September 2019. Based on the medical evidence provided, the application was disallowed on 14 September 2019.

The person concerned has provided additional medical evidence to support their claim for a Companion Free Travel Pass. I am advised that the medical evidence has been forwarded to

the Medical Advisor and the matter will be re-examined. When a decision is made the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

292. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51928/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 31 May 2019.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 6 December 2019 and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 19 December 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 6 June 2019 to 18 December 2019 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 6 December 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Labour Activation Programmes

293. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when she will inform major stakeholders on foot of the completed interdepartmental review regarding labour activation schemes; when she plans to publish the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51970/19]

299. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the interdepartmental review into community employment schemes; when the outcome of the review will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52028/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 293 and 299 together.

In early 2019, the Government agreed to establish an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) to explore how social inclusion schemes might be organised going forward.

A series of meetings of the IDG have taken place and a number of bilateral meetings were also undertaken with the relevant Departments. In addition to this, all submissions received from key stakeholders and community groups were considered as part of the deliberation process. The final report of the IDG is expected to be available over the coming weeks.

The priority for my Department is to ensure that all employment and activation programmes

have the best outcomes for participants. The Government is very mindful of the large number of work programme places involved in service delivery and other valuable services to individuals and communities across Ireland.

State Pensions Payments

294. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to improve the income for persons on the State pension living alone in view of the fact that most of the costs they incur are the same as in households with two pensioners; her plans to address the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51983/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Primary weekly social welfare payments are intended to enable recipients to meet their basic day-to-day income needs. In addition to the living alone increase my Department pays out a range of other payments, both cash and non-cash on a weekly, monthly or less frequent basis. These payments are considered secondary in nature.

The living alone increase is currently an additional payment of €9, and it is not a payment in its own right, but rather it is a supplement paid to people aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and who are living alone. It is also available to people who are under 66 years of age who are living alone and are in receipt of Invalidity Pension, Incapacity Supplement or Blind Pension. There are currently over 206,000 recipients of the living alone increase, with circa 167,000 of these in receipt of a state pension payment.

The rate of primary and secondary payments to pensioners, and their adequacy, are considered in the context of the annual budgetary process. In so doing, the Government considers evidence from a wide range of sources, including agencies such as the CSO, and also research submitted by advocacy groups such as the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. I am committed to reducing the risk of poverty of marginalised groups, particularly those who live alone. People living alone can be more vulnerable to economic deprivation than two-person households where resources can be pooled.

To this end, the increase for living alone was increased in Budget 2020 from €9 to €14 per week. This increase will be paid to pensioners from January 6th 2020.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Strategies

295. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the social inclusion strategy 2019-25 roadmap for social inclusion, which was due for publication in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52009/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I have received the draft of the new social inclusion strategy “Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025”, and intend to bring it to cabinet committee and government for review and approval as soon as possible. I expect that the new strategy will be published shortly. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Expenditure

296. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of providing an additional one, two and three weeks of fuel allowance to who that are also in receipt of the over 80s allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52022/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Fuel Allowance is a payment made for 28 weeks, from October to April, to help with heating costs during the winter months. I was pleased to announce, as part of Budget 2020, that the Fuel Allowance will be increased by €2 per week from January 2020. This increase will raise the payment to €24.50 per week, benefiting over 373,000 low-income households.

The Over 80 Allowance is an additional payment of €10 per week paid to people who are in receipt of a social welfare payment, including State pensions, and who are over 80 years of age.

The full year cost of increasing the duration of the Fuel Allowance season by 1, 2, and 3 weeks for those who are also in receipt of the Over 80s Allowance, is estimated to be €1.3m, €2.6m and €3.9m respectively.

It should be noted that these costings are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients. Any decision to extend the fuel season would need to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Child Benefit Expenditure

297. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of providing a single additional monthly child benefit payment to parents on the birth of their first child only; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52025/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The estimated full year cost of providing a single additional monthly child benefit payment to parents on the birth of their first child only is €3.5 million in 2020.

This cost assumes the payment of €140, representing an additional months payment in respect of these children. It is estimated that there will be approximately 25,000 first births in 2020. It should be noted that these costings are subject to change in the context of emerging demographic trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of beneficiaries for 2020.

State Pensions

298. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if correspondence has been received from a union (details supplied) regarding increases in the State pension age; the estimated cost of implementing its proposals, including reversing the decision to increase the State pension age in 2021 and 2028; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52027/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The organisation in question recently corresponded with my Department requesting clarification on various aspects of the increases to State Pension Age as legislated for in the 2011 Social Welfare and Pension Act.

As the Deputy is aware, the organisation concerned is affiliated to the Irish Congress of

Trade Unions (ICTU) which participates in the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). This Forum was established in 2016 to bring together representatives of employers and trade unions with Government Ministers to exchange views on economic and employment issues as they affect the Labour Market and which are of mutual concern. A Pensions Sub Group of LEEF meets regularly to cover matters concerning pensions.

In order to provide for sustainable pensions and to facilitate a longer working life, successive Governments have considered the sustainability challenges faced by the Pensions system as a result of changing demographics in Ireland. In 2007, Minister Cullen launched the Green Paper on Pensions, which proposed raising the Pension Age. This was followed by a major public consultation exercise. Three years later, in 2010, Minister Hanafin launched the National Pensions Framework which, following a Government decision, set out the agenda of changes in the State Pension Age in 2014, 2021 and 2028. This strategy was enacted via legislation introduced by then Minister Burton and passed in 2011 which provides for an increase in the State pension age in three separate stages. In 2014, the State pension age was standardised at 66. This will be increased to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028.

The Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 has stated that future changes in State pension age after 2035 will be based on research into life expectancy. This is in keeping with similar measures introduced by most EU and OECD countries.

This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age. It is the only feasible solution which does not involve reducing pension rates to pensioners (which would result in an increase in the rate of poverty among older people) or reducing other significant areas of Government expenditure (such as other payments made by my Department).

It is estimated that the gross cost to the State Pension (Contributory) of postponing the increase in State Pension Age would be approximately €430m per annum, with a net cost of around €217.5 million per annum. These estimates factor in secondary costs such as foregone PRSI receipts and additional Household Benefit payments. Therefore, if the age changes legislated for in 2021 and 2028 were both reversed, the current estimated net cost from 2028 would be c.€435m per annum.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 299 answered with Question No. 293.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

300. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance suspension in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52069/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): A review of this gentleman's disability allowance (DA) was carried out and it was established by a social welfare inspector (SWI) that the person concerned had means not previously disclosed to this department. DA is a means tested scheme and the way means are assessed is laid down in social welfare legislation. The person concerned was notified on 8 July 2019 that his DA was suspended pending an investigation.

On 9 December 2019 the deciding officer (DO) wrote to the person concerned stating the contentions for termination of their DA and requesting a response to them, along with request-

ing further supporting information required by the DO in order to review his eligibility for DA.

On receipt of this information a decision will be made on this gentleman's review and he will be notified directly in writing.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

301. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to sustain the programme of individual placement and support beyond the service reform fund funding period; if individual placement and support falls under the comprehensive employment strategy for which she is responsible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52082/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Justice and Equality is the lead department with regard to Ireland's Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities.

On 3 December, the Department of Justice and Equality published a revised action plan to support the delivery of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy objectives in the coming years. The revised plan (available at: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/CES_Action_Plan_2019_to_2021.pdf/Files/CES_Action_Plan_2019_to_2021.pdf) sets out a range of actions across various Government departments and agencies and was agreed following consultation with the Comprehensive Employment Strategy Implementation Group chaired by Fergus Finlay.

As set out in the revised plan, the HSE is the lead agency with regards to the individual placement and support service (IPS) and has entered into service level agreements for the delivery of same as part of its service for persons who have experienced or are experiencing mental health difficulties. The IPS element of the service is delivered in each of the HSE's Community Health Organisation areas across the country and is integrated into the work of its adult mental health teams.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

302. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of her Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52117/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department administers over 80 separate schemes and services, which affect the lives of almost every person in the State. The Department is fully committed to ensuring that members of the general public are fully aware of the social welfare supports and services available, as well as ensuring key changes are communicated to them. Public information campaigns are therefore an important part of the Department's work.

The Department's public information and promotional campaigns span national and regional print media and radio, digital, social media and outdoor advertising.

Questions - Written Answers

All advertising expenditure undertaken by the Department is tendered for in accordance with Government and EU procurement guidelines, including use of framework agreements from the Office of Government Procurement.

Details of all print, radio, outdoor, digital and social media advertising spend to date in 2019, is detailed below.

Purpose of Public Information Campaign	Formats used	Total campaign costs, inc. creative/design work (ex. VAT)*
Promotion of Jobs Week 2019	Print, Radio, Digital, Social Media	€24,431.71
Public information campaign on the new Employment Legislation Act	Print, Radio, Digital, Social Media	€74,779.09
Promotion of MyWelfare.ie - the home for online welfare services	Outdoor, Radio, Digital, Social Media	€150,934.00
Promotion of Working Family Payment - in particular raising scheme awareness among working families	Print, Radio, Outdoor, Digital, Social Media	€115,053.14
Promotion of Cross Border Job Fair	Print, Radio, Social Media	€6,528.04
Promotion of application dates and online application route for Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance	Digital, Social Media	€12,115.06
Promote the MyWelfare.ie online application route for Maternity and Paternity Benefits	Digital, Social Media	€34,812.47
Promotion of JobsIreland.ie - the Government's national recruitment site for employers and jobseekers	Digital, Social Media	€24,541.78
Intreo (including separate 'Return to Work' element) - promotion of the wide range of schemes & services available to employers, jobseekers and those wishing to return to work	Digital, Social Media	€43,090.10
Promotion of new Jobseeker's Benefit for the Self-Employed	Print, Radio, Digital, Social Media	€89,239.95
Promotion of new Parent's Benefit	Print, Radio, Digital, Social Media	€89,249.11

Purpose of Public Information Campaign	Formats used	Total campaign costs, inc. creative/design work (ex. VAT)*
Promotion of EURES London Job Fair	Print, Digital, Social Media	€6,279.54

* Total costs invoiced to 9 December 2018.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

303. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by her Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52134/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department administers over 80 separate schemes and services, which affect the lives of almost every person in the State. The Department is fully committed to ensuring that members of the general public are fully aware of the social welfare supports and services available, as well as ensuring key changes are communicated to them. This includes the use of videos where this is considered the most effective way to communicate a particular message.

Details of all expenses incurred to date in 2019 for the commissioning, production, promotion and online sharing of video is detailed below.

Video Project	Total Costs (ex. VAT)
Production of seven videos to promote the range of services which Intreo offers to employers and jobseekers for use across two campaigns, including cutdown and GIFs for use in digital and social media advertising.	€43,090**(**)
Production of two videos to promote JobsIreland.ie - the Government's national recruitment site for employers and jobseekers, including cutdown and GIFs for use in digital and social media advertising.	€24,542*
Production of video to raise awareness of changes introduced as part of Budget 2020	€1,040
Production of three videos as part of the Government's National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy to promote existing Intreo services to the Traveller and Roma communities.	€13,107
Production of videos to explain to customers the process to get a verified MyGovID account.	€13,760
Production of videos in a range of accessible formats of Make Work Pay reports.	€10,880
Production of Brexit video to outline Department's reassuring 'no change' message with regard to Brexit clearly and succinctly	€15,294
Production of video to promote MyWelfare.ie - the Department's home of online services	€9,795*

***Includes media buying costs/online advertising costs**

()Includes creative and media buying costs associated with Return to Work element of campaign**

No videos highlighting schemes and services have been commissioned for 2020.

Question No. 304 answered with Question No. 289.

Home Loan Scheme

305. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the second income of a person arising from a retained firefighter role can be taken into consideration as guaranteed income as part of a Rebuilding Ireland home loan application process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [51924/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, single applicants applying for the loan must not be earning greater than €50,000 gross per annum and the combined income of joint applicants must not be greater than €75,000 gross per annum. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications. Housing Agency recommendations are then considered by the Credit Committee in each local authority, which issues loan approvals.

The final decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its Credit Committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants.

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

I have asked the Housing Agency how income such as in the situation of a retained firefighter is assessed. They have confirmed that it is possible for such income can be taken into account in the loan application process, although it depends on the specifics of each situation, in particular how long the applicant has been in the role.

Question No. 306 answered with Question No. 67.

Property Registration

307. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a mapping issue (details supplied) that is currently with the Land Registry will be expedited. [51976/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A service for Oireachtas members was introduced in 2006 through which information can be obtained on the current status of applications to the Property Registration Authority (PRA), such

as in the case referenced. This provides a speedy, efficient and cost effective system through which the PRA can address such queries. This service can be contacted at reps@prai.ie.

Housing Policy

308. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce cost-to-rental housing as part of future local authority or approved housing body housing developments in counties Laois and Offaly. [51981/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In order to support the delivery of discounted homes to buy or rent, this Government has committed €310 million under the Serviced Sites Fund, from 2019 to 2021, to provide infrastructure to support the delivery of some 6,200 homes. To date, funding of €127 million, in support of 35 projects in 14 local authority areas, has been allocated for infrastructure works on sites that will support the delivery of almost 3,200 homes. Details of all SSF funded infrastructure projects can be found on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following links:

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-10-local-authority-sites-affordable-housing-serviced-sites-fund/>.

<https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-approves-funding-of-e84m-to-support-delivery-of-1770-affordable-homes-under-the-ssf/>.

The Government is committed to the introduction of a Cost Rental sector in Ireland. Cost Rental is housing where the rents charged cover the cost of delivering, managing, and maintaining the homes only. With the resulting rents significantly below market levels, households on moderate incomes will have access to a more affordable and stable form of rental tenure.

Cost Rental homes may be provided by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, or other bodies as deemed appropriate. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, Cost Rental can make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness. Over the longer term, as homes are delivered at scale, it is envisaged that Cost Rental will have a stabilising effect on the broader private rental market.

It should be noted that Cost Rental is not designed to replace traditional social housing provision for low-income households, which remains a priority for the Government. Cost Rental is a new tenure option for Ireland, and is one of several schemes which my Department is using to deliver on the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan and ultimately provide more affordable housing.

Although my Department is producing a national framework for Cost Rental, which will allow its implementation across the country, the initial pilots have been targeted at large urban centres. These areas have the highest rent levels, driven by increasing demand and present the most acute affordability issues for households. For this reason, my Department is currently supporting initial Cost Rental pilot projects at Emmet Road in Inchicore and Enniskerry Road in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. The latter has already commenced construction, and is being delivered in partnership with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and the Respond and Tuath Approved Housing Bodies; the first homes are anticipated to come on stream from 2021.

The selection of further sites for Cost Rental will be informed largely by the financial and operational model that will emerge from the evidence building currently underway.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

309. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the income thresholds for social housing in counties Laois and Offaly will be increased to take account of the situation with wages and house prices. [51982/19]

325. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if income qualification thresholds for local authority houses are likely to be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52165/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 309 and 325 together.

Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The 2011 Regulations do not provide local authorities with any discretion to exceed the limits that apply to their administrative areas.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

The income bands are expressed in terms of a maximum net income threshold for a single-person household, with an allowance of 5% for each additional adult household member, subject to a maximum allowance under this category of 10%; and 2.5% for each child, subject to a maximum allowance under this category of 10%.

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

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

However, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is underway. The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Home Loan Scheme

310. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the number of applications for the home loan scheme received by South Dublin County Council; the number of applications approved; the number declined ; the number of applications that successfully drew down a loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52010/19]

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

The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications. Housing Agency recommendations are then considered by the Credit Committee in each local authority, which issues loan approvals.

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

I have asked the Agency to compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and recommended to approve/decline for South Dublin County Council since the scheme began. In 2018, the Housing Agency assessed 214 valid applications. Of these, it recommended 112 for approval and 102 for decline. For 2019, as of end-November 2019, the Housing Agency have assessed 166 valid applications of which 86 have been recommended for approval and 80 recommended for decline.

My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Local authority approval means that an official letter of offer has been sent to a borrower (and therefore relates to a specific property and loan amount). Information on the RIHL for Quarter 2 2019, including in relation to the number and value of mortgage approvals and drawdowns and also average loan amounts is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>.

Homeless Persons Data

311. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless families and children in each county in December 2018 and each month to date in 2019. [52089/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The most recently published report, in respect of October 2019, shows that there were a total of 10,514 individuals in emergency accommodation, including 6,688 adults, 1,733 families and 3,826 dependants. The monthly report includes data in relation to families and dependants at a regional level and are published on my Department's website at: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

Supporting families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. In 2016, the Government published the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. Rebuilding Ireland is designed to significantly increase the supply of social housing by 50,000 homes in the period to 2021, double the output of overall housing to at least 25,000 homes per annum by 2020, support all tenure types (social, private and rental), and tackle homelessness comprehensively. Rebuilding Ireland is delivering significant results in supporting households to exit from homelessness to independent tenancies. In 2018, 5,135 adults and their associated dependants exited homelessness to independent tenancies, an 8.6% increase on 2017. In the

first nine months of 2019, 4,389 adults and their associated dependants exited from homelessness to independent tenancies, a 17% increase on the corresponding period in 2018.

Local Authority Housing Data

312. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homes allocated by each local authority in the past 12 months, in tabular form; the number of refusals of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52091/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The allocation of social housing support is a matter for each individual local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and associated regulations. Section 22 of the 2009 Act requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

My Department does not hold information on the allocations of the specific type or the number of refusals of same requested by the Deputy.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

313. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of his Department, including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online, in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative. [52121/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The details requested are set out in the table below:

Initiative	Expenditure	Medium
Vacant Homes Leaflet	€150	Online
Vacant Homes Campaign	€39,089	Print
Open recruitment competition	€1,529	Print
Register of Electors Awareness Campaign	€7,729	Print
Invitation for Electoral Commission Submissions	€11,997	Print
Public consultation on Modernisation of Electoral Register	€33,040	Print
Sponsorship of supplement on 100 Years of Voting for women	€27,390	Print
Electoral Register Modernisation	€17,632	Online
Electoral Register Modernisation	€40,927	Radio
Advertisements on Spending Period for the 2019 Local Elections	€4,462	Print
Local Elections – Period for reckoning electoral expenses	€11,090	Print

Initiative	Expenditure	Medium
Electors with physical disability	€23,216	Print
Public Consultation on the Draft Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Water Quality	€3,632	Print
Short Term Letting Regulations	€400	Online
Short Term Letting Regulations	€25,859	Print
Met Éireann Podcast	€968	Online
Met Éireann Advertisement - National Ploughing Catalogue 2019	€431	Print
Fire Safety Week	€167,857	TV
Fire Safety Advertisement – National Ploughing Catalogue 2019	€1,476	Print
Fire Safety - Halloween	€42,424	Radio

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

314. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expenses incurred by his Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by his Department, in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020, and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52138/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has incurred no expenditure to date this year on the commissioning, development, production, promotion or online sharing of videos highlighting schemes and programmes it operates.

My Department has produced a number of videos this year, including three published videos on the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, a scheme it operates. It did not incur expenditure as these videos were produced in-house and not advertised at any cost.

To limit public expenditure in the production of digital content, including videos, my Department normally develops and produces video in-house. It occasionally incurs expenditure on the advertising and promotion of videos to increase public awareness of policies, legislative changes and initiatives. An increasing amount of online content is in video format and my Department has developed its capacity in this area in order to communicate more effectively with the public, elected representatives, stakeholders, interested parties and media and others.

My Department has not currently commissioned any videos on schemes or programmes for 2020. It is possible that it may incur expenditure on the promotion of videos next year but decisions in that respect have not yet been made.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

315. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to meet the housing needs of those in emergency housing accommodation or who are homeless in the course of the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52155/19]

317. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses likely to become available to homeless families by county in the course of the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52157/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 315 and 317 together.

Supporting families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. In 2016, the Government published the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, which contains a range of measures to support individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Under the legal and policy framework in place, local authorities are responsible for the provision of homeless services to households experiencing homelessness. Local authorities and their service delivery partners work with each household experiencing homelessness to identify and secure an appropriate home for that household. My Department has increased the budget available to local authorities to deliver homeless services by over 25% to €146m this year. Next year, this funding will increase by €20m to €166m. This increased funding will support increased numbers of households experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to exit from homelessness to a home.

In the first nine months of 2018, a total of 4,389 adults and their associated dependants exited from homelessness to an independent tenancy. This is a 17% increase on the numbers recorded at the same point in 2018. The exits for this period include: 873 exits to local authority owned properties, or up 69% on the corresponding period in 2018; 691 exits to Approved Housing Body (AHB) lettings or Long Term Supported Accommodation, up 46% on the corresponding period in 2018; and 2,825 exits to private rented properties up 2% on the corresponding period in 2018.

In 2020, as we continue to increase housing output and, in particular increase the number of new social homes to 11,000, I expect to see increased exits from homelessness to all tenure types.

Local Authority Housing Provision

316. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he expects to be in a position to meet the housing needs of those on local authority housing lists nationwide in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52156/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The 2019 Summary of Social Housing Assessments shows that 68,693 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 3,165 households or 4.4% on the last assessment in June 2018. Indeed, since the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan was launched in 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 68,693, a reduction of 25%.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time snapshot of the demand for social housing support in each local authority area and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the housing waiting lists. Local authorities have provided over 90,000 social housing supports in the period of Rebuilding Ireland to date.

The undertaking of the SSHA assists in providing a more strategic picture of the dynamics

of the numbers applying for social housing supports and emerging trends. The purpose of the SSHA is to capture the total number of households qualified for social housing support across the country whose social housing need is not being met, in order to better understand the level of need for such support. The data garnered through the Summary will allow my Department to target the delivery of social housing supports under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to those most in need.

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

Over the period of Rebuilding Ireland, 2016 to end Quarter 3 2019, over 90,000 additional households across the country had their housing needs met. In 2018, just over 27,100 households were supported, 6% ahead of the overall target for the year. We are targeting over 27,000 again this year and next.

In 2019 alone, 10,000 new social homes will be delivered utilising these methods, including 6,545 build homes delivered by Local Authorities nationwide, in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies. Looking to 2020 we expect to see 11,000 new social homes delivered showing the increased capacity now in the system to deliver homes for those who need them.

Earlier this year, I published the 2019 targets for social housing delivery broken down by local authority, and also broken into Build, Acquisition, Leasing, HAP and RAS. Each quarter, I publish progress against those targets, and this morning I published the Quarter 3 2019 outputs, showing 66% delivery to end September. This data is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

It is recognised that local authority building activity and the pace of such delivery must continue to increase. Against this background, additional resources, including technical resources, which during the inactive years had been lost to local authorities, continue to be replenished. Streamlined approval processes for capital projects have been put in place, including a revised single stage approval process. A range of supports have also been put in place including:

- Internal Layouts for Social Housing;
- Employers Requirements;
- Volumetric Frameworks;
- Rapid Framework
- Guidance Notes, including on Turnkey Delivery;
- Planning Reforms;
- Heights & Apartment Guidelines

- A newly restructured Housing Delivery Office is being advanced and work is ongoing between my Department and the LGMA in this regard.

The blend of delivery will vary across areas depending on local circumstances. However, my message to local authorities has been consistent and it is a message that every possible effort must be made to, at minimum, achieve our targets, if not exceed them. The range of delivery schemes, funding and resources are in place to support this. I will continue to engage proactively with local authorities to ensure that any impediments to progress are addressed.

Question No. 317 answered with Question No. 315.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

318. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which sites serviced or unserviced can be made available by county to assist families that may be able to provide their own houses on such sites if available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52158/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A number of options are available to local authorities in meeting social housing needs, and these include the provision of low cost sites to persons qualified for social housing support on which they would build their own homes. Another option which could be utilised by a local authority, where it considers it appropriate, is the transfer of a site from a person qualified for social housing to the local authority, and the building of a social house on the site by the local authority, to be tenanted by the person who transferred the site.

It is a matter for the local authorities to select and prioritise projects under the various programmes they implement, to meet their overall housing need. They are responsible for the identification of the social housing need in their areas and for the development of appropriate responses to meet that need.

Home Loan Scheme

319. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans likely to become available to suitable applicants nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52159/19]

320. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to adjust income limits for applicants for Rebuilding Ireland home loans in order to aggressively deal with the housing shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52160/19]

321. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase dramatically the number and availability of Rebuilding Ireland home loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52161/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 319 to 321, inclusive, together.

It continues to be the case under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, which was introduced on 1 February 2018, that single applicants applying for the loan must not be earning more than €50,000 gross per annum and the combined income of joint applicants must not be greater than €75,000 gross per annum. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources. I have no plans to raise these income limits at present.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is a demand led scheme and when it was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans would be approximately €200 million over three years. However, this loan product has proved to be more successful than initially anticipated. In the context of the scheme's success my Department engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance with regard to the allocation for 2019.

I engaged early as I said I would. While discussions commenced in October 2018 on additional funding, the first tranche of €200m was only fully drawn down in August of this year. My Department wrote to all 31 local authorities on 15 August 2019 sanctioning an additional €363.6 million in funding for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. This brings total funding for the Loan to over €563.6 million for 2018 and 2019 combined.

The overall allocations incorporate loans already issued since the inception of the scheme, loans which will be drawn down on foot of approvals already issued and projected loan demand for the rest of 2019. There are no requests for additional funding in 2019.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

322. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families likely to qualify for local authority houses in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52162/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended. In order to qualify for social housing support and be placed on a housing list, an applicant must be assessed by the authority concerned as meeting all of the eligibility and need criteria set down in the legislation.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are set out in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA).

The most recently conducted SSHA details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 24 June 2019 (the count date). Since the count date, the Housing Agency has been examining the figures submitted by Local Authorities. The Agency recently submitted its report to me which provides information on the characteristics of the households on the list. The full report is available on my Department's website.

The final numbers provided by the Housing Agency regarding the 2019 assessment show that 68,693 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 3,165 households or 4.4% on the last assessment in June 2018. Indeed, since the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan was launched in 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 68,693, a reduction of 25%.

It is important to note that social housing is a demand led service and for that reason it is difficult to predict the degree to which housing lists will decrease or increase over the next 12 months. The number of units delivered by local authorities in a given time period does not necessarily equate to the 'net need' for social housing support reducing by an equivalent number. The nature of the list is dynamic. As new households are added to it, others are removed as their housing needs are met or where the households themselves indicate that they no longer require State support.

The undertaking of the SSHA assists in providing a more strategic picture of the dynamics of the numbers applying for social housing supports and emerging trends. The purpose of the SSHA is to capture the total number of households qualified for social housing support across the country whose social housing need is not being met, in order to better understand the level of need for such support. The data garnered through the Summary will allow my Department to target the delivery of social housing supports under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to those most in need.

While it is difficult to predict social housing need, it is important that Housing Authorities are aware in general terms of the potential demand when they are preparing their Housing Strategies as part of their Development Plan process. To this end, National Policy Objective 37 of the National Planning Framework (NPF) requires that local authorities in the future will undertake a “Housing Need and Demand Assessment” (HNDA) for each local authority area. This will be important in estimating likely future housing need across tenures.

Work on the development of the HNDA process has commenced in my Department and an expert advisory group is preparing guidance for local authorities to assist them in conducting a HNDA. This new evidence-based approach will form the basis of a more accurate and consistent projection of demand for different tenures of housing. The HNDA methodology, which it is hoped will be available in early 2020, will comprise guidance and an assessment tool, that will inform local authority HNDA preparation.

Housing Policy

323. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he will take in terms of reform to address the issue of families having to spend more than half the family income to meet rent payments; if provision will be made by which families can compete with investors in the market place to provide themselves with a home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52163/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Our private rental market is experiencing ongoing upward pressures due to strong economic and demographic growth. Ultimately the most effective way to reduce and stabilise rents in the medium to long term is to increase supply and accelerate delivery of housing for the private and social rental sectors. At this point, affordability remains a significant issue in the rental market and the Government is tackling this in a number of different ways to help ensure that families can provide themselves with a home - whether that be in the rental market itself or via home purchase.

Acknowledging that renters in Dublin and other major urban centres are facing significant housing access and affordability challenges, the Government is committed to the introduction of a Cost Rental sector in Ireland. Cost Rental relates to housing where the rents charged cover the cost of delivering, managing, and maintaining the homes only as opposed to private sector rentals where rents are set by the market, which may lead to high rents in high demand areas. The rent paid by a household in a Cost Rental tenancy will not be driven by market demand. A core objective of Cost Rental is to offer moderate income households the choice of a more affordable and stable form of rental tenure. Over the longer term, as homes are delivered at scale, it is envisaged that Cost Rental will have a stabilising effect on the broader private rental market. 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.

The Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector recognises that rapidly increasing rental inflation is the most significant challenge to security of tenure in the rental sector and that there is a need for a targeted, time-bound and transparent policy response to the issue of rising rents. To address this, the Government introduced the Rent Predictability Measure. This measure, which was provided for by the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, introduced the concept of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) to moderate the rate of rent increases in those areas of the country where rents are highest and rising quickly.

At this stage, some 68% of the approximate 311,000 tenancies in the private rental sector are covered by RPZ designations and come under the 4% rent increase restriction.

In order to support more robust enforcement of the RPZ regime, the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 has provided the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) with additional powers and resources to carry out investigations and sanction landlords, if required, for any contravention of the 4% rent increase restriction in Rent Pressure Zones.

The Government has also introduced a number of affordability measures to support people who wish to purchase their own homes. In particular, a new loan offering, known as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, was introduced with effect from 1 February 2018. The loan enables credit-worthy first time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not have otherwise been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

Additionally, the Help To Buy (HTB) incentive, announced in Budget 2017, is designed to assist first-time buyers with the deposit required to purchase or self-build a new house or apartment to live in as their home.

The incentive provides for a refund of Income Tax and DIRT paid over the previous four tax years, limited to a maximum of 5% of the purchase value. The HTB refund is capped at €20,000.

As of 30 November 2019, Revenue has received 34,760 applications, and a total of 16,550 HTB claims have been made, of which 15,903 are approved. The estimated total value of approved HTB claims to date is in the order of €236 million.

The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure, Pascal Donohoe TD, extended the initiative in its current form in Budget 2020. This means that the HTB initiative will remain for another two years until 31st December 2021."

Increasing the supply of new homes at affordable prices is a key pillar of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

Under Rebuilding Ireland the Government has introduced the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund. The objective of the fund is to provide public off-site infrastructure to relieve infrastructure blockages, thereby enabling the accelerated delivery of housing in Dublin and in other urban areas in high demand. Funding of €200m has been allocated across 30 projects over the period to 2021 and work is underway to deliver the infrastructure with an associated housing delivery of up to 20,000 units. About 40% of these homes will be sold at rates which provide a discount on market prices. More than 3,000 will be social units and the remainder will be sold at market rates.

€310m has been made available under the Serviced Sites Fund over the period to 2021 for infrastructure works on local authority lands that will support the delivery of housing for rent or purchase at rates which provide a significant discount on open market costs. Two calls for

proposals have been made to date which has resulted in 'Approval in Principle' being given for an allocation of c. €127m in funding to 35 projects and c. 3,200 more affordable homes. It is anticipated that a further call for proposals will issue in 2020.

In 2018, the affordability provisions set out in Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 came into force. Regulations in relation to a number of operational matters (including schemes of priority) were made earlier this year and further Regulations will be made in the coming months. Under affordable dwelling purchase arrangements, a maximum discount of 40% of the market price will be given. However, unlike previous affordable schemes, the percentage discount provided will remain a Local Authority equity charge until it is repaid.

Local Authority Housing Provision

324. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of local authority-owned potential building lands available for local authority affordable housing in the greater Dublin area, with particular reference to those counties adjacent to Dublin; if particular reasons have emerged that may inhibit progress of a major house building campaign to meet the demands of the local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52164/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The development of major local authority residential sites in Dublin and the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), where undersupply and the greatest affordability issues are being experienced, is a major priority for the Government.

In the first instance, it is a matter for each local authority and its elected members to agree the optimal approach to development and financing of its land bank, including the viability of sites for development. Notwithstanding this, my Department has been working closely with all local authorities, including local authorities in the GDA, to ensure that new social and affordable homes can be delivered from the public land bank, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the greatest potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term.

In terms of the strategic development of the State's residential land bank, all local authority sites have been mapped on the Rebuilding Ireland land map. The map includes details of over 700 local authority and Housing Agency owned sites amounting to some 1,700 hectares including the land owned by local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area and is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

All local authorities are being funded to significantly increase their delivery of social housing, as part of the Rebuilding Ireland programme, and a strong social housing construction pipeline is already in place for local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies. A detailed breakdown of the social housing construction programme for all local authorities is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report, which is published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 2 of 2019 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <https://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-for-q2-2019-2/>. Further projects will continue to be added to the programme on an ongoing basis.

In terms of affordable housing, a targeted approach is being pursued to support local authorities. Significant housing delivery is to be achieved through the Serviced Site Fund (SSF), where €310 million has been allocated to support the delivery of at least 6,200 affordable homes over the next three years. Following two calls to date for bids under the SSF, I have allocated

funding of €127 million, in support of 35 projects in 14 local authority areas, for infrastructure works that will see the delivery of more than 3,200 affordable homes. Of this €127m, over half has been awarded to projects in the Greater Dublin Area which will in turn provide for a potential 2,213 new affordable homes to follow. Many of these sites will include a tenure mix and accommodate further social and private homes. My Department will continue to engage proactively with the local authorities to accelerate the delivery of these projects. A further SSF call for proposals will issue in 2020.

Table: List of projects in the GDA that have received approval in principle under SSF first and second call for proposals.

LA	Project Description	Total Provisional Cost of Proposal - €	Provisional Exchequer Grant Amount - €	Provisional LA Contribution - €	Affordable Housing Potential
Dublin City	Cherry Orchard	€7,645,415	€6,804,419	€840,996	215
Dublin City	Balbutcher, Ballymun	€4,135,351	€3,680,462	€454,889	74
Dublin City	Sillogue, Ballymun	€3,975,000	€3,537,750	€437,250	83
Dublin City	O'Devaney Gardens	€10,233,682	€9,107,977	€1,125,705	165
DLR	Enniskerry Road	€4,537,576	€4,038,443	€499,133	50
DLR	Ballyogan Court	€2,342,745	€2,085,043	€257,702	52
DLR	St Laurences Park, Stillorgan	€1,960,698	€1,745,021	€215,677	40
Fingal	Church Fields, Mulhuddart	€11,000,000	€9,790,000	€1,210,000	760
Fingal	Dun Emer, Lusk	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	39
Fingal	Hackettstown, Skerries	€2,198,667	€1,956,814	€241,853	49
Fingal	Cappaghfinn	€3,552,500	€3,161,725	€390,775	122
Kildare	Ardclough Road, Celbridge	€363,732	€323,721	€40,011	10
South Dublin Co Co	Killinarden	€9,987,000	€8,888,430	€1,098,570	300
South Dublin	Rathcoole	€3,712,000	€3,303,680	€408,320	100
South Dublin	Clonburris	€6,968,000	€6,201,520	€766,480	133
Wicklow	Rathnew	€676,000	€601,640	€74,360	21
Total		€74,788,366	€66,561,645	€8,226,721	2,213

Question No. 325 answered with Question No. 309.

Departmental Properties Acquisition

326. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on a matter relating to the property of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [51994/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department is aware of this property and has in the past made enquiries about this property. While it would have been considered desirable, any pursuit of the property had been constrained by resources available as the Department focused upon managing its existing National Park holdings, including the completion of the restoration and refurbishment of Killarney House and Gardens.

My Department's most recent enquiry in relation to the property in October was to ask if the property was still on the market. I am advised that the Department was unaware that an offer had been made on the property and that the timing of this enquiry by the Department's representative was coincidental. Ultimately, the sale or otherwise of this property is a private commercial transaction for the owner(s) and my Department will not comment further on same. The Department is unaware of an approach by the Office of Public Works.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

327. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the implementation of ongoing communications strategy initiatives that highlight schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of her Department including advertising and promotion on television, radio, newspapers and online in tabular form; and the level of expenditure for each such initiative.. [52114/19]

328. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenses incurred by her Department to date in 2019 for the commissioning, development, production, promotion and online sharing of a video that highlighted schemes and programmes operated by her Department in tabular form; if such videos have been commissioned for 2020; and if so, the estimated costs of each such video. [52131/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 327 and 328 together.

Communication with the public is of significant importance to the Department given the nature of its work. The mission statement of the Department is to promote, nurture and develop Ireland's Arts, culture and Heritage; to support and promote the use of the Irish language and to facilitate the development of Gaeltacht and the Islands.

Promoting the work of the Department gives an opportunity to offer a unique window to the richness and variety of our culture and give easy access to information on galleries, museum and events happening locally. It helps give the public knowledge and opportunities to experience our national parks, nature resources and waterways and also builds awareness and knowledge of our natural heritage and biodiversity. It helps raise appreciation of the Irish language and presents the relevance, vitality and value of the language.

The Department's communications strategy encompasses use of media across the wide

range of schemes and programmes operated under the auspices of my Department.

The Department's communication presence and its management is undertaken by the Department's in-house Communications and Press Office team which comprises 5 staff. Content is also supplied by staff across the Department who are engaged in the day to day work in the Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht Divisions.

In 2019, costs arose in relation to specific initiatives as outlined below.

- In relation to Creative Ireland expenditure of €76,506 was incurred in respect of social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) which included research, image sourcing and scheduling) to maximise awareness of the Programme, taking into account the diversity of the target audiences. The Creative Ireland Programme undertook a bespoke two month campaign from April to June on regional radio and online to promote participation in and provide support to the over 750 events being organised by the Local Authorities across the country as part of Cruinniú na nÓg on June 15, a day of creativity for children and young people. The cost of this campaign amounted to €92,565.

- A series of 20 videos and video promos were also commissioned in 2019 at a cost of €101,017 to promote various aspects of the Programme particularly Cruinniú na nÓg, initiatives such as Creative Schools under Pillar 1 'Creative Youth' and innovative projects under the National Creativity Fund across the various platforms outlined above.

No videos are planned in the Department as yet for 2020.

Policy Area	Event	Estimated cost
Heritage	Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme (Newspaper Advertisements, announcement of calls for applications for Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme)	€6,700
Creative Ireland Programme	Social media Jan-Nov 2019	€76,506
	Cruinniú na nÓg promotion nationwide	€92,565
	Creative Ireland videos and video promotions	€101,017
Culture Ireland	Live streaming of the Culture Ireland Global Ireland 2025 Conference	€ 3,167