COVID-19 Queries from TDs

Dates: 17th & 20th April 2020
Queries:

53, 54 & 198 – identical queries  To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to ensure that the emergency mortgage moratorium scheme is made available to persons availing of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. (Darragh O Brien TD)

693  To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a mortgage moratorium will be introduced in respect of local authority house loans and if he will make a statement on the matter. (Brendan Smith TD)

783  To ask the Minister to instruct Local Authorities to give a mortgage break to households who have a council mortgage and have lost their income. And that their Credit Rating would be protected if they avail of such a break. (Rose Conway Walsh TD)

106  To ask the Minister for Housing when is the government planning to issue an instruction to the Local Authorities to freeze loan repayments on Rebuilding Ireland home loans, in line with the banking sector, South Dublin County Council processed a reduction from a mortgagee on 31 March – (Richard Boyd Barrett TD)

Reply:

I propose to take Queries 53, 54, 198, 693, 783 and 106 together.

On 19 March 2020, I confirmed that homeowners with local authority mortgages would be able to apply for a mortgage payment break as a result of the COVID-19 emergency. To implement this, on Friday 10th April I issued Circular 9 2020 to each local authority confirming that local authority mortgage borrowers who face mortgage payment difficulties can apply for a mortgage break of up to 3 months.

This is in line with measures put in place by commercial banks. The mortgage payment break, which applies to all local authority mortgage products, will be available to borrowers who have already faced mortgage difficulties due to the COVID-19 emergency and those who may encounter difficulties in the near future.

The approach being taken will ensure that no additional costs to the original home loan balance will arise for any borrower availing of these measures, as borrowers are not charged interest for the period of the break. At the end of the payment break period, repayments will be adjusted so that the mortgage will be repaid within its original term. To achieve this, the break period repayments will be spread over the remaining mortgage term.

The aim has been to ensure a simplified application process that can be accessed easily and through which applications can be processed efficiently, so that borrowers in distress can access the payment break quickly. Any local authority borrower facing difficulties due to COVID-19 should contact their local authority as soon as possible, in particular to access the application form and information that will be available on each local authority’s website.
Borrowers should apply to their local authority and have approval for the payment break before stopping their mortgage payments. An agreed Mortgage Payment Break will not adversely impact on a borrower’s credit record.

These measures will help ease some of the short-term financial concerns faced by local authority borrowers. They will be kept under review and assessed in line with other developments in the COVID-19 emergency.
Query:

59. To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to clarify why the Property Registration Authority during the COVID Crisis will not show dealings pre-lodged online against a folio when a search is being carried out and people cannot be sure there has been no dealings lodged online and will the Minister ensure that pre-lodged dealings show up in closing searches. While registrations can be completed searches cannot be completed and this is causing a problem

(Seán Fleming, T.D.).

Reply:

The Property Registration Authority (PRA) temporarily suspended its registration of title services from 31 March 2020 in order to protect the safety of its staff and customers and to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This decision was taken on the basis of the Taoiseach’s announcement in relation to the national public health emergency arising, and in light of the associated guidelines in relation to essential services.

Online inspection of the register is available at all times at www.landdirect.ie. The suspension of the formal receipt of incoming post and electronic pre-lodgements prevents an application showing as pending on the system. This essentially freezes the register at a point in time to all incoming applications.

Applications pre-lodged online are never shown as pending until the paper documents are received in the PRA offices and the application is created on its computer system. The fact that applications were not being accepted in the PRA offices prevented these applications from appearing as pending applications during the period of suspension.

The temporary suspension of registration services was for the initial period of operation of the restrictions announced by the Government and it was intended that the matter would be reviewed in the event of the period of restrictions being extended, conscious of the fact that a prolonged period of suspension of registration services would create difficulties in the property market. Following the extension of the restrictions for a further 3 weeks, the PRA has reviewed the matter as part of its ongoing business continuity planning and, on foot of this review, the PRA will be open again to receive applications via An Post and DX from Monday, 20 April 2020.

Details of the revised arrangements are available on www.prai.ie and customers can contact the PRA at info@prai.ie where specific queries can be addressed.

The PRA will continues to adhere to Government and public health advice and, therefore, all working arrangements will remain under review during the current COVID-19 crisis.
Query:

117 To ask the Minister for Housing to work with the Local Authorities to ensure that all tenants in overcrowded conditions are transferred to more suitable accommodation in the interests of the public health of these tenants and to make a statement on the matter,

(Richard Boyd Barrett TD)

Reply:

A coordinated response has been put in place by the local authority sector and the HSE, working with other relevant organisations, to ensure that vulnerable people have a means to self-isolate where required.

Where a person in overcrowded accommodation requires to self-isolate, and they are unable to do so in their normal place of residence, the HSE have put in place a number of facilities to provide alternative accommodation. In addition, local authorities have put in place self-isolation facilities for individuals accessing homeless emergency accommodation. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive has put systems in place in relation to the provision of appropriate accommodation, i.e. cocooning and isolation beds, in partnership with the HSE to protect those in emergency accommodation in the Dublin Region during the COVID-19 crisis.

Local authorities are continuing to use all available housing stock and are facilitating urgent social housing allocations, where necessary for health/welfare purposes. Approved Housing Bodies have also been requested to maintain close contact with the relevant local authorities in order to ensure a collaborative effort to prioritise urgent cases identified.
Query:

To ask the Minister for Housing what recourse tenants have where landlords are insisting that rent be paid despite a tenants reduction in income and where rent supplement will not cover the balance; will he clarify if the RTB has been instructed to provide support to those tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

(Gino Kenny TD)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, on foot of which tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. Initially, these emergency legislative provisions will last for a period of 3 months, but may be extended if the Government considers it necessary. A notice of termination cannot be served during the COVID-19 emergency period. All notices of termination which were served before the emergency period are paused and tenants, in general, cannot be obliged to leave their rented accommodation during this time.

Tenants receiving a notice of termination during the emergency COVID-19 period should contact the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to seek to prevent the termination from proceeding.

Tenants are still required to pay rent to their landlord during this emergency period. Tenants are encouraged to engage with their landlords and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection at their earliest opportunity if they cannot afford to pay their rent. Income supports and Rent Supplement are available for individuals in such circumstances. Further information can be found in a guidance document which is available on my Department’s website at https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/covid-19-coronavirus/guidance-document-covid-19-supports-landlords-and-tenants.

The RTB has commissioned an awareness campaign focused on the emergency legislation. A dedicated section on the RTB website provides all the information on the new legislation, including a FAQ section which can be found here. A full review/update of all relevant pages on the website is underway to reflect the legislative change.

With Government funding, the national housing charity, Threshold, operates the Tenancy Protection Service (TPS). The TPS is a national service providing advice and support to households living in private rented accommodation who are experiencing tenancy problems, including where a tenancy is at risk of termination. The TPS seeks to protect existing tenancies and keep tenants in their homes. The TPS operates a free helpline - 1800 454 454 – available from Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm. Further information is also available at www.threshold.ie.
The Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 also prohibits any increases to rent for the duration of the emergency period.

Concerns have been raised regarding the potential accumulation of rent arrears during the period of the crisis. I have asked my Department to undertake a piece of research on this issue and this is being taken forward as part of the established housing research programme in place between my Department and the ESRI. The research will have regard to the range of rental and income supports being made available to those affected by COVID 19, and will assess the combined impact that these supports, together with changed consumption patterns, have on the incidence of arrears.
Query:

To ask the Minister for Housing what recourse tenants have where landlords are proceeding with evictions despite the provisions set down in emergency legislation; will he clarify if the RTB has been instructed to provide support to those tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

(Gino Kenny TD)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, on foot of which tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. Initially, these emergency legislative provisions will last for a period of 3 months, but may be extended if the Government considers it necessary. A notice of termination cannot be served during the COVID-19 emergency period. All notices of termination which were served before the emergency period are paused and tenants, in general, cannot be obliged to leave their rented accommodation during this time.

Tenants receiving a notice of termination during the emergency COVID-19 period should contact the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to seek to prevent the termination from proceeding.

The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019 regulate the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented residential sector and set out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Acts to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants in a quasi-judicial manner.

Carrying out an illegal eviction, which includes prohibiting access to the property or making the property uninhabitable by disconnecting services, can result in damages of up to €20,000 being awarded to the tenant. The RTB can seek an injunction from the Courts to reinstate the tenant and will continue to prioritise these cases during the emergency period.

Additional powers and functions were conferred on the RTB through the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 to investigate and administratively sanction landlords (up to €30,000) who engage in improper conduct, including non-compliance with the enhanced tenancy termination provisions.

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants, which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period.
The Guidance document is available [here](#) and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available [here](#).
Query:

To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he would provide for the Cork City Fire Brigade switch to a 24 hours on 72 hours off system for the duration of the health emergency; if he is aware that the proposal has the support of the station chief and the firefighters; if he will overrule the objection which is currently preventing the implementation of this plan; and if he would make a statement on the matter.

(Mick Barry TD)

Reply:

The provision of fire services, including staffing, equipment, premises, training and shift systems, is a function of local fire authorities, under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

Generally, 24-hour shifts are not regarded as best practice in the provision of fire services and it is not clear what particular service needs or other benefits would be met through the adoption of a 24-hour shift system during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The operation of a 24-hour shift presents issues in relation to safety, health and welfare of staff, as well as operational efficiency and effectiveness, and compliance with the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997.
Query:

171 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government what steps he has taken to ensure that all landlords and all tenants are aware of their new rights and obligations as established by part 2 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020; and will he make a statement on the matter?

(Cian O'Callaghan)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, on foot of which tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. Initially, these emergency legislative provisions will last for a period of 3 months, but may be extended if the Government considers it necessary.

Rent increases are prohibited during the emergency period but rent decreases can be implemented. Outside of the usual rent review cycle, temporary reductions in rent can be implemented on an informal basis by agreement between the landlord and tenant.

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period. The Guidance document is available [here](#) and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available [here](#).

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) has developed a communications plan to make tenants and landlords aware of the new provisions and this multi-media, integrated communications campaign will include using social media, digital and radio advertising, information video, regular updates on the RTB website and a stakeholder engagement plan.

A dedicated section on the RTB website, [www.rtb.ie](http://www.rtb.ie), provides information on the new legislation, including a FAQ section. A full review/update of all relevant pages on the website is underway to reflect the legislative changes.

The normal RTB phone lines, webchat and email services also remain available.
Query:

172 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government how many complaints he has received regarding non-compliance with the rent freeze and ban on evictions (part 2 of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020); and will he make a statement on the matter?

(Cian O'Callaghan TD)

Reply:

My Department does not hold or collate the data referred to by the Deputy in relation to complaints made regarding non-compliance with Covid-19 emergency rental legislation.

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004 to 2019 to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

The Clerk of the Dáil requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG(P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB set up a dedicated email address for this purpose. The RTB may be contacted at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie to establish the extent to which it may hold the information sought.
Query:

173 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government what additional resources have been given to state bodies and housing charities to deal with the increase in COVID-19 related housing queries and concerns; and will he make a statement on the matter?

(Cian O'Callaghan TD)

Reply:

I and my Department are in ongoing close contact with local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and other public and private bodies operating in the housing sphere in order to ensure that they are in a position to deal with the implications of the current COVID-19 emergency and respond in a timely manner to all housing-related queries and concerns.

A wide range of resources have been brought to bear in this regard. These include funding for additional separation and isolation-related accommodation in homeless services and for the Traveller community, as well as flexibility in funding rates for measures in these areas; flexibility in relation to the blend of funding from different programmes to allow local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to adapt their programmes to the changed housing sector, additional legislative resources in relation to the private rental sector, in terms of prohibiting evictions and rent increases for the duration of the emergency; forbearance arrangements in relation to the holders of local authority mortgages, similar to arrangements in place in relation to customers of financial institutions; and streamlined phased payment arrangements and other measures to assist local authorities dealing with cash flow pressures.

The intensive, ongoing COVID-19-related engagement between my Department and all the players in the housing sector will continue for the duration of the emergency in order to ensure that housing-related issues arising can continue to be dealt with in a prompt and robust manner.
Query:

174 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, in light of Threshold’s warning about a potential spike in homelessness following the emergency period, what steps are being taken now to prevent such an outcome; and will he make a statement on the matter?

(Cian O’Callaghan TD)

Reply:

Supporting families experiencing homelessness remains a key priority for the Government and has been the subject of focused attention under 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. Increasing the level of overall housing supply, particularly in terms of social and affordable housing, and ensuring stability in the rental sector are also essential to addressing fully the challenging situation in relation to homelessness, and very substantial progress continues to be made in those areas.

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 to €166m this year, an increase of €20m on the 2019 allocation.

In response to the emergency period brought about by the Covid-19 virus, the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 has been signed into law. The Act makes exceptional provision for emergency measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on workers and businesses, and the administration of crucial public service functions. The Act also provides for amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 2004-2019 to prevent the termination of residential tenancies and rent increases for the duration of the crisis.

To ensure that all households in receipt of HAP tenancies are not adversely affected, I have informed all local authorities that the payment of HAP rents is a matter of priority my Department. If a HAP tenant does not experience any change in financial circumstances as a result of the steps being taken to combat the spread of COVID-19, there should be no change to the operation of the scheme – HAP payments will continue to be made to the landlord and the tenant’s differential rent will continue to be collected. If a HAP tenant does experience a change in financial circumstances on foot of COVID-19, prior to contacting their relevant local authority, those tenants should contact the
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and apply for the relevant income supports at mywelfare.ie.

My Department is also working with the Department of Health and HSE on the delivery of the National Implementation Plan for Housing First. Housing First enables homeless individuals with high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive housing and health supports to help them maintain their tenancies. The National Implementation Plan for Housing First was published in September 2018. The Plan includes an overall target of 663 tenancies in the period 2018-2021, with annual targets for each local authority. The Plan is a joint initiative of my Department, the Department of Health, the HSE and the local authorities.

Local authorities are responsible for the establishment of a Housing First tenancy. Reports made by the local authorities to my Department show that 172 individuals were housed under Housing First over the course of 2019. New Housing First tenancies continue to be established during the current COVID-19 crisis, to support vulnerable individuals identified rough sleeping or accessing homeless services.

My Department will continue to work closely with the local authorities to ensure that the impacts of the current crisis on homelessness continue to be addressed effectively.
Query:

175 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government what steps he has taken to ensure that those living in overcrowded accommodation can comply with Government’s advice to engage in physical distancing; in light of concerns raised by medical professionals what steps, in particular, are being taken to support the Roma community many of whom live in crowded conditions; and will he make a statement on the matter?

(Cian O’Callaghan TD)

Reply:

It is important to note that HSE guidance indicates that people should “follow social distancing advice everywhere outside the home”.

Where a person in overcrowded accommodation requires to self-isolate, and they are unable to do so in their normal place of residence, the HSE have put in place a number of facilities to provide alternative accommodation, including for members of the Roma Community.

In the case of social housing households or others ordinarily supported by local authorities, a range of responses have been put in place in order to provide for self-isolation. For example, in the case of homeless emergency accommodation, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, in partnership with the HSE, has put systems in place to provide appropriate cocooning and isolation beds, in order to protect those in emergency accommodation in the Dublin Region during the COVID-19 crisis.
Queries:

204 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government that no person or family who presents as homeless during the Covid19 pandemic will be refused access to emergency accommodation or forced to travel to another local authority administrative area to access emergency accommodation if to do so were to breach the HSE and Government public health advice.

206 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government for an update on the de-congregation of emergency accommodation to reduce the risk of Covid19 infection and spread.

(Eoin Ó Broin TD)

Reply:

I propose to take Queries Nos. 204 and 206 together.

The role of my Department in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing homelessness at local or regional level. Responsibility for the provision of emergency accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with local authorities.

Under the Housing Act 1988, local authorities are responsible for assessing whether a person is homeless and for providing accommodation and other related services. I understand that the Deputy may be referring to instances where individuals had travelled to Dublin from other jurisdictions. In these instances, local authorities are working to minimise the movement of individuals between facilities due to the risk of the spread of COVID-19.

As part of the response to COVID-19, my Department is working closely with the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive (DRHE), local authorities and the HSE to ensure the necessary arrangements are in place to protect individuals and families accessing emergency accommodation. My Department is also working with the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) subgroup for vulnerable persons.

Local authorities nationally have been working to put in place additional accommodation to allow for the isolation of confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. Significant additional accommodation is also in place to support the appropriate levels of social distancing in emergency accommodation. This additional accommodation has allowed for the decongregation of existing facilities. The actions being taken are informed by the guidance developed by the HSE and which the local authorities have circulated to their NGO service delivery partners.
Query:

To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to outline what plans he and his officials are considering to deal with the rent arrears debt burden that will be left for many in the private rental sector once the Covid19 emergency period restrictions on the operation of the Residential Tenancies Act are lifted

(Eoin Ó Broin TD)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period.

While the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 prohibits any increases to rent for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency period, tenants are still required to pay rent to their landlords. Tenants are encouraged to engage with their landlords and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection at their earliest opportunity if they cannot afford to pay their rent. Income supports and Rent Supplement are available for individuals in such circumstances. Further information can be found in a guidance document which is available on my Department’s website at [https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/covid-19-coronavirus/guidance-document-covid-19-supports-landlords-and-tenants](https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/covid-19-coronavirus/guidance-document-covid-19-supports-landlords-and-tenants).

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

The RTB has commissioned an awareness campaign focused on the emergency legislation. A dedicated section on the RTB website provides all the information on the new legislation, including a FAQ section which can be found [here](http://www.threshold.ie). A full review/update of all relevant pages on the website is underway to reflect the legislative changes.

Concerns have been raised regarding the potential accumulation of rent arrears during the period of the crisis. I have asked my Department to undertake a piece of research on this issue and this is being taken forward as part of the established housing research programme in place between my Department and the ESRI. The research will have regard to the range of rental and income supports being made available to those affected by COVID 19, and will assess the combined impact that these supports, together with changed consumption patterns, have on the incidence of arrears.
Queries:

264. Will local authorities be given direction on rate payments after the three months, at the moment companies who are not operating are expected to pay back this money after the three months are up? (Duncan Smith TD)

614 - Can you confirm that despite the Covid-19 crisis that funding to Local Authorities will not be effected? And what plan is being put in place where Local Authorities are now to the loss of many months of valuable rate payments. (Michael Healy Rae TD)

677 - To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government to advise if additional funding will be provided to local authorities given their loss in income from business rates, tenants’ rent and any other loss of income, and if such funding has been made available to provide a breakdown by County as to the amount of funding awarded to each local authority in the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter (Claire Kerrane TD)

776 - To ask the Minister if rates for businesses can be waived rather than put on hold to alleviate cash flow problems once they are open again. (Rosemary Conway Walsh TD)

810. Is he considering suspending commercial rates for the rest of the year for COVID affected businesses. (Robert Troy TD)

827 To ask the Minister for Housing Planning and Local Government whether it is intended to introduce a moratorium on rates for all businesses closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic and fund the shortfall to local authorities from Department funds; if he does, the proposed length of such a moratorium; and if he will make a statement on the matter. (Éamon Ó Cuív TD)

Reply:

The levying and collection of rates are legally matters for each individual local authority. Local authorities in Ireland are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes.

The Government has agreed with local authorities that in response to the issues faced by ratepayers due to COVID-19, they should agree to defer rates payments due from the most immediately impacted businesses for at least a 3 month period. This measure is being implemented by each local authority in its own area and was announced by the Government on 20 March.

Local authorities have long-standing relationships with ratepayers and are therefore best placed to deal with this evolving situation in terms of the impact on ratepayers and operating environments. Notwithstanding that, local authorities have been asked to take particular account of the various pressures currently facing ratepayers, in terms of collection of rates and enforcement, in the sectors most impacted.
Ratepayers have been advised that if they have had to temporarily close or significantly curtail operations during the COVID-19 response period they should contact their local authority immediately in relation to any rates payments falling due in the period to end June.

It is recognised that this flexibility will have implications for local authorities in terms of cash flow and critical service delivery implications. As a short term measure in recognition of this, my Department made €136m available to local authorities as cash flow support in early April, in order to ensure that vital services that local authorities deliver can be maintained. This support is comprised of the early payment of the Local Property Tax allocation ordinarily paid from the Local Government Fund in May and July.

In order to support the local government sector, my Department is continuing to keep local authority income, expenditure and cash flow generally under review and will continue to work with all local authorities on both collective and individual issues arising.

My Department is engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform regarding the level of additional financial support that will be needed by local authorities during and after the COVID 19 Crisis. In addition, my Department is engaging with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Public Expenditure and Reform, Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to the role that commercial rates could play, in parallel with employment and enterprise supports already introduced, in helping to support economic activity in the near future. This work is at an early stage and will include consideration as to whether measures additional to the rates deferral period put in place for businesses most impacted, are necessary and appropriate.
Query:

283. When does the Minister for Housing plan to publish the guidelines for the rental sector in the context of the coronavirus, is the Rent Supplement payment now available to students and those on higher incomes?

(Paul Murphy TD)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, on foot of which tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. Initially, these emergency legislative provisions will last for a period of 3 months, but may be extended if the Government considers it necessary.

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants, which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period. The Guidance document is available here and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available here.

Issues in relation to Rent Supplement are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.
Query:

326 - To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to provide details on the measures that are in place to ensure that Business Continuity Plans (identifying critical functions and essential staff) are in place for all local authorities and water plant operators in the context of COVID-19 and if he will make a statement on the matter

(Carl Nolan TD)

Reply:

Public Water Services

Irish Water and local authorities are working in partnership to ensure public water and waste water services continue to function throughout the period of the COVID-19 public health measures in a way that protects the safety and well-being of water sector staff and the communities they serve.

Careful preparation by Irish Water, working together with local authorities and other key stakeholders, has ensured that services have continued to operate well. Irish Water has business continuity measures in place, including in the following key areas:

Keeping People Safe: to manage people’s health and safety to ensure the maximum number of people are available for work to keep the service operating. Employees are working from home unless absolutely necessary to attend offices. Operational staff members are subject to strict social distancing protocols. This includes measures such as split-shifts for key operational teams.

Communications and IT Systems: to ensure that Irish Water has continuity in critical IT systems. Customer call-centre staff members now have the ability to work from home.

Water Service Operations: to ensure that robust plans are in place for key operational activities. This focuses on critical areas of plant, including the resourcing of plants and working with the local authorities in the event of an escalation including responding to the absence of mission-critical staff. This also includes other critical elements such as stocks and supply of essential chemicals at local and national level.

Many of the challenges involved in managing our complex water and wastewater networks prior to the COVID-19 outbreak remain, and continue to be managed effectively in the current more difficult circumstances.
Irish Water is also linking in with water companies right across Europe to share knowledge in relation to their respective experiences in maintaining water services under COVID-19 related restrictions.

**Private Water Suppliers – Group Water Sector**

The National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS) is maintaining ongoing contact with Group Water Scheme members throughout the country. They have been working with local authorities to assist such schemes to put in place additional technical supports and resources to help protect and maintain essential operations. This includes support such as access to additional backup personnel, improving operational arrangements with contractors, and support from local authority rural water staff. Irish Water is also providing some technical support on process optimisation at the request of one scheme in County Clare.

The Federation has also developed a contingency plan checklist for schemes. NFGWS Development Officers have been having one-to-one conversations with schemes and assisting them to make the necessary arrangements and implement contingencies in terms of supply chains, operations and management, should people become ill or be required to self-isolate for a period. The Federation continues to keep my Department updated in relation to its work in this area.
Query:

328 - To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to clarify if Local Authorities have frozen all rent reviews for local authority tenants for the duration of the covid-19 crisis and if he will make a statement on the matter.

(Carol Nolan TD)

Reply:

The differential rent schemes in place in local authorities provide for rents which are based on a person’s income and it should be noted that rents can go down where a person’s income reduces. Accordingly, a rent freeze would not be appropriate as it would prevent downward rent movements in such circumstances.

Where a person in social housing has lost employment as a result of Covid-19, their local authority can review the rent payable to take account of this. In the current situation, local authority staff engaged on rents administration are prioritising the processing of these applications for downward rent reviews.

In relation to any household income increase that is attributable to Covid-19 payments issued by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, I understand that local authorities are not currently increasing rents as this is a temporary measure.
Query:

345. To ask the Minister for Housing and Planning if he is planning to extend the freeze on An Bord Pleanala deadlines after 20 April and until when and to make a statement on the matter.

(Richard Boyd Barrett TD)

Reply:

On 29 March 2020, the Government, following my request and taking account of the considerations under section 251A(5) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, made an Order which resulted in an extension of time for a range of specified or appropriate periods and timelines in that Act as well as associated planning regulations. This means that such periods were extended in duration from 29 March 2020 to 20 April 2020 inclusive. In determining the end date of the Order under section 251A, a number of additional days were added beyond the end of the period of the Government’s public health ‘stay at home’ announcement, in order to facilitate the return to normal business by planning authorities and public communication of revised arrangements in advance of the expiry of the section 251A Order.

In this context, section 251A(4) provides that the Order could be extended by Government (before it expires), once the statutory requirements for an extension are met and could be further extended as many times as is considered necessary, until 9 November 2020.

Arising from the decision of the Government late last week to extend the Covid-19 related restrictive measures until 5 May 2020, the Government on 16 April 2020 made a further Order under section 251A(4) of the Planning Act extending the duration of all relevant periods and timelines specified in planning legislation by an additional 19 days, up to and including 9 May 2020. The two Orders thereby have the combined effect of extending the relevant planning periods and timelines by an aggregate of 42 days/ 6 weeks.

Any such future decision to further extend the period by Government Order will be communicated to planning authorities and the FAQ available on my Department’s website will be updated accordingly.
Query:

359. Dear Minister

I am making representations on behalf of those small builders who are in the process of completing small scale, one man, construction projects. This matter has been raised by many including those families who now find themselves living in mini construction sites with families and with limited access to essential facilities such as a working kitchen and/or bathroom.

I have one such family of 8 with a young child who are relying on one small en suite to cater for all of them. 3 weeks work with their local builder would see the project finished with zero interaction between the builder and the customer. All trades could be on site separately so to have a blanket ban on these trades at these times is hindering productivity on all levels. This would also reduce the amount of payments to be made to the Self-employed if these builders were allowed to continue on a one-man basis where at all possible.

I would appreciate if this matter could be given some consideration with a workable strategy to help many people in this country at this time.

(Michael Fitzmaurice TD)

Reply:

The Government’s overriding objective during COVID-19 is to ensure the protection of public health and safety. Physical distancing measures are effective tools to inhibit the spread of COVID-19.

In this context, and where appropriate, it is important to minimise economic disruption especially for those economic activities which directly support efforts to ensure public health and safety. Upon the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET), the Government introduced a range of escalating measures, including those announced on 28 March 2020 concerning the list of essential service providers. Details of these are available at the following link: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/dfeb8f-list-of-essential-service-providers-under-new-public-health-guidelin/

In relation to construction the following are considered to be essential:

- essential health and related projects relevant to the COVID-19 crisis, and supplies necessary for such projects
- repair/construction of critical road and utility infrastructure
- delivery of emergency services to businesses and homes on an emergency call-out basis in areas such as electrical, plumbing, glazing and roofing.
The purpose of this guidance is to help inform companies in establishing whether they are providing an essential service; if the company is providing an essential service, latest public health guidance should be followed at all times.

The restrictions introduced in late March were extended last week and will now remain in place until at least 5th May. Ahead of that, the construction industry has been giving consideration to measures that might support it being part of the early phase of economic activity to resume in compliance with the prevailing public health advice, including in relation to social distance. My Department has been working with other relevant Departments in engaging with the construction sector in that regard and will continue to do so, but will be guided by the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team.
Query:

382. Can the Department of Housing please advise what arrangements are in place for students who are in rented accommodation attending Third Level College throughout the Country and in particular in Limerick and the colleges are now closed but landlords are looking for the rent even though the students are no longer there.

(Sean Fleming TD)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, on foot of which tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. Initially, these emergency legislative provisions will last for a period of 3 months, but they may be extended if the Government considers it necessary.

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period. The Guidance document is available here and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available here.

The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019 provide for minimum notice periods to be served by tenants and landlords for tenancy terminations. For example, a student must provide 28 days notice to end a tenancy of less than 6 months duration or 35 days notice to end a tenancy of more than 6 months but less than 1 year.

The Acts do not prescribe specific terms and conditions regarding the payment of rents or deposits for inclusion in individual letting agreements in the private rental market, including the student-specific accommodation sector. Contract law governs such individual arrangements.

The specific terms associated with an individual student’s rights and obligations are likely be set out in a written contract signed by both the student and the landlord. Engagement between the parties to clarify the respective contractual obligations of the student and the landlord is key in establishing whether a breach of contract had occurred.

I understand that where State universities have closed due to COVID-19, they are generally providing refunds in respect of their directly owned student-specific accommodation. Funding and policy matters in this area are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science.

In the event of the premature termination of a fixed term lease by a student, the landlord should attempt to mitigate any losses arising for a student by finding an alternative use for accommodation to better enable refunds.
Students may wish to contact their third level education providers to seek any assistance that they might be in a position to provide. If a student cannot come to an agreement with their accommodation provider, they might wish to contact the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) regarding their concerns – www.rtb.ie.
Query:

387. To ask the Minister for Housing if he has had any engagement in securing refunds for students who have lost deposits in student accommodation from landlord private and college provided

(Sean Sherlock TD)

Reply:

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period. The Guidance document is available here and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available here.

The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019 do not prescribe specific terms and conditions regarding the payment of rents or deposits for inclusion in individual letting agreements in the private rental market including the student-specific accommodation sector. Contract law governs such arrangements.

The specific terms associated with an individual student’s rights and obligations are likely be set out in a written contract signed by both the student and the landlord. Engagement between the parties to clarify the respective contractual obligations of the student and the landlord is key in establishing whether a breach of contract had occurred.

I understand that where State universities have closed due to COVID-19, they are generally providing refunds in respect of their directly owned student-specific accommodation. Funding and policy responsibility in this area is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills.

In the event of the premature termination of a fixed term lease by a student, the landlord should attempt to mitigate the losses of a student by finding an alternative use for accommodation to better enable refunds.

Students may wish to contact their third level education providers to seek any assistance that they might be in a position to provide. If a student cannot come to an agreement with their accommodation provider, they might wish to contact the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) regarding their concerns – www.rtb.ie – or to refer a dispute for resolution by the RTB with regard to the non-refund of their deposit.
Query:

619 - If an individual received notification of a rent increase prior to the introduction of legislation introducing a moratorium, does this rent increase, which is due to come into effect in June, still apply.

(Noel Grealish TD)

Reply:

All notices of rent increase, which were served before the COVID-19 emergency period and were due to start during this period, are paused and the tenant is not required to pay the increased amount of rent during that period. The emergency period commenced on 27 March 2020 for an initial period of 3 months, which can be extended, if necessary, by Government order.

Tenants are still required to pay rent to their landlord during this emergency period. Tenants are encouraged to engage with their landlords and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) at their earliest opportunity if they cannot afford to pay their rent. Income supports and Rent Supplement are available for individuals in such circumstances.

Further information on these supports can be found in the Government of Ireland Guidance Document, which is available here, by contacting the DEASP Income Support Helpline for COVID-19 at 1890 800 024, or visiting the DEASP website here.
Query:

633 - To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government what steps he has taken or will he take to enable third level students who have moved out of their college accommodation early due to COVID-19 to terminate their contracts with privately-owned purpose-built student accommodation complexes and private landlords; will he also consider how these students can be reimbursed where rent has been paid in advance; and will he make a statement on the matter?

(Cian O'Callaghan TD)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, on foot of which tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. Initially, these emergency legislative provisions will last for a period of 3 months, but they may be extended if the Government considers it necessary.

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period. The Guidance document is available here and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available here.

The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004 to 2019 do not prescribe specific terms and conditions regarding the payment of rents or deposits for inclusion in individual letting agreements in the private rental market, including the student-specific accommodation sector. Contract law governs such individual arrangements.

The specific terms associated with an individual student’s rights and obligations are likely be set out in a written contract signed by both the student and the landlord. Engagement between the parties to clarify the respective contractual obligations of the student and the landlord is key in establishing whether a breach of contract had occurred.

I understand that where State universities have closed due to COVID-19, they are generally providing refunds in respect of their directly owned student-specific accommodation. Funding and policy matters in this area are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science.

In the event of the premature termination of a fixed term lease by a student, the landlord should attempt to mitigate any losses arising for a student by finding an alternative use for accommodation to better enable refunds.

Students may wish to contact their third level education providers to seek any assistance that they might be in a position to provide. If a student cannot come to an
agreement with their accommodation provider, they might wish to contact the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) regarding their concerns – [www.rtb.ie](http://www.rtb.ie).
Query:

699 - To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to provide clarification in relation to the Order under Section 251A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and its impact on Strategic Housing Development public consultation periods?

(Roisin Shortall TD)

Reply:

On 29 March 2020, the Government, following my request and taking account of the considerations under section 251A(5) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, made an Order which resulted in an extension of time for a range of specified or appropriate periods and timelines in that Act and Chapter 1, Part 2 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 which deals with Strategic Housing Developments as well as associated planning regulations. This means that such periods, which include periods for public consultation in respect of Strategic Housing Developments, were extended in duration from 29 March 2020 to 20 April 2020 inclusive. In determining the end date of the Order under section 251A, a number of additional days were added beyond the end of the period of the Government’s public health ‘stay at home’ announcement, in order to facilitate the return to normal business by planning authorities and public communication of revised arrangements in advance of the expiry of the section 251A Order.

In this context, section 251A(4) provides that the Order could be extended by Government (before it expires), once the statutory requirements for an extension are met and could be further extended as many times as is considered necessary, until 9 November 2020.

Arising from the decision of the Government late last week to extend the Covid-19 related restrictive measures until 5 May 2020, the Government on 16 April 2020 made a further Order under section 251A(4) of the Planning Act extending the duration of all relevant periods and timelines specified in planning legislation by an additional 19 days, up to and including 9 May 2020. The two Orders thereby have the combined effect of extending the relevant planning periods and timelines by an aggregate of 42 days/ 6 weeks.

Clarification in relation to the effect on the planning system of the Orders made under section 251A of the Act, including an updated FAQ document, has been issued in a circular letter to all planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála.

The updated FAQ document is publically available on my Department’s website at https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/faqs_revision_2_160420_final.pdf. The updated FAQ document, the Circular and the Government Order
will be added to the Department’s main Covid-19/Planning webpage shortly.

Any such future decision to further extend the period by Government Order will be communicated to planning authorities and the FAQ available on my Department’s website will be updated accordingly.
Query:

741. To ask the Minister for Housing, if an extension for appeals deadlines to An Bord Pleanala due to COVID-19 delays similar to the extensions provided for local authority planning permissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

(Jennifer Whitmore TD)

Reply:

On 29 March 2020, the Government, following my request and taking account of the considerations under section 251A(5) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, made an Order which resulted in an extension of time for a range of specified or appropriate periods and timelines in that Act as well as associated planning regulations. This means that such periods, which include the timeframe within which an appeal to An Bord Pleanála must be made, were extended in duration from 29 March 2020 to 20 April 2020 inclusive. In determining the end date of the Order under section 251A, a number of additional days were added beyond the end of the period of the Government’s public health ‘stay at home’ announcement, in order to facilitate the return to normal business by planning authorities and public communication of revised arrangements in advance of the expiry of the section 251A Order.

In this context, section 251A(4) provides that the Order could be extended by Government (before it expires), once the statutory requirements for an extension are met and could be further extended as many times as is considered necessary, until 9 November 2020.

Arising from the decision of the Government late last week to extend the Covid-19 related restrictive measures until 5 May 2020, the Government on 16 April 2020 made a further Order under section 251A(4) of the Planning Act extending the duration of all relevant periods and timelines specified in planning legislation by an additional 19 days, up to and including 9 May 2020. The two Orders thereby have the combined effect of extending the relevant planning periods and timelines by an aggregate of 42 days/ 6 weeks.

Clarification in relation to the effect on the planning system of the Orders made under section 251A of the Act, including an updated FAQ document, has been issued in a circular letter to all planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála.

Any such future decision to further extend the period by Government Order will be communicated to planning authorities and the FAQ available on my Department’s website will be updated accordingly.
831. To ask the Minister for Justice and Equality what arrangement he intends to put in place to ensure that persons, who are awaiting confirmation from their solicitors that there are no dealings pending or judgements on a folio, will be able to draw down mortgages due to the suspension of certain work being carried out by the PRA and the closure of the Sheriff’s Office to business due to Covid-19 which means that the Conveyancing Committee of the Law Society cannot guarantee PRA records can be relied on; leaving a situation where purchasers of houses are left paying rents in rented accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

(Éamon Ó Cuiv TD)

Reply:

The Property Registration Authority (PRA) temporarily suspended its registration of title services from 31 March 2020 in order to protect the safety of its staff and customers and to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This decision was taken on the basis of the Taoiseach’s announcement in relation to the national public health emergency arising, and in light of the associated guidelines in relation to essential services.

Online inspection of the register is available at all times at www.landdirect.ie. The suspension of the formal receipt of incoming post and electronic pre-lodgements prevents an application showing as pending on the system. This essentially freezes the register at a point in time to all incoming applications.

Applications pre-lodged online are never shown as pending until the paper documents are received in the PRA offices and the application is created on its computer system. The fact that applications were not being accepted in the PRA offices prevented these applications from appearing as pending applications during the period of suspension.

The temporary suspension of registration services was for the initial period of operation of the restrictions announced by the Government and it was intended that the matter would be reviewed in the event of the period of restrictions being extended, conscious of the fact that a prolonged period of suspension of registration services would create difficulties in the property market. Following the extension of the restrictions for a further 3 weeks, the PRA has reviewed the matter as part of its ongoing business continuity planning and, on foot of this review, the PRA will be open again to receive applications via An Post and DX from Monday, 20 April 2020.

Details of the revised arrangements are available on www.prai.ie and customers can contact the PRA at info@prai.ie where specific queries can be addressed.

The PRA will continue to adhere to Government and public health advice and, therefore, all working arrangements will remain under review during the current COVID-19 crisis.
Queries:

839 To ask the Minister for Housing outline the precise steps which have been taken to ensure that people living in collective living situations including Direct Provision centres, Halting Sites and Emergency Accommodation for homeless people have the space to engage in social distancing and support to self-isolate on an equal basis with everyone else in Ireland?

840 To ask the Minister for Housing what steps are being taken to ensure that people are being appropriately consulted about decisions that affect them, including where they might be asked for reasons related to the pandemic to move out of their accommodation.

(Garry Gannon TD)

Reply:

I propose to take Queries 839 and 840 together.

The role of my Department in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing homelessness at local or regional level. Responsibility for the provision of emergency accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with local authorities.

As part of the response to COVID-19, my Department is working closely with the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive (DRHE), local authorities and the HSE to ensure the necessary arrangements are in place to protect individuals and families accessing emergency accommodation. My Department is also working with the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) subgroup for vulnerable persons.

Local authorities nationally have been working to put in place additional accommodation to allow for the isolation of confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. Additional accommodation is also in place to support the appropriate levels of social distancing in emergency accommodation. The actions being taken are informed by the guidance developed by the HSE and which the local authorities have circulated to their NGO service delivery partners. Communication with individuals accessing emergency accommodation is a matter for the local authorities and relevant NGOs involved.

In relation to Traveller accommodation, my Department has been working with local authorities and Traveller representative groups to address measures impacting on Travellers living on halting sites. The Department has advised local authorities that funding is available for essential mitigation works and that any such requests will be processed as a priority. Works identified include extra toilets or temporary sanitary blocks, additional accommodation where there is overcrowding, cleaning of sites and extra refuse collection. Funding is also being provided for additional units on-site to
allow for self-isolation where required. The provisions apply to both authorised and unauthorised sites for the duration of this crisis.

Issues in relation to Direct Provision are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.
Query:

1008 To ask the Minister for Housing what emergency measures have been put in place for persons in homelessness during the Covid19 pandemic to allow them to self-isolate and if currently idle student accommodation could be considered for use?

(Chris Andrews TD)

Reply:

The role of my Department in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing homelessness at local or regional level. Responsibility for the provision of emergency accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with local authorities.

As part of the response to COVID-19, my Department is working closely with the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive (DRHE), local authorities and the HSE to ensure the necessary arrangements are in place to protect individuals and families accessing emergency accommodation. My Department is also working with the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) subgroup for vulnerable persons.

Local authorities nationally have been working to put in place additional accommodation to allow for the isolation of confirmed or suspected cases of COVID 19. Additional accommodation is also in place to support the appropriate levels of social distancing in emergency accommodation. The local authorities are responsible for determining the type and location of the additional accommodation sourced. The actions being taken are informed by the guidance developed by the HSE and which the local authorities have circulated to their NGO service delivery partners. Communication with individuals accessing emergency accommodation is a matter for the local authorities and the relevant NGOs involved.
Query:

1009 To ask the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the reopening or allowing of limited access to allotments by local authorities has been considered given the physical and mental health benefits of such activity to patrons and also of the welfare of planted crops and flowers given that these facilities have been closed for some weeks due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

(Sean Crowe TD)

Reply:

Since 27 March 2020, the Government, based on the advice of the National Public Health Emergency team (NPHET), has directed everyone to stay in their homes other than in certain specified circumstances, in order to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The period of operation of this requirement was recently extended up to 5 May 2020.

The decision by local authorities to close allotments was made on foot of the restrictions put in place by the Government. Allotments are not exempt from the “stay at home” requirement - they do not fall under the food production exemption and they do not have a specific exemption as it is not possible to manage or control access to allotments and there is no way to enforce social distancing once people are on site.

It is important to acknowledge the underlying public health rationale for the restrictions that have been introduced, grounded in the need to protect our communities, particularly older people and those who are medically vulnerable, by slowing the spread of the virus. A review of any restrictions will of course be informed by public health advice.
**Query:**

1010 To ask the Minister for Housing to detail the additional resources and emergency measures being made available to Longford County Council and Westmeath County Council to assist persons in homelessness and emergency accommodation during Covid19 to allow for self-isolation and if alternative accommodation is being examined if there was to be a confirmed case of COVID19

(Sorca Clarke TD)

**Reply:**

The role of my Department in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing homelessness at local or regional level. Responsibility for the provision of emergency accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with local authorities.

As part of the response to COVID-19, my Department is working closely with the local authorities and the HSE to ensure the necessary arrangements are in place to protect individuals and families accessing emergency accommodation. My Department is also working with the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHEt) subgroup for vulnerable persons.

Local authorities nationally have been working to put in place additional accommodation to allow for the isolation of confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. Additional accommodation is also in place to support the appropriate levels of social distancing in emergency accommodation. The actions being taken are informed by the guidance developed by the HSE and which the local authorities have circulated to their NGO service delivery partners.
Query:

1011 To ask the Minister for Housing what emergency measures have been put in place for persons in homelessness, rough sleepers, hostels, hotels, B&Bs and Hubs during the Covid19 pandemic to allow them to self-isolate and if communication supports can be made available to them so they can access online support services?

(Mark Ward TD)

Reply:

The role of my Department in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing homelessness at local or regional level. Responsibility for the provision of emergency accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with local authorities.

As part of the response to COVID-19, my Department is working closely with the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive (DRHE), local authorities and the HSE to ensure the necessary arrangements are in place to protect individuals and families accessing emergency accommodation. My Department is also working with the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) subgroup for vulnerable persons.

Local authorities nationally have been working to put in place additional accommodation to allow for the isolation of confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. Additional accommodation is also in place to support the appropriate levels of social distancing in emergency accommodation. The actions being taken are informed by the guidance developed by the HSE and which the local authorities have circulated to their NGO service delivery partners.

In relation to rough sleepers, outreach teams continue to work in Dublin offering beds and accommodation to all rough sleepers. My Department understands that a significant number of people have availed of accommodation in recent weeks.
Query:

1032 To detail what action the department has taken to prevent evictions among Travellers from their accommodation who test positive for Covid 19 or who are advised to who need to self isolate?

(Brid Smith TD)

Reply:

In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, my Department’s role is to ensure that adequate structures and supports are in place to assist housing authorities in providing accommodation for Travellers, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

On 12 March 2020, the Taoiseach announced that a number of significant measures were being put in place in response to the growing Coronavirus/COVID-19 emergency. In line with these measures, on 18 March 2020, my Department issued Circular 06/2020 advising local authorities of preventative measures that may be necessary on some Traveller sites to combat the progression of the virus.

The circular identified 6 key areas for local authorities to focus on, where practical and appropriate additional measures may be required. The areas identified are as follows:

1. Extra toilets;
2. Running water;
3. Additional mobile accommodation / space where there is overcrowding;
4. Extra refuse collection;
5. Access and egress on sites; and
6. Additional units (either mobiles on site or houses elsewhere that will allow for self-isolation/ quarantine).

The guidance provided in this circular indicates that in cases where the local authority identifies sites where additional measures are required to reduce the risk of COVID-19, every effort should be made to find prompt and practical solutions on existing sites and, where these additional measures prove not to be possible, it may be necessary for local authorities to work with the families involved in order to move residents.

The Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 came into effect on 27 March 2020. Section 5(7) of the Act provides that all Travellers currently residing in any location should not be evicted from that location during the COVID-19 emergency, except where the movement “is required to ameliorate hardship and provide protection” and subject to consultation with the Travellers concerned.
My Department has been working closely with local authorities in an effort to implement the preventative measures advised by the HSE on all Traveller sites, regardless of their designation. In doing so, local authorities have put a number of temporary arrangements in place to provide, among other things, services to previously un-serviced sites which will facilitate better sanitation and social distancing. These measures will remain in place for the duration of the emergency.

Local authorities have acted in implementing these measures and my Department continues to provide funding and support as appropriate. As indicated in Circular 06/20, the Department will provide sufficient funding to all local authorities to meet the costs involved in implementing these emergency measures. My Department has also engaged closely with the national Traveller organisations and I am very grateful for the valuable assistance which they have provided during this emergency.
Query:

To ask the Minister for Housing, what measures he will take to ensure that people in rent a room, licensee and other informal arrangements not covered by the 2004 Act, are safeguarded from evictions during the crisis?

(Brid Smith TD)

Reply:

With effect from 27 March 2020, new emergency legislative measures were introduced to protect tenants during the COVID-19 emergency period, on foot of which tenants cannot be forced to leave their rental accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. Initially, these emergency legislative provisions will last for a period of 3 months, but they may be extended if the Government considers it necessary.

My Department recently published a Guidance Document on COVID-19 supports for landlords and tenants which sets out the emergency rental measures and income and other supports available to tenants and landlords during the emergency period. The Guidance document is available here and a list of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and is available here.

The emergency legislation states (Section 5(7)) that all evictions are prohibited. It is understood that the intent of this provision is to address arrangements which are often described as Rent-a-Room and “Digs” style accommodation. Landlords and tenants in such circumstances are asked to show forbearance and support for each other during the emergency period and, where possible, and having regard to the precautions necessary to tackle COVID-19, to avoid termination of accommodation arrangements.

The RTB has developed a communications plan to make tenants and landlords aware of the new provisions and this multi-media, integrated communications campaign will include using social media, digital and radio advertising, information videos, regular updates on the RTB website and a stakeholder engagement plan.

A dedicated section on the RTB website, www.rtb.ie, provides information on the new legislation, including a FAQ section. A full review/update of all relevant pages on the website is underway to reflect the legislative changes.

The normal RTB phone lines, webchat and email services also remain available.

While rent increases are prohibited during this emergency period, tenants are still required to pay rent to their landlords. Tenants are encouraged to engage with their landlords and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) at their earliest opportunity if they cannot afford to pay their rent. Income supports and Rent Supplement are available for individuals in such circumstances.
Further information on these supports can be found in the Government of Ireland Guidance Document, which is available here, by contacting the DEASP Income Support Helpline for COVID-19 at 1890 800 024, or visiting the DEASP website here.
Query:

1034 To ask the Minister for housing to detail what supports and resources have to date been allocated to emergency homeless accommodation in order to deal with Covid 19 and social distancing practices?

(Brid Smith TD)

Reply:

The role of my Department in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local authorities in addressing homelessness at local or regional level. Responsibility for the provision of emergency accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with local authorities.

As part of the response to COVID-19, my Department is working closely with the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive (DRHE), local authorities and the HSE to ensure the necessary arrangements are in place to protect individuals and families accessing emergency accommodation. My Department is also working with the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) subgroup for vulnerable persons.

Local authorities nationally have been working to put in place additional accommodation to allow for the isolation of confirmed or suspected cases of COVID 19. Additional accommodation is also in place to support the appropriate levels of social distancing in emergency accommodation. The actions being taken are informed by the guidance developed by the HSE and which the local authorities have circulated to their NGO service delivery partners.